THE PALESTINIAN PERIPHERY

Home demolitions and settler colonialism in the Jordan Valley and south Hebron hills

The Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign - www.stopthewall.org

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Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign
(Stop the Wall)
Ramallah, occupied Palestine
www.stopthewall.org

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Cover photo:
Aerial view of Um al Kheir besieged by the settlement of Karmiel.

We thank Paul for having supported Stop the Wall with his political commitment, determination, research and writing skills to make this report possible.

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About Stop the Wall

The Campaign's aim to tear down the Wall is aligned with the Palestinian desire for liberation—for those of us inside and in exile, the young and old, those who have died, and those yet to be born.

We are part of the struggle to protect our birthright to not only exist, but to reclaim our history and our ancestral land, and ensure a just future for the Palestinian people. Our vision is built upon our strength of will and steadfastness, which, like the roots of our ancient olive trees, run deep within our struggle and continue to feed our resistance. We stand firmly in the belief that these basic principles of our cause must no longer be betrayed or compromised. We will not relinquish our right to our lands, and we will not stand by while a new Nakba descends upon our people.

Preface

by: Jamal Juma', coordinator of the Palestinian Stop the Wall Campaign and the Palestinian Land Defense Coalition

The report *The Palestinian Periphery* is being published at a time when Israel's settlement policy is once again in the headlines and condemned and lamented by governments and politicians across the world. In December 2016, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 2334 underlining the illegality of all Israeli colonization and annexation efforts in occupied territory and condemning once again Israel's settlements – an act that was likely more of a victory for the UN than for the Palestinian people. The 'Land Grab Law' that the Israeli parliament approved on February 6, 2017, in order to 'legalize' dozens of settlement outposts built on Palestinian private land, therefore seems a slap in the face of the international community.

Nevertheless, world leaders are still keeping to the known routine: more or less strong words that reassure Israel no effective measures to stop its colonization of our lands - and with this the expulsion of our people from their homes – will be taken. The only remarkable aspect seems to be the slow admission that Israel is, according to the UN Security Council, 'entrenching a one-State reality' or, as the EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini put it, 'entrenching a one-state reality of unequal rights'. This is apartheid.

While world leaders wrangle with definitions failing to act, the Palestinian people on the ground are being displaced and dispossessed by Israel's settlement project and its overall framework of colonization. As I am writing this preface, the Israeli settlers have moved from the dismantled Amona outpost to the Jordan Valley, where they are building their new, equally illegal settlement.

There, in the Jordan Valley, the Southern Hebron hills or other places in the flow of the major corridors of settlements, these settlers will continue to receive Israeli state benefits. These areas at the centre of Israeli colonization have been previously transformed in peripheries of Palestinian society and the people living there in what the United Nations calls 'vulnerable communities'.

This report is about these communities, about our people and the way Israeli policies have shaped our lives and social and political geographies. It shows the multifaceted methods of Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing and their impacts on our struggle, demonstrating that the people in what has become the 'periphery' are neither weak nor have they been historically marginalised. In fact, they have been pushed by Israel into isolation and are resisting under constant attack.

Finally, *The Palestinian Periphery* points at the forms of resistance - from the politics of delay to the politics of liberation - that the communities have adopted. Far from being helpless victims, they are the stronghold in our daily resistance. But time is running out for these communities.

Unfortunately, the international community and the Palestinian National Authority have acquiesed to the status quo of Israeli created bantustans while the 'rest', the communities in area C,have been turned into dispensable 'peripheries' at the mercy of Israeli expulsion.

This report tries to explain to ourselves and to people around the world these strategies of power and of resistance and is an urgent appeal to the Palestinian leadership and to the international community to change policies before it is too late.

1

INTRODUCTION

In the early weeks of winter, in the northern corner of the Jordan Valley, Abu Saqar and his family found themselves sleeping on the ground. The family had been engaged in a furious struggle with the Israeli Civil Administration and military, which seemed to be intent on finally pushing them out of al-Hadidiya. The army would enter, its heavy machinery tearing down homes and flattening animal barracks, and then withdraw. People would rebuild, the army would return, and they would wait to rebuild again. This back and forth continued for several weeks between November and December 2015, finally exhausting the community's supply of emergency tents from government and international aid agencies. Fearing that if they left the area they would be barred from returning, the family cobbled together a makeshift shelter from wood, rope and plastic sheeting to protect themselves from the November rain. That same night, soldiers returned and pulled the plastic off them while they slept.

Abu Saqr, from al Hadidiya, tells the story of his community and its struggle to remain steadfast on their land.

The events that winter have been particularly dramatic but neither the first nor the last demolitions in the village. This year started with demolitions in al Hadidiya and nearby Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar on January 10, affecting 60 households. These demolitions in al-Hadidiya is part of a larger, systematic process targeting small, rural communities in the West Bank. Since 2010, when home demolitions in these areas dramatically increased, the Israeli military has destroyed an average of 580 structures a year. Half of these buildings are homes, meaning that some 1200 people are displaced annually. The data from the beginning of 2017 indicates further increase in demolitions.[6] Accompanying this targeted destruction, in 2014 the Israeli government made its intention to forcibly transfer 46 Bedouin communities, some 7,000 people, to three planned townships on the edges of Jerusalem and Jericho.[7] In 2016, however, a dangerous intensification of this process has started. By the end of the year, Israel had destroyed 1094 Palestinian structures, displacing 1628 people and affecting 7126.[8] The Jordan Valley is especially hard-hit, as are the farming and Bedouin communities in the south Hebron hills. In 2016 alone, Israeli authorities announced plans to remove the Dkaika Bedouins from south Hebron, continued its assault on the people of Susiya, and destroyed dozens of buildings in al-Hadidiya, Um al-Kheir and other small communities. As the numbers make clear, the Israeli military is targeting small, relatively isolated Palestinian communities in the peripheral regions of the West Bank.

The large humanitarian and human rights organizations have provided several descriptions for what is happening. UNOCHA, which has been closely following the issue, has noted that the Israeli policy of demolitions and the planned forced "relocation" of several Bedouin communities is

6 Compiled from UNOCHA OPT, online Data System, http://data.ochaopt.org/demolition-sys.aspx#close

7 UNOCHA. *Bedouin Communities at Risk of Forcible Transfer, September 2014.* September 23, 2014. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/bedouin-communities-risk-forcible-transfer-september-2014

8 Compiled from UNOCHA OPT, online Data System, http://data.ochaopt.org/demolition-sys.aspx#close

a policy that puts Palestinians "at risk [of] forcible transfer."[9] B'tselem, which has also extensively documented and campaigned on this issue, argues that the expulsions are part of the decades long, de-facto annexation of the rural areas of the West Bank.[10] Across the board, there seems to be very little disagreement that the pretext that Israel is simply preventing illegal building is baseless. Instead, what is at stake is the expulsion of Palestinians from territory that the Israeli government seeks to dominate and incorporate into the borders of the state.

Our analysis seeks to put forward two arguments that are crucial to the understanding of the situation. First, we situate forced displacement and expulsion in a much longer process of settler colonialism. The core of the problem did not begin in 2016, with Oslo, or even with the 1967 occupation. Rather, the patterns we are witnessing today are consistent with the territorial ideology and practices that have been constitutive of the Israeli state since its foundation. Israeli settler colonialism appropriates Palestinian land and moulds landscape to suit its purposes, creating 'peripheries' as the focal points of ethnic cleansing. Understanding this process and its impact on everyday life is vital to fighting against the ongoing displacement of Palestinians in Area C. Second, we provide a sketch of the legal battles, social relations, economic arrangements and political struggles that Palestinians in the Jordan Valley and south Hebron hills engage in to remain on their land. This analysis of daily life and resistance is largely ignored as irrelevant by humanitarian and human rights reporting, or framed in the current buzzword of "resilience," or "sustainability." However, this analysis is essential if we wish to understand current political possibilities of these communities.

The issue at stake is not simply home demolitions. Instead, the current formation of Israeli settler colonialism shapes the means by which Palestinians living in the West Bank periphery are able to resist immediate displacement. The long term effects of settler colonialism in these same areas - access to markets, land, transportation and basic infrastructure - have severely affected the material conditions that allow communities to persist on the land. Moreover, the shift of the Palestinian Authority toward neoliberal technocracy and the effective abandonment of communities superfluous to the current interests of the Palestinian capitalist class has reinforced the process of geographical isolation, material deterioration and political atomization of these communities. As a result, the constitution of Palestinian resistance in these areas is being transformed. Sumud, or steadfastness on the land, has been often severed from any collective project that might make material life viable. Instead, sumud has been reduced to a politics of survival and delay. At great financial, social and emotional costs to those involved, Palestinians fight to push back home demolitions for weeks, months or years. At a time when success can only be thought of in terms of pushing back the inevitable, and the threat of exhaustion is very real, these communities have started to re-organize their resistance as they form structures and participate in coordination that aims to place their struggle for land at the core of the path towards self-determination. The Popular Council of the Jordan Valley and the Land Defense Coalition are two examples of organizing that are striving to create viable strategies and practices that could serve as a basis of collective politics.

9 UNOCHA, *At risk of forcible transfer.* June 3, 2016. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/risk-forcible-transfer; UNOCHA, *UN's Humanitarain Coordinator in Palestine warns of a heightened risk of forcible transfers of Bedouins in the West Bank.* August 22, 2016. http://ochaopt.org/content/un-s-humanitarian-coordinator-palestine-warns-heightened-risk-forcible-transfers-bedouins

10 B'tselem. *New wave of demolitions in West Bank: Another phase in policy of expelling Palestinians from vast portions of West Bank.* February 16, 2016. http://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building/20160216_new_demolition_wave

2

SETTLER COLONIALISM AND ETHNIC CLEANSING IN AREA C

Displacement in the post-Oslo era

Israel has occupied and had full control over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) since 1967. Since the Oslo Accords in 1995 Israel has implemented supposedly temporary policies that to this day are used to legitimize the steady colonization and concomitant expulsion of the Palestinian population from over half of the West Bank. As part of the Oslo Accords in 1995, control over the West Bank was divided between Israel and the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA) for a five year period, after which theoretically a Palestinian state would be formed and the PA would gain full control. Through these Accords, Israel asserted full military and civil control over "Area C," which makes up over 60 percent of the West Bank and is home to an estimated 300,000 Palestinians, living in about 530 residential areas that are partially or entirely located in Area C.[6] Area C is mainly rural, and includes the major resources for Palestinians in the West Bank, including water and agricultural and grazing lands. Despite the supposed temporary nature of this agreement, Israel maintains full control over Area C to this day.

Israeli control over this area has in effect created islands, or Bantustans, of urban Palestinian areas, designated Areas "A" and "B" under the Accords, with restricted movement between them, and to which Palestinians living in Area C continue to be displaced. Israeli civil control over Area C has also set the 'legal' or bureaucratic framework for Israel's settlement expansion and displacement of the Palestinians living in Area C. Under this system, Israel has used the Civil Administration (ICA) to implement discriminatory zoning and planning regulations that prevent Palestinians from constructing or even rehabilitating existing structures in Area C. Less than two percent of Palestinian requests for permits to the ICA are granted.[7] What this has meant for Palestinians living in Area C is that for over twenty years, any structure that they build or rehabilitate is at risk of demolition. Permits are required for any and all new structures and to rehabilitate any old structures, including infrastructure such as water pipelines, schools, and roads. In some areas, entire communities are unrecognized and are at risk of demolition, their lands declared 'military closed zones' or 'natural reserves'. Meanwhile, building permits are generously granted for the construction of illegal Israeli settlements in the same areas, and settler 'outposts', built without permits, which now are retroactively recognized.

This system of apartheid has occurred in violation of international law and the most basic rights of Palestinians, including the right to self determination, life, water, adequate housing, and to be free from discrimination. In 2013, OCHA found that 63 percent of Palestinian communities in Area C lack basic services, and 72 percent of communities had homes that had already received demolition orders.[8] In total, there are demolition orders affecting some 17 thousand Palestinian

6 UNOCHA. *Area C of the West Bank: Key humanitarian concerns, August 2014.* August 18, 2014. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/area-c-west-bank-key-humanitarian-concerns-august-2014

7 B'Tselem, *Acting the Land Lord: Israel's Policy in Area C, the West Bank*. June 2013, p. 19. UNOCHA, *Displacement and Insecurity in Area C of the West Bank.* 2011; UNOCHA, *Under Threat: Demolition Orders in Area C*. September, 2015.

8 UNOCHA. *Official Data on demolition Orders in Area C*. http://data.ochaopt.org/vpp.aspx

buildings in Area C.[9] Communities in Area C not only have lost the ability to build and rehabilitate their homes and other structures, but now the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements, the apartheid Wall system and bypass roads cut Palestinians off from their land and restrict their movement. Not surprisingly, in addition to direct loss of farmland, buildings and access to work, many more simply do not want to risk building without a permit and accept their forced displacement, leaving their homes in Area C to move to Areas A and B or emigrate abroad.

These Israeli policies of home demolitions and restrictions violate human rights and even the most essential obligations of international humanitarian law, including the duty to safeguard occupied territory on a temporary basis; to refrain from altering the area or exploiting its resources to benefit the occupying power; the prohibition of destruction of property not justified by military necessity; and to fulfill the basic needs of the local residents and respect their rights. Under the law of occupation, Israel is prohibited (unless necessary during military operations – which is not the case here) from destruction of civilian property of the occupied Palestinian territory.[10] Extensive destruction of civilian property in an occupied territory is a prosecutable war crime and a grave breach of the Geneva Convention.[11]

Al Hadidiya after the home demolitions in November 2015. All structures of the family had been demolished. (Photo by: EAPPI)

9 UNOCHA. *Under Threat: Demolition orders in Area C of the West Bank*. https://www.ochaopt.org/content/under-threat-demolition-orders-area-c-west-bank

10 Geneva Convention IV, Art. 49, 53, 147; Rome Statute, Art. 7(10)(d).

11 Ibd.

Ethnic cleansing and colonial expansion

The home demolitions in the Jordan Valley and the south Hebron hills are an instance of a larger process that entails the expansion of settler territorial control and the concomitant elimination of the Palestinian presence that began with the early Zionist colonization.[6] The particular tactics we are witnessing today developed immediately after the founding, and within the borders, of the Israeli state. From 1948 to 1967, Israel placed its Palestinian population under military rule. In these areas, the authorities implemented a variety of policies and practices that explicitly aimed to restrict and fragment the growth of Palestinian population centers in favour of increasing Jewish settlement in these areas. Through the creation of closed military zones, curwfews and permit systems, military rule confined Palestinians primarily to their villages. Delays in recognizing local municipalities, disconnection from infrastructure and discriminatory zoning practices all served to prevent contiguity between Palestinian towns and villages. In order to secure land for Jewish settlement, the Israeli state confiscated land left behind by refugees (many of whom remained within the borders of the state), carried out 'selective expulsions' in the Galilee from 1948 – 1951, and seized 'uncultivated' and 'state' land from Arab villages. The state then attempted to settle its Jewish citizens on these newly acquired lands. According to then-head of the Jewish National Fund Joseph Nahmani, the project of "Judaization" (as it was officially called) had a clear aim: to "break up this concentration of Arabs through Jewish settlements."[7] After the 1967 occupation, Israeli authorities exported the same techniques and practices into the West Bank. There, they would serve as the legal and regulatory basis of continued colonization.[8]

From our perspective displacement, military occupation, civil control over Area C, and home demolitions are all particular expressions of a deeper settler colonial logic. The presence of a military occupation and civil control over Area C cannot be seen as a sufficient explanations for what is occurring. Rather, the bureaucracy developed around the existence of Area C provides the mechanisms that the state and settlers draw on, in different ways, to expand settlement and remove unwanted populations. Like the Wall, forced removal is justified by Israel as necessitated for security reasons; i.e. both to protect "law and order" by having an enforced permit system for both Palestinians and settlers, and to protect the security of the settlers and preventing Palestinians from living or traveling near to settlements. In effect "security" for Israel hinges on securing settler homogeneity through indigenous removal; in this sense the Palestinian presence in Area C is seen as a threat. As such, Israel and its policies are not unique. Rather, it joins the ranks of other European settler states - Canada, the United States, Australia and much of Latin America - whose historical experiences, legal development and present policies regarding indigenous populations

6 For an account of the pre-state period, see: Shafir, Gershon. *Land, labor and the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 1882-1914*. University of California Press, 1996.

7 Our account is based on Jiryis, Sabri. *The Arabs in Israel. Monthly Review Press*, 1976. A lawyer and activist, Jiryis based his studies primarily on publicly available Hebrew sources. The Israeli authorities banned his book after it was published. For an account of the legal mechanisms used to seize land after 1948, see: Bishara, Suhad. *The Logic of No Reasoning*. May 16, 2016., http://nakbafiles.org/2016/05/16/the-logic-of-no-reasoning/ and Robinson, Shira. *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State*. Stanford University Press, 2013.

8 Forman, Geremy. *Israeli Supreme Court doctrine and the battle over Arab land in Galilee: A vertical assessment. Journal of Palestine Studies* 40.4 (2011): 24-44.

serve to expropriate land and curtail sovereignty.

While "destruction of civilian property" and "forced displacement" accurately describe some of what is happening to Palestinians in Area C, these terms do not capture Israel's underlying intent to create areas cleansed of a Palestinian presence. Ethnic cleansing is the most accurate description of the way in which settler colonialism is taking shape today in parts of the West Bank. Ethnic cleansing consists of displacement of a civilian population with the "aim to change the demographic composition of a territory" and has been recognized as a crime against humanity and a war crime.[9] Israel's ongoing practice of displacing Palestinians (directly or indirectly) and increasing the population of Israeli settlers has clearly changed the demographic composition of Area C, and amounts to ethnic cleansing. Out of the 350,000 Palestinians that have been living in 1967 in what is now Area C, only 150,000 are left.[10] At the same time, according to a report released in 2016 by former Member of the Knesset Yaakov Katz, at the time over 400,000 settlers were living in 128 settlements across the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. According to the report, the number of settlers in the occupied West Bank will reach 1.2 million by 2036.[11]

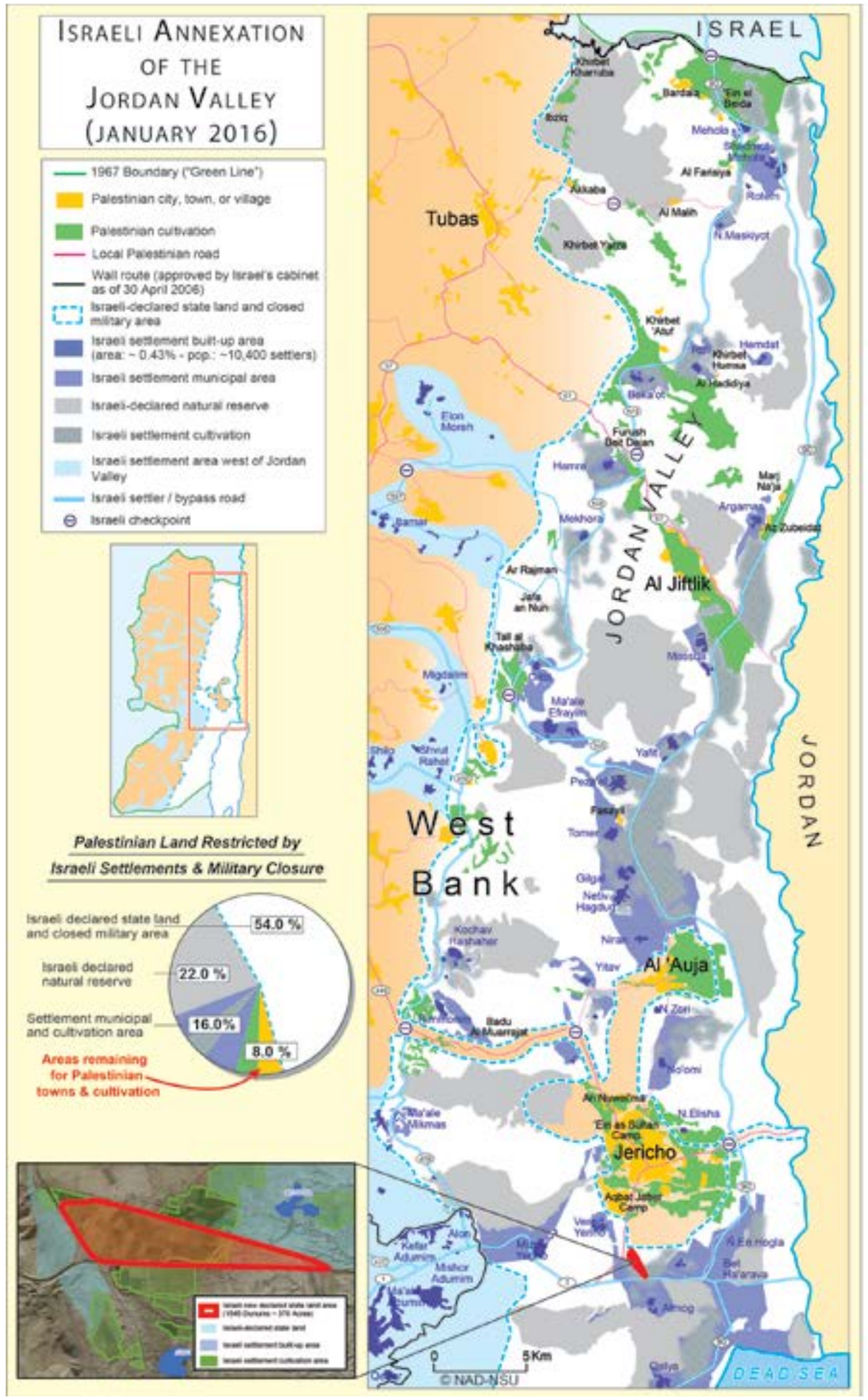
Population transfer is strictly prohibited under the Geneva Convention and has been defined in the statute of the International Criminal Court as a crime against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population. The crime of population transfer can be carried out through a large range of coercive pressures on people to flee their homes, including destruction of their homes or denial of access for communities to schools and services. Displacement of individuals when undertaken on discriminatory grounds may amount to persecution, another crime against humanity. Transfer of population as implemented by Israel is a core part of the policies that constitute a policy of colonialism and the crime of apartheid. According to the International Convention against Apartheid, apartheid policies include 'any measures including legislative measures, designed to divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups'. as well as 'the deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development of such a group or groups, in particular by denying to members of a racial group or groups basic human rights and freedoms, including [....] the right to freedom of movement and residence'.

The international community has clear obligations deriving from these grave violations by Israel and the imposition of an apartheid regime. These duties under international law do not include the provision of humanitarian aid or development assistance to the wronged population, but rather third States are obligated to ensure respect for international law and to hold those responsible for violations accountable. All states are obliged not to aid or assist and to implement individually or collectively effective measures in order to stop Israel from committing grave breaches of international law. According to the UN Convention against Apartheid, members of organizations and agents that commit, participate in, directly incite or inspire, directly abet, encourage or cooperate in the commission of the crime of apartheid are subject to criminal prosecution.

9 https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule129

10 UNDP, *INFOCUS: Bedouins in the occupied Palestinian territory.* September 2013. http://www.undp.ps/en/newsroom/publications/pdf/other/Bedouins%20in%20the%20occupied%20Palestinian%20territory.pdf

11 Middle East Monitor. *Israeli report: More than 400,000 settlers in West Bank.* February 19, 2016. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160219-israeli-report-more-than-400000-settlers-in-west-bank/



3

THE PERIPHERY AT THE CENTRE OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

Communities in the periphery: Al-Hadidiya and Um al-Kheir

In this analysis, we will focus on the communities of al-Hadidya in the northern Jordan Valley, and Um al-Kheir in the south Hebron hills. Both are small herding communities, and both have faced expanding settler and military presence on their lands since the early 1980s. And both are representative of the ways in which dozens of small communities constitute the geographic and political periphery of Palestinian bantustans, just as their land is central to the Israeli settler project. We explore the ways in which al-Hadidiya and Um al-Kheir have been marginalized and cut off from the rest of the West Bank, before moving on to examine how this condition shapes material life and political struggle.

Al-Hadidya is located in northern part of the Jordan Valley. To say that al-Hadidiya is difficult to reach would be a gross understatement. Travel to the closest Palestinian towns and cities - Tubas, Tamun, Nablus - requires passing through the Hamra military checkpoint. Once in the Valley, one travels up Road 578, passing the illegal agricultural settlements of Beka'ot and Roi on the right before arriving at a junction with an Israeli military base. From the junction, one turns onto a dirt road that winds back through the hills to a valley behind the Roi settlement. Today, some 90 people still reside in al-Hadidiya, living in sturdy tents constructed of canvas and wood, as well as a number of animal barracks. Interspaced with standing structures are the remains of demolitions: tangled piles of wood, garbage and metal sheeting, along with battered signs bearing the names of the NGOs that had donated the shelters. In addition to sheep, residents keep chickens and other animals. The surrounding plots are planted with grain and alfalfa. On one large plot, residents have recently begun cultivating olive trees and, to a lesser extent, vegetables.

The residents of al-Hadidiya are herders that originally hail from the larger, nearby towns of Tubas and Tammun. They have long standing commercial and social ties with the urban dwellers and local farmers which extend back to the days of Ottoman rule. Problems began in the mid-1970s, with the foundation of the Ro'i settlement and Israel's expansion of closed military zones in the area. The first demolitions occurred in 1997. Residents took their battle to Israeli court, and after 9 years, the court ruled against the village. In June of 2006, demolitions began again. A new case was filed in 2007, which was followed by two waves of demolitions in 2011 and 2015.

The most recent wave of demolitions began on November 25, 2015, when the Israeli military bulldozed the new road that residents had built to link together sections of the community. The next morning, on November 26, the military entered again and destroyed a number of residential tents. In the afternoon, people set up replacement tents delivered by the Red Cross, but these were destroyed several hours later. Late that night, residents set up more tents, this time delivered by an international NGO. Again, the military destroyed these tents several hours later. On November 27 residents woke early and rebuilt, but again the military responded quickly, pulling down the tents several hours later. The next day, the military returned and confiscated the remains of the tents to prevent rebuilding. After the military withdrew, the Palestinian Authority delivered three new tents.

These would stand for almost a full day, before being destroyed on November 29. Rebuilding happened for the last time on November 30, after which the remaining emergency tents destroyed and confiscated. The shelters that were constructed out of wood and plastic were torn off by the soldiers during the night.

For several weeks, residents were unable to rebuild and fearful that they would be forcefully evicted from the area. But on December 12, their lawyer succeeded in petitioning the Jerusalem court for a temporary injunction, (this prevents demolition, but also prevents Palestinians from constructing any structures that had not already existed). The next day, the document arrived in al-Hadidya. On December 14, tents supplied by an international NGO were constructed in the same locations where the destroyed homes had stood. When the army arrived to tear them down, residents confronted them with the order, and they withdrew.

A photo of the illegal Israeli settlement of Roi and then the Palestinian village Al Hadidiya. (www.thominpalestine.wordpress.com)

Um al-Kheir is a small community of 125 people located in the south Hebron hills, east of the city of Yatta. Like al-Hadidiya, reaching the community requires driving along several dirt roads. The illegal Karmel settlement surrounds the community. The residential section of the settlement sits up against the top of Um al-Kheir, while the fence of its dairy operation lies 20 meters below. In addition to animal barracks and tents, several old stone homes stand in the middle of the community. Near to the settlement, residents have constructed a football field for the children. Like al-Hadidiya, some residents have begun to cultivate olive trees near to their homes.

South Hebron hills, cose to the Susia settlement.

The people of Um al-Kheir hail from Jahalin Bedouin of Tel Arad. In 1948, Israeli forces expelled thousands from Tel Arad. Of the 22,000 that were expelled, some moved to the hills around Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Jericho. Others left the West Bank entirely, heading to

Jordan and Saudi Arabia.[6] Some, like the residents of Um al-Kheir, moved to the south Hebron hills. In the early 1950s, the people of Um al-Kheir purchased lands from the residents of Yatta and began to rebuild their lives and flocks. With the construction of the Karmel settlement in 1981, the land of Um al-Kheir became the site of struggle. Closures, restrictions and settlement expansion continued for decades, and demolitions began in 2008. After a brief period, demolitions occurred almost yearly in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014. The latest demolition occurred in August of 2016[7], when the military destroyed 3 structures in the village.

Two photos of Um al Kheir.

6 For an account based on the oral history of the Jahalin, see:Hunaiti, Hadeel. *'Arab Jahalin: From the Nakba to the Wall*. Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign: 2008

7 Ma'an News Agency. *Israeli forces demolishes Palestinian structures across West Bank, assault locals.* August 9, 2016. http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=772593

Creating the periphery

The demolition of homes and agricultural structures, however, does not exhaust the means by which residents are pushed off their lands. Remaining on the land is not simply a political issue, but a material one as well. Here, we wish to briefly examine other means through which Israeli settler colonialism has shaped material life in the Jordan Valley and south Hebron hills as it isolates them from the rest of the West Bank.

Communities that rely on animal husbandry use land in particular ways. Um al-Kheir, al-Hadidiya and other communities in the West Bank can be loosely classified as semi-nomadic; for parts of the year, members of the community move with their herds to various pastures, returning on a regular basis to their permanent homes.[6] Thus, while some of these communities may possess title to or rent the land they live on, they rarely purchase the land they use as pasture. Instead, they pasture their flocks on lands a great distance from population centres, often land that is not used for intensive agriculture, or come to various types of use-agreements with landowners. Prior to the Israeli occupation, for example, al-Hadidiya shepherds would move with their flocks as far north as Ein al-Beida, as far south as Jiftlik, and east along and beyond the Jordan River. The area is relatively rich in natural springs, and herders were also able to water animals along the river. Even though the community lacked paved roads, electricity or public transportation during the 1950s and 1960s, recalled one resident, movement was easier than it is today.

After 1967, Israeli military rule ushered in a myriad of movement restrictions that were especially destructive for pastoral communities: unilaterally declared closed military zones and nature reserves. In 1970, 736,000 dunums, or 45.7% of the Jordan Valley and Northern Dead Sea was declared to be a closed military area. From 1969 to 1970, other orders were issued declaring 318,000 dunums nature reserves (.200,000 dunums of nature reserve overlapped with closed

6 This has been the case for generations. See: Hunaiti, *'Arab Jahalin: From the Nakba to the Wall*. Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign: 2008. Prior to the Nakba, Bedouin clans in the Naqab had developed relatively set territorial borders, but following their expulsion and continued dispersal, these have become less fixed. For details, see: *BIMKOM. The Bedouin Communities East of Jerusalem – A Planning Survey.* http://bimkom.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/jahalin/index.htm

military zones).[7] These declarations of closed zones fragmented space, closing some pastures and blocking passage to others. Both military personnel and green patrols, set up to guard the reserves, harassed herders on a regular basis. Again, the experience of shepherds from al-Hadidiya is representative. Beginning in the 1970s, Israeli army patrols chased shepherds out of certain areas and began to confiscate sheep and hold them in a former Jordanian military base, imposing holding fees of 5 dinars an animal on offending shepherds. Animals faced injury when they were captured, and could be auctioned off if they were not claimed in time.[8] Furthermore, access to a number of springs, along with the Jordan River, was blocked. Pastures could be further damaged by fires caused by military operations or, later in the 1970s, by settlers.

In the mid-1970s, the foundation of Israeli settlements would change the lives of herding communities. Rather than expanding the total area affected by closure, they would act as magnets, pulling infrastructure, capital, settlers and soldiers into particular areas and effectively concentrating the means through which closure was enforced. Both the Ro'i settlement, located several kilometres from al-Hadidiya, and the Karmel settlement, located several metres from Um al-Kheir, are agricultural colonies. Unlike the highly populated, residential colonies of Ma'ale Adumim, Ariel or Gush Etzion, these colonies are only lightly populated: Karmel is home to 450 settlers, and Ro'i to only 130. But these settlements bring with them the military, intensifying closure and bringing constant, daily violence. Today in Um al-Kheir, residents find themselves harassed by soldiers frequently when they or their animals wander within 10 meters of the fences that surround them. In al-Hadidiya, during training days the sound of gunfire goes on, nearly uninterrupted, from morning until evening. And jeeps frequently patrol the back roads, reminding residents exactly where they are. Control over land is also exercised through agriculture. Acres and acres of greenhouses, fields, plantations and dairy operations all serve to connect these settlements to each other, to settlements within the Green Line and to large companies like Tnova. Integration into the wider circuits of Israeli agricultural production serves a dual purpose, both sustaining and developing the

Israeli occupation forces use Palestinian fields in the Jordan Valley as training ground, May 4 2015.

settlement while maintaining and expanding territorial control.

The implications of these developments for a pastoral economy have been devastating. In both communities, herd sizes have steadily fallen over the past decades. One resident of Um al-Kheir, for example, owned 1000 sheep in the early 1980s. Today, he is down to 15. In order to

7 B'Tselem. *Dispossession and Exploitation Israel's Policy in the Jordan Valley and Northern Dead Sea.* May 2011.

8 See: Hunaiti, *'Arab Jahalin: From the Nakba to the Wall*. Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign: 2008 for further examples.

make up for lost pastures, some communities have begun larger scale cultivation. In al-Hadidiya, which is surrounded by flat agricultural land, hundreds of dunums are planted with several different kinds of grains. These lands belong to 9 families from Tubas, who cultivated it until Israeli military restrictions prevented them from doing so in 2001. Since then, residents of al-Hadidiya have rented it on a yearly basis. Each year, residents from al-Hadidiya pay 5 JD for each dunum they choose to plant. Agriculture, they say, is a gamble, since decisions are made based on the level of rainfall in the winter. If there is rain, cultivation occurs. However, there is no guarantee that rains will continue, and cultivation shifts depending on residents' calculations; some years 30 - 40 dunums, some years as many as 400. However, because the military does not allow infrastructure construction, irrigation is impossible, which means that the hot months can result in serious financial losses for already struggling communities.

Stop work order by theIsraeli occupation forces for a structure in al Hadidiya.

Al-Hadidiya and Um al-Kheir are also shaped by zoning and planning regulations Israel imposes in Area C through the ICA, which effectively forbids the construction of buildings and infrastructure.[9] Not only does this serve as the legal pretext for home demolitions, but it also cements the isolation of these communities. Quite simply put, it is incredibly difficult to come and go. Public transportation does not reach these areas, meaning that one needs to rely on someone with a private vehicle or somehow coordinate a pickup on a main road. Winter rains turn the dirt roads into mud. One of our visits to al-Hadidiya had to be delayed a number of days, as even tractors were having a difficult time traversing the flooded roads. And when the residents of al-Hadidya opened a new, internal road to better link together two sections of the community, Israeli military machinery tore it up.

This isolation structures the political economy of these communities. Al-Hadidiya mainly produces cheese, because yogurt and milk do not keep well without proper refrigeration. Lamb is also sold on the market. However, as a result of the isolation of the area and costs, of both time and money, and of transporting and selling products in urban markets, residents are at the mercy of merchants. These merchants visit al-Hadidiya and other isolated herding communities in the area several times a week in order to purchase products which they then transport and sell in Tubas, Nablus and further afield.

Isolation also creates highly exploitative markets for vital services. For al-Hadidiya, as well as Humsa, Makhul and other isolated communities, lack of infrastructure has created a private water market. Water sellers purchase water from wells in Tammun and Tubas and, according to one resident of al-Hadidiya, sell it for nearly quadruple its buying price. As they are prohibited from constructing a water network, these communities have no choice but to pay: the price of fuel and their inability to move large quantities of water on a daily basis means that even the inflated price of water is cheaper than daily trips on tractors. This venture, of course, is not without risks. Sellers

9 BIMKOM. *The Prohibited Zone. Israeli planning policy in the Palestinian villages in Area C*. June 2008.

can have their vehicles impounded on the grounds that they are trespassing in a military zone. One recent case, in November of 2015, saw one vehicle impounded for several months, after which the owner was fined 4,000 NIS.

The compounded effects of these policies has impacted Palestinians lives in two key ways. First, as core areas of the settler project expand in the Jordan Valley and the south Hebron hills, it transforms these areas into peripheral zones for the Palestinian West Bank. Rather than a natural geographical description, the isolation, disrepair and neglect of these small communities is a direct result of Israeli settler colonialism. Second, not only does this process decrease the total amount of land available to Palestinians, but it transforms the ways in which they are able survive and resist on the land. In the case of herding communities, life is becoming impossible to sustain.

Palestinian water tanker providing al Hadidiya with water.

Mekorot, Israel's national water corporation, is a key agent in the ethnic cleansing of the Bedouin communities.

Abandoning the periphery

Life in Area C is predominantly influenced by the Israeli military and administrative bodies. However, the Palestinian Authority claims sovereignty and responsibility over these areas and considers itself representing the Palestinian people living there. It is thus necessary to ask how the PA serves these communities and what role these communities and areas play in its political strategy.

The first obstacles to any coherent policy is the fact that the Jordan Valley is administratively divided into four districts. As a result, varying quantities and qualities of services and projects are being built depending on the district the area belongs to. This has played a significant part in ensuring there has not been an organic and unified plan on how to support communities in the area and how to build a development strategy that supports resistance to the occupation.

A far greater significance has, however, the fact that since its foundation in the early 1990s, and in a more forceful fashion since 2006, the PA has shifted the course of Palestinian politics. Abandoning confrontation and national liberation, the PA has instead adopted technocratic governance to foster economic integration and a favourable business climate that, it was hoped, would lead to political normalization and an independent Palestinian state.[6] This orientation has shaped the ways in which the PA addresses the problems faced in the Jordan Valley and south Hebron hills. First, as a governing body, the PA lacks a clear strategy confronting settler colonialism in these areas, and seems unaware of how its own policies add to the strains of daily life in these areas. Second, the projects that the PA encourages signal an abandonment of small rural communities in favour of large-scale agricultural and touristic development.

In terms of interventions, the PA assistance is limited to providing tents to replace destroyed homes. As such, it is in danger of mirroring the logic of international aid organisations and treating al-Hadidiya, Um al-Kheir and other threatened areas as humanitarian issues, rather than communities on the front lines of struggle against the settler project. Moreover, despite the fact that it is unable to provide services in Area C, the PA still collects taxes from residents of these areas. For struggling communities, taxes on essential products like animal feed or grain make survival even more difficult.

Nor is the pro-business climate that PA sought to create providing much relief. This is not to say that the Jordan Valley has been ignored by capital. Instead, it has drawn serious investment since the 1990s. Today, the largest projects undertaken in the Valley are controlled by PADICO (Palestinian Development and Investment Company), a dominating force in the West Bank's economy which links together PA-held capital with the most powerful players of internationalized Palestinian capitalist class.[7] In the Valley, PADICO controls two important projects. The first, Nakheel Palestine for Agricultural Investment, is an agricultural venture consisting of date plantations

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6 See for example: Khalidi, Raja, and Sobhi Samour. *Neoliberalism as liberation: The statehood program and the remaking of the Palestinian national movement. Journal of Palestine Studies* 40.2 (2011): 6-25 and Hanieh, Adam. *The internationalisation of Gulf capital and Palestinian class formation. Capital & Class* 35.1 (2011): 81-106.

7 Hanieh, *The internationalisation.* pp.95 - 96.

and a packing houses, covering 3,000 dunums outside of Jericho. The second is the Jericho Gate Real Estate Investment Company. A 2.5 - 3 billion dollar venture, the plans for Jericho Gate include 1,500 villas, 4 - 7 hotels, a museum, retail space and an “aqua-park and entertainment facilities”. Nor is PADICO the only player in this region: Sinokrot has set up agricultural investments, a number of smaller developers have built successful luxury real estate projects and land speculators have rushed to purchase lands in the areas around Jericho. Donor money, aimed at supporting private enterprise and market expansion, is also flowing in. Together with the Japanese Internatinoal Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Palestinian Industrial Estate and Free Zone Authority (PIEFZA), the Palestine Real Estate Investment Company (PRICO), thePalestine Investment Fund and Sanabel Investment Company have created the Jericho Agro Industrial Park to offer ‘ industrial and marketing solutions’ for investors.

This area is not only an important source of profit. Politically these projects fit into a powerful discourse, which has developed over the past decade, that situates profit and capitalist initiative as vital forces within Palestinian resistance. Private property is celebrated as an vital tool in preventing land confiscation, and luxury housing is supposed to form a deterrent to settlement expansion. And agribusiness, by employing Palestinian farm labor, is said to promote sumud. The discourse surrounding Nakheel, for example, is illustrative of this trend. Since much of its agricultural land is in Area C, its ownership by Palestinian capital is said to push back against the settlement encroachment in the area. At the same time the employment of Palestinian labor is celebrated as providing an alternative to workers who would otherwise likely harvest dates in the Valley’s settlements.

For the Valley’s threatened communities, however, the profits and politics of the market offer little. While more research is required to understand exactly how struggling cultivators and herders are being affected by these forms of investment, it seems unlikely that they would be integrated as anything other than inexpensive, precarious labor. Second, with Nakheel’s Area C lands notwithstanding, Palestinian capital is concentrated around Jericho, in Area A and B. Given the requirements of the market, this should not be surprising; only in these areas can the professional and business classes securely invest in land and home ownership But the result is an the effective abandonment of the Valley’s threatened communities, leaving them beyond the reach (or interest) of investors to fend for themselves.

“Jericho Agro Industrial Park established to be the first class of industrial park with the high-leveled technology for environmental protection.” (www.jaipark.com)

4

POLITICAL RESPONSES OF THE PEOPLE

The politics of delay

In December of 2015, after continuous military raids, Al Hadidya was able to obtain a temporary injunction from the Jerusalem District Court. The ruling, copied and delivered to the community, was all that provided some respite from the recent series of demolitions. Community representative Abu Saqar described how, when the soldiers arrived, he confronted the commander with the document. Upon reading it, the commander turned and left.

Through local law, Palestinians have engineered means by which to delay demolitions. Primarily, lawyers work through Israeli zoning laws, ultimately seeking building permits that would render isolated communities 'legal' in the eyes of state. As previous studies have pointed out in detail, the law itself is impossibly stacked against Palestinians. Tawfiq Jabareen, a lawyer who represents a family from al-Hadidiya, as well as other communities facing expulsion, said that of the 300 to 400 requests for building permits he has submitted to the courts, none have resulted in permits being issued. Given that the ultimate rate of success is nil, it seems surprising that so much energy, time and money is expended on these efforts.

The reason lies in the Israeli state's strict adherence to the letter of the law. Two things are worth bearing in mind. First, the procedures for obtaining a building permit are long and complex, involving multiple committees, inspections and appeals. Importantly, as long as a request or appeal for a building permit remains under consideration, a demolition should not be able to occur. Thus, the second element involves the Civil Administration's adherence to the letter of law. Demolitions in most cases do not occur at the whim, but within the particular parameters prescribed by local law. And in general, the Civil Administration respects injunctions, which means it does not undertake demolitions until the fate of a given locality has been decided in the courts. Surprisingly, this adherence to the law at times exceeds the court's. Jabareen recounted cases in which unsympathetic judges have refused to issue injunctions while the ultimate decision was being made at the High Court. However, rather than destroying the area immediately, the Civil Administration did not take action until a court decision was made. The legal process, then, is not so much about seeking redress through the law. Instead, it is turning the complexities of the law against itself in order to buy time.

The historical and geographical particulars of a given place shape how this process will play out. Let us return to al-Hadidya. In the early 1950s, the Jordanians began land registration in the West Bank. Land registration was completed in Tubas, but the 1967 war occurred before survey teams could complete their work in Tammun. As a result, the people of al-Hadidiya, who own land around Tammun, were never granted title. Instead, the rocky land they currently live on is owned by Tubas residents. Given Israeli military restrictions and the dry, desert climate, the land is not readily usable for agriculture or building, and the owners had agreed with al-Hadidiya residents to allow its use. In 1997 they signed a written contract, paying 200 JD a year to rent the land. In return, the owners provide the land ownership documents to be used in court.

These land ownership documents, in turn, are important in producing an application for a building permit. Each stage lasts for different lengths of time, from as little as a few months to as long, in the case of the HCJ, several years. First, one submits an application for a building permit.

When this is inevitably denied, one is able to submit an appeal to the Appeals Committee. And when this is denied, one can appeal to the HCJ. And when this fails, one may withdraw the petition, and ask instead for additional time to prepare a new zoning plan, which will then be sent to the planning committee. And denied. Importantly, rental agreements and titles provide the basis for important stages of this process, increasing the possibility of delay.

At times, these documents can be deployed to stave off the destruction of communities whose fate seemed sealed. Um al-Kheir is a case in point. Shortly after their arrival in the area in the 1950s, they began to purchase lands from the residents of Yatta. According to residents, lawyers appointed in the 1980s by the municipality overlooked these documents. A renewed legal battle in 2008, however, has drawn on these ownership papers to challenge state land claims in the area.

There are further issues that lawyers can draw on to delay the expulsion process. For example, if a set of homes is destroyed and residents move to a different plot of land and rebuild their homes, the Civil Administration is legally required to issue new demolition orders. At one point in al-Hadidiya, homes were rebuilt in a new area after a demolition. Military forces entered almost immediately and destroyed them. However, because the Civil Administration had failed to obtain new demolition orders, lawyers were able to obtain a temporary injunction on the grounds that the demolition had been carried out illegally. The drawback of receiving an injunction order is that not only demolitions are prohibited, but Palestinians are also prohibited from building or rehabilitating any structure, which prevents the natural growth of communities.

In addition to building permit struggles, residents have seized on other ways to remain on their land. One such method draws on an Ottoman law, modified by Jordan and kept in force by Israel, which grants property rights through continued cultivation. This law has served as the primary means through which Israel declares and seizes so-called state land, but it has also opened up a space for Palestinians to hold on to land, or at least to delay confiscation in the courts. In both al-Hadidiya and Um al-Kheir, residents have planted small groves of olive trees for this purpose. Settlers uprooted the saplings once in Um al-Kheir, but they were replanted a year and a half ago and since then have not been touched. In al-Hadidiya, the trees are several years old, and while homes have been torn down, these trees also have not been touched. Neither community has planted these trees for economic reasons. Instead, the explicit aim is to further establish and maintain ownership.

However, the length of a delay is highly variable. First, legal complications can just as often work against communities. Papers get misplaced and military orders become mismatched. Various structures will find themselves on various points of the application or appeals process. As different sections of a targeted area move to different sets of dates and deadlines, residents can lose track of exactly what is where in the process. Demolitions can occur in areas thought to be momentarily safe. Second, the length of a process or the issuing of an injunction can depend too heavily on the inclinations of the judge. More liberal judges may accept certain arguments for injunctions, while right-wing judges may dismiss them out of hand. One judge has recently threatened to cease issuing injunctions all together to Palestinians, wondering in court if they had any legal basis whatsoever. And, in response to political pressure, the time allotted to the HCJ to decide courses has been shortened.

Rebuilding politics of liberation

In the 1970s and 1980s, Palestinian activists and organizers confronted a crucial problem: how to remain on the land, not only in the face of a burgeoning settlement project, but also at a time when Palestinians were leaving agriculture to work as wage labor in Israel or further abroad. These organizers recognized that sumud, or steadfastness, in the face of settler colonial expansion required both supporting the economic needs of the community so that it could use and live off the land as well as developing strategies to directly confront Israeli attempts to expropriate it. As such, the material and the political were inextricably linked in the practice of sumud: one could not build a political project of resistance without attending to material needs, just as one could not attend material needs without confronting the many facets of the settler project.

Today, the people of the Jordan Valley and the south Hebron hills face an impossible contradiction. They are called upon by the political leadership and international NGOs to remain steadfast on their land in the face of settler expansion, to protect more territory from being lost. But without a political project that can not only ensures survival, but gives some hope of flourishing, there is simply no way to envision how these communities will be able to do so.

A serious danger of exhaustion for everyone involved in the current state of affairs. The ability to buy time, ultimately, depends on the resilience of the community to withstand demolitions, to remain vigilant, to keep track of papers and orders, often in a language they do not understand, for years and years on end. It is a drain on resources, as expensive barracks are destroyed and animals are lost. Al-Hadidiya used to be home to 150 families. Today, only 14 families have been able to remain. For the lawyers it requires constant improvisation, and working in a system that is systematically discriminatory against Palestinians, and is constantly threatening to deny respite to Palestinians all together.

Youth in a day of volunteer work to clean up rubble of a demolished home in Um al Kheir. (Photo by: EAPPI)

It is thus of crucial importance to ensure that struggles in these areas are able to adopt politics of liberation, rather than remain trapped in struggles in Israeli courts. Nor can the past experience and the collective efforts of our liberation movement pre-Oslo simply be repeated. Conditions have changed: The bureaucratic apparatus of the Palestinian Authority has created mechanisms and an official discourse based on a technocratic effort to 'develop' a state within the Bantustans of Area A and B carved out by Israel for the remaining Palestinian population. The PA and international donors have contributed to create a growing class divide and to exacerbate conflicting class interests. Lack of trust and confidence among the people in our political leadership has increased the tendency

to seek individual short term solutions, often based on humanitarian projects, while political parties have lost connection with their grassroots base and face difficulties to listen to and reflect the voices from the ground.

Yet, the spirit of sumud is still alive. The determination of our people to resist has not been broken and can build on the experiences of generations of struggle to rebuild organisational structures and strategic visions needed today. One such an effort is the construction of the Popular Council for the Protection of the Jordan Valley.

In 2012, representatives of the communities in the Jordan Valley and grassroots organisations have started a process of meetings and discussions in order to identify the key problems and organize a collective response to political fragmentation and ethnic cleansing. Two years later, they established the Popular Council for the Protection of the Jordan Valley - a coordinating body for villages, farmers and grassroots organizations from different areas of the Valley, in particularly those threatened with immediate displacement.

Beyond analysing the impact of the ongoing and systematic policies of occupation, colonisation, land and resource theft and ethnic cleansing, the Jordan Valley Council has focused as well on defining the problems that stand in the way of effective resistance. The relatively small population in the Valley and the dispersion and isolation of the localities makes mass action as well as collective resistance in moments of Israeli attacks difficult. Israel takes advantage of the fragmentation, attacking single communities and individuals at a time. The uncoordinated intervention of a multiplicity of external actors - whether PA institutions, international donors or others - without a strategic plan based on the demands of the people on how to support them in their effort to maintain a dignified life and resist the ethnic cleansing of the Valley has quite evidently failed to achieve positive change. Instead it has often led to increased fragmentation and has created a situation where large amounts of resources are invested to 'prove' concern and commitment without significant impact or preoccupation about the lack of sustainable results. Even if in the last years the Jordan Valley has received attention within 'development' and humanitarian programs, the people of the Valley are mainly seen as recipients of aid and development programming rather than active participants in their own liberation and resistance.

The Jordan Valley Council is a popular and unofficial body and does not enter into competition with institutions or political forces. It works with them to ensure they reflect and protect the needs of the people and, when necessary, challenges them. One of the important struggles at the national level remains the battle against PA taxes on livestock and farmers. In 2014 and 2015, the Jordan Valley Council together with allies organized demonstrations against PA taxes on farmers and livestock. As a result of the first demonstration, the PA took a decision to not levy taxes on the area. But, bafflingly, it imposed taxes in 2015. When some refused to pay, the PA began to take residents to court.[6] Our struggle has ensured those court cases were stopped. Yet, as well in 2016, we had to organize protests and campaigns to frustrate once again the PNA's attempts to impose new taxes on the farmers and Bedouin.[7]The struggle is ongoing.

In order to move beyond the politics of delay and humanitarian aid, actions need to be coupled with concrete resistance to Israeli displacement plans and international solidarity. This is only viable if national organizations come together with local grassroots organizing. In fact, the

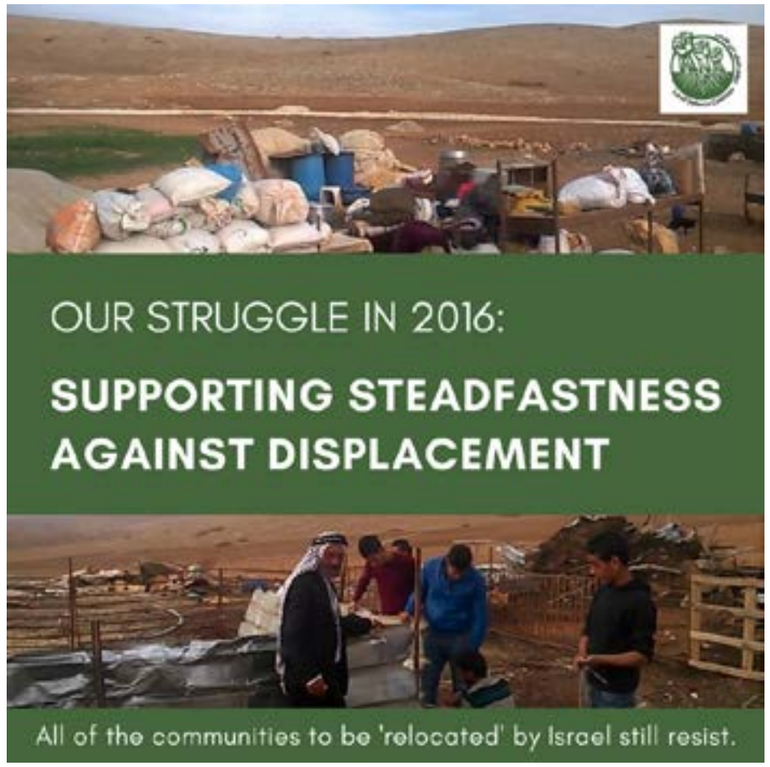
6 Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. *Abu Saqr: The Jordan Valley's Struggle For Survival, Unity And Rights.* December 16, 2015. http://www.stopthewall.org/abu-saqr-jordan-valleys-struggle-survival-unity-and-rights

7 Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. *Land Defense Coalition - Our Struggle 2016.* January 24, 2017. http://www.stopthewall.org/2017/01/24/land-defense-coalition-our-struggle-2016#Farmers

political and economic developments of the past two decades are creating problems for workers, communities affected by the Wall, farmers and all those on the front lines of resistance. The creation in 2013 of the Land Defense Coalition, a network uniting 12 movements and organizations that mobilize, among others, farmers, workers, Bedouin communities, youth and women, is therefore a necessary response to Palestinian politics and the pressure of the occupation. The Coalition has defined as its mission “to defend the land and resources effectively, to influence public policy in favour of small-scale farmers and marginalised social groups and protect their rights. [....] We want to defend their political, social and economic rights and reinforce international solidarity with their struggles. We do this by supporting them to organize themselves, supporting their struggles, strengthening their capacities, reinforcing joint work among the Coalition members and networking globally with social movements.”

At the beginning of 2015, for example, the Land Defense Coalition was a central part of the protest camp in Abu Dis area, ‘The Gate to Jerusalem’. The protest camp resisted for almost two months and a dozen demolitions before the Israeli bulldozers could move onto the land. People gathered on the lands to stop the Israeli plan to transform the area into a ‘relocation camp’ for Bedouin communities to be displaced from their homes. The Jordan Valley Council and the Land Defense Coalition jointly have already stopped Palestinian business who had been lured into profiting from this plan, and will continue to work together to stop the ‘relocation camps’ and the displacement of Palestinian communities as well as connivence and profiteering by national and international companies from these policies.

Such grassroots efforts, coalitions and strategies of struggle are able to integrate material support with political aims and demands. In this way we may be able to resurrect and build on a practice of sumud that can inspire a politics of liberation.



What you can do ...

There are many different ways in which you can join the effort to stop Israel’s policies of colonisation and ethnic cleansing. Among them are:

- Spread the information among your friends and the organizations you are active in.
- Work with the institutions, organizations and local authorities to:
  - Send a factfinding mission and ‘local ambassadors’ to the communities.
  - Organize speaking tours for representatives of the Popular Council for the Protection of the Jordan Valley, host photo exhibits and panel discussions.
  - Ask your local authorities to pass motions in defense of the rights of the local communities to exist and committing to ‘responsible investment’ and not to contract or otherwise support corporations or institutions complicit in Israeli war crimes and violations of international law.
  - Ask your parliamentary representative to question government what they are doing to follow through with their obligation under international law to act