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*The Occupation and a "Wedding in Galilee"*  
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The United States has not had a foreign army on its soil since before the Revolutionary War, so it is not surprising that we have trouble imagining what occupation can be like. Now that the United States military occupies Iraq, we should make an effort to understand how occupation affects both the occupied people and the occupying forces.

To help our imagination, let me discuss a film called "Wedding in Galilee," shown recently by UW's International Studies Program. It is about the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Galilee. The situation is not exactly parallel to the USA's efforts in Iraq, but it indicates some of the difficulties occupation causes.

The film's plot is simple. An old Palestinian man wants to give his son a wedding with the traditional all-night celebration. Since his village is under a dusk-to-dawn curfew, he seeks out the military governor to ask that it be lifted for that night. The governor grants it on one condition, that he and his staff be invited as guests of honor. The old man accepts and the movie follows the wedding activities and the incidents the Israelis' presence bring about.

It quickly becomes clear that occupation increases the difficulty of living a normal life. A bus trip into town entails check-points and surprise identification inspections. Encounters with military police become fraught with danger when Uzi submachine guns enforce orders. Even acquiring the needed foodstuffs for the feast becomes more difficult. At one point the horse that carried the groom to the bride escapes and runs into a mine field, endangering itself and the children chasing it. Luckily, everyone survives, including the horse. These kinds of problems not only cause anger, but keep it stirred up and make it part of every waking moment.

Through the groom's inability to consummate the marriage, "Wedding" symbolically shows how occupation removes a people's strength, its ability to create its future. Cooperation with the occupiers enables the appearances of normal life, but underneath it takes away the people's ability to regenerate and renew themselves. The longer the military remains, the more the people's strength declines.

But occupation is also dangerous for the occupiers. They are targets for the populace's anger, simply because they are there. Because the Israelis occupy Galilee, they are targets. Their uniforms make them stand out wherever they go, and are easily seen by attackers.

Moreover, the Israelis know their vulnerability. It is clear that in all contacts between the occupying soldiers and the occupied people, it is the soldiers who are constantly scared. While part of this is because they know they are targets, the main reason is because they do not understand the people around them. On the one hand, few soldiers understand the native language, so they cannot talk to the people. On the other hand, the soldiers do not understand the social customs of people they occupy, and misunderstandings easily ensue.

During the reception, a basket big enough to hold a weapon is passed through the crowd, getting closer and closer to the Israelis. They stand up in alarm, only to discover a baby doll in the basket, a common wedding joke about the expectations for the newlyweds.

At another moment, a 15-year-old girl teases an 18-year-old soldier before a gaggle of giggling girls. He does not understand what she says, but he knows, as teenagers do, that he is being made fun of and that makes him embarrassed and angry. He waves his Uzi at them to drive them away. Throughout the film, it is clear that while the occupied people live with frustration and anger, it is the occupiers who live constantly with fear.

"Wedding in Galilee" shows how occupation changes both the occupied people and the occupying forces. While the occupied live with constant anger, the occupiers live with constant fear, even though they are the ones with the weapons.

Note: If you want to see "Wedding in Galilee," it can be purchased at Amazon.com and other retailers. It contains some nudity.