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# Forced evictions in Israel-Palestine

Amelia Smith &  
Penny Green





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The Middle East Monitor is a not-for-profit policy research institute that provides research, information and analyses of primarily the Palestine-Israel conflict. It also provides briefings on other Middle East issues. Its outputs are made available for use by journalists, academics and politicians with an interest in the Middle East and North Africa region.

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Title: *Forced evictions in Israel-Palestine*

Cover: *Yattir forest in the Naqab (Negev); This is the largest of the JNF's forests, spanning some 30,000 dunams. The forest was planted to create a buffer between Jewish Israeli settlements and Palestinian villages.*

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## Acknowledgements

This report is in two parts. The first, authored by Penny Green, concentrates on untangling the historical land and planning complexities behind forced evictions in Israel/Palestine, the mechanics of house demolitions and the impact of the separation wall.

The second part, authored by Amelia Smith, tells the story of Judaisation as the driver of Israeli land grabs and forced evictions, restrictions over the control and use of natural resources, and Israeli settlements, from the standpoint of those most affected.

Our fieldwork and subsequent report were made possible by the gracious and generous hospitality of the many people we encountered in our time in Palestine and Israel. They were prepared to tell us their stories about life under occupation and the imminent threat of forced eviction; stories that they have undoubtedly told many times, and to many international visitors, without ever seeing the conditions of their oppression change.

We are, therefore, all the more thankful for the time and spirited commitment that they shared with us. We would like to extend particular thanks to Jamal Juma (Stop the Wall Campaign); Umm Kamil; Mahmoud Qaraeen (Wadi Hilweh Community Information Centre); Michal Zak and Bob Mark; Sami Abu Shehadeh (Jaffa Popular Committee); Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian; Mukhlis Burghal; Sha'aban Sha'aban; Ismail Arafat (Head of the Dahmash Village Committee); Abu Saqer; the Anastas family; Oren Yifchatel (Ben Gurion University); Thabet Abu Rass and Khalil Al-Amour (Adalah: Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel); Sabah Al Turi; Aziz Al Turi; Shaikh Sayyah; Hashem Azzeh (Ibrahim Al-Khalil Association).

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# Forced evictions in Israel-Palestine: an introduction

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*The kind of displacement we are experiencing is not the kind where the authority comes and takes people and puts them in another place. What they do is a kind of destruction – it's displacement by destruction. They come and they destroy everything. They destroy your life. They destroy your future. They cut the water from you so, in a way, they want to kill you. They come with massive power and destroy the small things we have, they destroy everything. To us this is criminal aggression.*

Abu Saqer (Alhadidya village, Jordan Valley)

The state of Israel is premised upon the historical necessity of ethnic cleansing and forced evictions. From the Nakba (Palestinian “Catastrophe”) in 1948 when mandated Palestine was destroyed and replaced with a new nation, forced evictions have been the mechanism and modus operandi of Israel’s nation-building project.

At the turn of the twentieth century the vast majority of Palestinian people lived in Palestine, a land mass now divided into the state of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At that time, 1.4 million Palestinian people lived in 1,300 towns and villages across the whole country. During the Nakba, 15,000 Palestinians were killed and 800,000 were driven at gunpoint from their homes into the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and other parts of the world. Thousands more Palestinians were evicted forcibly from their homes but remained within the new Israeli-controlled 1948 territory. Israel destroyed 531 Palestinian towns and villages, wiping them from the map. In 1967, following the start of Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, an estimated 300,000 Palestinians

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were displaced. According to the [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics](#)<sup>1</sup> 7.4 million (66 per cent) of the global population of 11.2 million Palestinians have been displaced forcibly from their homeland.

In its 2011 submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions ([ICAHD](#))<sup>2</sup> reported that since 1967 ‘...Israel has demolished over 25,000 Palestinian homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The motivation for demolishing these homes is purely political: to either drive the Palestinians out of the country altogether or to confine the four million residents of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza to small, crowded, impoverished and disconnected enclaves.’

Forced eviction has thus defined the Palestinian condition for the past 66 years, not only as a historical tragedy situated in the state crimes of 1948 but also as an ongoing form of persecution. Thousands of Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel have experienced eviction and displacement, many on multiple occasions. The social, economic and psychological impact on individuals, families and communities is incalculable.

The constant threat and reality of forced eviction results in a permanent state of insecurity, fragmentation, misery and fear for Palestinian men, women and children living in what was mandated Palestine and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In order to understand the continuing crisis of forced evictions of Palestinian communities in Israel/Palestine it is first important to understand the complex and fragmented structure of Israeli land, planning and housing control in the

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DANGER סכנה גדולה

שטח אש הכניסה אסורה!

المنطقة مغلقة

FIRING AREA - ENTRANCE FORBIDDEN

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West Bank.

In 1996 the West Bank was divided into 3 distinct categories: Area A encompassing all Palestinian cities (and covering 18 per cent of the total land mass of the West Bank) is controlled by the Palestinian Authority; in Area B (22 per cent of the total land mass and largely rural) Israel controls all security while the PA controls civil affairs; and in Area C (comprising 60 per cent of the West Bank) Israel controls both security and all land-related civil affairs. So while the PA has responsibility for education and healthcare services Israel controls the ability of the PA to provide the infrastructure for these services; that is, it controls the allocation of land, infrastructure, the planning process and construction.

The possibility of Palestinian construction is restricted severely. Building is limited to only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem and only one per cent of Area C. Moreover, more than [94% of the 3,750 requests for planning permission](#)<sup>3</sup> made by Palestinians between 2010 and 2012 were rejected by the Israeli authorities.

Palestinians wishing to extend their homes or expand their communities in order to accommodate family and population growth face impossible bureaucratic barriers and have no other option but to build without a permit.

Areas A and B (home to the majority of the West Bank Palestinian population, i.e. 2.4 million people) have been carved up into [165 separate geographical areas](#)<sup>4</sup> with no territorial contiguity and surrounded by Area C. This fragmentation, which resolutely restricts the possibility of demographic planning for growth, was to have been temporary while the transfer of governance from Israel to

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the Palestinian Authority took place. Twenty years later fragmentation remains a structural reality and an impossible barrier to Palestinian development.

The deliberate complexity and confusion of Israel's land, planning and security governance is designed to obfuscate and deflect attention from its illegal and criminal practice of forced evictions. Yet as political geographer Oren Yiftachel reports, this complexity makes sense in terms of Israel's "ethnocratic" state project: "It's a way of managing a colonial situation through Judaisation internally and through a combined military sovereignty and Jewish settlement project in the West Bank."

According to Israel's leading Human Rights authority, B'Tselem, "Israel prohibits Palestinian construction and development on some 70 per cent of [Area C territory](#)<sup>5</sup>, arguing various rationales, such as being 'state lands' or 'firing zones'. Israel's planning and construction policy



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virtually ignores the needs of the local population: it refuses to recognise most of the villages in the area or draw up plans for them, prevents the expansion and development of Palestinian communities, demolishes homes and does not allow the communities to hook up to infrastructure. Thousands of inhabitants live under the constant threat of expulsion for living in alleged firing zones or ‘illegal communities’.”

According to international law, Israel is an occupying power; it is obliged to protect the civilian population and administer the occupied territory for the benefit of civilians living there. Forced evictions, mass forced displacement, house and village demolitions, institutionalised discrimination, land grabbing, resource theft and the movement of settlers into the occupied territory, all designed to expand Israeli control of Palestinian territory, are strictly prohibited by international laws and conventions. Israel, however, continues to defy them with its illegal neo-colonial programme of expansion. This report examines the ongoing role of Israel’s systematic and illegal programme of forced evictions in mandate Palestine. It is based on fieldwork that took us from East Jerusalem and Ramallah to the northern reaches of the Jordan Valley; Yafa (Jaffa); from “unrecognised” villages near Tel Aviv to Hebron in the southern West Bank; Bethlehem; and into the heart of the Negev Desert where 70,000 Palestinian Bedouins are under threat of mass forced displacement. We focus on the key political, “legal”, strategic, ideological and violence-based mechanisms that Israel has deployed in its programme of expansion. Through the use of a number of case-studies we hope to provide clarity and understanding to a planned and intentionally complex set of criminal practices employed by the state of Israel to remove Palestinians from their historic lands. Those practices are best defined as ethnic cleansing within

a system of apartheid and include: village destruction, house demolitions, the destruction of farmland and olive groves, land confiscation, access restrictions to natural resources, denial of residency rights and the denial of refugee return, all underpinned by a process now defined as Judaisation. These are facilitated through a range of formal and informal practices, notably discriminatory zoning and planning restrictions, the creation of militarised zones, forestation programmes, the illegal settlement programme, “unrecognising” Palestinian villages, the separation wall, security checkpoints, service removal, a programme of Bedouin urbanisation, suppression of resistance and impunity for state and settler violence.

We examine forced evictions not only inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories of East Jerusalem and the West Bank (Gaza was closed to us) but inside that part of mandated Palestine which became Israel, where 1.4 million Israeli Arabs/Palestinians still live, many under threat of forced eviction.

The means by which Israel executes forced evictions are many and varied. Here we concentrate specifically on house and village demolitions, the separation wall, discriminatory restrictions over the use natural resources, the role of illegal settlements and outposts, and the process of Judaisation, which lies at the heart of the eviction process.



Part 1:  
Village and House Demolitions  
Penny Green

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# Village and House Demolitions

## Penny Green

House and village demolitions are a wretched and repeated fact of life for thousands of Palestinians and signal an intent on the part of the Israeli authorities to drive Palestinians from their homeland.

In this section we concentrate on four communities: Dahmash, an unrecognised Palestinian village in Israel; Al-Araqib, a Bedouin village in the Negev Desert; Silwan in East Jerusalem; and the village of Alhadidya in the Jordan Valley. All are communities in which demolition is a continual and devastating reality. Each community is illustrative of a wider policy to remove Palestinians in order to expand Israeli territory.



The village of Dahmash

## Dahmash: the unrecognised village

The village of Dahmash lies some 20 kilometres from Tel Aviv; it is a Palestinian village located inside the 1967 borders of Israel. Its residents are Israeli citizens but as Arabs they are denied many of the basic rights of citizenship enjoyed by their Jewish Israeli neighbours.

Leaving the modern highway, the road to Dahmash takes on a Third World character. Unpaved and bumpy it crosses an unguarded railway line where, villagers report, a number of children have been killed and injured by passing trains. The railway line cuts right through the heart of the village and presents a constant danger to pedestrians. The village itself is a collection of well-built homes in a rural setting with chickens and dogs wandering through the lanes and courtyards.

Moreover, Dahmash is one of Israel's 176 'unrecognised' villages<sup>6</sup>, a status which places it at constant risk of destruction. Israel refuses to recognise Dahmash as a residential village, claiming instead that it is built in an agricultural zone. In refusing to recognise Dahmash in this way Israel also refuses to provide the basic services essential for community life. There is no sewage system or rubbish collection, no health services and no paved roads or public transport. There are no schools or nurseries. To be "unrecognised" is also to be without an official address. Villagers are not permitted to use their Dahmash address on their identity cards because, officially, Dahmash does not exist; their existence can only be verified through the listing of a fictitious address, Ha'Heshmoniam Street in the nearby town of Ramla.

The 70 houses, home to around 600 villagers that make up the Dahmash community, are almost all considered to be

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“illegal”. According to Arafat Ismail, the Head of Dahmash Village Committee, the village was targeted for demolition in 2004 when 18 houses in the process of being built or extended were issued with demolition orders on the grounds that they were built illegally on agricultural land. Five of the houses were demolished in March 2006. The owners of the remaining 13 continue to contest and resist the orders against them.

“You have to know,” says Arafat, “that if they demolish the 13 houses, they will demolish the rest of the village because none of these houses had planning permission when they were built... this is the strategy; they start with 13 and see how the community reacts. If the response is weak then they issue further demolition orders.”

Originally the 70 homes in Dahmash were built on land granted to the Palestinians by the new Israeli state in compensation for the land and property from which, in 1948, they were displaced forcibly. The land, however, was deemed agricultural and despite petitions by villagers to the regional planning office the Israeli government has refused consistently to re-zone the land and legitimise the village.

Successive planning committees in the regional centre of Ramla have rejected appeals by Dahmash residents to legitimise their homes by changing the zoning designation from agricultural to urban. New towns, they argue, are the province of the Interior Ministry. The regional planning committee also rejected an alternative claim to legality and security by the villagers; that Dahmash be re-designated as a neighbourhood of the existing towns of nearby Ramla or Lod. The [Mayor of Ramla](#)<sup>7</sup>, Yoel Lavi, who sits on the Regional Planning Committee, dismissed the proposal with a violent counter-proposal. He said on Israeli television that

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he would, "...take two bulldozers, the kind the IDF uses in the Golan Heights, two border police units to secure the area and go from one side [of the village] to the other... when you give the first shock everyone runs from their houses, don't worry."

According to a [Human Rights Watch Report](#)<sup>8</sup>, report, the Central Regional Committee for Planning and Construction rejected a plan submitted by Dahmash's residents on the grounds that it saw "no justification for the creation of a new village in central Israel".

In sharp contrast, evidence from the [Ramla Municipality](#)<sup>9</sup> reveals a picture of planned growth and development for Jewish communities in the same agricultural zone as Dahmash. This development excludes Palestinian communities implicitly. According to the Ramla Municipal Plan the overall residential construction potential of Ramla is estimated at around 8,000 housing units, including 3,597 housing units to be built in the West Ramla complex; 888 units in the Maccabi complex (which immediately adjoins Dahmash); and 500 housing units in a new planned complex in the Menachim Begin neighbourhood.

It seems that what central Israel can't justify is a "new" Palestinian village, regardless of the fact that Dahmash's existence dates back to 1951. Jewish villages of the same age are welcomed. Listed on the Lod Valley Regional Council website are 9 villages (8 of them moshavim or Zionist agricultural communities). All were built between 1948 and 1953.

A neighbour of [Dahmash](#)<sup>10</sup> is the Nir Zvi moshav. Built in 1950 it enjoys all the services and facilities denied to the Palestinian village yet Nir Zvi is a village inside an agricultural

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zone. Housing development in Nir Zvi has avoided the restrictions imposed by zoning through the implementation of a plan from the era of the British Mandate. R6 permits the building and recognition of residential units on agricultural land in central Israel and in theory Palestinian communities should be able to use it. In reality, however, the state has systematically denied the Palestinians access to the R6 permit route, denied the village a master plan and in consequence and without exception, denied villagers planning and construction permits.

The contrast between the planned Jewish residential communities cited above and the failure of the same Regional Planning and Construction Committee to recognise Dahmash, and all that would follow, speaks only to the planned policy of discrimination evident throughout Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. While Jewish neighbourhoods flourish and develop Palestinian communities face eviction, demolition and destruction.

## Sha'aban Sha'aban's Story

When he was thirteen, Israeli forces came to demolish Sha'aban Sha'aban's family home.



Sha'aban's Family Home

*"My father was driving us to school, it was 7am, and our neighbours called to say that Israeli tractors were on their way to our house to demolish it. We drove straight back home and locked ourselves inside. We sat there for five minutes and then the police started to arrive on foot. They stood outside and shouted for us to open the door but we refused. Instead I turned on the gas supply and poured petrol over the floor and shouted that if they broke down the door of our house I would open the lighter I had in my hand and the house would explode with us all inside. The police yelled, "Burn the house and you all die." I held the lighter in my hand and all that stopped me from flicking it open was a worry for my younger brothers and sisters. I felt a lot of pressure but the police stayed outside.*

Many people came to support the Sha'abans that day, including lawyers, local residents and community activists.

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The demolition order was frozen, despite an appeal by the police, but the stay was temporary: “We struggled for a long time and we built a tent outside to create awareness about the Israeli state’s intention to demolish our houses.”

Sha’aban is now twenty and his family home remains under a demolition order.

The Sha’aban family’s neighbours, the Assaf family, were given only a few days’ notice that their three homes were to be demolished in April 2014. They appealed against the administrative orders on April 8th; although the local magistrate’s court accepted a petition to halt the demolition temporarily, a few weeks later it was approved. While the family is submitting appeals to the High Court the police have begun to put pressure on the families into demolishing their homes themselves to avoid paying the state to do it.

The Assafs, like the majority of people in Dahmash, continue to live in an endless, exhausting and insecure cycle of threat, resistance, demolition and rebuilding.



Sha'aban Sha'aban



The inside of Al Araqib's makeshift mosque, home now to 22 families

## Al Araqib: Ethnic Cleansing in the Negev

Al-Araqib is a beleaguered Bedouin village in the western Negev Desert; beleaguered because as part of the Israeli government's programme of Judaisation all Arab Israeli citizens of the Negev face eviction from their homes and land. Al-Araqib is reached by a 2 kilometre track, invisible from the highway, and its collection of tents, sheet metal mosque and small cemetery is now home to some 22 families and their livestock. They live in dire poverty without water or electricity and cut off completely from the services available to other Israeli citizens.

Al-Araqib is one of the 35 "unrecognised" Bedouin villages of the Negev most at risk of destruction. According to Dr Thabet Abu Rass, Negev Director of Adalah, (the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel), "The policy of the government is to deliberately deny basic services to these villages, including running water, electricity, roads, healthcare, postal, telecommunications and schools, in order to pressure the Bedouin communities to abandon their land." Without these services Bedouin communities endure extreme poverty and hardship.

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Central to Israel's creation myth is the notion of "a land without a people for a people without a land". To reinforce the myth Israeli maps do not mark Bedouin villages; instead they name Bedouin tribes, in so doing they imply, erroneously, that the Bedouin are nomadic people without specific ties to land or place.



Dr Thabet Abu Rass of Adalah

While it attempts to airbrush the Negev's indigenous Bedouin population from its ancient history, the myth, at the same time, identifies the Bedouin as a problem for both Jewish expansion and the physical environment of the Negev. The proclamations of Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, that the Zionist movement would both protect the desert (from whom? we must ask) and make it bloom imply that the desert was an agricultural wasteland.

The evidence, however, shows otherwise. For generations, the Bedouin have grown crops and grazed livestock in the Negev Desert, living in harmony with the land.

The myth, despite its obviously false premise, has political value and continues to give licence to land-grabbing on a grand scale, land confiscation, house and village demolitions and forced evictions in order to force the dispersed Bedouin population into concentrated and controlled urban areas.

Al-Araqib illustrates with particular clarity the discriminatory nature of land acquisition and village recognition policy in Israel: In 1926, two tracts of land were purchased in the same vicinity, the Kibbutz Mishar Hanegev and the Al-Turi Bedouin tribe's Al-Araqib. The purchase of Mishar Hanegev was recognised while Al-Araqib was defined as a trespasser. As an unrecognised village, at the time of writing (May 2014), since 2010 Al Araqib has been [demolished](#)<sup>11</sup> by the Israeli authorities an inconceivable 70 times.

The demolitions began on July 27th that year and have continued as an unceasing act of state aggression against the Bedouin. The Israeli government is planning new Jewish settlements for the Bedouin land, some directly on the sites of demolished villages. It is also planting two large forests on the ancestral land of the Al-Araqib Bedouin. One of those forests, "the Ambassador", was planted by the Israeli government in collusion with the Jewish National Fund (JNF). This "environmentally friendly" form of land-grabbing and dispossession was inaugurated in the presence of officials from 49 countries as a celebration of greening the desert. Forestation in Israel is a widespread strategy and a mechanism of forced eviction. For Thabet Abu Rass, Israel's attempted grab of Bedouin land is ideological:



Watch

The forestation of "the Ambassador" forest

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*“There is room for everyone in the Negev – room for all Israel’s projects,” he says. “After all, Israel controls 96 per cent of the total geographical area of the Negev, it is state land. The question we must ask is why the state is targeting the specific land of the Bedouin. We are not against trees, we love trees, but why exactly are they targeting Bedouin cultivated land for these forests? There is enough room here for all of their trees; we could show them where to plant their forests but not on land the Bedouin are cultivating... for the first time since the inception of Israel they are closing areas in national places. Arabs cannot go and live there. This is creeping apartheid.”*

Dr Abu Rass pointed out that Israeli policy towards the Bedouin has, since 1948, been founded on 3 pillars: “The first pillar has been to concentrate the Bedouin into just 1 per cent of the area of the Negev (the Negev comprises 60 per cent of the total area of Israel and the Bedouin own 5.5 per cent of the Negev); the second is urbanisation (under the guise of modernisation) and the third relates to finalising land claims and land confiscation; in essence, this means confiscation.” These pillars are each embodied in the controversial Praver Plan.

## The Praver Plan

Under the Praver Plan, the bill for which was approved in the Israeli Knesset on June 24th 2013, the Arab Bedouin of the Negev face mass expulsion from their ancestral lands in Israel's attempt to nationalise the remaining 5 per cent of the Negev not already state-owned and under land claims by the Bedouin. Acknowledged internationally as discriminatory legislation, the Praver Plan allows for the demolition of the 35 "unrecognised" Bedouin villages and the forced eviction of some 70,000 Bedouin Israeli citizens.



Unrecognised Naqab village

The plan brings together and coordinates the practice begun in 2010 of concentrating, urbanising and driving

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the Bedouin population from the Negev through confiscation and forced eviction in order to establish Jewish communities throughout the desert area. The Praver doctrine rests entirely on the claim that the Bedouin are trespassing on state land or, as Israel's extreme right-wing Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman declared, "Stealing our lands".

Giving the lie to this claim are three incontestable facts:

- 1) There is abundant evidence to demonstrate that the Bedouin actually owned land in the Negev under both Ottoman and British governance and that both regimes recognised traditional Bedouin ownership of the land;
- 2) The Bedouin of the Negev, for centuries, cultivated large tracts of land and, in order to do so, lived in tent settlements; and
- 3) Jewish organisations purchased large swathes of land from the Bedouin during the period of the British Mandate.

According to Yiftachel, et al: "In the 1920s, the British began mapping and registering all cultivated, possessed and allocated land in the names of its traditional owners. The process was based on testimony from neighbours, tax documents and confirmation from community leaders, which was usually enough for the registrars, alongside the Ottoman registration or traditional contracts of sale... There is no doubt that if this process had reached the Negev before 1948, the cultivated and settled Bedouin land would have been registered in their names." (Yiftachel, O., Amara, A. and Kedar, S. 2014)

The British, however, managed to register only 20 per cent of the land before Israel took over the process. In the 1960s, however, Israel stopped this work in the Negev, after 3,200 Bedouin filed claims to their land.

For Adalah the Praver Plan is an attempt to institutionalise the state's historic injustice against its Bedouin citizens, and according to Thabet Abu Rass:

*"The Bedouin now face the most severe attack on their homes and livelihoods since the Nakba. Demolishing houses is the major problem right now but Israel is trying different tactics to make life for the Bedouin hell. First of all demolishing their houses but other tactics include chasing shepherds and confiscating their herds, then demanding 1,000 shekels for the return of each sheep; cutting the water supply to Bedouin communities and ploughing cultivated land. These are all acts of destruction."*

The mechanics of forced demolition are brutal. Along with the evictions they often embody they are acts of terror and involve many of the features of forced disappearances witnessed under military dictatorships (see Ward and Green 2004; Feitlowitz 1998). They occur without warning, usually in the very early hours of the morning when everyone is sleeping. Forced evictions are also exceptionally loud: police and military vehicles arrive with sirens blaring, helicopters hover overhead, police dogs bark wildly, armed security forces storm into houses and bulldozers are positioned to destroy targeted homes.

Standing in front of Al-Araqib's makeshift mosque where Sabbah Al Turi and her family now live, she relayed her experience of the day when the village was first destroyed in 2010:

*"I'll never forget that day; army, cars, tractors, bulldozers, officials from the Israeli Lands Administration, they came at 5 in the morning... we woke in terror. There were more than 60 houses here, more than 60 families. Imagine, in about 3-4 hours they had demolished the entire village."*



Sabbah Al Turi, outside Al Araqib's makeshift mosque

Oren Yiftachel, the former Chair of B'Tselem who was in the village at the time of the eviction, described the violence of the process: “One thousand special police forces arrived and villagers and supporters were dragged by arms and legs onto waiting trucks.”

Aziz Al-Turi, Sabah's husband, recounted another village demolition: *“Imagine a car travelling at 120 kilometres an hour over the sand – it looks like an aeroplane. When they get out of the car they are fully prepared, all pointing guns to frighten us as if they want to terrorise us. One time in 2011 the soldiers fired on us, on men, women and children, and then they wouldn't allow ambulances to enter the village to treat the injured.*

*When the demolitions first began my eldest daughter would go to bed every night wearing her shoes. I told her take them off; you'll be more comfortable I said, but she replied, 'No I will leave my shoes on. If they come to demolish our house I don't want*

*to have to look for my shoes, my bag, my clothes; they will take everything'."*

To add insult to injury the Israeli state demands payment of the demolition costs from those whose homes they destroy. *"The government demanded that we pay 2 million shekels for its crimes of demolishing our homes and village, for uprooting our 4,500 olive saplings, for arresting our young men and women. Two million shekels for 3 demolitions – what about the other 60 times?" asked the village head, Shaikh Sayyah. "Maybe we should pay 10 million shekels! ... This is all about evicting us from our land but we will not be evicted at any cost. We will either live here on the land with dignity or be buried in it with dignity."*

Before 1948 around 92,000 Bedouin controlled 99 per cent of the land in the Negev. Following the 1948 Nakba most Bedouin were expelled to neighbouring Arab states with only 11 per cent of the population remaining on their land. They were concentrated in a barren and restricted area called the Siyag and have never been permitted to return to their ancestral homes. Nor were they given property rights to land in the Siyag. Later, from 1969, they were moved for administrative purposes to seven Negev townships established to concentrate and contain the Bedouin. In the process the displaced Bedouin were dislocated from their agricultural traditions, their livelihoods and culture.

In a makeshift tent, bare save for two brilliantly striped rugs and a brewing samovar, we heard Shaikh Sayyah tell of his relationship with the land and his struggle to retain his home:

*"I was here on this land three years before the state of Israel was declared. My ancestors lived on this land for 700 years. I'm three years older than Israel but I'm not allowed to build a home. I live in a tent and my tent also has a demolition order against it. Settlers*

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*from Romania, Russia and America come – like monsters they come – and build on our land and take it over.”*



Al Araqib's head, Shaikh Sayyah

The Shaikh argues that it is state policy to target the Bedouin and Palestinian leadership, to arrest them, to demolish their homes and villages and to humiliate them in order to control their communities:

*“They say I am a criminal because I am protecting my land? They should know that even if they kill me, or arrest me and imprison me for a long time I will keep saying this is my land and if I die my children will say it's our land and if my children die our grandchildren will say this land is ours.*

*They say the land doesn't belong to us! Where were we in 1944? If we are not the owners of this land who are those people buried in the cemetery here? They are all Arab Muslims; they are our*

families. The cemetery has been here since 1914.”

The violent harassment of Al-Araqib, however, began long before the demolitions. Aziz remembers being woken at 4am one morning in 2003 to aircraft sweeping low over the village and surrounding land: *“They sprayed all the land and the entire village with a toxic chemical called roundup. This chemical kills plants and living things. For the next five or six years our land didn’t produce normal crops and the soil was damaged deeply. Because of the poisoning more than 300 sheep died, 200 belonging to my uncle and one hundred of our own. And my uncle died about three months after the poisoning; he had been outside at the time and they sprayed him directly with the toxic chemicals.”*

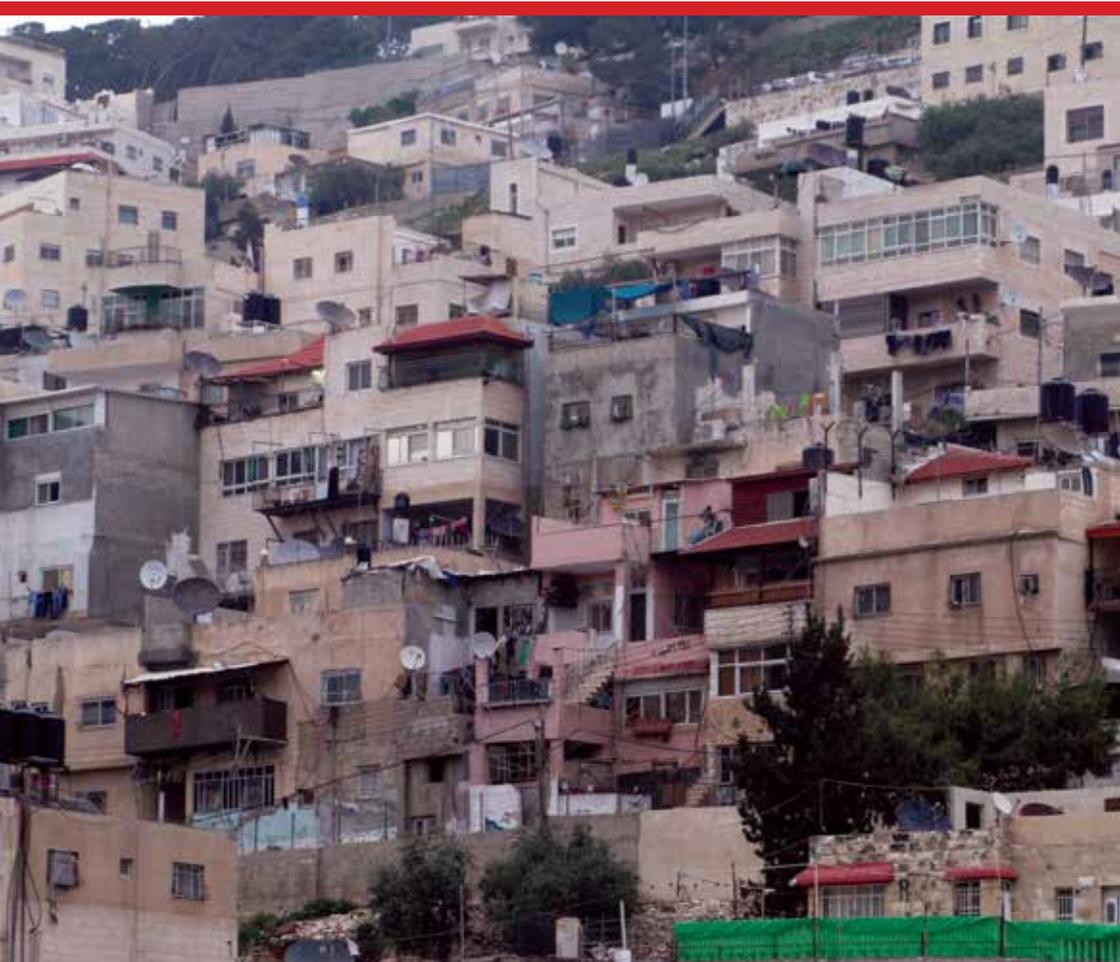
The programme to poison Bedouin land began in February 2002. It was justified by the Israeli Lands Authority as the best and most efficient means to counter what it described ironically as the Bedouin’s “phenomenon of illegal occupation” of state-owned land. In a petition submitted in May 2004 to Israel’s Supreme Court of Justice, Adalah submitted expert evidence stating that the chemical used in the crop dusting not only destroyed crops and livestock but also increased the risk of developing cancer and producing birth defects, and caused breathing difficulties, nausea and vertigo. (Haaretz, February 16th 2005) The majority view of the three justices involved was that although spraying was a disproportionate means of controlling state lands, as the landowner “the state is allowed to take steps to cope with a takeover of that land”. (Haaretz, April 16th 2007)

Aziz makes a simple yet profound point when he says that he and his people live in peace, here in the Negev, self-sufficient with their crops and livestock. It is incomprehensible to him that Israel wants to “enslave” the Bedouin away from their only means of livelihood and in towns where Bedouin suffer extreme rates of

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unemployment and poverty.

As Thabet Abu Rass waved goodbye to us from Adalah's Be'er Sheva office he said, *"There are many Hebrew songs about the land but the problem with Jewish Israelis is that they forget that we Arabs sing the same songs."*



Silwan, under the threat of demolition

## House demolitions and a Biblical Theme Park in East Jerusalem

From the vantage point of the Ancient Tombs you can see a Palestinian neighbourhood spreading out before you. Because 90 per cent of it was built after the 1967 Israeli occupation and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, it is considered by the authorities to be there “without a permit”. As a result, 64 per cent of it is under a demolition order.

According to the UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) which monitors and maps house demolitions, East Jerusalem is experiencing an increasing number of demolitions and population displacement. In the ten years between 2004 and 2014, [516 housing units were demolished](#) in East Jerusalem; 59 were carried out by the home owners to save the amount that Israel demands for demolition. As a result, 2,028 people have been made homeless. The vast majority of these homes belonged to Palestinians.

“Residents don’t have alternative solutions for housing, which forces them to build ‘illegal’ housing,” says Mahmoud Qaraeen of the Silwan Visitor’s centre. Yet not only does this give Israel a pretext for demolishing homes, it makes a lot of money – up to 200 million shekels a year Mahmoud says – in fines imposed by the Jerusalem municipality.

From Wadi Hilweh you can look across into the Silwan area of Al-Bustan. The houses here lie at the base of Silwan’s densely-populated Judean hills.

The neighbourhood has 1,200 residents and 88 buildings. This is the area that Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat wants to destroy and replace with a [bible - themed tourist park](#).<sup>13</sup> The 88 Palestinian homes that he says will be demolished to make way for his theme park are, in his words, “illegally

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built slums". Demolishing these homes and evicting 1,000 residents does not constitute eviction according to Mayor Birkat. When challenged on his plans to evict the residents of Al-Bustan he declared, "Not evict! When you improve their quality of life, the right word to say is that you are dealing with improvement of quality of life." This claim is gratefully disingenuous given the fact that not a single building permit has been issued to residents of Al-Bustan since 1967. The forced evictions and house demolitions in [Al Bustan](#)<sup>14</sup> represent a clear plan to wrest land from Palestinians and bring it under Israeli control. Abu Diab, who heads the Al-Bustan Residents' Committee, said that the people of Al-Bustan are afraid to go on holiday because they don't know "if their houses will still be there when they get back."

Victims of house demolitions in East Jerusalem speak of "battalions" of armed and masked police storming their homes while they sleep; of being pushed, punched and abused; and of being photographed by soldiers as the bulldozers move in.

[Iyad al-Shaer](#)<sup>15</sup> recently made the agonising decision to demolish the home he had built for his brother and his fiancée. "I have two choices: I destroy it myself or they will come, demolish my home, then charge me for it. The second choice is that I go to court, pay fines, pay the engineer, pay the lawyer; at the end I know that I will lose. Palestinians; we always lose."

According to Jamal Juma, this is the most humiliating aspect of the demolitions. *"They come and they destroy your life investment, where you and your sons and your wife, the whole family were working to build this house and the state decides to demolish it, and when they decide to demolish it they bring their bulldozers and the military and the one who should pay is you, the*

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owner.”

Activist Lubna Masarwa told us that we need to understand something about housing in Palestine. “To build a house here, it’s a whole process and you are thinking how to build a house for your child. It’s all your emotions and life goal, and when you’ve built your house you make a big feast and the neighbours come. It is a very dear thing to us. So when you demolish a home you have built or watch as the state destroys it, it is something very, very difficult.”

Israel’s prosecution of building code violations is blatantly [discriminatory](#).<sup>16</sup> In the period 1996-2000, for example, the number of recorded building violations was four and a half times higher in Israeli neighbourhoods of Jerusalem (17,382 violations) than in Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem (3,846 violations). Nevertheless, during this same period, the number of demolition orders issued in West Jerusalem was four time fewer (86 orders) than the number in East Jerusalem (348 orders). In other words, while over 80 per cent of building violations were recorded in West Jerusalem, 80 per cent of actual demolition orders were issued for buildings in Palestinian East Jerusalem. Between 1999 and 2003, 157 Palestinian-owned buildings were demolished, while only 30 Israeli-owned buildings met the same fate.

דרך זו מובילה לשטח A  
בשליטת הרשות הפלסטינאית  
הכניסה לישראלים אסורה,  
מסכנת את חייכם  
ומהווה עבירה פלילית

هذه الطريق تؤدي إلى منطقة (أ)  
التابعة للسلطة الفلسطينية

الدخول للمواطنين الاسرائيليين  
ممنوعة وخطرة على حياتهم  
وتشكل مخالفة جنائية في حقهم

This Road leads To Area "A"  
Under The Palestinian Authority  
The Entrance For Israeli  
Citizens Is Forbidden,  
Dangerous To Your Lives  
And Is Against The Israeli Law

## Abu Saqer: Demolition, Eviction and Resistance in the Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley constitutes 28.8 per cent of the West Bank's land mass; it is sparsely populated and home to approximately 65,000 Palestinians. Located in Area C and therefore under Israeli security and land control it is an area subject to widespread house and workplace demolitions and forced evictions.

The land is rich and fertile. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, however, Palestinians in the Jordan Valley cultivate only around 12 per cent of the arable land in the region. The reasons for this underuse are ascribed to Israel's "[prohibition](#)<sup>17</sup> on use of most of the land in the area, diminished access to water and restrictions on construction and infrastructure hook-ups."

The land in the Jordan Valley, in theory, provides the possibility for extensive Palestinian urban, agricultural and economic expansion and development. However, Israel has made any such development impossible through its strategies of militarised zoning, planning rejections, resource theft and the wide-spread forced eviction of agricultural communities.

[OCHA](#) reports that 390 Palestinian-owned structures in the Jordan valley were demolished in 2013 resulting in the forced displacement of 590 Palestinians (more than half of them children). This represents a dramatic increase from the 172 demolitions of houses, workplaces, communal buildings and livestock pens carried out by Israeli forces in 2012 when 279 people were made homeless.

Abu Saqer is a proud and defiant farmer living with his children in the village of Alhadidya in the northern part of the Jordan Valley. His family have farmed the land here for

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generations.

For the 63 year old, demolition is a fact of life; he and his family have suffered the demolition of their home and farm buildings six times.

*“In our area,” he told us, “the destruction of houses began in 1967 and the destruction of our livestock shelters, that began in 1997. They began by harassing us – the farmers and the shepherds - forcing us through the demolition of our homes and animal shelters to move from one place to another. After destroying our properties, they began to harass our animals.”*



Abu Saqer

From 1987 until the beginning of the Oslo peace process in 1993 there was some respite but it was short-lived. *“With Oslo we were re-classified as being in Area C and came under full Israeli jurisdiction. As soon as we were re-classified the evacuation and destruction of our communities began with brutality,”* he said.

Explaining the process and apparent justification Abu Saqer explained:

*“They send us a written demolition order; they just throw it here under the door. The last time they came to demolish my home they did so despite a court order freezing the demolition. The court had issued an interim order prohibiting the state from demolishing the village. They just ignored it! They said the land surveys of the land aren’t accurate and that’s why we destroy your home.*

*The Special Forces come for the evictions and they are very violent – their faces are covered with black masks. They come with at least 40 military vehicles and with bulldozers. They destroy*

*everything, the house, the oven that we cook our bread in, the water troughs. And not just that they take our water and pour it out onto the ground – the water for our children to drink – they just pour it away.*

*Women, children, sheep – everyone was forced to stay outside for 10 days with nothing to shelter under. The military didn't leave the area and each time tents were put up they came and tore them all down again.*

*The biggest crime is not simply the destruction of our houses but also the way in which the destruction takes place. Here in the summer the temperature reaches 50 degrees in the shade so when they come in summer and destroy our tents they leave us totally exposed – they simply throw us out into the heat. It's the same in winter – they come at night when the temperature is below freezing. The impact on our animals is terrible; most of our new-borns died because of the heat or the freezing temperatures. This affects our future – these are serious losses for us.*

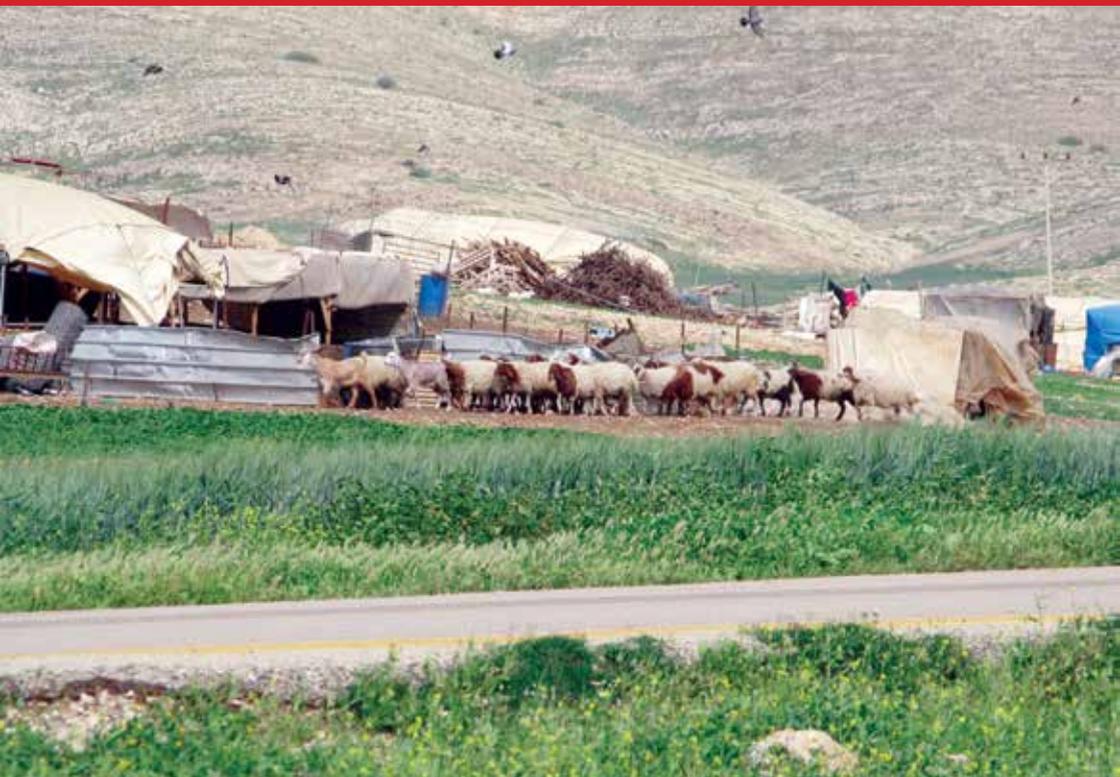
*The impact on us as parents is very difficult – when you can't feed your children because the oven has been destroyed and you can't bake bread, when you can't give them any water, when you can't give them shelter– can you imagine how this feels?*

*It's happening constantly in the Jordan Valley, not just to me but to most Palestinians here in Area C. The last time our home was demolished was 21st June 2011 but the destruction that has taken place in 2013-14 has been much more violent, much more criminal than what happened to us. Before 2013 they would destroy our tents and shelters. The International Red Cross would bring tents for us so our children could have shelter. Now what is happening is that when they have destroyed a home the Israeli forces don't leave – they stay and keep controlling the area. Anyone who tries to bring assistance is prevented and the goods they bring to help those evicted are confiscated. Worse there are cases where those bringing humanitarian aid have been beaten.”*

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Here he is referring to the Israel Defence Forces assault on a French diplomat, Marion Castaing, who arrived with an EU diplomatic convoy to bring support for 120 Bedouins who'd been evicted from their homes in the nearby village of Khirbet Al-Makhul.

*"Everything she and her organisation brought with them was confiscated by the IDF and she was kicked out of the country. The French kept their mouths shut – they didn't raise a voice in protest."*



Abu Saqer is steadfast and continues to resist the state's incursions into his life and land.

Despite the classification of much of the Jordan Valley as military and firing zones he refuses to accept the illegal status foisted upon him.

*“The Israelis behave like Mafia gangs. They are liars and as they come to demolish our houses they also come to support the settlers despite pretending that they don’t.”*

As Abu Saqer’s experience reveals, demolition does not always equate with long-term eviction. In many cases the destruction of a home is followed by its immediate re-building. Oren Yifchatel describes this cycle of state harassment and Palestinian resilience; as “the performance of sovereignty”. As we saw in the Negev, Dahmash and the Jordan Valley, Palestinians consistently and defiantly challenge the pressure to leave their homes by rebuilding immediately and re-inhabiting their houses after every demolition.

The performance of sovereignty is, however, much more than theatre and must be understood as integral to Israel’s broader expansionist plans.



## The Separation Wall(s), Apartheid Roads and Hidden Tunnels

The separation wall is a monstrous, suffocating, 810 kilometre grey concrete structure which winds in seemingly irrational convolutions through Jerusalem, parts of Ramallah, Qalqilya and the West Bank. It separates Palestinians not only from Israel but also from their



Palestinian neighbours, from their friends and families, and in some cases encircles whole communities.

One is struck by the fact that this wall is not about security; it is most certainly not about protecting Israelis from Palestinians. Its path is designed to connect and annexe the illegal settlements to Israel; ultimately, as Jamal Juma

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from [Stop the Wall Campaign](#)<sup>18</sup> declares, it is about “the complete colonisation of the West Bank and the expulsion or enslavement of the Palestinian population.”

In building the wall Israel has already, by stealth, seized another 12 per cent of Palestinian West Bank territory. As a result, 211,000 Jewish settlers living illegally on land confiscated from Palestinians have also been effectively annexed to Jerusalem.

The wall has separated hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Jerusalem and in doing so has wilfully and forcibly altered the city’s cultural and demographic composition. We spoke with many for whom the wall has made family life and friendships difficult if not impossible: At Shaikh Sa’id checkpoint a man told us, *“Before the wall it would take me just 10 minutes to reach my daughter and her children; now it takes me between an hour and an hour and a half depending on traffic at the checkpoint.”*

He pointed to the village of Jabal Almokabir in the distance. The wall, he said, has isolated the two villages from each other.

Umm Kamel lives in Shaikh Jarrah and has been evicted twice from her home. Her daughter lived just 3 minutes away from her but now she is behind the wall and it can take almost two hours to make the journey. For Jamal to visit his sister and her family living near Al Quds University is now an arduous and unpleasant journey through checkpoints designed, as Jamal said, “to stop Palestinians passing.”

Whereas the Berlin Wall was 4 metres high, Israel’s separation wall is a massive 8 metres. It is chequered with watchtowers and its 30-100 metre “buffer zone”



Watch

At the Shaikh Sa’id  
checkpoint



ساعة

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accommodates military patrols, surveillance equipment and electric fences. There are 634 checkpoints along the wall, 34 of them fortified. The wall and these checkpoints limit severely the capacity of Palestinians to live and work freely. Rather they have created permanent Israeli control over the daily lives of Palestinians. Witness the thousands of Palestinians queuing in the metal corridors of Eyal, Qalqilya, Tarqumya or any of the West Bank's checkpoints every morning; they all serve as major entry points for those Palestinians with permits to work in Israel. The checkpoints resemble cattle yards, with yellow barriers, metal holding pens covered with razor wire, long narrow metal-fenced inspection lanes and iron turnstiles.

Workers at Tulkarem "Terminal" begin arriving as early as



Tulkarem "Terminal"



Tulkarem "Terminal"

midnight, hours before the checkpoints open at 4am. By 3.30am thousands of workers are edging forward in a process which will take them at least 2 hours, just so that they may get to work on time.

The experience is dehumanising and, at the same time, a very clear assertion of Israeli power over Palestinian movement. The wall has also separated many farmers from their land and while agricultural "gates" exist they are often opened only at the whim of the IDF soldiers who control them.

Passing through checkpoints is to be subjected to harassment, humiliation, violence and control.

In the Ambassador Hotel in East Jerusalem our waiter Ra'ad smiled and shrugged as he described how the separation wall has changed his life. Living in the village of Biddo and working in East Jerusalem, Ra'ad's journey to work should take just 15 minutes; with the construction of

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the wall it can now take him up to 2 hours.

The wall is supplemented by an apartheid system of modern, direct roads, bridges and highways linking the illegal settlements to west Jerusalem; there are 1,661 kilometres of roads on which it is strictly forbidden for Palestinians to travel. They must instead rely on a system of 44 tunnels linked by roads in poor repair which wind beneath the illegal settlements and link the 22 otherwise fragmented and isolated Palestinian villages through slow and circuitous routes.

To understand the physical, demographic, social and economic impact of the wall we followed it as it snakes from Ramallah to Bir Nabalah. To follow the line of the wall is to experience a state of utter disorientation. It is very hard to make sense of it until one realises that disorientation and fragmentation are central to its purpose. The ugly grey concrete structure was planned carefully. For Israel, the wall renders invisible the Palestinian population, annexes the illegal Jewish settlements to Jerusalem and at the same time separates Palestinian communities and their farmlands from the rest of the West Bank. The convolutions and incursions into West Bank territory that we saw are not irrational but designed specifically to accommodate Israel's future expansion of illegal settlements.

The [Stop the Wall](#)<sup>19</sup> Campaign estimates that the wall, when completed, will have annexed around 46 per cent of the West Bank and isolated 78 Palestinian villages and communities in which 266,442 people live. As a result, some 257,265 Palestinians will be living in villages surrounded by the wall, settlements and settler-only roads; 8,557 Palestinians will be living in villages trapped between the wall and the Green (1949 Armistice) Line; and

6,314 Palestinians will be threatened with expulsion. The Palestinians of East Jerusalem will be totally isolated from the rest of the West Bank.

For the [Arab Association for Human Rights](#),<sup>20</sup> Israel's establishment of walls and fences "sends a clear message to the Palestinian minority that they are not welcome citizens and that there is no possibility for the two populations to live together."



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## The Ghost villages of Bir Nabalah: death by wall

We drove through Ramallah and into Area B. The wall ran parallel, half a kilometre to our right, as we travelled along a Palestinian road built seven years ago to link what are popularly described as “Bantustans”, those Palestinian villages fragmented, encircled and isolated from the West Bank by the wall and its checkpoints. Road 443 lay ahead; this is a road we would not be driving along, as Palestinians are prohibited from using it. It’s the first of the roads in the apartheid transport system designed specifically to provide access between the settlements and Jerusalem.



Driving through Qalandiya village we could see, in the distance, a small collection of 6 or 7 houses squashed between two walls. Then we reached the so-called Bir Nabala enclave, a group of villages Beit Hanina, Al-Balad, Bir Nabala, Al-Jib, Al-Judeira and Qalandiya completely

surrounded by the wall. Home to over 15,000 Palestinians, the area was once prosperous and linked to Jaffa. Now it lies ruined and largely abandoned, cut off completely from neighbouring Palestinian villages and East Jerusalem by walls and roads. “Anyone who knew this place before could not believe it now,” we were told by Jamal.

Nasir Abu Skena showed us his derelict home. It lies at the end of a once busy street and is now completely overshadowed by the wall. With the broken glass and inch-deep pigeon droppings it is hard to imagine the family life which just eight years ago filled these broken walls. Now Nasir’s 5-storey house is home only to thousands of pigeons who have conquered every nook and cranny. It seems an appropriate metaphor for Israel’s colonisation strategy.



Nasir Abu Skena's derelict home

The wall, just metres from the front door, casts a dark shadow over the house and Nasir explained why he was forced to leave: “My family lived here and life was good but the wall changed everything for me. Before the wall it took me 15 minutes to get to work but now the drive is almost 2 hours. It became impossible; now we live in a small flat in East Jerusalem. I had another house here just behind but it is nothing but rubble. The Israelis demolished it one night two months before they built the wall; they said I did not have permission. It is very sad. I have nothing here now.”



A little further up the road a young man stood in the doorway of an empty garage with a small boy. “Shalom,” he called out, and pointed to the wall 6 metres in front of him. “This is the Israelis’ peace,” he added, before turning away and disappearing inside. The street is desolate and abandoned. It is hard to imagine the economic and social vibrancy of its former life.

Further along a road that used to be the main link between Jerusalem and Ramallah we reached Al-Jeeb checkpoint. Even checkpoints have restrictions; only workers and diplomatic cars can cross this one so we continued through agricultural land and the longest tunnel in the apartheid system, 1 kilometre, to get to Biddo village. Here wire fences revealed what the grey cement wall conceals; the extent of the land confiscation which



has accompanied the building of the wall. We saw that between 30 and 100 metres of Palestinian land has been taken by the construction of the wall. The road, which used to run directly to Ramallah, now ends abruptly. There is a wall “protecting” an illegal Jewish settlement perched on the hillside.

It was here, at this dead-end, that Jamal Juma lost two young colleagues in 2004. Campaigners against the wall, they were shot dead by Israeli soldiers as they protested peacefully against the construction. “We lost five people in this area in 2004,” he said, quietly. “People here sacrificed everything to stop this wall. We blocked the work on it for months. That’s why they started killing people. More than 100 people have been shot so that this wall could be built. They left a misery forever.”



## Suffocating in Bethlehem

En route to Bethlehem we stopped at a lay-by, which provided a stark example of Israel's segregated transport system. To our left lay a modern settler-only road leading to the illegal settlements of Beit Shemesh and Beitar Illit. In parallel, and to our right, lay a poorly-maintained Palestinian road leading to Palestinian villages. At no point do these roads meet.

As with the entrance to all roads and checkpoints leading to Palestinian communities we found Israel's ubiquitous and alarmist red and white road signs, a distorted reassurance for Israelis that apartheid is a necessary protection: *"This Road Leads to Area A under the Palestinian Authority. The entrance for Israeli Citizens is Forbidden, Dangerous to Your Lives, And Is Against Israeli Law."*



Watch

Israel's segregated transport system

Bethlehem lies behind the wall which was in front of us. At this particular vantage point – available to those with Israeli IDs – the wall is inset with tasteful sandstone bricks, suggesting a suburban landscaped garden rather than a racist barrier. In our Israeli-plated car we were travelling on a road denied to those holding West Bank IDs. The difference in perspectives is both real and symbolic.

Palestinian access to Bethlehem is via an old pot-holed road winding down a hill and through a tunnel beneath a modern settler-only highway. We could see Bethlehem directly in front of us but the wall and apartheid roads prevented any form of direct and easy access.

We went to Bethlehem to meet the Anastas family whose lives and businesses have been blighted by the wall. They live on what was once Bethlehem's busiest street, linking Bethlehem to Jerusalem, and within a stone's throw of Rachel's Tomb. The street is no longer a thoroughfare and no longer busy; it is blocked completely by the wall. Rachel's Tomb is hidden behind, visible only partially through a tiny crack in the concrete; a memory of another geography.

Before the wall, the Anastas family garage and vegetable store were flourishing businesses. Now, however, the separation wall imprisons their home on three sides. It is hard to describe the oppressive quality of this isolated house imprisoned by concrete.

The Anastas's 15 year old son, Danny, described going to school to school one morning and returning to find his home surrounded by towering concrete walls: "I went to each side of the house and the wall was there on every



side; are we buried alive? I asked my mother. Surely we must leave tomorrow, but she couldn't reply... we can't leave, we have no place to go." As soon as he is old enough Danny says he will leave but for most of his family there is no such option.

Danny's father portrayed an anxiety and despair borne of the imprisonment that daily life holds for him. "I want to get out of here but where can I go?" he asked. "I just want to live a normal life without fear."

## Local variants

Other, more local segregation walls are emerging in Israel. Close to the unrecognised village of Dahmash in the Lod Valley we saw a 4 metre high construction built by the regional council to separate Lod's impoverished Arab/Palestinian neighbourhood of Pardes Snir from the nearby Nir Zvi moshav. Covered in graffiti, the wall establishes a stark and ugly visual and physical barrier between the troubled Pardes Snir and the affluent community of Nir Zvi.

Rather than being a response to noise, nuisance and petty crime, as the residents of Nir Zvi claim, the Pardes Snir wall represents something more sinister, mirroring as it does the national programme of segregation and ghettoisation. Local residents have, however, fought back against this creeping apartheid by destroying a 100 metre stretch of the structure, throwing down a challenge over its reconstruction.





Palestine  
(and never

היישוב היהודי בחברון  
www.hebron.com | מערת המכפלה



never existed!  
(will)

חפשו אותנו בפייסבוק "חברון - ס'

Part 2:

Settlers, settlements and the case of Hebron

Amelia Smith

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# Settlers, Settlements and the case for Hebron

Amelia Smith



Watch

The history and the colonisation of Hebron



## Hashem's home

To the front of Hashem's house there was a line of white washing. When the wind shifts it slightly you can snatch glimpses of a beautiful view over the old city of Hebron.

Around the back is an ugly orange settlement, home to the leader of the Jewish National Front Party. Hashem tells us that the inside is adorned with stickers and posters: "I

already managed to kill Arabs, did you?” asks one. “God gave us the right to kill Arabs and we love it,” says another.

Separating the two buildings is a row of olive trees that belongs to Hashem, but the settlers fenced them off with barbed wire so he is unable to harvest them. In 2012 and 2013 he was given a permit that allowed him access, but on the first occasion settlers attacked him and on the second he found that they had already picked the olives. The ones that were left were poisoned.

To the left is his brother’s family home. He has fitted ugly, brown metal shutters over the windows to prevent frequent break-ins. Hashem’s family were offered \$20 million to leave the house and when they refused the illegal Jewish settlers cut the water pipes to the building. “Then they saw that my wife was three months pregnant; they came and beat her here,” he told us. “She lost the baby.”



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This has happened twice. “The second time my wife was four months pregnant and they came and beat her again and she lost the second pregnancy. They’ve been inside my house, they smashed all of my furniture, they beat my son with guns on his head and he had three stitches. They beat me with the back of the guns and destroyed my teeth,” Hashem said, pointing to a series of scars around his mouth.

Hashem’s story hangs in the air like a bad smell and trying to leave it behind we departed via a rocky path. About halfway up he pointed to a thick wire across the way, warning us to be careful. “Barbed wire was tied here to prevent us from passing,” he explained with the nonchalance, or weariness, of someone who has put up with brutish behaviour for years.

It’s not just Hashem’s house and his family that are subject to such harassment; many Palestinians undergo the same treatment on a daily basis. The whole of Hebron is littered with intimidation. On a rusty door that once opened onto a Palestinian shop, the words “Gas the Arabs” have been scrawled in black paint; further down the road a blue banner hangs with the words, “Palestine never existed, and never will” written on it.

[According to a UN report from 2005](#)<sup>21</sup> there are 600 settlers and 1,500 soldiers in Hebron. That’s two and a half soldiers for every settler. Many of them live inside the illegal housing blocs and it’s widely accepted that the Israeli army is there to protect the settlers. There are countless incidents where they have been present during attacks but have done nothing to stop the beatings of Palestinians.

On [this video](#)<sup>22</sup> from Breaking the Silence – an organisation

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of former soldiers who now expose what they witnessed serving in Hebron – Gil Hillel recounted her experience of being sent to “guard” settlers at a soldier’s funeral in Hebron. “We were there to protect them from the Palestinians,” she said.

In the weeks after we returned from Palestine a new settlement appeared in Hebron. [Here’s a video](#)<sup>23</sup> of Israeli soldiers helping illegal settlers connect to a water pipe. [This video](#)<sup>24</sup> shows settlers throwing stones at Palestinian school children, who are not helped by the army despite the fact that they are present. [Here’s a selection](#)<sup>25</sup> of nasty incidents carried out by settlers across Palestine whilst soldiers stand by.



Abdullah Nasser, in the picture above, works as a bodyguard at Qurtuba School in Hebron to protect the children from attacks.

## The Hebron Protocol

Since 1997 the situation in Hebron has spiralled downhill. Thanks to an agreement signed between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel, Hebron was split into two areas: H-1, 80 per cent of the area, was placed under the control of the Palestinian Authority whilst the remaining 20 per cent, H-2, (home to 30,000 Palestinians and 200 settlers), was handed to the Israeli army.

H-2 is a section carved off to the west of the city. Protecting the area is a series of checkpoints, put in place after the 2001 Intifada, which control the movement of Palestinians coming in from H-1. Everything is scanned, from bags of fruit to handbags, and IDs are inspected. There is a separate tent for body searches. When we were there a young woman was denied entry and, not far from the metal detector, sat weeping.



All the shops in H-2 have been closed down, killing numerous businesses and making day-to-day life a struggle. If Palestinians want to buy something they must

pass through a checkpoint, undergo the various security checks, and enter H-1.



Palestinian shops in H-2 have been boarded up

The same is true in the event of an emergency.

*“That’s why a lot of Palestinians passed away at this checkpoint,” said Hashem. “The last one was only two weeks ago. He was living in this area but he had a heart attack and there is no ambulance. They wanted to check him; he passed away at the checkpoint. A lot of pregnant women give birth at the checkpoint too.”*

Between 2000 and 2005 [67 Palestinian women were forced to give birth](#)<sup>26</sup> at Israeli checkpoints and 36 babies died.

Situated inside H-2 itself are the settlements of Avraham Avinu, Beit Hadassah and Tel Rumeida, whilst Kiryat Arba and Givat Harsina overlook the area from the hills. A series of roads, which Palestinians are not allowed to use, connect the blocs of illegal housing. This adds an extra 40 minutes to the journey of Palestinians trying to reach their homes; people with British passports, however, are allowed to use them freely. From behind a wire mesh a lady peered down at us on Al-Shuhada Street below. Her front door has been welded shut to prevent her leaving the house onto the forbidden street.

Within Israel’s 20 per cent, two of Hebron’s most cherished sites are situated: the army-controlled entrance to the Ibrahimi Mosque and the Old Souq.

Outside the mosque a line of bored looking soldiers enquire about sharp objects. Inside the mosque, through bullet proof glass towards the rear, it’s possible to see illegal settlers praying in the other half of the building. In the middle of the two sections is the grave of Prophet Abraham.

Twenty years ago, in February 1994, the carpets of the mosque were soaked in blood when, during Ramadan, a

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US-born Israeli military physician living in the Kiryat Arba settlement opened fire on Palestinians praying at dawn, killing 29 and injuring a further 125. He was overpowered and beaten to death. Since then, the mosque has been divided into two areas; the Muslims pray in one area and the illegal Jewish settlers use a much larger portion. This is a mosque, remember.

Through another checkpoint lies the Old Souq, once a bustling hub of life for Palestinians but now a symbol of their economic and financial meltdown. The streets of the market are deserted; there are no customers buying the herbs, traditional Palestinian kuffeyas and beautifully embroidered cushion covers. Above the market is a wire mesh, put in place to stop the settlers above throwing rocks and rubbish onto the Palestinians below.

## **Israel's separation policy**

By early 2010, throughout the West Bank, there were around 120 settlements and many unofficial outposts, with 300,000 illegal settlers in the West Bank hinterland and 200,000 in and around East Jerusalem. Security guards protect them, guarded by their white 4 by 4 vehicles and high salaries, which, thanks to the housing ministry are paid out of both Israeli and Palestinian taxes.

The practice of placing settlers directly in the midst of the Palestinian population makes life excruciating for Palestinians. Yet it is they who pay the price by having harsher restrictions imposed on them as a result: access to their places of worship closed; shops boarded up; roads they are not allowed to walk along; all to protect the settlers.

Israel says it is impossible for settlers to be safe in Hebron without separating Israelis and Palestinians. But the expansion of illegal housing, along with a lack of accountability for the people who live inside these zones, suggests an ulterior motive.

As Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, said: "We will make a great and awful mistake if we fail to settle Hebron, neighbour and predecessor of Jerusalem, with a large Jewish settlement, constantly growing and expanding, very soon. This will also be a blessing to the Arab neighbours. Hebron is worthy to be Jerusalem's sister."



## **Judaising Jerusalem King David's City, in the heart of Silwan**

The steep street that runs through the heart of Silwan was packed with cars. A young boy was carried through the crowds on the shoulders of his friends, brandishing a white and yellow flag and wearing a matching headband. Silwan celebrated the Israelis' release of Palestinian prisoner Mohammed Siyam, aged 13.

The district of Silwan is home to around 55,000 Palestinians. It is located in East Jerusalem, designated to be the future capital of a Palestinian state. Under international law the Green Line divides Jewish West Jerusalem from Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Despite its location, Silwan has become a flashpoint between Palestinians demanding their rights and the aspirations that the Israeli authorities have for the district.

Children like Mohammed are a sober reminder of what happens when these two clash.

Since 1967 the Israeli authorities have pursued a policy of expanding the Jewish population in East Jerusalem and reducing the number of Palestinians. They have isolated the area from the rest of the West Bank and other Palestinian cities, demolished houses, enlarged settlements, established Kafkaesque bureaucracy and redrawn the city's municipal boundaries with the help of the separation wall.

One blueprint for this Judaisation and “de-Arabisation” process is a document called the Jerusalem Master Plan, devised by Ehud Olmert when he was Israeli mayor of the city. Though it has not yet been approved officially it is a reference point for planning decisions in Jerusalem, and the first of its kind since 1967.

On the surface the master plan calls for more housing for the Arab population in the city. However [a closer look](#),<sup>27</sup> at how the plan deals with the Old City, for example, shows that it intends to decrease the population of the Muslim and Christian quarters whilst offering 60 site plans for buildings in the Jewish quarter.

The Old City houses many sites of religious importance: the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque within the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa for Muslims (which the Jews call the Temple Mount); the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for Christians; and the Western Wall for Jews. In 1981 it was listed as a world heritage site.

Twenty metres outside of the Old City, as the sun began to fade, the call to the sunset prayer was disrupted by loud banging. One hundred metres from Al-Aqsa Mosque



(the third holiest site in Islam), excavations are being carried out by the Israeli authorities in their hunt for Jewish artefacts to “prove” their historical narrative.

The site of this dig, inside Silwan, is on confiscated, private Palestinian land originally owned by the Siyam family. Ancient Islamic archaeological sites and antiquities, including a cemetery from the Abbasid Caliphate period, are being destroyed. The excavations have weakened the foundations of surrounding houses; 40 have collapsed as a direct result.

“It’s going to be the biggest building in East Jerusalem,” shouted Mahmoud over the sound of the building work. “It’s going to change the facade of the neighbourhood. They want to make it look like a Jewish neighbourhood.”

Mahmoud Qaraeen co-founded the Wadi Hilweh

information centre opposite. It received a demolition order immediately after it was established. He explained that these days some 400,000 visitors come every year to visit this archaeological site. “They are trying to tell them this neighbourhood is controlled by Israelis, that they are a Jewish majority in the neighbourhood; they are lying and covering up a lot of things,” he told us.

Across the road a smart entrance leads onto another archaeological dig, also carried out by the Israeli authorities, but this time in search of the City of David.

The organisation driving the work is [Elad](#)<sup>28</sup> (Hebrew for ‘To the City of David’), pioneered by [David Be’eri](#)<sup>29</sup> in 1986. According to its website, “Ir David”, or the “City of David”, is the actual location of the Biblical city of Jerusalem captured by King David over 3,000 years ago.

In the centre of the complex lies the Palestinian Abbasi family home comprised of nine flats and two warehouses. Mahmoud said that Be’eri once brought groups of visitors to Abbasi’s home, to whom he would sell oranges, lemons, coffee and tea. The two became close friends, eventually visiting each other’s families. Abbasi began to trust him and would tell his secrets; the history of the house, how one of his brothers lived in the US and the other in Jordan.

“David Be’eri started to collect this information to keep it in order to use it against him by the Absentee Properties Law,” said Mahmoud. The 1950 Absentee Properties Law authorises the transfer of land to the state of Israel if the owner is “absent”. This meant that thousands of Palestinians who were forced out of the country during the 1948 Nakba when Israel was established could not return to their homes because their homes were transferred to

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state ownership.

Eventually, in 1991, Be'eri came flanked by a member of the Knesset and a group of settlers in the middle of the night to occupy part of the house and over the following 20 years took all the parts that belonged to Abbasi's absent brothers. Now Abbasi has seven cameras at the entrance to his home and if he travels he needs a permit to get in and out. If guests visit, they are obliged to leave their names with the authorities.

According to Mahmoud, and many scholars, there is no evidence that King David was ever on this site. "The British Mandate did a lot of excavations around here but they didn't find anything that linked it to the City of David. If they found something it's not really so bad for us; if King David lived here we would be proud. But it doesn't give them the right or reason to occupy our land," he insisted.

With or without evidence the archaeological prestige covers the intentions of the Israeli authorities to move Palestinians out and Jews in. [In this video](#)<sup>30</sup> Doron Spielman, international director of development for the City of David, talks to journalist Lesley Stahl about his aspirations for the site. Stahl claims that the message is simple: because King David took Jerusalem for the Jewish people back then, it belongs to them today.

Back on the development itself we passed another house whose Palestinian owners are in Jordan. Settlers have taken over the roof and built a cinema, whilst a Palestinian family, sitting tenants, are downstairs. In total there are 550 security cameras placed around the City of David. "From this point you can imagine the life of the Big Brother show," Mahmoud said.

The cameras imply that the Jewish settlers are being protected from dangerous outsiders, a myth which takes its toll on the Palestinian tourist industry and the country's economy. Mahmoud told us that a bottle of water in Silwan costs 3 shekels, but in the City of David it is 12 shekels. Still, people would rather pay four times the price.

"From 1991 until today we didn't earn anything from tourism," he said, showing us a restaurant where tourists would once drink tea, but which is now closed. The Israeli authorities took away its permit claiming to be dissatisfied with the kitchen.

We asked Mahmoud if there are ever demonstrations against the policies pursued by the Israelis in Jerusalem. He replied that in the beginning there were indeed many; 3,300 people aged 4-18 years old were arrested over the past three years. "In the beginning they arrested activists, demolished houses, gave house owners more demolition orders. But in the past three years they found that the best way to stop the Palestinians' movement into East Jerusalem is to arrest the children."

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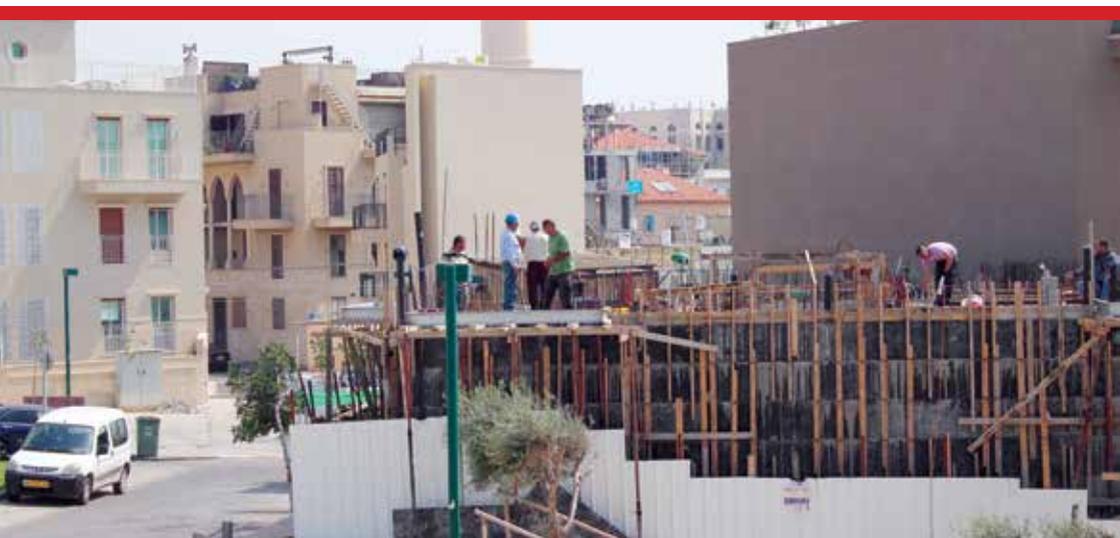
## Ajami: a window onto the Mediterranean

According to Sami Abu Shehada, in the late 1980s the film Delta Force starring Chuck Norris was filmed in the Arab neighbourhood of Ajami in Jaffa. Much of the production was set during the Beirut civil war; it was said that Ajami back then looked just like the battle-torn city.

Of Jaffa's 70 neighbourhoods, Ajami is the weakest economically and socially. In some parts of it the roads are still littered with potholes; paint is peeling off the buildings; there are crumbling walls and the remnants of graffiti.

Yet the further you drive towards the sea, the less run-down the neighbourhood becomes. The road eventually opens up onto an affluent complex of houses, with a sweeping view of the Mediterranean.

“The real estate market reinvented this area,” revealed Jaffa Popular Committee Member Abu Shehada. “The market calls this Northern Ajami.” As Ajami only covers one square kilometre there is no real geographical need to divide it into north and south. “There is no southern Ajami, there is no eastern Ajami. But whenever you buy it is northern Ajami.”



The story, according to Abu Shehada, is that in the late 80s an Israeli architect called Ilan Pivkow came to Ajami and bought up a lot of the land nearby, renovated the buildings and then sold them for high prices. “He convinced the planners that in order to save this criminal neighbourhood the solution was to bring in the rich population.”

“However, the gap between the two populations is huge. We’re talking about people who can make 100,000 shekels a month and people who are living below the poverty line. They have nothing in common. The wealthy people want to see the sea; they don’t want to see poor Arabs.”

Abu Shehada said that the price goes up for groceries, the price goes up for vegetables, the price goes up for meat and then you see this crazy phenomenon. “You come here on Saturdays and hundreds of families leave Jaffa to buy in the West Bank because they can’t afford to buy anything in Jaffa any more.”

If gentrification is one way that the Palestinian population are being squeezed out of Ajami, Judaisation is another. During the 1948 Nakba, the majority of the Arab population in Jaffa was expelled. Most were exiled out of the new state of Israel, but those who remained were moved into Ajami. Four thousand Arabs stayed here whilst their houses were occupied and destroyed in other parts of the city.

After the state of Israel was created Palestinian houses in Ajami were divided into four apartments and the original family would have to share their home with three Jewish immigrant families. In 2010 the Israeli Supreme Court [approved](#)<sup>31</sup> the building of three Jewish-only residential projects in Ajami. There are currently more than 400 Arab

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families living under eviction and destruction orders.

Meanwhile, affluent Israelis, ambassadors and diplomats are offered a window onto the Mediterranean.

In the video on the right, Abu Shehada discusses 'coexistence' in Jaffa.

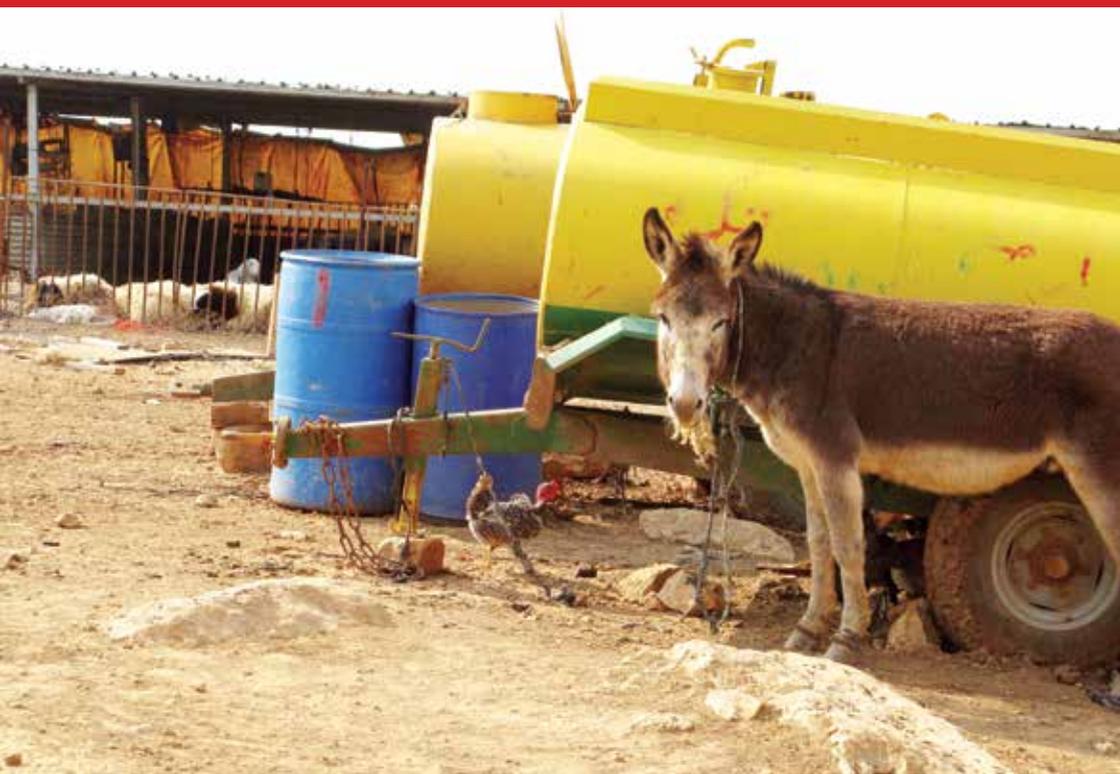


Watch

"Coexistence" in Jaffa

## A monopoly on natural resources The breadbasket of the region

At the entrance to Abu Saqer's windswept, isolated farm, a donkey is tied to a bright yellow water carrier. Sheep rest under a makeshift, corrugated iron roof and chickens inspect the earth. To the side of the shelters a line of goats navigate their way around the tents and file inside.



From the back of the encampment Abu Saqer, the head of the family appears. He has a warm, open face, skin that has seen too much sun, and a white beard which matches his hair, though it is partly concealed by a kuffeyya.

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Under a tarpaulin tent he told us that this farm has been destroyed six times by the Israeli authorities. They come in the height of summer when temperatures soar as high as fifty degrees, or in the dead of winter. His animals die from either heatstroke or the cold, whilst his children contract illnesses. They empty his water supply on the ground and bulldoze the oven where the family bakes bread.

This is life in the Jordan Valley, a strip along the east side of the West Bank which makes up around a third of its land mass. Before 1967 the Palestinian population of the Jordan Valley was between 200,000 and 320,000. Today, thanks to the forced eviction of communities, the delegation of half of the land to Jewish settlements and 44 per cent to closed military zones, it is closer to 65,000.

For Abu Saqer, life has been much worse post-1967. All those years ago his animals were allowed to graze freely and drink water from the River Jordan. Palestinians are not allowed access to the river now.

The issue of water is a problem not only restricted to the Jordan Valley. Thanks to their occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, including areas with plenty of natural resources, Israel's direct control over water resources has increased by almost 50 per cent.

[According to a 2013 report by Al-Haq](#), a non-governmental organisation based in Ramallah, Israel regularly denies permits for and prevents the construction and maintenance of water infrastructure in the West Bank. Anything built without a permit is likely to be destroyed.

Not only do Palestinians not have control over the development and management of water, but half-a-million



illegal settlers also consume around six times more water than 2.6 million Palestinians.

Somewhere outside the tent a cockerel crows. Abu Sager told us that the Israeli authorities “arrest” his animals, detain them and then fine him to keep them overnight, a particularly costly endeavour when a flock of sheep is imprisoned. From 1971, he claimed, the Israelis flew helicopters over cattle grazing in the mountains and shot them.

Still, he is adamant that he will not be bullied into leaving. *“In the summer when I was young we would move to the mountains for the cooler fresh air and in the winter we would move again to warmer areas of the Valley.”*

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He remembers one very dry season when they didn't have enough water so they moved down close to the Jordan River and stayed there for a while. *"The land to me is like the sea to the fish. Like the tree, my roots are deeply in the ground and my head is in the sky. This tree will never willingly leave its land. If it is forced, then it will not peaceful, not peaceful resistance as it is now."*

He said that as long as he and fellow Palestinians plant their land and graze their animals they've limited the expansion of the settlements. "All the punishments and policies, the beatings and confiscations, evictions and demolitions; these are to force us to leave." He is not afraid.

*"They come at midnight to scare us and to make us afraid, but I'm not afraid of them; my being here is worth more than any price they try to extract. And this way we are resisting; disobeying their orders. My only worry is how I can protect my children, how I can manage to provide them with water and the things they need to stay alive, how can I protect them from hatred. When my children see the soldiers acting so violently and aggressively against us, destroying everything we own, how can I prevent them growing up with hatred in their hearts? I am afraid of hatred because I know that when the kids see the soldiers, how they are so aggressive and violent and what they are doing to us, they became really full of hatred."*

Whilst Abu Saqer and other families across the Jordan Valley live in anticipation of the next bulldozer, Israelis are encouraged to settle here with the promise of land (stolen from the Palestinians and often built on within "closed" military zones), free water for irrigation and free education, all care of the Israeli state.

The Jordan Valley is known widely as the breadbasket of the region because it is abundant in vegetables and has rich

soil for animals to graze upon. It contains one-third of the underground water reserves for the West Bank, upon which farmers are dependent.

Three checkpoints control access to and from the Jordan Valley. This succeeds in isolating the communities inside and greatly reduces their ability to sell their produce to the rest of the West Bank. At the same time it increases the market prospects for subsidised settlement goods, which are not subject to the same level of control.



## Unrecognising Bedouin villages

Driving east from Bir Seb'a, the capital of the Negev, which is located inside Israel, you pass the unrecognised village of Umm Al-Hiran, soon to be plain Hiran. It has been earmarked for destruction and when it is, illegal Jewish settlers will be resettled on the rubble of the razed village.

It won't be a difficult task. The stone and cement structures, along with the community's fruit and olive trees, were demolished 18 months ago and replaced with makeshift homes forged from corrugated iron. Classing it as unrecognised, declared 'illegal' by the State of Israel or to have been built without permission, means that the residents are denied access to municipal services including water, electricity, paved roads, health care, schools and sewage systems.

Yet not everybody in the area is so deprived. Far above the flimsy structures that now constitute homes runs an electricity pylon, put in place to supply a nearby graveyard for Jewish dogs. [A recent article by Allison Deger](#) reported that the cemetery boasted an outdoor shower, embossed headstones and even a piano.

The Israeli authorities eventually want residents of Umm Al-

Hiran, who are actually Israeli citizens, to move to the village of Hura. Khalid, a field researcher at Adalah, pointed out pens attached to the sides of the houses. “They put a lot of limits on moving animals, buying animals, selling animals, transferring animals from place to place,” he explained. Where the animals would once graze freely and eat the grass in the fields, they are now restricted to a box at the side of the house.

“Here you see some families buy bags of hay, which Bedouins didn’t do in the past, they didn’t need to buy hay. They always let them graze and fed them with fresh grass. But today they are giving them artificial food and nobody is happy. Not the sellers, not the buyers, not the customers, not the consumers, nobody.”

In the late 1960s Israel declared that it wanted to “urbanise” the Bedouin community in the desert. In practice this meant concentrating them and their animals on as little land as possible, destroying their existing homes and forcing them into townships, often to make way for settlements.

“We are not against civilisation, we are not against modernisation, we are just against urbanisation,” stressed Khalil. “We don’t want to live in cities and I think this is the most important thing that Israel doesn’t want to listen to; it just wants to urbanise everything, concentrate the people into a very minimum space and say now, look, now you are modern.”

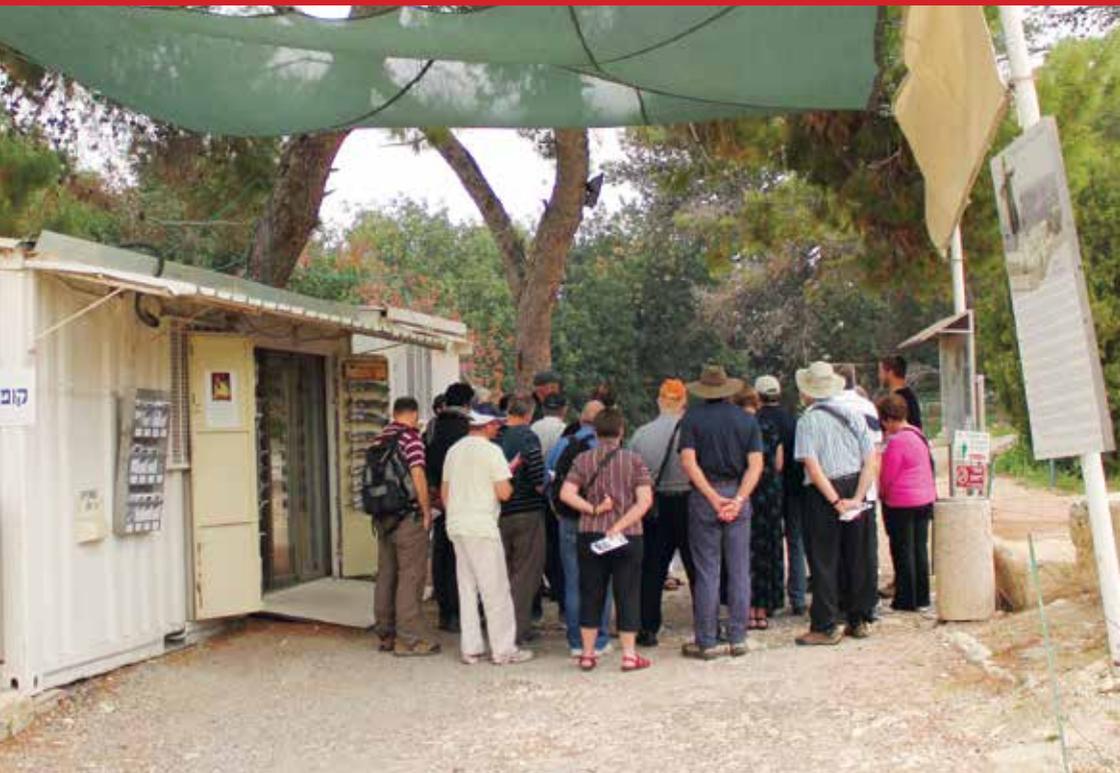
“We are in favour of being modern and having a modern life,” he continued. “Modern facilities, modern infrastructures, modern internet access, schools, iPhones; no problem. I think that modernisation and technology are not contradicting the culture and the traditions.”

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## The Jewish National Fund Building parks on Palestinian remains

When the sun comes out, Israelis picnic, hike and soak up the panoramic views from the hilltops of Canada Park. There are many signs detailing artefacts from the Second Temple, Hellenic and Roman eras.

Yet in between the signposts, under the feet of the hikers, is a scattering of stone blocks reminiscent of another historical narrative. During the Six-Day War in 1967 the land under Canada Park, home to three Palestinian villages, was captured and razed to the ground. Up to 10,000 people were expelled and almost 1,500 homes demolished.



The park was built on the remains of Imwas, Yalo and Beit Nuba to prevent Palestinians from returning to their homes; it was bankrolled to the tune of \$15 million in charitable donations from Canadian Jews. There is nothing at the park to tell visitors about these three villages, or that it has been built on the wrong side of the Green Line, outside Israel's internationally recognised borders.

"If you ask them, 'do you know you are sitting on villages?' they really don't know because it's not mentioned at all," Michal Zack, a resident of nearby Neve Shalom, told us. "But this is the cemetery of one of the villages," she said, pointing towards the park.

Canada Park is run by the [Jewish National Fund](#),<sup>32</sup> an organisation that takes advantage of a complex web of laws to take land from Palestinians and exclude non-Jews from using it. The JNF helps Israel to build settlements, control natural resources to their own ends and ultimately Judaise the areas it takes over.

Thanks to the [Jewish Agency Law passed in 1952](#)<sup>33</sup> and [the Jewish National Fund Law passed in 1953](#)<sup>34</sup> by the Knesset, a special legal status and role was created for the JNF in the development of Israeli land regime and policy. They declared it an Israeli institution and detailed its part in the design and administration of public land in Israel.

Land was taken away from Palestinians through the 1950 Absentee Properties Law and the 1953 Acquisition of Land Law and transferred to the JNF. It was to be used for Jewish citizens only.

All over Israel there are forests abundant with fruit trees and cactus plants, built on land reassigned to the JNF. In total,



more than 500 Palestinian villages, some 2,000 years old, have been depopulated, destroyed and buried under Israeli parks and forests.

Prior to 1948 the JNF owned around 600,000 dunams of land. After 1948 this went up to around 2.5 billion within the Green Line. At least 70 per cent of the land that the JNF now owns has been confiscated from Palestinians.

As part of its afforestation plan, the [Jewish National Fund \(JNF\)](#),<sup>35</sup> the self-declared “guardian of the land”, has planted many trees on Palestinian ruins in the Negev Desert.

“When the pioneers of the State arrived, they were greeted by barren land,” claims the JNF website. In reality, they uprooted many indigenous olive groves and planted pine and cyprus trees, which also happen to grow fast. The trees they plant restrict the movement of Bedouins and prevent



evicted Palestinians from returning to their land, whilst ridding the area of any trace of the people they evict.

When you turn off the highway, there are no signs to the village of Al-Araqib as it is unrecognised by the state of Israel. A lucky guess and a gravel path flanked by green fields took us to the community, many of whom are camping out in the local mosque. Their homes have been flattened some 70 times by the Israeli authorities.

Aziz, son of village head Shaikh Sayyah, showed us trees planted by the JNF between the stones left from his original home and the stumps of olive trees that belonged to his family. "Every tree they plant here is like an Israeli criminal policeman who is rooted in our land," he told us. "They want us to hate the land but they will never be able to do that. This is my life."

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## Afterword

Since leaving Palestine in March many of the people who were kind enough to give us an insight into their daily lives under occupation have stayed in touch.

Hashem Azzeh wrote to explain that life in Hebron has become extremely tense. Across the West Bank the Israeli army has carried out violent raids, imposed curfews and shot dead a number of Palestinians since three settlers went missing on 12 June.

Khalil Al-Amour of Adalah told us that the village of Al-Araqib in the Negev Desert has been demolished a number of times since our visit and meeting with Shaikh Sayyah and his family.

Jamal Juma of Stop the Wall informed us that a protest was planned outside the UN office in Ramallah following the bulldozing of the houses and animal enclosures of thirteen families in Abu Al-Jaj refugee camp in the Jordan Valley.

And so the cycle of destruction and displacement continues.

Over the six days we were in Israel-Palestine in late March we spoke to many people. We met leaders of resistance organisations, people who had been pushed out of their homes, children who had confronted the Israeli army, Bedouins, farmers, academics, entrepreneurs, refugees and activists. We travelled from Bir Seb'a in Israel to Ramallah in the West Bank. We were waved through checkpoints and avoided borders and travel restrictions which, sadly Palestinians are unable to do. Our focus was on members of the community who had been affected directly by occupation and the threat of forced eviction.

What was striking about our trip was the variety of methods used by the Israeli authorities to make Palestinians' lives so unbearable that they have no option but to leave their homes. Crops in Al-Araqib village were sprayed with a toxic chemical in the dead of night, poisoning the soil and destroying Bedouin livelihoods. The Anastas family home in Bethlehem had a huge camera placed on the wall directly opposite their home, forcing them to keep the curtains to the master bedroom drawn at all times.

Our report has attempted to explain the various methods used by Israel to displace Palestinians, but inevitably there has been an overlap as all the techniques are intertwined. Yet whether it is demolishing someone's home to make way for Jewish-only housing or cutting off their water supply, the effect on the people is nearly always the same. Psychological trauma and the thwarting of Palestinian potential to live as free people.

Of the two most moving stories we heard, one was told in the unrecognised village of Dahmesh. Sha'aban Sha'aban, a young man of around 20, dressed in a black t-shirt and baseball cap, told us that when he was 13 Israeli soldiers tried to get inside his home to demolish it so he threatened to set fire to the house with petrol if they came a step closer.

In Bethlehem a 16 year-old boy told us that his family nearly starved for two years because his Dad could not go out to work after an accident and the wall meant that their business was affected severely. Both talked with eloquence, maturity and worldliness of men far beyond their years.

You only need one day in Palestine to see that life there is

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far from easy. Nevertheless, in between the endless rows of settlements that continue to transform the landscape and beyond the signs that declare Palestinian land as closed military zones, the warmth, dignity and strength of the people that live there shine through. We saw beautifully embroidered purses, scarves and bags made by Palestinian women in an attempt to preserve their identity and national heritage. We were invited into many homes and had the pleasure of sharing delicious Palestinian food, and conversations, with the people there.

Through these conversations we encountered many suggestions for a solution to the conflict; one of the two sides leaving, both making more of an effort to understand the other, more pressure from the international community. It was even suggested that a natural catastrophe would be the only way to change the reality on the ground.

In the words of activist, guide, driver, translator and friend, Lubna Masarwa:

*"I want to live in one state. I don't think it's realistic to evacuate the Jewish people from here because at least some of them have been born here. This will create another catastrophe. So I just want to live in one state; a democratic, secular state, and to have a place for everyone and of course to make the right of return happen. Without murders, without walls, without checkpoints."*

Looking forward, there is no end in sight to forced eviction in Palestine. What is taking place is a battle of wills; those who want to remove a population and those who want to remain. For Palestinians the struggle is more than about borders, it is about their very existence in their ancestral home. To this end they have displayed an indomitable spirit to live in freedom and with dignity.

Aziz Al-Turi, son of Sheikh Sayah, picks up bathroom tiles discarded when his family home was demolished by Israeli forces.



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## End Notes

1. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: <http://bit.ly/1x5Po2g>
2. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1kzhEXD>
3. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1kzhEXD>
4. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1kzhEXD>
5. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1fhBt4H>
6. MEDEA: <http://bit.ly/1sRP3RV> (Around 90,000 Palestinian/Arab Israeli's live in 176 'unrecognised' villages located largely, but not solely in the Negev and Galilee)
7. Human Rights Watch: <http://bit.ly/V3juWv>
8. Human Rights Watch: <http://bit.ly/V3juWv>
9. Ramla Municipality: <http://bit.ly/1meaf11>
10. Tarabut - Hithabrut: <http://bit.ly/1pQi3nA>
11. IMEMC: <http://bit.ly/1x5UmMo>
12. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1pEM7XJ>
13. CBS News - Youtube: <http://bit.ly/1IK5QBJ>
14. Ir Amim: <http://bit.ly/1x5VFLI>
15. Aljazeera: <http://aje.me/OQnUwi>
16. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1pEM7XJ>
17. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1IK6MWD>
18. Stop the Wall: <http://bit.ly/1nZsR1F>

19. Stop the Wall: <http://bit.ly/V3p4rR>
20. The Electronic Intifada: <http://bit.ly/TJOAS0>
21. Ochaopt: <http://bit.ly/1sEwmE>
22. B'Tselem: <http://bit.ly/1mcPjXb>
23. +972: <http://bit.ly/1gu8mJr>
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28. City of David: <http://bit.ly/1sRTEUI>
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30. CBS News - <http://cbsn.ws/1jbUjvA>
31. Haaretz: <http://bit.ly/1k6Sr2a>
32. JNF: <http://bit.ly/1qaPldT>
33. Stop the JNF: <http://bit.ly/V3upil>
34. Stop the JNF: <http://bit.ly/1rQkyHP>
35. JNF: <http://bit.ly/1qaPldT>

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