

A Palestinian Desperate to Get to His Job Is Shot Dead by Israeli Troops

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Since the war started, the Hajar family has been banned from reaching their West Bank aluminium factory. When two of the sons tried to sneak through the security fence, soldiers shot the older one dead



Selim's brother, Seif (right), and uncle, Raad. Credit: Alex Levac

Barta'a is a divided village – more or less. Its eastern, Palestinian section had for many years been in the West Bank while its western section was in Israel. However, when the security barrier was erected some two decades ago, the entire village was left to the west of it, as if it had been annexed to Israel. Thus, today, West Bank Palestinians who want to visit even the eastern part of Barta'a need a special entry permit. Moreover, West Bank Palestinians who own a business in Barta'a but do not reside have needed an entry permit to access their property in the Palestinian section.

Life under occupation is replete with other Kafkaesque absurdities, which residents somehow learned to live with – until the [war in Gaza](#) broke out and turned everything topsy-turvy in the West Bank, too. Owners of businesses and workers are now barred from getting to their place of employment in Palestinian Barta'a. Why? Because of the war. Thus, it's not enough that 150,000 Palestinians have been prohibited for over two months from getting to their jobs in Israel – some can't even get to work in the Palestinian territories.

What can someone in this predicament do? Try to sneak in. What do the Israel Defense Forces do? Shoot you to death. Desperate Palestinians who are trying to get to their jobs in a Palestinian village are being shot to death. The despair is rife.

The Hajar family lives in a spacious home in Shuweika, a Palestinian village north of Tul Karm that has become a suburb of that city. The father of the family, Nasser, 54, has two daughters and two sons. He owns an aluminum factory in Barta'a, not far away. He and his sons – Selim, a 27-year-old automotive engineer, and Seif, 19, who's studying automotive engineering at Kadoorie, a technical college in Tul Karm – used to drive every morning to their plant, which produces products including window frames, blinds and doors, to clients in Israel.

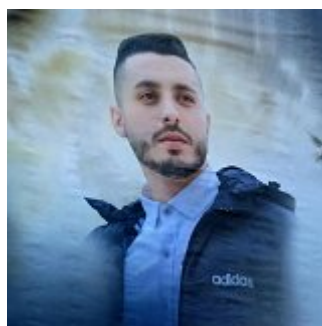
Nasser and his two sons have permanent entry permits into Israel, and their business used to be on a solid footing. Nasser's older brother, Raad, owns a garage in Barta'a; he too works mainly with Israeli clients. This week Raad's phone rang nonstop; all the conversations were conducted in Hebrew and dealt with buying and selling cars, and with estimates for repair work. The members of this household work in Hebrew.

"We lived among you," Nasser told us this past Monday when we visited him at home along with Abdulkarim Sadi, a field researcher for the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem.

The route to Shuweika passes through the Nur Shams refugee camp, which the IDF once again raided last week, wreaking new destruction on top of the old. It sometimes seems that soldiers in the West Bank are jealous of their [buddies in the Gaza Strip](#) - who are able to kill and destroy as they please - and are trying to get a little wartime-like action here, as well. The main road to Tul Karm, opposite the entrance to Nur Shams has been seriously damaged in army operations, so traffic moves lethargically as drivers skirt potholes. When it rains, the potholes fill up with water and mud and the road becomes almost impassable. But why would the IDF care? Settlers don't use this road.

Until the war broke out, the Hajars went to work at their plant and returned every evening. They had to leave their car at the Reihan checkpoint and continue to Barta'a in a shared taxi; they were not allowed to use their own vehicle to get to their factory. They followed the same procedure on Saturday, October 7. "At first we didn't know who was against whom here," Nasser tells us. They returned home that evening, and laid low for a while. On Tuesday they set out for work again via the Reihan crossing at 7 A.M. At 7:15 it was shut down - indefinitely. The three men managed to get home that evening, but haven't been able since then to get to their factory.

They did try, however: Two or three times a week they traveled to Reihan and inserted their magnetic ID cards on the scanner there in order to pass through as usual, but they were rejected. No one is entering the Palestinian part of Barta'a these days. After all, there's a war in Gaza. The last time they tried was on December 12, and the card was spit out once again. They made a number of inquiries but the Palestinian Coordination and Liaison Administration has just given them the runaround - no one knows for sure when the road and checkpoint will be opened again.



Selim Hajar. Credit: Alex Levac

Meanwhile, in the Hajars' deserted factory, the raw materials lay unused, and orders and other paperwork were piling up. There was a large order from Pardes Hannah, another from a school in the center of Israel and so on. Pressure from clients and contractors mounted. The family, which had never had any trouble with Israeli authorities before, was at a complete loss. Then, two weeks ago, Selim and Seif persuaded their father that they had no choice but to try to sneak over to the Israeli side with the aid of one of the local smuggling operators.

Their plan was to get to Barta'a and to stay there until the end of the war in order to get their

collapsing business back on its feet. They prepared backpacks with clothes and other items for a lengthy stay. On previous occasions, Nasser had vetoed the idea, but this time he realized that the war and the closure would drag on, and someone had to go to work.

The Palestinian traffickers take 300 shekels (about \$83) for the entry of each person into Israel, via breaches in the separation barrier, and for the transportation to Barta'a. The money is divided between the drivers on each side of the fence and, according to the Hajars, also among Israelis who are involved in this human smuggling industry. Thousands of workers have used these services since the war broke out, they say. Nasser says big gangs are involved, and perhaps even soldiers as well, but Haaretz has found no confirmation of this. The IDF Spokesperson's Unit stated: "No incident is known in which fighters assisted unauthorized elements to cross the seam-line fence."

On Saturday, December 16, the two brothers took their packs and set out in the smuggler's car that picked them up from their house. Forty-six workers tried to enter Israel that day, four per car, in a convoy. The breaches in the security barrier were situated between two gates that close off fields of crops, one at Atil, the other at Deir al-Ghusun. The IDF is building a concrete wall there, to replace the fence, but it's still incomplete.

Arriving near the barrier, Selim and Seif, who were in the second car of the convoy, got out and ran through the hole in it, ending up in the olive grove on the Israeli side, across from the Arab community of Zemer. Most of the would-be infiltrators also hid amid the trees, waiting to make the second leg of the journey: Transportation to Barta'a was provided there by Israeli drivers. The two brothers hurried to the car that had arrived to pick them up.

They had driven only a few meters when suddenly, out of nowhere, an army jeep appeared and blocked their way. The brothers immediately got out of the car and ran for their lives, but the soldiers in the vehicle opened fire at them. Selim and Seif ran in two different directions. Seif found shelter behind a boulder and covered himself with dry leaves and twigs. He heard more gunfire.

Selim was hit by a single bullet to the head.

Seif was afraid to emerge from his hiding place - he remained there for almost four hours, barely moving, fearful of being caught or killed. At first he didn't know Selim had been shot, but from his hiding place he saw soldiers undressing a wounded man. An Israeli Magen David Adom ambulance arrived after about an hour, Seif recalls now, and evacuated the wounded person (to Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikva, as he later learned).

Seif thought that maybe their driver had been wounded. Only after the ambulance and soldiers had left the scene did Seif notice the clothing and shoes of the wounded person lying on the road, about 20 meters away. They belonged to Selim. Seif had no idea what his brother's condition was, or even if he was alive. Seif eventually made his way to Zemer and from there to the Reihan checkpoint, then home. He still didn't know what had happened to Selim.



Nasser Hajar in the village of Shuweika this week, with a poster of his son Selim, who was killed by soldiers. "May you never see anything like this in your life," the bereaved father says bitterly. Credit: Alex Levac

While he was still in hiding, at about 10:45 A.M., Seif texted his father and asked him to be sure to charge his cell phone so that he would be able to phone him. He warned Nasser not to call him because he was afraid to talk out loud. Nasser had a bad feeling; he had no idea what was going on with his sons. He tried, unsuccessfully, to call Selim, to ask whether they had made it across safely and had reached the factory.

Around midday someone finally answered Selim's phone and spoke in Arabic. He told Nasser his name was Amir and that Selim had been hospitalized in serious condition in Beilinson Hospital. He declined to give further details and hung up. Nasser began to call everyone he knew in Israel, including a friend in Zichron Yaakov, members of the extended Hajar family in Acre, Taibeh and Fureidis, and a brother-in-law in Rahat.

He also called Beilinson but was unable to get any information about his son. Finally, Nasser reached an Arab physician in the hospital and asked him to send him confirmation that Selim had been admitted as a patient and was in serious condition, so that he, Nasser, could get an entry permit to Israel to see his son before it would be too late.

Nasser also called the Civil Administration, where someone told him, after a few nerve-wracking hours, that during the war it would be impossible for him to enter Israel to see his wounded son. In the meantime, Raad, Nasser's brother, learned from his own connections that his nephew was in critical condition, but he did not pass that news on to his brother. Shortly afterward, Raad learned that Selim had died of his injuries. He asked the brother-in-law in Rahat to go to Beilinson and photograph the body, so they would know for certain what fate had befallen their loved one. The brother-in-law drove to the hospital but was turned away.

"May you never see anything like this in your life," Nasser says bitterly.

On Monday, the family launched efforts to recover Selim's body. At first the Coordination and Liaison unit promised that it would be returned quickly. "Your son died by mistake," Nasser says he was told. But the tone changed when it emerged that a soldier had tripped and apparently broken his leg while pursuing the infiltrators. Now they were told, for some unknown or random reason, that it would be a month to a month and a half before the young man's body would be returned.

The family is shattered. They are desperate to receive the body of Selim, who as far as is known hurt no one and wanted only to get to his place of work at the family-owned factory.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit stated this week, in response to a query from Haaretz: "Observers identified dozens of infiltrators who crossed the barrier near the village of Deir al-Ghusun, in the [territory of] the Menashe Brigade, on December 16, 2023. An IDF unit that arrived at the site launched a pursuit of the suspects, at the end of which all the suspects were apprehended.

"Afterward, searches were conducted in the area, during which one of the suspects, wounded in the head, was located. The force administered first aid in the field, after which the infiltrator was evacuated to a hospital. Subsequently his death was reported. The circumstances of the incident are being clarified. The infiltrator's body is being held by the IDF in accordance with the usual procedures, pending a decision by political decision makers."

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P.S.

- Haaretz. Dec 29, 2023:
<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/twilight-zone/2023-12-29/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/a-palestinian-desperate-to-get-to-his-job-is-shot-dead-by-israeli-troops/0000018c-b56c-d014-a3cd-bf7efdbe0000>