



*The Tunnel Road, Daniel Bauer, 2002*

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## Interlude – 1967

Israeli military strategy, conscious of the strategic limitations of Israel's pre-1967 borders, was defined by an oxymoron coined by former military general and then Knesset member Yigal Allon in 1959: 'pre-emptive counter-attack'.<sup>1</sup> According to a plan he drew up with Air Force Commander Ezer Weizman in the mid-1960s, Israel's Air Force would provide volumetric – that is, aerial – compensation for Israel's apparent inferiority on the ground.

In May 1967, after several clashes between Israeli and Syrian troops, originating in earlier dispute over water sources, Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser honoured his country's military pact with Syria and deployed ten divisions along the border to Israel, ordered UN observers to leave the Sinai and, on 23 May 1967, closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Israel formed a unity government, mobilized reserves and appointed, under popular pressure, the bellicose Moshe Dayan as Minister of Defence. In anxious anticipation of the war, sports grounds were consecrated as makeshift cemeteries and Israeli newspapers explicitly likened Nasser to Hitler. However, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) under Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, confident of its ability and seeing an opportunity to defeat the Arab armies, pressed – by some accounts even threatened – the hesitant government of Levy Eshkol into war. The 1967 war implemented Allon and Weizman's strategy to the letter: On 5 June 1967 the IDF launched an air strike that incapacitated the Egyptian and Jordanian Air Forces. This allowed Israel's ground forces to charge across the surface of the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. On 7 June the Old City of Jerusalem was surrounded and then occupied. The entire West Bank followed soon afterwards. On 9 June Israel attacked Syrian positions on the Golan Heights. By the end of the June 1967 war, Israeli soldiers were deployed behind clear territorial boundaries of mountain and water: the Suez Canal, the Jordan River on the Jordanian front and the line of volcanic mounts about 40 kilometres into the Syrian Golan Heights. The territory under Israeli control grew threefold, including the rest of former British Mandatory



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Palestine – the 365 square kilometres of the Gaza Strip and the 5,655 square kilometres of the West Bank.<sup>2</sup> A period of economic prosperity began, due in no small part to the cheap labor drawn from the newly occupied Palestinian population of more than a million people, about a third of them refugees who had either fled or had been expelled to the region during the 1948 War.<sup>3</sup> On December 1967, the Israeli government decided to erase the internationally recognized 1949 Armistice Agreement's Green Line, which separated Israel from the West Bank and Gaza, from all atlases, maps and textbooks it published. However, except for the area around Jerusalem, Israel did not annex the territories, and according to international law, their status remained that of 'occupied territories'; in these territories, the Israeli military assumed legislative, executive and judicial powers.<sup>4</sup>

The area occupied had distinct topographical characteristics. The mountain ranges of Palestine were formed by the fissure of the Great Rift Valley, a 5,000 kilometre tectonic crack running north to south, from the Golan Heights to the eastern shores of Africa, on the Indian Ocean. The West Bank occupies the central portion of this mountain range. Marking its eastern edge is the Jordan River which meanders through the Jordan Valley where the weather is hot, dry and delusionary. The Palestinian population of the area is mainly located around the city of Jericho, a desert oasis on the Jerusalem–Amman road, in small villages and semi-nomadic Bedouin encampments. West of the Rift Valley the ridges rise fast and steep, scorched by wadies, deep canyons and cliffs. The mountain range itself is corrugated with a repetitive sequence of wrinkles and folds, whose elevation ranges from 500 to 1,000 metres above sea level. The summits are barren, rocky and windswept, while the valleys between are fertile and often cultivated with field crops. The six most populous Palestinian cities of the West Bank – Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron – are strung from north to south along the mountain range's line-of-water-divide by the Mountain Road (now Road 60), the most important transport route in the West Bank. A few kilometres west of the line-of-water-divide are the western slopes of the West Bank – an area characterized by a benign landscape that slopes gently westwards, with fertile soil and plenty of water and a position close to and overlooking the main Israeli metropolitan centres on the coastal plain.

The hydrological cycle of the Jordan Valley basin, of which Israel/Palestine and the surrounding states form part, is a system of cyclical flows that cuts through the area's political and security borders. In winter the water evaporating off the surface of the Mediterranean Sea condenses into rain clouds. The clouds are blown eastwards over the Israeli coastal plains towards the West Bank mountains. There they break against their peaks in sudden bursts of violent rain.

The rainwater runs into gullies and streams that drain westwards through the western slopes of the West Bank mountains and back through the Israeli coastal plain into the sea. Some of this rainwater filters through the porous limestone and drains into the soil. Depending on the porosity of the rocks, it may take decades for the water to filter through and collect in underground 'storage areas', trapped by a 'floor' and 'ceiling' of impenetrable rock. There, within the western slopes of the West Bank mountains, on both sides of the 1949 Green Line, the water of the mountain aquifer, can be easily pumped out.

This hydrological condition asserts itself in the organization of habitation on the surface. The location of water-extraction points has determined the location of Palestinian towns and villages, later that of the Jewish settlements, and recently the meanderings of the path of the Wall in this region.<sup>5</sup> It is thus not surprising that, through specially constructed tunnels equipped with grills and drainage pipes, the Wall seeks to be as permeable to water as it seeks to be impermeable to people.

Indeed, one of the most crucial battlegrounds of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is below the surface. About 80 per cent of the mountain aquifer is located under the West Bank. Israeli politicians generally believe, although this fact has recently been contested,<sup>6</sup> that Israel's future depends on these waters, and have therefore been unwilling to give control of it to the Palestinians, regardless of the question of who may control the surface terrain above. The erosion of the principles of Palestinian sovereignty in its subsoil is carried out by a process so bureaucratically complex that it is almost invisible.<sup>7</sup> Although the aquifer is the sole water source for residents of the West Bank, Israel uses 83 per cent of its annually available water for the benefit of Israeli cities and its settlements, while West Bank Palestinians use the remaining 17 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank and virtually all Palestinians in Gaza thus receive water irregularly and in limited amounts.<sup>9</sup> Israel's 'politics of verticality' is also manifested in the depth to which water pumps are allowed to reach. Israeli pumps may reach down to the waters of the common aquifers whilst Palestinian pumps are usually restricted to a considerably shorter reach, only as far down as seasonal wells trapped within shallow rock formations, which, from a hydrological perspective, are detached from the fundamental lower layers of 'ancient waters'.

Under the terms of what former Minister of National Infrastructure Ephraim Eitam termed in 2005 'the Water Intifada', the Palestinians were accused of deliberate waste and sewage dumping in order to 'pollute Israel's ground water'.<sup>10</sup> In the imagination of the military general-cum-leader of the settlers, Palestinians were using the mountain topography as routes for a new kind of 'chemical-biological warfare'. His accusation did not acknowledge the fact that the Israeli authorities failed to

provide the minimum necessary sewage infrastructure for Palestinians throughout the period of direct occupation although this is the legal duty of an occupying force.<sup>11</sup> The sanitary conditions of West Bank Palestinians were aggravated by Israel's segregation politics that isolated Palestinian towns and villages behind barriers of all kinds. This policy generated more than 300 pirate dumping sites where truckloads of waste were poured into the valleys beside towns and villages.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, the restrictions on the flow of people accelerated the trans-boundary flow of their refuse. Furthermore, Israeli companies have themselves used sites in the West Bank for their own waste disposal. Some tens of thousands of tonnes of household garbage from the Tel Aviv metropolitan area have been dumped, in one example, into the largest disused quarry in the West Bank near Nablus.<sup>13</sup> A total breakdown of sewerage systems has occurred throughout. The few existing treatment projects are overflowing, and unpiped sewage runs overground in most valleys. In the wild frontier of the West Bank, Israel's planning chaos means Jewish neighbourhoods and settlements are often constructed without permits, and populated before and regardless of sewerage systems being installed and connected. This sewage runs from the hills to the valleys, simply following the force of gravity and topography, through and across any of the boundaries that may be put in front of it. The topography of the West Bank guarantees that all raw sewage from hilltop settlements will pass down a valley next to a Palestinian town or village<sup>14</sup> and that, mixing with Palestinian sewage, travelling along the same open valleys, it will eventually end up in Israeli territory. Instead of fresh water flowing in the specially conceived water pipes installed under the Wall, Israel absorbs large quantities of raw sewage from all across the West Bank. The closures and barriers of the recent Intifada thus created the very condition against which they sought to fortify. The accumulated dirt within the walled-off Palestinian areas confirmed the hygienic phobia of Zionism. Blurring the literal with the metaphorical, the piles of dirt and sewage affirmed a common national-territorial imagination that sees the presence of Palestinians as a 'defiled' substance within the 'Israeli' landscape, or as 'matter out of place,' to use Mary Douglas's words, in whose book, *Purity and Danger*, dirt is defined and understood in terms of transgression of boundaries.<sup>15</sup> By inducing dirt and raw sewage, Israel could go on demanding the further application of its hygienic practices of separation and segregation. The legitimacy of these acts is defined as an immediate reaction to its own violation. The result is an ever-radicalizing feedback loop, by which sewage marks the point of collision between the two meanings – a metaphorical political notion concerned with the health of the state, and the literal physical sensation of abjection. The politics of separation has thus accelerated the emergence of a physiognomy of a carved up and compartmentalized landscape of discrete units, pulled apart by sharp contours, and woven together by the flow



*Sewage flowing down Shiloh Valley in the West Bank*



of sewage. At points where the separation walls are so high that they create the illusion of complete separation, the thin path of foamy dark waters flowing across and under it, remains the last remnant of a shared ecosystem.

Sewage is also used as a tool in the hands of government agents. As part of the state effort to dislocate the Bedouin tribe of Jabalin, camped on the lower slopes of a mountain onto which the settlement-town of M'ale Adumim is now expanding, the military civil administration disconnected one of the settlement's sewage pipes, flooding large areas within and around the Bedouin camp with streams and ponds of polluted matter, forcing it to relocate.<sup>16</sup>

Only half of Gaza Strip residents are actually connected to the central functioning sewerage system. Raw sewage flows overground the length of some Palestinian refugee camps, pouring out onto the sand dunes that surround them or directly onto Gaza's beaches. When sewage overflows and 'private shit', from under the ground, invades the public realm, it becomes a private hazard but also a political asset.<sup>17</sup> In some places, efforts by UN departments to replace existing systems of infrastructure with permanent underground plumbing have been rejected. The raw sewage affirms the refugee camp's state of temporariness and with it the urgency of claim for return.

For Israel, the same sewage continuously affirms another preconception – the connection between pollution and terror. At the beginning of 2005, Avi Dichter, then head of the GSS – Israel's General Security Service (Shin Bet) – and now a government minister explained to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) Security and Foreign Relations Committee: 'From the level of the satellites' the rectangular grid of streets in the Gaza refugee camp of Jebalia 'looks like that of Manhattan, only when you get nearer to it, one notices that the large pool at its centre is not the lake in Central Park, but a huge pool of sewage.'<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in the eyes

of generations of Israeli security officials, the refugee camps are seen not only as the locus of resistance, but the very condition responsible for its perpetuation. Accordingly, if sewage breeds terrorism, these Palestinian spaces must be disinfected.

Indeed, in his only commitment to release Palestinian money held by Israel to fund Palestinian public services since the outbreak of the Intifada, in 2003 Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allocated funds in order to pre-empt a hygiene crisis, hoping the money would be used to construct a few sewage treatment facilities near Palestinian cities. His actions echo the confession of Jerusalem's long-standing mayor Teddy Kolek: 'For Jewish Jerusalem I did something in the past twenty-five years. For East Jerusalem? Zilch! . . . Yes, we installed a sewage system for them and improved the water supply. Do you know why? Do you think it was for their good, for their welfare? Forget it! There were some cases of cholera there, and the Jews were afraid that they would catch it, so we installed sewerage and a water system.'<sup>19</sup> He further remembered: 'When modern sewage and drainage systems were finally installed the unbearable stench that was prevalent in east Jerusalem before the [1967] war was finally eliminated . . .'<sup>20</sup>