Walls of Apartheid all over Palestine

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After 1948, a small population of Palestinians remained within the armistice line of the newly created Israeli state. Since the 1994 Oslo Accords, 'Palestinian' has come to refer only to Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and in the diaspora. Palestinians in Israel were isolated with a new definition: 'Israeli Arabs'. However, they ARE Palestinians.

Within the Palestinian lands occupied in 1948, the Palestinian minority and the Jewish majority generally live in separate areas. Even in the mixed cities, where Palestinians and Jews live alongside each other, most of the Palestinian minority lives in its own neighbourhoods, distinct from the neighbourhoods of the Jewish majority.

This geographical apartheid is clearest in the big cities where in some cases Palestinian neighbourhoods are separated from Jewish neighbourhoods by a walls and fences. This is only the more visible part of the structure of racist exclusion, discrimination and dispossession Israel is built upon. Land property laws, residency rights, access to education and jobs - an intricate system of "Jewish first" or "Jewish only" allows the Zionist state to oppress and control the remaining Palestinian population.

We present three examples where Palestinian communities within Palestine '48 have been isolated behind walls. These examples show a general trend of Zionist urban planning as a tool to limit the possibility of growth of Palestinian residential areas, thus reinforcing expulsion policies.

Palestinian towns and neighbourhoods in Palestine '48 - and in particular the neighbourhoods we refer to - suffer from overcrowding, poor planning and the absence of decent infrastructure. There is a great deal of unemployment and poverty and a general neglect for the needs of the population though the cost of living is very high.

Jisr Al-Zarqa and Qisariya

Jisr Al-Zarqa is an Arab Palestinian village on the Mediterranean coast, north of Tel Aviv and Road 2. It has a population of 10,751

The neighbouring area of Qisariya is also on the coast. Until 1948, the population of the town included 960 Palestinians and 160 Jews. In 1948, it was one of the first towns where the armed Jewish Zionist gang known as the Hagana carried out expulsion of Palestinians and destruction of their homes. Today, the population of the town is entirely Jewish. Qisariya is a popular tourist site, managed by the Qisariya Development Company. The population is of high socioeconomic status.

Road 2 runs between the two communities and is the main road for both villages. You need to cross the highway to get to the northern and southern areas, and to the western area which is the tourist zone close to the beach.

In November 2002 the Qisariya Development Company began constructing an earth wall between the two communities, without any lawful permit, without any coordination with the Jisr Al-Zarqa local council and without informing the residents. The length of the wall is 1-1.5 km and it has a height of 4-5 meters. Trees were planted on both sides of the embankment to give it a "natural" look.

Jawarish and Gannei Dan

Ramle is a city half way between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, close to the highway between the two cities.

Before 1948, 20,000 Palestinians lived in the city and there was no Jewish presence. In the aftermath of the expulsion during the Nakba only 1,500 Palestinians remained in the city. Municipal statistics show that in 2003, the city had a population of 63,000, 80.5 percent of whom were Jews and 19.5 percent Palestinians.

The neighbourhood of Jawarish was built in 1950 for expelled families from nearby villages. In 1965, Jawarish was annexed to Ramle. The neighbourhood now has a population of some 2,000 Palestinians, most them working in the construction industry and in agriculture. Even Israeli statistics show the income gap between the Palestinians and the rest of city: 848 NIS monthly in comparison to an 1846 NIS average.

Yefe Nof is a well off Jewish neighbourhood of 700 inhabitants, built in the 1980s next to Jawarish. During the immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, the Gannei Dan neighbourhood was built as an extension on the Yefe Nof community. It is home to 2000 Jewish

Russian immigrants. As part of the construction of Gannei Dan, its promoters built and financed a cement wall 2km in length and 4m tall was built separating the new community from Jawarish.

Pardes Snir and Nir Zvi

Pardes Snir and Nir Zvi are neighbourhoods in Lydd, a city half way between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, near Ramle.

Until 1948, Lydd carried a Palestinian population of over 18000. 39,000 were expelled during for the creation of the Israeli state. Jewish settlers began to move to the area and by 2003 there was a population of 74,000. The population is now 72.5% Jews and 27.5% Palestinians.

Pardes Snir is a Palestinian neighbourhood in Lydd whose population was 3000 in 2003. Nir Zvi is an adjacent affluent Jewish neighbourhood. The two communities are separated by several hundred square metres of agricultural land and a small road that has been used by the Palestinian neighbourhood.

In 1999, a plan was put forward for Pardes Snir, for the improvement of dilapidated infrastructure and a widening and repair of roads used by the community.

Residents of Nir Zvi took advantage of the situation and opposed the plan. They conditioned their approval on several demands, including that a 4-meter high wall of concrete and bricks be built along a section of approximately 1.5 kilometers, dividing Nir Zvi from the Palestinian neighbourhood. They demanded that the construction and maintenance of the wall be financed by the Ministry of Housing and the Municicality of Lid.

The Objections Committee of the Central District Planning and Building Committee agreed and decided that the outline plan for the neighbourhood of Pardes Snir would only be approved when a building plan was approved for the establishment of the wall and its implementation was guaranteed. On 21st July 2002, the Israeli government issued a decision approving building the wall between the two neighbourhoods and requiring the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Housing to cover the cost of its construction from their budget at 3 million shekels each. On 23rd July 2003 the construction permit for the wall was approved.

Analysis: Walls around Palestinian communities

"We are not animals - we are humans as well"
- Ahmed Abu Omar, 17, Resident of Pardes Snir

The official argumentation of the private and public Zionist planners, tried to hide some of the most sinister aims of these apartheid walls, yet does not escape the racist motivations that place any contact with Palestinians as intrinsically negative. The Qisaraya development company and the Jewish population in the neighbourhood argue that the earth wall is a 'acoustic wall' to tackle 'noise pollution', such as the sound of music, prayers, parties and fireworks. In other examples it is claimed that the walls are a measure to protect the Jewish community from Palestinian petty crime, theft of property and vandalism. The cynicism of the argument is blatant considering that Israel itself has been built on the destruction of over 500 Palestinian villages, the expulsion of three quarters of the Palestinian population and mass dispossession. Finally, as the price of land next to Palestinian neighbourhoods tends to be lower, Jewish communities wish to isolate themselves from Palestinian communities in order to improve house prices.

These walls are generally not effective in tackling any of the

claims above as their location or structure is completely inadequate for those purposes. Furthermore, in particular, the unofficial walls have been constructed without any studies showing their environmental impact or overall effect on planning and development of Palestinian neighbourhoods. Yet, looking at the de facto impacts of these walls, the more hidden rational for the walls surfaces.

Looking at these three examples, it is clear that separating Palestinians and Jews is a means of isolating Palestinian neighbourhoods and rendering them invisible. On top of the physical separation, the walls symbolise the racist view that Jewish society takes of the Palestinian minority. De facto, these are apartheid walls that effectively choke Palestinian communities by encircling, preventing the possibility of development or expansion. The effect will be to be expel the Palestinian community, forcing them to move to other areas or leave Palestine. There is growing anger in Palestinian communities at the humiliation by a racist Jewish community who consider them to be lower-class citizens and a strong feeling that the wall is just another physical manifestation of this racism.

The involvement of the Israeli government, especially in the funding of the wall in Lid shows a clear official position. All successive Israeli governments have declared their intention to protect the Jewish majority in the Israeli state and pursued policies of racial discrimination against the Palestinian minority. Building walls around Palestinian communities is the logical counterpart to the Apartheid Wall which is isolating communities in the West Bank.

The Israeli government is cultivates a paranoid focus on the 'demographic threat' posed to the Jewish state by an expanding Palestinian population. The response is to build cantons and ghettoes for the Palestinian population, and to ensure that these ghettoes have no possibility of future development or enlargement, exerting such pressure on Palestinian communities that they eventually choose to leave.

"All the Bantu have their permanent homes in the reserves and their entry into other areas and into the urban areas is merely of a temporary nature and for economic reasons. In other words they are admitted as work-seekers, not as settlers."
- Dr. W. W. M. Eiselen, Secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. ("Optima", March 1959).