



MA'AN Development Center



**BETHLEHEM WOES:
TROUBLING TIMES TO A HOLY CITY**

MA'AN Development Center

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Introduction

Bethlehem is one of the main spiritual, cultural and economic centers of Palestinian life. It is a city of historical and religious significance, with pilgrims arriving from around the world to pay their spiritual respects at the many religious sites in the area.

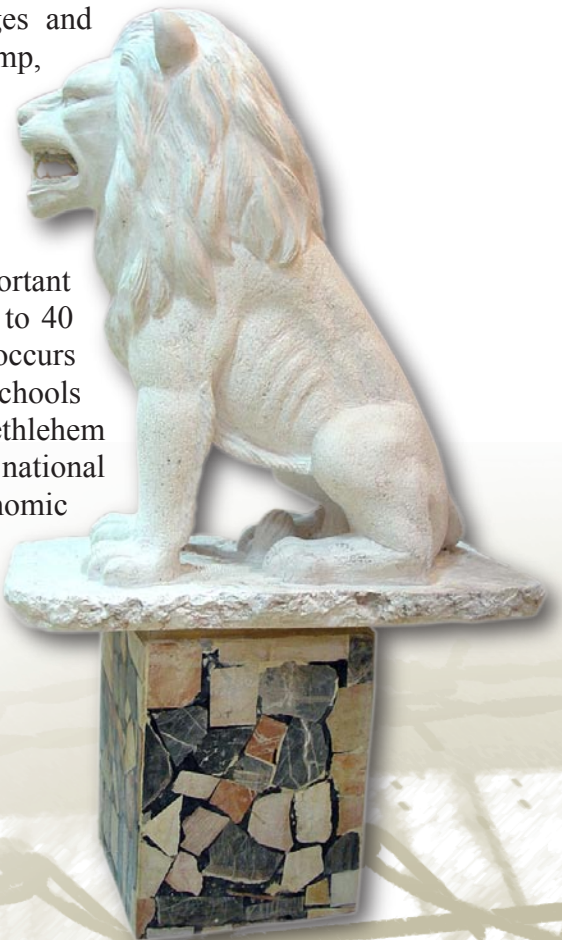
Bethlehem is also being gradually isolated from the world and decimated by the practices and policies of the Israeli occupation. As Israeli settlements and roads continue to encroach on Palestinian land, as checkpoints and barriers thwart the daily movement of Palestinians, and as the Apartheid Wall divides Palestinian communities from each other, Bethlehem and its surrounding villages struggle for their daily survival.



The Nativity Square in Bethlehem

Bethlehem Overview

Bethlehem Governorate contains over 58 Palestinian villages and communities, and the three refugee camps of 'Aida Camp, Beit Jibrin (or al-'Azza) Camp and Dheisheh Camp. The Governorate is located in the central area of the West Bank, with Bethlehem city 6 km south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem, along with the other major Palestinian cities of Jerusalem and Ramallah, has historically been a part of the vital central metropolitan area of Palestine, forming one of the most important economic, cultural and social centers of Palestinian life. Up to 40 percent⁽¹⁾ of all Palestinian economic activity in the West Bank occurs in this central metropolitan unit, with many major hospitals, schools and universities located in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The Bethlehem Governorate contributes approximately 13 percent⁽²⁾ to the national Palestinian gross domestic product (GDP), with its major economic sectors being tourism, stonemasonry and marble production, light industries (such as textiles, paints, plastics, chemicals, furniture production, metalwork, etc.) and services (banks, construction, transportation, insurance companies, etc.).⁽³⁾



Stonemasonry

Governorate	Bethlehem
Population - total (Governorate)	185,572 (mid-2007)
- Bethlehem (city)	29,927
- Beit Jala	16,689
- Beit Sahour	15,388
Area - total (Governorate)	659 km ²
- Bethlehem (city)	21 km ²

Source: PCBS⁽⁴⁾

The Bethlehem Governorate contributes approximately 13% to the national Palestinian gross domestic product (GDP)



Olivewood carving

¹ Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry

² Ibid

³ Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce & Industry, *Economic Profile 2007*.

⁴ Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), *Projected Mid-Year Population in The Palestinian Territory by Governorate (2001-2007)*,



Samples of Bethlehem Products



Mother of Pearl



Metal manufacturing



Silver Jewelry



Hand-woven fabrics and molded gypsum

Settlements in Bethlehem Governorate



There are approximately 20⁽⁵⁾ Israeli settlements located in Bethlehem Governorate, housing over 47,000 Israeli settlers and appropriating over 33 percent of the region's total land area. The major settlement bloc in the area is known as Gush Etzion, which is located to the west and south-west of Bethlehem along the main road between Hebron and Jerusalem. The Gush Etzion bloc comprises 12 largely religious settlements: Har Gilo, Neve Daniel, Keidar, Rosh Tzurim, El'azar, Migdal Oz, Alon Shevut, Kfar Etzion, Bat Ayin, Geva'ot (a military outpost), Betar 'Illit, and Efrata.

View of Gilo settlement from Rachel's Tomb area

The following table shows the major settlements in Bethlehem:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Population (at June 2006)</i>	<i>Established</i>
Alon Shevut	3,235	1970
Bat Ayin	841	1989
Betar' Illit	28,023	1989
Efrata	7,695	1980
El'azar	1,242	1975
Har Gilo	430	1972
Keidar	722	1984
Kfar Etzion	544	1967
Ma'ale Amos	383	1981
Migdal Oz	411	1977
Neve Daniel	1,568	1982
Nokdim	801	1982
Rosh Zurim	457	1969
Tekoa	1,336	1977
Geva'ot	11 families	1997

Sources: PASSIA⁽⁶⁾

⁵ Sources: Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Ibrahim Manasra, Coordinator of the Local Popular Committees against the Wall in Bethlehem

⁶ Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), *Diary 2007*, p.312.

The Apartheid Wall



In Bethlehem Governorate, the Apartheid Wall is being built on Palestinian land to the east of many of the Israeli settlements and far beyond the 1949 Green Line, in an effort to annex the strategic Gush Etzion bloc of settlements and Palestinian land into Israel and to pre-empt any final peace negotiations. Only three percent of the Wall is located on the Green Line, while over 79 percent is located east of the Green Line, in some places reaching up to 10kms into Bethlehem Governorate⁽⁷⁾. Over 7,300 dunams⁽⁸⁾ of Bethlehem's land has been annexed by the Wall. This means that villages to the west of Bethlehem, housing 18,651 Palestinians, will become isolated enclaves, disconnected from Bethlehem and from each other, and encircled by the Wall and Israeli settlements. Many villages will be surrounded on three sides by the Wall and with only a gated entrance on the fourth side allowing access to and from the village. These village populations will lose their land, income opportunities, and access to employment, markets and services (medical and education facilities, etc), which are mostly located east of the Wall in Bethlehem. The combination of the Separation and Annexation Wall and heavy Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement has severely affected daily life for these Palestinian communities. Israel's aim with the Separation Wall is to keep 45 percent of Bethlehem's land under Israeli control in eastern and western segregation zones, and to cut all viable connections between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

The impact of the Wall on local farmers

Palestinian farmers who have been cut off from their farmlands by the Wall are finding it increasingly difficult to access their land and tend to their crops. First, Palestinian farmers are required to prove the ownership of their land to the Israeli authorities – an often difficult process in situations where ownership papers have been lost or when land has been traditionally handed down through the family's generations. Second, Israeli permits are issued only for seasonal access to their land, such as at harvest time, and do not allow the farmer to take any tools, machinery, or equipment to tend to his crops.

⁷ source: Bethlehem Municipality

⁸ source: Ibrahim Manasra, Coordinator of the Local Popular Committees against the Wall in Bethlehem



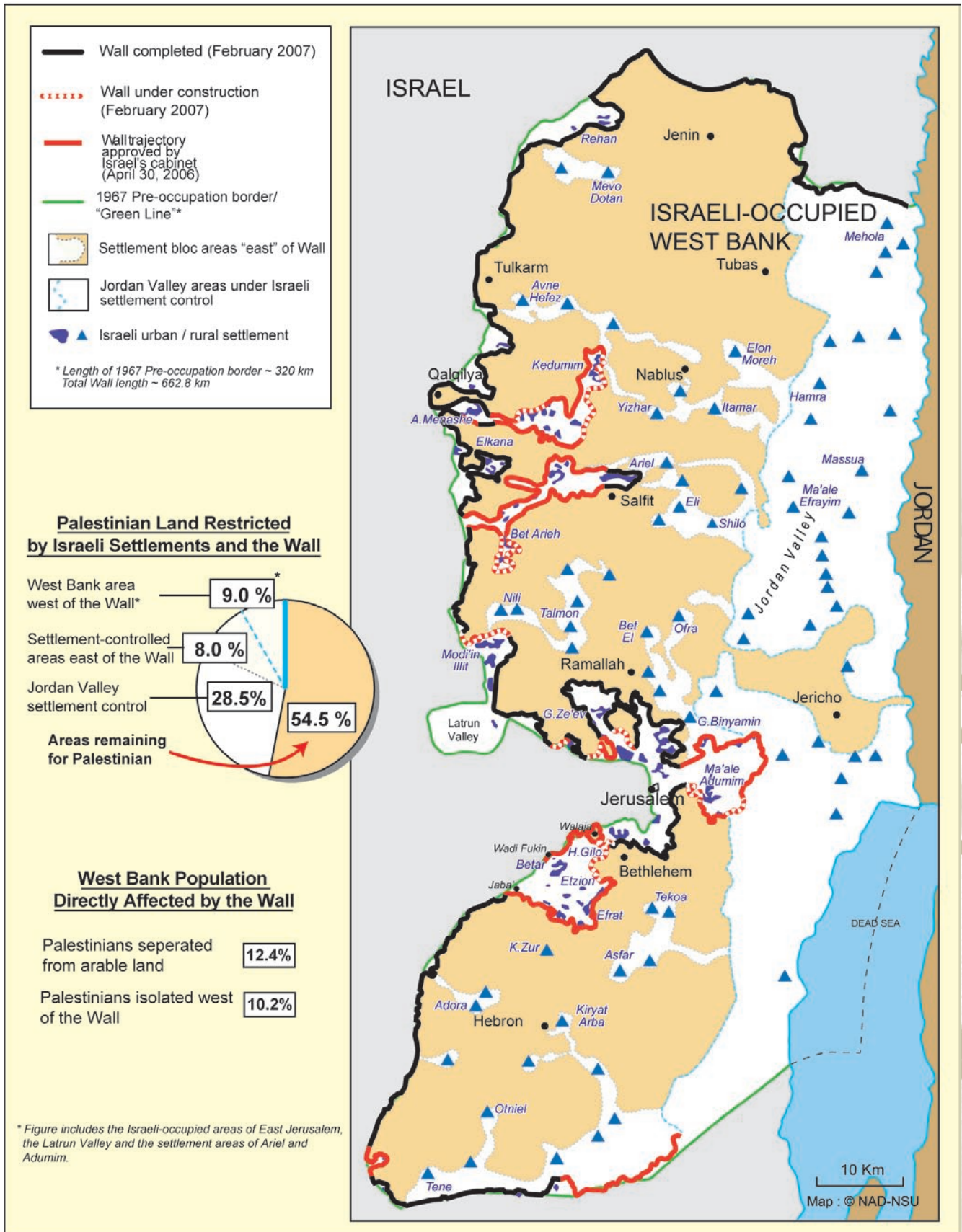
The Separation Wall and International Law

On 9 July 2004, an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel's construction of the Wall was contrary to international law, that construction of the Wall must cease immediately in all areas and be dismantled in areas where it is already built, that any legislation or regulations relating to the Wall be repealed, and that Israel must make reparations for damages caused by the Wall's construction. Furthermore, the ICJ rejected the Israeli claim that the Wall was for "security" or "self defense". The ICJ ruling was further strengthened when a majority in the UN General Assembly voted on 20 July 2004 to demand that Israel comply with the ICJ opinion. To date, Israel has not complied with the ICJ opinion or the UN General Assembly Resolution (ES-10/15), and construction of the Wall continues.



Israel's Wall and Settlements (Colonies)

February 2007



Source: <http://www.nad-plo.org/maps/Wall/jpeg/Wall%20Map%20February2007.jpg>

Checkpoints and Bypass Roads

The Israeli occupation is further entrenched with its system of checkpoints and Israeli-only bypass roads. Checkpoints are designed to control and restrict the movement of Palestinians within and between their villages, their agricultural lands and their cities. Bypass roads are built for the sole use of Israeli settlers and connect the settlements to each other and to Israel. Bypass roads are prohibited to Palestinians and are another way that more Palestinian land is appropriated for Israeli use.

In April 2007, there were a total of 37 points of closure, checkpoints or other restrictions of Palestinian movement in Bethlehem.

Checkpoints	9
Partial checkpoints	1
Roadblocks	6
Road gates	5
Earth mounds	9
Earth walls	2 (2,100 meters)
Trenches	0
Road barriers	5 (2,500 meters)

Source: OCHA-oPt⁽⁹⁾



Al Qubba checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem

⁹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), *West Bank and Gaza Strip Closure Maps*, April 2007, p.13.



Many checkpoints control Palestinian access between Bethlehem city and its surrounding villages. One of these – Mazmuria checkpoint – will become the only link for Palestinians traveling between the northern and southern West Bank areas.

<i>Checkpoint</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Presence</i>
Al-Qubba (also known as Checkpoint 300 or Gilo cross-road)	Rachel's Tomb (north); connects Bethlehem & Jerusalem	Open only for permit holders	Permanent; transit & trade	Border guards
Tunnel	Near Al-Khader village on Road No. 60 (west); connects Bethlehem & Jerusalem	Closed in front of Palestinians	Permanent	Border guards & police
Al-Jab'a	Near Al-Jab'a village (south-west); connects to 1948 Palestine	Open to Palestinians with special work permits	Permanent	Military
Etzion triangle	On Etzion junction; connects Bethlehem & Hebron	Open	Permanent	Military police
Al-Walaja	Near Al-Walaja village (north-west); connects Bethlehem & Jerusalem	Open only for permit holders	Permanent	Border guards & police
Husan	Connects western suburbs with Jerusalem & 1948 Palestine	Open only for permit holders	Permanent	Border guards & military police
Mazmuria	Near Khamat an-Nu'man village (east); connects Bethlehem & Anata (Jerusalem)	Under construction Will require permits	Trade cross-road	N/A

Sources: Bethlehem DCO

Ibrahim Manasra, coordinator of the Local Popular Committees against the Wall in Bethlehem

A total of 76km of Israeli-only bypass roads surround Bethlehem and its villages, with a further 31km of roads still to be constructed. There are six major bypass roads in the Bethlehem area.

<i>Road</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Access to Palestinians</i>
Road No. 375	North-east of Wadi Fukhin village, connecting settlements of Bitar 'Illit and Hadar Beitar.	Special permits required
Road No. 356	West of Bethlehem, via Tekoa settlement, connecting the settlements in southern Jerusalem (Har Homa) with those in Hebron.	Special permits required
Road No. 367	South-west of Bethlehem, connecting settlements of Migdal Oz, Kfar Etzion and Bat Ayin.	Special permits required
Za'tara Road	Connects Nokdim settlement in south-west to Har Homa settlement in north-east.	Settler road largely avoided by Palestinians
Road No. 90	Main north-south road along the Dead Sea in the Jordan Valley.	Palestinian access to Jordan Valley is restricted.
Road No. 60 (Tunnel)	South connecting Bethlehem to Hebron	Closed

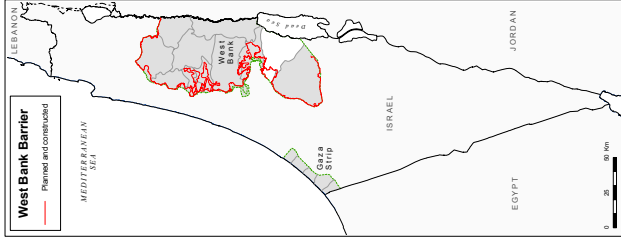
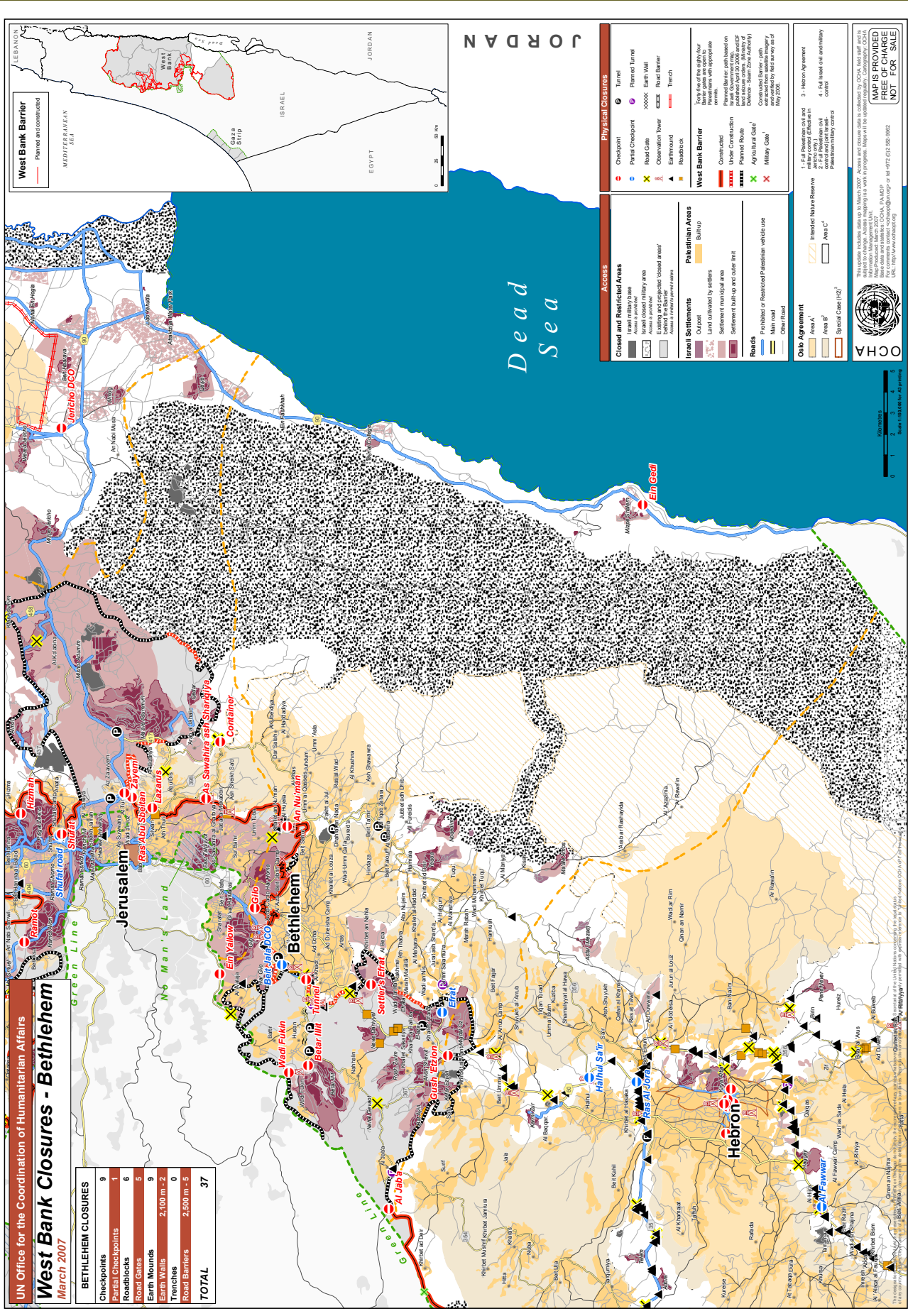
Source: Ibrahim Manasra, coordinator of the Local Popular Committees against the Wall in Bethlehem



Bypass road 60 (Tunnel)

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
West Bank Closures - Bethlehem
 March 2007

BETHLEHEM CLOSURES	
Checkpoints	9
Partial Checkpoints	1
Roadblocks	6
Earth Mounds	9
Trenches	2, 100 m - 2
Road Barriers	2, 500 m - 5
TOTAL	37



Physical Closures

- Checkpoint
- Partial Checkpoint
- Road Gate
- Observation Tower
- Earthmound
- Roadblock
- Tunnel
- Planned Tunnel
- Earth Wall
- Road Barrier
- Trench

West Bank Barrier

Types of the 4,800 m barrier:

- Planned Barrier (planned)
- Planned Barrier (based on Israel's 2002 map)
- Planned Barrier (based on Israel's 2002 map and the 2004 map)
- Planned Barrier (based on the 2004 map)
- Planned Barrier (based on the 2004 map and the 2006 map)

Access

Closed and Restricted Areas

- Israel military zone
- Israel closed military area
- Access to Israel's planned area
- Access to Israel's planned area

Israel Settlements

- Outpost
- Land cultivated by settlers
- Settlement municipal area
- Settlement built-up and outer limit

Palestinian Areas

- Buildup

Roads

- Prohibited or Restricted Palestinian vehicles use
- Other Road

Olo Agreement

- Area A
- Area B
- Area C
- Special Case (SC)
- Interdiction Reserve
- Area C

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
 Information Management Unit
 Humanitarian Information System (HIS) - OCHA
 Date of last update: 17 March 2007
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Source: http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/Bethlehem_closure_March07.pdf



The Economic Effects of the Israeli Occupation on Bethlehem – Rachel’s Tomb Area

The Israeli occupation affects every aspect of daily life for the Palestinians. In Bethlehem, policies of closure, siege, movement restrictions, land confiscation and the Separation and Annexation Wall have combined to cause devastating effects on Bethlehem. This has been most evident in Bethlehem’s vital tourism industry, which has been virtually destroyed since the start of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000. Bethlehem’s significance as a site for pilgrims and tourists to the many Christian religious sites has been undermined by Israeli occupation policies.

Rachel’s Tomb area, located in the northern entrance of Bethlehem, has dealt a stifling economic blow to the local economy. In 1997, Israel decided to annex the revered site and its surrounding area, imposing restrictions on

Palestinian movement on the main road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.⁽¹⁰⁾ Approximately 1/3 of Bethlehem’s 575 km² area has been confiscated by the Annexation Wall, siphoning off the entire northwestern section of the city.⁽¹¹⁾ Economic sectors inclusive of service, agriculture, stone masonry, and light industry have all suffered as a consequence of the Wall, leading to a myriad of business closures and severe economic losses. Today, Palestinian unemployment has reached 55-60 percent in Bethlehem District.⁽¹²⁾

In Rachel’s Tomb area, the stifling restrictions on economic activity imposed by the occupation has severely restricted the free flow of people, goods and services. Approximately 65% of the Palestinian population in the region now lives under



View of Rachel’s Tomb from Aida Refugee Camp

¹⁰ Costs of conflict: The Changing Face of Bethlehem, OCHA Fact Sheet, December 2004

¹¹ Bethlehem Municipality

¹² Ibid



the United Nations set poverty line of 2 dollars per day.¹³ Highly dependent on tourism, the intimidating military barricades built around Rachel's Tomb and the perceived volatility of Bethlehem have deterred tourists from traveling to the holy city. This has caused a virtual plummet of the local businesses and economic activities in close proximity to the holy site and its surrounding areas.

Since Rachel's Tomb is at the entrance of Bethlehem, Palestinian economic enterprises that enjoyed the business of tourists and Palestinians alike from surrounding Jerusalem has proved catastrophic to the once bustling economic hub. Souvenir shops, restaurants, grocery stores, factories, workshops and other private enterprises have closed down since the barrier's construction over the main artery route, placing many once self-sustaining Palestinians in a state of poverty.



Table 1: Economic Establishment Comparison

Economic establishment	2002	2007
Restaurants	11	4
Pharmacies	2	1
Butchers, confectioners, clothes, tobacconists, etc	21	2
Vehicle Maintenance	22	0
Factories and workshops	13	0
Souvenir shops	3	2
Gas stations	2	2
Hotels	1	1

Source: Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce & Industry

The restriction on movement between Jerusalem and Bethlehem has not only deprived Palestinian businesses a share in accommodating tourists, but has reverted a large part of tourism's economic boost to Israel. Tourists no longer stay in Bethlehem for their visit, but instead travel back to Jerusalem on Israeli buses and sleep in Israeli hotels.

¹³ Bethlehem Municipality

Table 2: Tourism Rates	2000	2005
No. of tourists	1,000,000	300,000
No. of rooms	1,450	1,400
% Occupancy	38%	5%
No. of guests	80,000	13,600
% guests of the total tourists	8%	4%
No. nights	260,000	39,000
Average nights stay	3.25	2.8

Source: Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities

Today, tourism rates in Bethlehem have fallen to only 15-20% of its usual activity. This economic sector in Bethlehem comprised approximately 10% of the national income, with \$300 million in annual tourism revenue and \$700 million in the total investment of the tourism sector between 1994 and 2000.⁽¹⁴⁾

Table 3: Tourist Visit Comparison Average	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
No. of tourists	907,000	1,055,000	81,000	9,400	46,000	103,000	277,000
No. of buses into Bethlehem	18,630	22,500	1,800	200	1,150	2,100	6,450
hotel occupancy	-	550 out of a total of 1,450	-	-	-	-	70 out of a total of 1,400
No. of guests	-	80,000	-	-	-	-	13,600
No. of nights	-	260,000	-	-	-	-	39,000

Source: Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities

¹⁴ Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce



Land Confiscation

While economic implications of the Separation and Annexation Wall can be expressed through numbers and figures, assessing the social costs around the closure of Rachel's Tomb is more difficult to assess. Since the Wall meanders insensitively to Palestinian demographics, many Palestinians find that they are cut off from each other and their lands, fragmenting their social infrastructure.

As an important aspect of Palestinian life, connection with land is often a relationship many are baffled by in the West. In Palestinian culture, land is passed down through several generations to offspring and is deemed invaluable. Losing land can be compared to losing a historic piece of a family's heritage. Thousands of dunums of private Palestinian lands have been confiscated, as the Separation Wall meanders through towns, villages, and even neighborhoods. As a result, many Palestinians who depended on land for their livelihood have been deprived of their ability to sustain an adequate source of income.



Religious Worship



Church of Nativity

Aside from the local economy, the Apartheid Wall's social impacts have also had their toll on religious pilgrims wishing to access the revered site. The rates of Muslim worshippers at the Bilal Mosque, located in Rachel's Tomb area, have plummeted as the site has become inaccessible. A surrounding Muslim cemetery also remains isolated and difficult to reach. Palestinian Christians also cannot access the site easily as they are subject to Israel's difficult permit policies. The access road blocked by the Wall has precluded a tradition of receiving Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah into Bethlehem during the Christmas holiday season. Israeli restrictions have stemmed this tradition, as only a few high profiled clergy members and a restricted number of Christians are allowed to pass. As a significant place of worship for Muslims, Christians, and Jews, Israeli barricades characteristic of high cement Walls, with watchtowers protruding high up into the air has made Rachel's Tomb Area resemble more of a military post and prison than a place of spirituality.

ANTOINETTE'S STORY

Losing Land in Rachel's Tomb Area

When 73 year old Antoinette Anastas looks out her window, the once rich scenery that encompassed olive trees, hilly slopes, and old historic Arab homes are now checkered pieces of the landscape. Her land is now interspersed by a meandering 8 meter high concrete Wall and a Jewish settlement by the name of Gilo not far from her estate. In the distance, a shepherd herds his sheep, with the towering barrier just behind him overhead. Antoinette's home is right next to Rachel's Tomb, to reach the Anastas household, one must drive down a dirt road, the only entrance to the house as the other three sides are blocked by the barrier. When asked by a journalist long ago why she and her family wouldn't move, Antoinette simply answered, "These are our lands, and they are as valuable to us as our children." Pointing out into the distance, Antoinette explains how the Separation and Annexation Wall confiscated more than 25 dunums of land from her and her brothers. One of her brothers had dreamed of building a house on his share of land inheritance, but it fell on the other side of the Separation Wall, taking his land and his dreams of a home near his sister's residence.

The Separation Wall by Antoinette's house is no further than 20 meters away, with Rachel's Tomb visible to the naked eye from her estate through the protruding dome behind another section of the barrier. Nearby, a military watch tower sits and overlooks the area. Pieces of her



family's estate can be seen on the other side of the Wall. Antoinette recollects a time when her brothers had succeeded in the olive oil family business. However, due to their loss of land, approximately four trees remain out of the 50 to 60 on their estate. Antoinette says her family at one time was able to live on the olive oil's monthly income generation. Since the Separation Wall's construction, her family is no longer able to produce olive oil and must instead buy their own. As a Palestinian Anglican, Antoinette is like many other Palestinians who must face difficult challenges to their ability in keeping their lands, especially those whose lands fall in Israel's way of the Apartheid Wall.



As a former teacher who has now retired, Antoinette recalls her time as a music teacher in Jerusalem when traveling wasn't so difficult. Now, things are not as they were, especially since Israel began a severe closure policy, imposing difficult travel restrictions on Palestinians and shutting Palestinians out from their own lands. Since Antoinette's house is in close proximity to the barricade, many foreigners who used to rent out an apartment in one of her buildings no longer come to the area given the volatile situation. Antoinette expresses the elderly vulnerability to the situation in that without a Palestinian state, it is difficult for the government's institutions to take care of this age group. What was once her source of income of \$500 from renting out her flat has now become an unreliable source of income as the difficult

situation has made foreigners wary of living in the area. The Anastas family has suffered a great deal from Israel's apartheid Wall, and it represents many of the frustrations of Palestinians who have lost land to Israeli annexation.

For now, Antoinette carries on, continuing to live in a state of uncertainty. The future remains unclear, especially since the barrier has yet to be completed. Yet her resolve remains and shows her strength despite the fearful environment. Antoinette is hopeful that the situation will improve, but the much revered holy site stays a source of dispute and represents yet another chiseled chip out of prospects for peace and stability in the region.

Withstanding Occupation of the Nassar Family Household

The best way to make a restaurant go out of business is to set up a military post in the middle of it. That's what happened to George Nassar and his family when his restaurant establishment was taken over by Israeli occupying forces in Bethlehem near Rachel's Tomb. Israel has annexed the matriarch's burial site and has maintained control of it since 1994. Difficult travel restrictions imposed on Palestinians around the area and the presence of Israeli checkpoints staffed by soldiers has stifled movement and economic activity, and the Nassar family has been among those affected. For George, the experience of the occupying force within his home, using his belongings, and repelling customers from his establishment has destroyed his business and his family's livelihood.

In 1977, George and his family opened a restaurant near Rachel's Tomb that largely depended on tourists and Palestinians visiting Bethlehem from Jerusalem and other surrounding areas. Beginning in 1994, Israeli soldiers broke into his home, bringing their military equipment onto George's premises, staying in his building and on his roof. Israeli soldiers would come and go, but things changed in 2002 when soldiers remained on his property for an indefinite period. Extended razor wires sprawled across the front of his restaurant and Israeli soldiers destroyed the main gate to his business. The building was flanked by Israeli



tanks, and Israeli soldiers present in and around the area kept potential customers at bay, destroying Nassar's clientele base. The Israelis have used George's home as an "observation post," overlooking the Aida refugee camp that sits adjacent to Rachel's Tomb. Tourists can no longer reach his restaurant easily, and the local customers are wary of coming when the Israeli occupational force has surrounded the building. George and his family's livelihood has been destroyed by Israeli occupation of the area, as what began as a highly profitable business has now become a source of frustration.

Apart from the economic consequences for the Nassar family, presence of the Israeli occupation force has been a source of fear and anxiety. In one instance, George's mother Carmen was tied and locked in a room. Another time, George's wife was injured when she was hit by the butt of a gun while trying to protect



Barricading the Nassar family business

her children from Israeli soldiers. This does not include the psychological distress the family has endured, as Israeli soldiers have on numerous occasions raided the Nassar household in the middle of the night. Israeli soldiers have used personal belongings of the Nassar family, often eating in the restaurant kitchen, using the water and electricity at George's expense. Not only has the Nassar family lost their source of livelihood as well as having to endure the psychological distress of the Israeli occupational force, but they have also lost agricultural lands and property. It is estimated that the Nassar family lost 16 dunums due to the closure of the area and confiscation of Palestinian lands.

The Israeli seizure of lands, homes, and personal property have undermined Palestinian efforts to improve their economic and social growth and development, as the constant presence of Israeli soldiers and the restriction of Palestinian movement have all contributed to a virtual collapse of Palestinian social and economic coherence



Barb wiring Nassar's restaurant establishment

and stability. The future seems uncertain, but like many other Palestinian families, the Nassars seem to have the strength to withstand these challenging times in hopes of one day returning to a sense of safety, security, and freedom. Until then, occupation continues and Palestinians face an unpredictable future as their communities and livelihoods are destroyed, painting a bleak prospect for a safe and stable Palestinian future.

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