

Synopsis:

IQRIT: GOING BACK HOME

Photographic documentary by

Constance DECORDE

Israel - Palestine 4/2014 - 3/2015

"Iqrit: going back home" is about the fight of the Iqrit community through 3 generations, to return to their home village from which they were ousted in 1948 when the state of Israel was created. Even though there was an historic ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice of Israel in 1951 granting them the right to return, they are today still fighting to implement this decision, and are only allowed to celebrate masses at the church and funerals in the cemetery. Today, the Iqrit Community is formed by 1300 persons. Its struggle is also directly on the ground with about 20 youth living permanently in the village, despite Israel's ban.

"Golda Meir once said that the 3rd generation would have forgotten everything of the Nakba. We prove her wrong: It is not the case".

Iqrit is a village located in Galilee, in the North of Israel, at the border with Lebanon. In 1948, its 490 inhabitants, all of them Catholic Christians, were evacuated by the State of Israel because of military operations, only for 2 weeks said the soldiers; but finally, the inhabitants could never return to their home village, as Iqrit was declared a military zone by Israel.

In July 1951, the Supreme Court of Justice of Israel issued an historic ruling granting the people of Iqrit the right to return to their home village. But the Israeli government ignored this decision, and in 1951, on Christmas Eve, under the eyes of the "mayor" of the village, the army completely destroyed the village, with the exception of the church and the cemetery, which still stand today. In the 70s, and after numerous appeals, the State of Israel only authorized the people of Iqrit to use the cemetery to bury their dead, and the church for religious services.

Today, the 1300 people forming the Iqrit community live in the north of Israel around Haifa, have the Israeli nationality, but are still determined to return to Iqrit and to rebuild their houses. They continue to use the church for masses, christenings and weddings, as well as the cemetery for the funerals; since 1995, summer camps for children are also organized every year.

An Association for the community of Iqrit was also created, which fights at the institutional level, with advocating actions aimed at the international community, the religious community and the Knesset. Recently, the struggle is also directly on the ground: since August 2012, around 20 young people of the third generation decided to live permanently in the village, despite Israel's ban. This common decision intervened after Elias, one of the initiators of the movement, planted a tree during a summer camp which was immediately uprooted by the Israeli ministry of Land once everybody had left Iqrit.

Since that day, a group of about twenty activists makes sure that somebody is always present in Iqrit, by sleeping alternately in tents or makeshift shelters that they built, under the stars or in the church.

"It became a habit: 3 times a week, we arrange between our studies or our work so that one of us is always in Iqrit" said Yosef, who studies nursing in Haifa.

"Of course I believe that one day we will be able to return to our home village, otherwise we would not keep on fighting. It is not dead and buried in the cemetery that we want to return to Iqrit, but alive." adds Jeries, another of the young people who resists on the ground.