

PALESTINE: FOR LAND AND LIFE

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# FROM ANIN TO ZBUBA

DRYING OUT PALESTINIAN LANDS AND PEOPLE



The Oakland Institute





## Location: Anin and Zbuba

*Across the West Bank, farmers lost their land, livelihoods, and even their ability to visit their families when the separation wall was constructed. Under occupation, they also face massive water shortages as Israel diverts water from the Jordan River and the West Bank's own Mountain Aquifer to Israel and its settlements. Controlling land and water. This is what the occupation is about.*



Mohammed Yasin in his field in the village of Anin © The Oakland Institute

For Mohammed Yasin, a Palestinian farmer from a family that has cultivated the land for generations, farming is not just about the livelihood. “We Palestinians love to farm and work with nature,” says Yasin.<sup>1</sup>

Yasin is from Anin, an agricultural village of 5,500 inhabitants near Jenin in the West Bank, next to Israel’s separation wall. He and his family, owners of 50 *dunums* [5 hectares] of land, have lost 34 *dunums* to the wall.

“I have lost nearly 65 percent of my land to the wall. I need a permit from the Israeli authorities to cross the barrier to cultivate my own land. I was allowed access in November 2016 and now I am allowed in every Monday and Thursday. The gate opens at 7 am and closes at 3 pm daily. I have to leave home very early to get in at 9 am and be back at the gate by 2 pm before the gates are closed. This leaves very little time to work. Instead, an Israeli settler uses my land as grazing grounds – his cows graze and destroy my olive trees. On the remaining land in my own village, the Israeli soldiers come as they please and rest under the trees demanding to see my ID.”<sup>2</sup>

Construction of the wall – a 350-kilometre barrier to physically separate the West Bank from Israel – started in June 2002. Instead of following the Green Line,<sup>3</sup> the wall deviated many kilometers into the West Bank, isolating 160,000 *dunums* [16,000 hectares] of fertile farmland on the Israeli side of the barrier.

—United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.<sup>4</sup>



Yasin's village is surrounded by the Israeli settlements. The wall in the Barta'a Ash Sharqiya enclave,<sup>5</sup> starting from Anin, took away 7,140 *dunums* [700 hectares] of the land<sup>6</sup> separating the village from the Israeli settlement Hinanit.<sup>7</sup> The Shaked settlement, home to more than 850 Israeli settlers, was established in 1981 on 950 *dunums* [95 hectares] in the southern part of Anin's land.<sup>8</sup> Continued expansion of the Shaked settlement on Anin's lands is allegedly in the plans.<sup>9</sup> Adjacent to Hinanit and Shaked, in the northwest, is the Orthodox Jewish settlement of Tel Menashe. The enclosed Palestinian village, Daher Al Mahler, is on the southwest, as is an Israeli military base.

"On the 16 *dunums* [1.6 hectares] I still have, I used to get 70-75 tins of olive oil, each weighing 15 kg. With the separation wall and limited access to water, production has reduced to five tins – 14 times less from before. Forced to depend on rain-fed agriculture, I only cultivate olives. Our village was once lush with eight springs that fed the area. Today with five springs behind the wall, we face acute water shortages. We have lost our water, land, and life. We have the Red Cross and other human rights groups, but they can do nothing for us. If the judge is against you, who do you complain to? But I am not alone. The whole village faces this crisis – we lost land in 1948, then in 1967. Today almost 20,000 *dunums* [2,000 hectares] are behind the wall. If I had all of my land, my income would be at least 500 percent more.

But this is not all. My relatives live in the next village, Umial Fahem, five minutes away from here. With the wall, their village is two days away, if I get a permit to visit. But without the permit, visiting my family is just a dream," laments Yasin.<sup>10</sup>

"This loss of family relationships, livelihoods, and restricted access to water is too big a loss for us. All has been taken away by force. Even if compensation was to be offered, no Palestinian farmer will accept it in lieu of land. After our land was taken, the Minister of Agriculture from the Palestinian Authority offered olive saplings in compensation. But where do we plant the saplings – in our bedrooms or on the roofs?"<sup>11</sup>

**"Where do we plant the saplings – in our bedrooms or on the roofs?"**



Jamal Abou Baker and his brother Soleman, farmers from Zbuba village  
© The Oakland Institute

Yasin is not alone.

Jamal Abou Baker and his brother Soleman, residents of Zbuba Village near Jenin, have their fields enclosed by the fence, demarcating the wall. "We are forced to plough 150 meters away from the wall since soldiers shoot if we get any closer. We are scared even if this is lost income for us. Once, harvest time used to be about celebration and family time in the fields. Now, soldiers with the key to the doors of the wall release wild boars, destroying the crops just as the harvest time approaches. Even our children are not safe."<sup>12</sup>

When asked if they faced any water-related problems, Jamal responds, "We have no water problem since we have no water to start with. The other side has all the water. Our farming and livelihoods depend on the rainfall. Drinking water is made available twice a week so we have to manage our consumption."<sup>13</sup>





Olive trees in the village of Anin © The Oakland Institute

Soleman, his brother, solemnly adds, “We live in a big jail. We cannot move or farm freely. It is good that we still smile. Someone else would have committed suicide. Our youth are criticized for throwing stones. But our life has forced our children to become children of stone. Killings, occupation – all has become normal here.”<sup>14</sup>

**“First came the fence, followed by the cement wall. Then it is a part of the landscape – a part of our condition. A part of the normal.”**

—Lamis Zamzam, Canaan Palestine<sup>15</sup>

“Our Rumi trees are hundreds of years old and still bearing fruit. There are 7.6 million olive trees in the West Bank. 2.1 million are inaccessible as they are in Area C<sup>16</sup> or behind the wall. We have lost one third of our trees. I am from a family of farmers. I lost half an acre of land with the wall but in 1948 my family lost 25 acres,” says the neighboring farmer, Rafiq Suleman Hussain.<sup>17</sup> Much of Area C, which makes up over 60 percent of the West Bank, is inaccessible to the Palestinians.<sup>1</sup>

Like hundreds of other farmers, Yasin, Jamal Abou Baker, and his brother are members of the Palestinian Fair Trade Association (PFTA), a national fair trade union working to empower farmers through the promotion of fair trade and organic farming and accessing profitable international markets.<sup>19</sup> Following the second *Intifada*, the economic and

political situation turned for the worse, leaving farmers with no access to the markets. Prices in the local market were low – nine *shekels* [\$2.56] per kilogram of olives. The fair trade price was 16-18 *shekels* [\$4.38-4.93] per kilogram.

But the wall gets in the way of this effort to improve livelihoods as well.

“Our teams cannot visit the farms that are inside the wall, making the audit impossible and thus farms cannot be labeled organic. This is a real loss for the farmers. Twenty percent of our 1,300 member farmers are impacted by the wall – but all are impacted by policies which are more effective in denying Palestinian farmers access to water, markets, or infrastructure,” shares PFTA Manager Mohamed Ruzzi.<sup>20</sup>

“Water is critical. Yields of almonds and olives might double with irrigation. Last year production was impacted by several heat waves and the extreme weather devastated the crops. But the Palestinian farmers cannot dig a well. If they do and are discovered by the Israeli authorities, they will come and destroy the well. People have been imprisoned and even killed for doing so.”<sup>21</sup>

Majed Maree, a farmer, shares, “I tried to dig a well in my land and reached 90 meters. When the Israeli authorities found out, they destroyed it. I had to pay for the destruction of my access to water.”<sup>22</sup>

Sixty-three percent of the arable agricultural land in the West Bank is located in Area C, placing Palestinian agriculture under Israeli military control.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Israel's control over almost all of the West Bank's water reserve severely restricts access by Palestinians.

"We are allowed only a specific amount for human and farming consumption. Israeli authorities inspect ground wells, even those controlled by the Palestinian Authority, twice a month. They come in military cars spreading fear. Since the Paris agreement,<sup>24</sup> there are 11 artisanal wells in Jenin. But since then, no more wells have been allowed," shares the PFTA staff.<sup>25</sup>

**"Israeli restrictions on the use of water resources have caused a permanent water shortage for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. This has been exacerbated by the diversion of water supplies into Israel and Jewish settlements, especially from aquifers in the West Bank, and has proved to be especially detrimental to Palestinian agriculture. The denial of adequate water supplies has forced many Palestinian farmers to abandon their agricultural pursuits and has thus facilitated Israel's take-over of their lands."**

—Ruling Palestine: A History of the Legally Sanctioned Jewish-Israeli Seizure of Land and Housing in Palestine<sup>26</sup>

## DRYING OUT PALESTINE

"Ensuring access to and control over the major surface and groundwater resources in the region dates back to the Six-Day War June of 1967 when Israeli forces occupied lands strategic for their natural water resources. Indicative of the importance of the aquifers, one of Israel's first acts after the war included declaring all water resources subject to Israeli military control through a series of military orders – still in place today. These efforts were clearly aimed at consolidating control over the Palestinian share of the water resources as it integrated the West Bank water system into the Israeli system. The integration was completed in 1982 when then Minister of Defence Ariel Sharon transferred ownership over all West Bank water supply systems to Mekorot [Israel's national water company] for the symbolic price of one *shekel* [\$ 0.27]."<sup>27</sup>

With the Jordan River on the eastern border of the West Bank and the Mountain Aquifer underlying the West Bank, there are ample water resources in the region and their transboundary nature by international law should require them to be shared equally by Israel and Palestine. Palestinians, however, remain parched, having "virtually no control over the water resources in the West Bank."<sup>28</sup>

On the one hand, Palestinians' physical access to the Jordan River has been denied, preventing their equitable share. In addition, the river is so heavily exploited by Israel (and also Jordan and Syria), that by the time it reaches the West Bank "it is little more than a polluted stream," making Palestinian utilization zero, compared with Israel's intake of 600-700 million cubic meters per year.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, 80 percent of the Mountain Aquifer's water resources are taken by Israel and Israeli settlements, leaving a mere 20 percent for the Palestinians.<sup>30</sup>

Under the Oslo accords, two separate water supply networks operate within the West Bank. The Israeli water network – integrated into Israel's national water network – draws water directly from wells drilled into the West Bank portion of the Mountain Aquifer to service the settlements. In contrast, the Palestinian Authority (PA) network is made up of non-contiguous lines, some of which draw water from PA controlled wells and springs, and others, from the Israeli network.<sup>31</sup>

The water inequity is made worse by several other realities. Allocations are still capped at the 1995 Oslo accords levels – 13 percent for Palestinians and 87 percent for Israel – while the Palestinian population of the West Bank has almost doubled, further lessening their limited access to water granted by the already inequitable agreement.<sup>33</sup>

The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) has also been unable to develop new water resources since all water projects in the West Bank must be approved by the Joint Water Committee (JWC) where Israel enjoys the de facto veto power.<sup>34</sup> While Israel withdraws almost 90 percent of West Bank water resources,<sup>35</sup> the majority of Palestinian projects are rejected by the JWC.<sup>36</sup>

To top this, the construction of all new water facilities (even small-scale projects such as a well or rainwater collection cistern) and the maintenance of existing water infrastructure projects in Area C – which constitutes over 60 percent of the West Bank and the bulk of Palestinian agricultural and grazing land, water resources, and underground reservoirs – requires a permit from the



Israeli Civil Administration (ICA). Between 2010 and 2014, only 33 of 2,020 applications submitted by Palestinians for building permits in Area C – or 1.5 percent – were approved.<sup>37</sup>

Any structure built or rehabilitated without a permit risks demolition. Between 1988 and 2014, the ICA issued 14,087 demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures located in Area C (see map).<sup>38</sup> In January and February 2017 alone, Israeli authorities demolished seven water cisterns used by farmers and shepherds near the Palestinian village of Tuqu' in Bethlehem District, and another cistern in the South Hebron Hills community of Khashm a-Daraj. A water pipe serving Palestinian farming and herding communities in the northern Jordan Valley was also destroyed.<sup>39</sup>

With policies stacked against them, Palestinians struggle to access the minimum water requirements. An estimated 113,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have no piped water supply, while hundreds of thousands more have only intermittent supply, especially in the summer.<sup>41</sup> The chronic water shortage among the Palestinian communities in Area C has created a dependence on Mekorot, Israel's national water company and the country's top agency for water management.<sup>42</sup> In the event of a water shortage, supplies to settlements are prioritized while valves supplying Palestinian towns and villages are cut off for days or weeks, forcing Palestinians to buy trucked water at five times the price of network water and reduce their already low consumption.<sup>43</sup>



Demolition Orders against  
Palestinian Structures,  
Area C, 1988-2014<sup>40</sup>

The wide disparity between water use by Palestinians and settlers in the West Bank was confirmed by the UN Human Rights Council. While some Jewish-Israeli settlements consume as much as 400 liters per capita per day (l/c/d), Palestinians survive on 73 l/c/d and the Bedouin communities on as little as 10-20 l/c/d. The minimum recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) is 100 l/c/d.<sup>44</sup>

The lack of access to water resources often precedes dispossession as Palestinians are forced to leave their communities in

Area C, allowing Israel's takeover of land and further expansion of its settlements.<sup>45</sup> The settlements, however, have enough water to run farms and orchards, and for swimming pools and spas.<sup>46</sup>

Restrictions on water and access to land have made it impossible for the Palestinians to maintain livelihoods in the occupied West Bank.

Drying out the land and people and preventing farming are key instruments of the colonization of Palestine.



Countryside in the village of Anin © The Oakland Institute

## WEST BANK'S MOUNTAIN AQUIFER<sup>32</sup>

The West Bank Mountain Aquifer, the main groundwater basin in the region, can be divided into three basins: the Western basin, the Northeastern basin, and the Eastern basin. The majority of the aquifer's flow is used by Israel and the settlements.

The Western basin aquifer, the largest basin comprised of several sub-aquifers, supplies more than half of the Mountain Aquifer's total yield. It crops out of and is recharged in Palestine – about 80 to 90 percent of the basin is recharged by precipitation falling within the boundaries of the West Bank – crosses the 1949 United Nations Armistice Demarcation Line (also called the Green Line) and forms an aquifer beneath central Israel, with the apportionment managed by Israel.

Most of the Northeastern basin – the second largest – originates from rainfall in the West Bank and crosses the Green Line, with 75 percent of the water used by Israel. Palestinians in the West Bank are allowed to use 20 percent and Jewish settlers in the same region use about five percent.

The Eastern basin, composed of several sub-aquifers that lie entirely within the West Bank, has 39 to 48 percent of the water used by the Palestinians in the West Bank, while the Israeli settlers use up to 60 percent.





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Cover photo: The fence demarcating the wall at the end of the field owned by Jamal and Soleman. They are forced to plough 150 meters away from the fence  
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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Interview with Mohammed Yasin, a Palestinian farmer from the village of Anin, Jenin. February 11, 2017.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 The Green Line, also known as the pre-1967 border or 1949 Armistice border, is the demarcation line set out in the 1949 Armistice agreements between the armies of Israel and those of its neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria) after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. It served as the de facto borders of the State of Israel from 1949 until 1967. The name comes from the green ink used to draw the line on the map while the armistice talks were going on. After the Six-Day War, the territories captured by Israel beyond the Green Line came to be designated as East Jerusalem, the West bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula (the Sinai Peninsula has since been returned to Egypt as part of the 1979 peace treaty).
- 4 UNRWA. "Special report on the West Bank security barrier." July 15, 2003. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/special-report-west-bank-security-barrier/1258> (accessed February 19, 2017).
- 5 Barta'a is a town split between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Western Barta'a is in the Haifa District of Israel and Eastern Barta'a is in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in the northern part of the Jenin Governorate of the West Bank, designated as Area C under Oslo Accords. After the 2003 construction of the Israeli West bank barrier, Eastern Barta'a found itself located in a closed military zone, an area between the Green Line and the barrier known as the Seam Zone, with two restricted entry/exit gates to rest of the West Bank: Barta'a and Shaked. The Shaked gate is open for a few minutes in the morning and at lunchtime, allowing children from the villages of Daher al-Mahler and Um ar-Rehan to school in a nearby village. All those over 12 years of age must have a permit to pass through the Shaked gate.
- 6 The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem. "Targeting Palestinian Properties inside Barta'a Enclave." *Monitoring Israeli Colonization Activities in the Palestinian Territories*, February 23, 2012. <http://poica.org/2012/02/targeting-palestinian-properties-inside-bartaa-enclave-new-israeli-halt-of-construction-orders-in-bartaa-ash-sharqiya-village/> (accessed March 16, 2017).
- 7 Hinanit, an Israeli settlement in the northern West Bank, is approximately nine miles (15 km) west of Jenin city. In 2015 it had a population of 1,089. The international community considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal under international law.
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- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Interview with Mohammed Yasin, a Palestinian farmer from Anin. February 11, 2017.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Direct communication with Jamal Abou Baker and his brother, Soleman, of Zbuba Village. March 7, 2014.
- 13 Direct communication with Jamal Abou Baker. March 7, 2014.
- 14 Direct communication with Soleman. March 7, 2014.
- 15 Interview with Lamis Zamzam of Canaan, Palestine. February 11, 2017.
- 16 Under the Oslo accords with the start of the process in 1993 and completed in 1995, the West Bank was divided into three administrative areas, A, B, and C. The newly created Palestinian Authority was to control Area A; have civilian control of Area B with Israel in control of security; and Israel was to be in full control of Area C, including security matters and all land-related civil matters. This division was to be temporary with the intent to enable an incremental transfer of authority to the Palestinian Authority. However this arrangement remains in force today.
- 17 Direct communication with Rafiq Suleman Huassain. March 7, 2014.
- 18 The World Bank. *West Bank and Gaza Overview*. Last updated April 1, 2017. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/overview> (accessed April 17, 2017).
- 19 PFTA was founded in 2004 by Palestinian-American entrepreneur Nasser Abufarha.
- 20 Direct communication with PFTA Manager Mohamed Ruzzi. February 11, 2017.
- 21 Direct communication with staff at PFTA in Jenin. February 11, 2017.
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- 42 In Areas A and B as well, water shortages have forced the Palestinians to purchase water from Mekorot – including 18.5 percent in 2014. Founded in 1937, Mekorot supplies Israel with 90 percent of its drinking water and operates a cross-country water supply network, known as the National Water Carrier.
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