



# MA'AN DEVELOPMENT CENTER

## Case Study

West Bank Apartheid Wall

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### Tulkarm : People's Roots are as Deep as those of the Olive Trees

Jamal Othman, a farmer from Al-Jaroushia, a village in the Tulkarm governorate, is one of many saddening examples of the human costs of the construction of the occupation's new Wall. Othman's family has lived in Al-Jaroushia for generations, the second most prominent family in the village of 1400 residents. His extended family of 120 lives on a 400-dunam plot of land.

Olive oil had been the primary output of Othman's land. In the 1920's, his family brought in some of the best olive tree seedlings from what is now Jordan, and after several generations, they flourished to a point where they produced 12 tons of oil per year. In addition, the farm harvested an annual six tons of almonds. The output provided a descent living standard for the entire family and financed university education for all of their children.

In 2002, Othman received orders that his land had been confiscated and would be used for security purposes, more specifically to construct the Wall. In many cases, the orders are deliberately thrown under trees where farmers cannot find them. Moreover, confiscation orders were thrown during the 2002 invasion when the occupation forces imposed strict curfew all day and night. When the curfew was finally lifted, the "legal" period allowed by the Israeli court to appeal against the orders was expired. Then, when the land is taken, Israeli officials can "prove" that they followed proper regulation by providing advance notification to the residents in question. Ironically

As proven in Othman's case, there is nothing proper about it. He had retained legitimate land ownership documentation since the British mandate. The Israeli occupation and eventually their court, however, claimed that the documents did not prove ownership, only payment of taxes.

The proceedings with Othman took place in a haphazard and fast track manner. The occupying forces claimed 300 dunams of his land, 75% of the total. In the process of doing so, they leveled 3,000 olive trees and 1,000 almond trees, covering the property with rocks to hinder any further growth and make way for the Wall. The absurdity of the situation climaxed when military officers stopped by the home to say they were "sorry" for their mistake, as the planned Wall track in Othman's backyard was incorrect. They chose a new track in yet another chunk of his land. Undoubtedly, this "sorry" has caused the loss of the family's vital source of livelihood

pipelines and 20,000 kilometers of agricultural roads. When the soldiers left Othman's property, all that remained was the house and four trees.

According to the occupation's Ministry of Defense, the route of the "anti-terrorism security fence" has been sensitive to human suffering, avoiding annexation of Palestinian villages, and followed the route of the green line whenever possible. They also claim that it will provide adequate passage for people, cars, and goods. People whose property is divided by the Wall are allegedly granted passage to work their land. The Wall in Tulkarm region is 27 km and passes through 17 villages and localities. The occupying forces allotted eight gates to the area, but only one is functional, and only for a few hours a day. The process of obtaining passes is arduous and even then they are rarely given. In Othman's circumstance, only twenty people out of his 120-member extended family received passes. They were intentionally given to the elderly and woman, leaving out the strong workers. In his words, "people go to their land as tourists, not to work."

For Othman to reach the olive tree on the opposite side of the wall, he has to trek a staggering 12 kilometers, and wait for the gate to open. Those who are fortunate enough to acquire passes are lined up in three rows- one for men, one for women, and the other for donkeys. Soldiers order the men to name their donkey and wife when crossing. One man from al-Jaroushia was forced at gunpoint to wear his donkey's saddle and make animal noises at the gunpoint of an 18-year-old female soldier. Such practices come as no surprise to Palestinians, where occupational methods have hit rock bottom both in terms of humiliation and disregard for human dignity. It is part of everyday life. It is a piece of the occupation.



Under Ottoman law, if land is not used in seven years, it can be confiscated by the state. This was changed to three years under Israeli occupation. By not allowing people to labor their land, the occupying forces are attempting further West Bank annexation and choking the community of its basic survival needs.

Othman now buys olive oil and his fifteen-year-old son will be the first in the family not to go on to the university. "This is the real life, the life of the people," he says, "one that is not easily explained through political or economic analysis." The implications for the entire Palestinian community whose lives are affected by the Wall are urgently pressing.

Despite these and other massive complications, Palestinians remain in their villages and insist on their rights to their land and livelihood. They have taken the lessons of 1948 to heart and vow not to repeat them, not to be refugees in their own land, and not to give up.