

Arrested Development: The Long Term Impact of the Separation Barrier

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Abandoned house near the Separation Barrier in the town of Bir Nabala, 24 September. Photo: Anne Paq, activestills.org.

Ten years ago, Israel's security establishment began building the Separation Barrier – the largest and costliest infrastructure project undertaken by Israel since the construction of the national water carrier during the 1950s and '60s. All the related decisions and documents emphasize that the barrier does not constitute a future political boundary. Yet the Separation Barrier is to all appearances a border and its route was determined, among other things, by the location of settlements and the intention to expand them.

Eighty-five percent of the barrier is built inside the West Bank. The security establishment declared 74% of the areas on the "Israeli" side of the barrier, home to 7,500 Palestinians, as a "seam zone" and imposed a rigid permit regime there. Palestinians must obtain a Civil Administration permit to enter or remain in the Seam Zone, and these permits are only given after Palestinians undergo a cumbersome bureaucratic process to supply a long list of documents to support their request. Israeli citizens or non-Israeli Jews (if "entitled to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return") may enter the seam zone areas freely. The Civil Administration permits issued to Palestinians are given for periods ranging between a single day and two years, depending on the type of permit. Access to seam zone areas, via "fabric of life" crossings or designated agricultural gates built into the barrier, requires a security check.

Video: [Welcome to Bir Nabala](#)

The Civil Administration allows entry to the seam zone pursuant to a list of reasons it defines in advance. This limits Palestinians' access to these areas and obliges them to adapt their plans to the specific circumstances recognized by the Civil Administration as legitimate reasons for entry to these areas.

Since the advent of the barrier, Palestinians have lost the opportunity to make profitable use of their land—their

major remaining resource. Currently, with nearly two-thirds of the barrier's construction completed, Palestinians' agricultural-economic activity has already decreased in areas formerly considered stable, eroding the ability of these communities to support themselves.

The spatial rift created by the barrier between neighboring communities and between the communities and their lands is threatening their continued survival and paralyzing any possibility of sustainable development. In some places, this rift has also reduced the Palestinian presence in areas isolated on the "Israeli" side of the barrier and in enclaves encircled by its route. The barrier has also restricted longstanding commercial ties between Palestinian communities near the Green Line and Israelis living nearby.

The barrier's location within the territory of the West Bank and the imposition of a rigid permit regime infringe on a long list of Palestinians' human rights. These include the right to freedom of movement—and hence also the right to work, education, medical care, a family life, a livelihood and a normal quality of life. Palestinians' collective right to self-determination is also damaged, in that the barrier route approved by the Israeli government dissects the territory of the West Bank: the barrier encircling the Ma'ale Adumim settlement "finger," if and when built as planned, is liable to sever territorial contiguity between the northern and southern West Bank and cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

Given that construction of the Separation Barrier along its present route violates human rights of Palestinians, the government of Israel must dismantle all the sections built inside the territory of the West Bank and stop further construction there. Pending the dismantling, Israel must return all the land already taken in places where the barrier is not constructed, rescind the permit regime in the seam zone areas, and allow free access to these areas for all Palestinians. If Israel wishes to build a physical obstacle between Israel and the West Bank, it should do so, as a rule, along the Green Line or within the sovereign territory of Israel. Even in that case, Israel must avoid building in such a way as to divide and isolate Palestinian communities.

Case studies:

Barta'ah a-Sharqiyah



Palestinians wait at a checkpoint at the entrance to the Barta'ah-Rehan enclave, 20 February 2010. Photo: Ruti Tuval, MachsomWatch.

The route of the Separation Barrier around Barta'ah a-Sharqiyah encircles an area of some 32,000 dunams, encompassing the village of Barta'ah a-Sharqiyah and seven smaller villages with a population of 5,348 Palestinians, of whom 4,575 live in Barta'ah a-Sharqiyah. The barrier separates the residents of this enclave from

their urban hub in Jenin and from the villages of Ya'bad to the east and Qaffin to the south. These communities used to provide residents with food and other goods and with educational and health services, which the residents now have difficulty accessing. In October 2003, the Israeli military imposed the permit regime on this area.

The main crossing enabling the movement of people and goods into and out of this enclave is the Rehan crossing, which was privatized in May 2007. The security check on people and private vehicles crossing at Rehan is extensive, and during peak hours — in the morning and afternoon — the process can take an hour. Anyone wishing to enter the enclave — including the chronically ill, post-surgical patients, pregnant women, disabled persons and children — must undergo extensive security checks that involve several different stages along a route of some 200 meters. The Civil Administration has imposed restrictions on the quantity of goods allowed into the village and that, too, is subject to stringent checks. The restrictions imposed on the transfer of goods to the village increase their transport costs and lead to higher prices in the village, including for basic foodstuffs — which can cost several times more than the same product in nearby Jenin.

Jayus



Palestinians cross at an agricultural gate at Jayus, 24 September 2012. Photo: Oren Ziv, activestills.org.

The village of Jayus, northeast of Qalqilyah, has over 3,000 residents. Jayus has more agricultural land within the seam zone than does any other village, amounting to 60% of the village's farmland. The village's economy is based on intensive agriculture including orchards, olive groves, hothouse vegetables, grain fields, and raising sheep and goats. Before the construction of the Separation Barrier, around 90% of adults in Jayus worked in agriculture, with a volume of some 9,000 tons of agricultural produce annually. Most of that was sold to Palestinian markets and the remainder to Israeli merchants.

The permit regime has reduced the number of Jayus residents working their land on the "Israeli" side of the barrier. The rate of permit applications denied is high. The limited number of permits approved and the fact that they are not issued sequentially for periods covering every day in the year has reduced the village's agricultural production to some 4,000 tons annually, less than half the level before the advent of the barrier. Although the opening schedule for the agricultural gates allows for ten hours of farm work during the daytime, hothouse work is negatively affected. Residents of the village have uprooted some 2,000 dunams of orchards (mainly guava and various citrus fruits) out of 3,500 dunams they cultivated prior to construction of the barrier, switching instead to wheat, lemons and olives, which require less irrigation but also produce less income. Sheep and goat herds have shrunk from 9,300 head, prior to the barrier's construction, to only about 3,000 animals.

Qalqiliyah



Closed shops in Qalqiliyah, 24 September 2012. Photo: Oren Ziv, activestills.org.

The isolation of Qalqiliyah, the fourth largest city in the West Bank, by the Separation Barrier has blocked any possibility of significant development for the city. By the middle of the preceding decade, most of the land designated for building in the city, only 4,200 dunams, had already been utilized. The volume of new land approved for construction by the municipality between November 2010 and November 2011 was the lowest of any West Bank city—1.5% of all construction approved in the other West Bank cities. Having utilized the land available for building, the city is prevented from developing and building additional municipal institutions like schools, cultural centers and a stadium.

As a consequence of the city's extreme isolation due to the imposition of stringent restrictions on freedom of movement during the second intifada and its isolation by the Separation Barrier from other parts of the West Bank, the rate of population growth in the city, the fourth largest city in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem), now lags behind that of the other West Bank cities. About 10,000 residents from other cities who had been living in Qalqiliyah, due to its proximity to places of work inside Israel, have relocated. Cut off as it is by the barrier to the west, Qalqiliyah has lost more than 600 shops, workshops, gas stations and other businesses – mostly from the industrial area in the west of the city, near the Green Line.

Bir Nabala



Abandoned buildings located near the Separation Barrier in the town of Bir Nabala, 24 September 2012. Photo: Anne Paq, activestills.org.

The Separation Barrier in the Ramallah area has created a closed rural enclave surrounded on all sides by the barrier. The length of the barrier enclosing this enclave is 18.3 km. Four communities are trapped inside, the town of Bir Nabala the largest of them. Before completion of the barrier in this area, 6,090 people were registered residents of the town but the local council estimates that another 4,000 people, residents of East Jerusalem, were living in apartments they rented or owned in Bir Nabala while retaining their Jerusalem addresses. Since the 1970s, the town served as a residential suburb of East Jerusalem. During the 1990s, the town enjoyed an economic boom due to its central location and the fact that it had easy access to both Ramallah and East Jerusalem and, from there, to cities in central Israel. This central location made the town a meeting place for Palestinian merchants from the West Bank and Israeli merchants and contributed to the prosperity of the businesses and the commerce in the town.

The Separation Barrier cut the town off from East Jerusalem; once the barrier was built in 2006, Bir Nabala was linked only to Ramallah via a new “fabric of life” road. The barrier almost completely severed the commercial ties between town residents and other West Bank cities and with business people in Israel, and likewise ended the manifold ties between East Jerusalem residents and the town. Bir Nabala lost nearly half its inhabitants after the barrier went up: By 2011, five years after construction of the barrier, there were 5,140 people living in the village, all of them West Bank residents. The al-Mawahel neighborhood in the eastern part of the town, where about 250 families from East Jerusalem had been living and in which some 30 small businesses were located, lost nearly all its residents and became a ghost town. On the town’s main road, a-Latrun, which in the past was a major traffic artery, dozens of businesses have closed their doors, multi-story buildings stand with entire floors empty and others wait in vain for their construction to be completed. The mass abandonment by East Jerusalem residents has also led to a dramatic drop in both the extent of construction and in the rental and purchase prices for apartments in Bir Nabala.