



MA'AN DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Case Study

West Bank Apartheid Wall
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Up Against the Wall: the Story of a Qalqilya Farmer

The Qalqilya district continued to surface as one of the hardest hit areas by Israel's occupation and colonization. Qalqilya is a difficult place to visit, not only from the act of bearing witness to blatant injustice, but also because the occupation often turn the visitor away at checkpoints. One can spend an entire afternoon attempting to reach the district from Ramallah, a physical distance of a little more than 30 kilometers, only to be denied passage. That number is rapidly decreasing.

Qalqilya, a city of 41,000 residents, has perhaps suffered more from the consequences of the Wall than any other Palestinian city. The area has been continually targeted for demolition or evacuation by consecutive occupation governments since 1948 due to its strategic location near settlements. The Western Aquifers is located beneath Qalqilya, further heightening its importance to the Israeli occupation. Qalqilya and the Mediterranean Sea are separated by a mere 14 kilometers, yet it is a sea that most Palestinians have only seen in photographs.

As a control mechanism, the Wall takes on the form of an enclosed cage in this area, transforming it into an open-air prison¹. The Wall around Qalqilya consists of concrete sections with sniper towers positioned every 300 meters in some places and razor wires and trenches in others. There are two entrances and exists from which Palestinians can obtain passage only during specified hours, and under strict occupation forces supervision and control². The first is an opening in the apartheid wall east of the city, and the second is a tunnel to the south. Many times, the military chooses to lock the gate entirely and prevent Qalqilya's inhabitants from entering or exiting the city. The human cost of the Wall in the district, however, is more staggering than its topography could ever account for.

**The gate (entrance/ exist) of Azzun
Atmeh Village**



¹ Al Shanti, K. The Apartheid Cage around Qalqilya: Qalqilya's Struggle for Survival since 1948. Palestinian Farmer's Union in Stop the Wall <http://www.stopthewall.org/activistresources/12.shtml>

² Ibid.

Abdullah Ahmad Yusuf Amar, 61, a longtime farmer and landowner, owns eight dunams of land in Azun Atmeh, a small village south of Qalqilya's city center. Azun Atmeh is also menacingly close to the parameter of Sharia Tikvah, one of the occupation's several settlements in the area.

Amar pointed out the irony that Sharia Tikvah means "gate of hope" in Hebrew. The ever-expanding settlement has cut Palestinians off from one another as well as from their livelihoods. According to Amar, the idea of the Wall began with the settlements.

Amar reflected on his life during the period of astronomical settlement expansion of the 1980's in occupied Palestine. He quickly joined a clandestine land defense group, illegal under the policy of the Israeli occupation. His voice was paramount



in his community and at a local press conference in 1984, the occupying power had caught word of his activities and were waiting outside to arrest and incarcerate him.

Abdullah Ahmad Yusuf Amar

Israeli policy was especially corrupt during that time. The Israel occupation found itself under increasing international condemnation for annexing greater areas of the West Bank, and Palestinians were desperate to find a way out of poverty. International law stated that, "the occupying state could not buy or sell land from the land it occupies." In theory, the occupation had to obtain detailed documents, including fingerprints, from Palestinian landowners in order to use their land for any purpose. Amar testified to the atrocity of the occupation cutting off human fingers in order to capture the necessary fingerprints.

Even though most Palestinians were doing all that they could in the 1980's to remain on their land, others were circumventing the system and working privately collaborators for the occupation. One such man was Ahmad Adwara whose actions eventually led to his assassination, but many residents of Azun Atmeh lost their land because of his betrayal. Amar describes this as "a battle between simple peasants and Israel."

In 2004, Amar's rights were again infringed upon when the occupation confiscated and demolished his home to build the Wall. He possessed all the necessary

documentation of land ownership, but was forced to certify his paperwork. This process cost him 1,400 Jordanian Dinars (about 2,000 USD) - but his land was still confiscated - and he was offered no compensation for his losses. He said somberly, "I can't say I'm affected, because everyone around me is affected. I see the Wall as an international border - not a security border."

Barring the fact that Amar still lives on portions of his original property, he describes his situation as that of a prisoner. His family has been split by the Wall. If his grown children want to visit, they must apply for a permit, as only husbands and wives are considered legitimate landowners. "The suffering here," he says, "You just can't describe it. We are refugees from one village to the other." In this area alone, there are 80,000 people trapped.

Amar delved deeper into his personal experiences. He recalled a time in which he was able to access his former land that had been annexed by the occupation. It was a rare for him to be granted a permit to work his own land, and document stated, "You are allowed to enter an Israeli closed area for 'x' hours." it is also worthy to mention that the back of the permit says that "this permit" does not mean that "you own the land".

Amar turned the permit away, refusing Israeli confiscation of his property. He then told the story of the time he was met at a gate by a young Israeli female soldier



Ammar with his youngest son

when keys in his jacket had activated the metal detector. The girl asked him to remove his jacket. He did. Then she asked him to strip at gunpoint. He was quite understandably shaken by the humiliation. "Where is democracy," he asked forlornly, "when a little girl makes me take my clothes off?"

Aside from the demolition of his home, the Wall on Amar's property has perpetrated the eradication of more than 4/5 of his agricultural land and 32 olive trees dating to the Roman occupation prior to the Othman Empire. "The olive tree," he said candidly, "means holy peace."