

# Geography and security: citizenship denied?

**Maurice Hopper** describes how the Israeli Separation Barrier is changing the landscape and lives of people living in West Bank Palestine

Under the heading 'Changes in world geography', Walford and Haggett considered 'instability in major geopolitical hegemonies' (1995, p. 5). Although they discussed the collapse the former Soviet Union and the rise of China and India as major players in the world economy, their text illustrated the difficulty of predicting what issues geographers should be watching out for in the future. This article illustrates how the *geography of security* affects the geography of people's lives, an issue not raised by Walford and Haggett. It focuses on the construction of the **Separation Barrier** by Israel in and around **West Bank Palestine**, and how the Barrier is affecting the lives of people in rural areas. It

is based on my experiences, when acting for three months as a human rights observer (on behalf of the World Council of Churches), in the Palestinian village of Jayyous and in other areas of Israel and Palestine.

## Teaching and learning approaches

Although there are similarities with the construction and eventual destruction of the Berlin Wall which separated West from East Berlin from 1961 to 1989, and the partitioning of Cyprus from 1974, the situation in West Bank Palestine is also unique. Geography offers good opportunities for getting to grips with issues of this kind (see Storey, 2003).

During my time observing the situation around the Israeli Separation Barrier, I was able to make use of my neglected skills of geography fieldwork. When reflecting on how geography could assist in the interpretation of the landscape and the human responses, two questions arose:

## Glossary of terms (shown in bold)

**Checkpoint:** Movement control points set up by the Israeli Defence Force to enforce permits which limit Palestinian access, for example to East Jerusalem. There are also 'flying checkpoints' which can be set up any where in the West Bank.

**Greater or Eretz Israel:** The vision of an Israel extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Euphrates, as depicted on Israeli coinage and the national flag.

**Green Line:** The 1949 Armistice Line separating Israel from the West Bank and the basis for several UN resolutions about the conflict.

**Israel:** The State established in 1947.

**Palestine:** The pre-1947 area bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

**Palestinian Territories/Occupied Territories:** Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (i.e. modern Palestine) and the Golan Heights, which were part of Syria.

**Separation Barrier:** The fence or wall being built on the Green Line or inside the West Bank to provide security for Israeli (Figure 1).

**Settlement:** An Israeli community established within the occupied territories.

**West Bank Palestine or the Palestinian West Bank or the West Bank:** The area of Palestine, including East Jerusalem to the west of the River Jordan and enclosed by Israel.

Figure 1: The Jayyous North Gate in the Israeli Separation Barrier. Photos: Maurice Hopper



- How can we interpret the landscape and geography of security?
- Do we need to see these local events as part of the bigger geopolitical situation that, nevertheless, has an impact on the lives, and indeed geographies, of individuals?

In attempting to answer these questions, I came up with a number of options. There is the *traditional approach* of recording elements of the landscape – mostly those that are different from the elements with which we are accustomed – often as sketches

rather than in writing. For example, my journal includes sketches of a share plough (designed to be pulled by a donkey) and sheep under olive trees. While this may be of interest it does not really offer ways of getting to grips with the underlying issues. A *case study* approach may be of value. For example, a comparison between a Palestinian village and an Israeli settlement would certainly indicate differences (and some similarities), but, again, such a study could be carried out with little reference to the underlying situation. A *study of social, political, agricultural and economic change* would be possible. After all, in studying changes we must consider the reasons behind them, which would widen the scope of the work. But, I suspected that this would quickly become a *study of issues*. The two major issues – land and water resources – are ones that geographers handle with confidence, but a third issue must feature: military occupation. The Israeli occupation affects every aspect of life in West Bank Palestine, thus it is impossible to discuss resource issues without reference to and an understanding of its impact. This would naturally lead to a debate centred on the development and formation of students' *values and attitudes* through a knowledge, understanding and analysis of a particular situation.

No matter how the topic of security is covered in the classroom, it is becoming an increasingly important factor in geographical understanding, which is best addressed by examination of its role in related issues. As Kobayashi and Mackenzie state:

*Whether we consciously incorporate 'dynamism' into our framework, our work is active and dynamic, and necessarily, constantly changing. New issues, emerging forms of social organisation ... or alteration of existing ones coerce us into new ways of understanding, and we adjust our theoretical perspectives to meet the exigencies of social change* (1988, pp. 1–2).

This article offers material that could be used to generate further research and a geographically informed discussion based on real observations. Although there are limitations to focusing on experiences in the Palestinian West Bank, they provide a detailed snapshot of part of a bigger and more complex geopolitical situation. It indicates how one government's decision to construct a security fence around an area impacts upon the lives of others. As well as the 'on the ground' political demarcation these include restrictions on access to land and resources (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Abu Azam is a leading farmer in Jayyous. Behind him is the Separation Barrier and beyond that the village land and 'poly-tunnels'. In the distance is the Green Line and beyond that the coastal plain of Israel. At that time Abu did not have a permit to access his farmland, nevertheless, his wish is 'to live in peace with Israeli neighbours'.

## Background

The history of this area is one of changing names, changing shapes and changing places. From 1920 to 1948 Palestine was governed by Britain under the terms of a League of Nations Mandate. In 1947 the new United Nations called for the partition of Palestine – awarding 54% of the land to Israel and 46% to Palestine. In 1948, Israel, feeling threatened by its Arab neighbours, expanded its borders into

Palestine by military force. These new borders, the Armistice or Green Line, left just 22% of the original Palestine for the Arab population (Figure 3). Furthermore, the Palestinian land lay in two separate areas: the West Bank (which became integrated with neighbouring Jordan) and Gaza (under Egyptian administration). In 1967, during the Six-day War the Israeli army over-ran the West Bank and Gaza, starting the occupation that continues today.

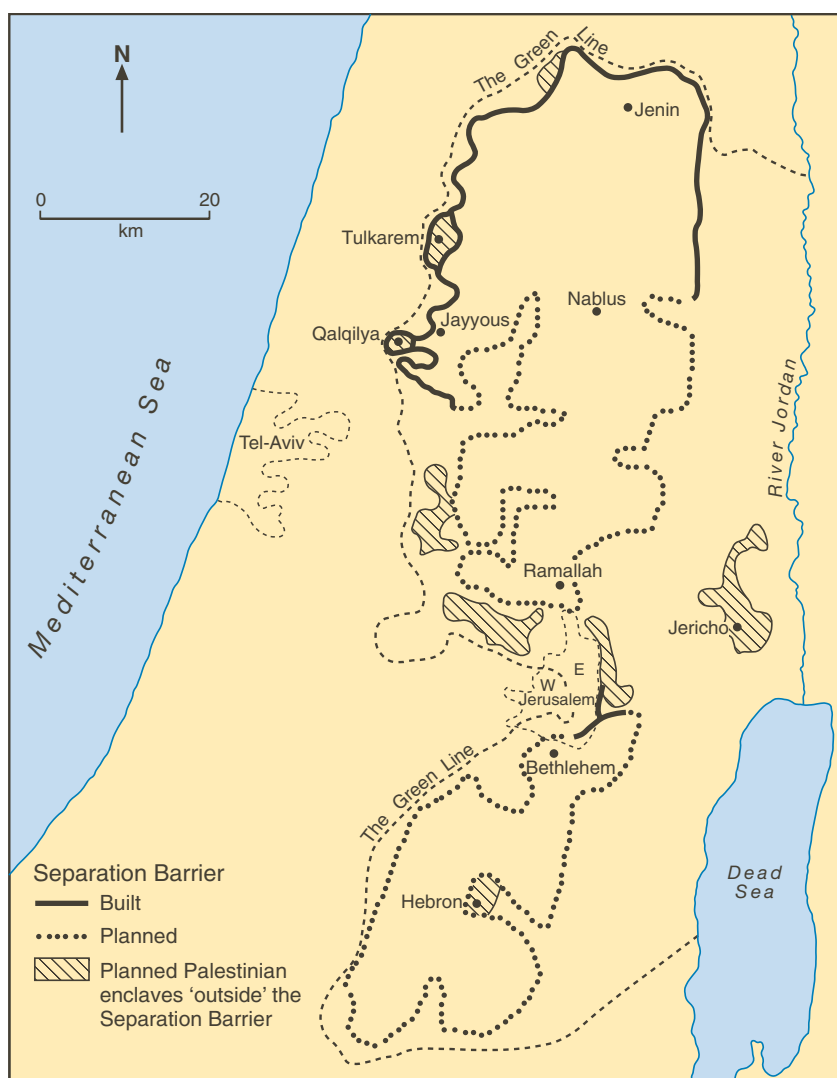


Figure 3: Israel and Palestine, showing places mentioned in the text, and the extent of the Separation Barrier.

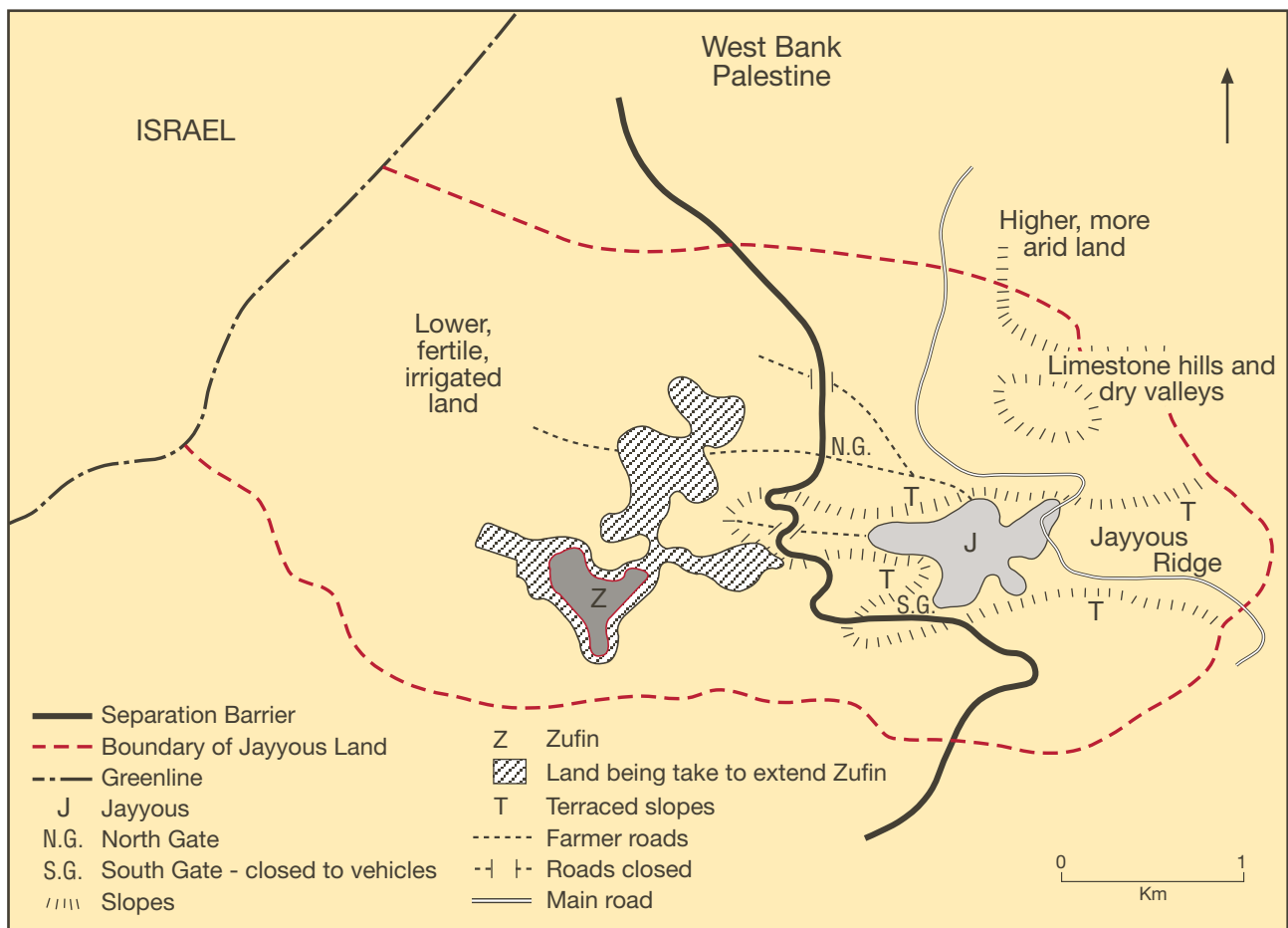


Figure 4: Jayyous – farmland and the Separation Barrier.

### A separation barrier or a security fence?

The West Bank, sometimes referred to as the Palestinian Territories or Occupied Territories, is sub-divided into areas of Palestinian and Israeli control. However, in reality, Palestinian areas remain under occupation and thus have little autonomy. The Green Line is the border between Israel and the occupied West Bank Palestine, and some suggest it could act as a basis for 'borders of peace' (see Gush Shalom website). Since 1967 an increasing number of Israelis have established settlements in the West Bank on the basis that this land is part of Greater or Eretz Israel. In response to the second Intifada (Arabic for 'shaking off' or uprising) in 2000, the Israelis started to plan and build a security fence (called the Separation Barrier). This Barrier comprises a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire in rural areas and an 8m-high wall of concrete slabs in urban areas. In places it follows the internationally recognised 1967 United Nations 'Green Line' boundary between Israel and the Palestinian West Bank, while in others it penetrates into the West Bank. According to the Israeli government, the route of the Barrier is determined by security and is a vital element in the 'war against terrorism'.

The remainder of this article focuses on the impacts of the construction of the Separation Barrier on the lives of people living in a Palestinian village.<sup>2</sup>

### Jayyous village

The village of Jayyous, with its population of approximately 3000, is situated along the top of an east-west limestone ridge at about 200m above sea level (Figure 4). The skyline includes a few traditional domed-roofed houses, a mosque and a village water tank. However, the village itself is dominated by flat-roofed concrete buildings, many of which have steel reinforcing rods protruding skywards as most buildings are inhabited but unfinished. Like most West Bank villages, Jayyous has its roots in agriculture. It is also a nucleated settlement with the farmers living in the village and travelling to work on their farmlands surrounding the village, which may be up to several kilometres away. Most farming activities away from the village relate to fruit and vegetable production. Livestock, mostly sheep and goats, are kept in the village and taken to graze in the traditional manner, with shepherds moving animals from pasture to pasture and preventing the animals eating the unfenced crops. The land on the slopes closest to the village has been extensively terraced and large parts of the village land are dominated by ancient olive trees – some up to 500 years old.

While most of the land around the village is planted with olives or almond groves, pockets of less stony and more fertile ground are used for growing crops, and vegetables are grown in the

many 'gardens' within the village. Even the smallest piece of land will be ploughed using a donkey and a share plough, which helps the penetration of the winter rains as well as weed control and preparation of the ground for planting. This cultivation has legal implications. Historically land had to be seen to be cultivated to maintain ownership during the Ottoman period up to 1917. However, the construction of the Separation Barrier has resulted in the Jayyous village land being split in two and has affected water supplies (see 'Dividing the landscape' and 'Disruption to water supplies').

### Dividing the landscape

The Separation Barrier has divided the village land, with the lower and more productive land (about 70%) towards the inner edge of the coastal plain being cut off from the relatively arid high ground (about 30%) around the village. The soils in the lower land are better and the ground more level, therefore, the Jayyous villagers have invested more time and money on improving this land. This includes soil fertilisation (mostly using organic methods) and the construction of more than 120 plastic tunnel-style greenhouses (poly-tunnels) to improve crop yield and extend the growing season. This is some of the most productive land in the West Bank.





Figure 6: Typical terraced landscape in the West Bank. It is a sign of hope for the future that these terraces were being rebuilt and the ground ploughed to catch the winter rain.

The building of the Separation Barrier has also changed the landscape; it is at least 30m wide, although often twice this width, which equates to the width of a motorway, and, like a motorway, often includes extensive earthworks in the way of cuttings and embankments. Five per cent of Jayyous land was taken in its construction. In addition, the construction involved the uprooting of 2500 olive trees, approximately 10% of all the olive trees on Jayyous village land. Many villagers transported the uprooted trees back to the village because the trees are seen as part of the family. It is estimated that along the 125km-long first phase of the Separation Barrier some 100,000 olive trees were removed to allow for its construction.

### Disruption to water supplies

On the farmland now separated from Jayyous village are six of the community's seven wells. The wells take water from the Western Aquifer (Figure 5). The recharge zone of the aquifer is in the high ground of the northern West Bank, the water being transferred westwards to the abstraction zone, being most accessible along the inner edge of the coastal plain. Despite increased demand, due to increased population and better farming, the water from the Jayyous wells (and other Palestinian wells) can only be drawn at the levels of abstraction decided at the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967.

The management of water in the West Bank in this way may be seen as contravening the international law (see Fourth Geneva Convention website) that relates to the management of resources in Occupied Territories. However, this argument is

purely academic because Israel apparently pays little regard to these International Conventions. Whatever the legal position, the situation impacts on people's lives because water is in short supply in Palestinian areas relative to Israeli areas.

Jayyous villagers also collect rainwater from house roofs onto concrete aprons that drain into concrete-lined underground cisterns. It rains for only three months (November–January) of the year around Jayyous, but these tanks collect significant amounts of water. Unfortunately, the increasingly late arrival of the 'winter rain' generates difficulties because water must be found for irrigating the young vegetable plants before the rains eventually arrive (Figure 6). By November many of the cisterns are empty after nine months without rain. In a land of low and seasonal rainfall and a prolonged summer drought, the management of water is of critical importance. The water supply to Jayyous has been restricted during recent summers to as little as 25 litres per person per day to cover all water needs. (The amount recommended by the World Health Organisation is 100 litres per day for all uses.)<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, the construction of the Separation Barrier has had a deleterious effect on farmers' access to their farmland.

### Access to farmland

Although access to water is an important issue, access to farmland is even more critical. In order to reach their land the farmers are required to pass through a checkpoint – the North Gate. This Gate is positioned at a point where the Barrier intersects the main (but not the only) track from the village to the farmland; access to other tracks is entirely blocked by the Barrier. The North Gate is normally opened three times daily: in the morning, at midday and just before sunset. While there are official opening times, often they are simply not observed. Figure 7, which indicates morning opening times from mid-December 2003 to early January 2004, was compiled from direct observations.<sup>4</sup>

The erratic pattern of gate opening makes life very difficult for farmers trying to access their farmland, with much time being wasted simply waiting for the Gate to open. Over one year, the collective loss of work hours can be

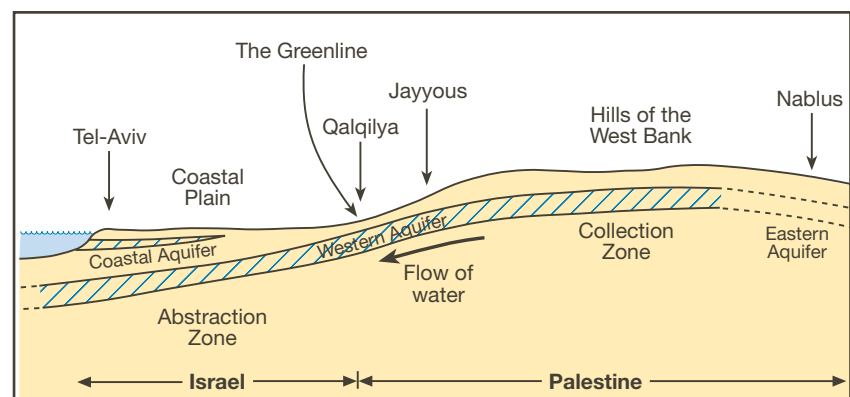
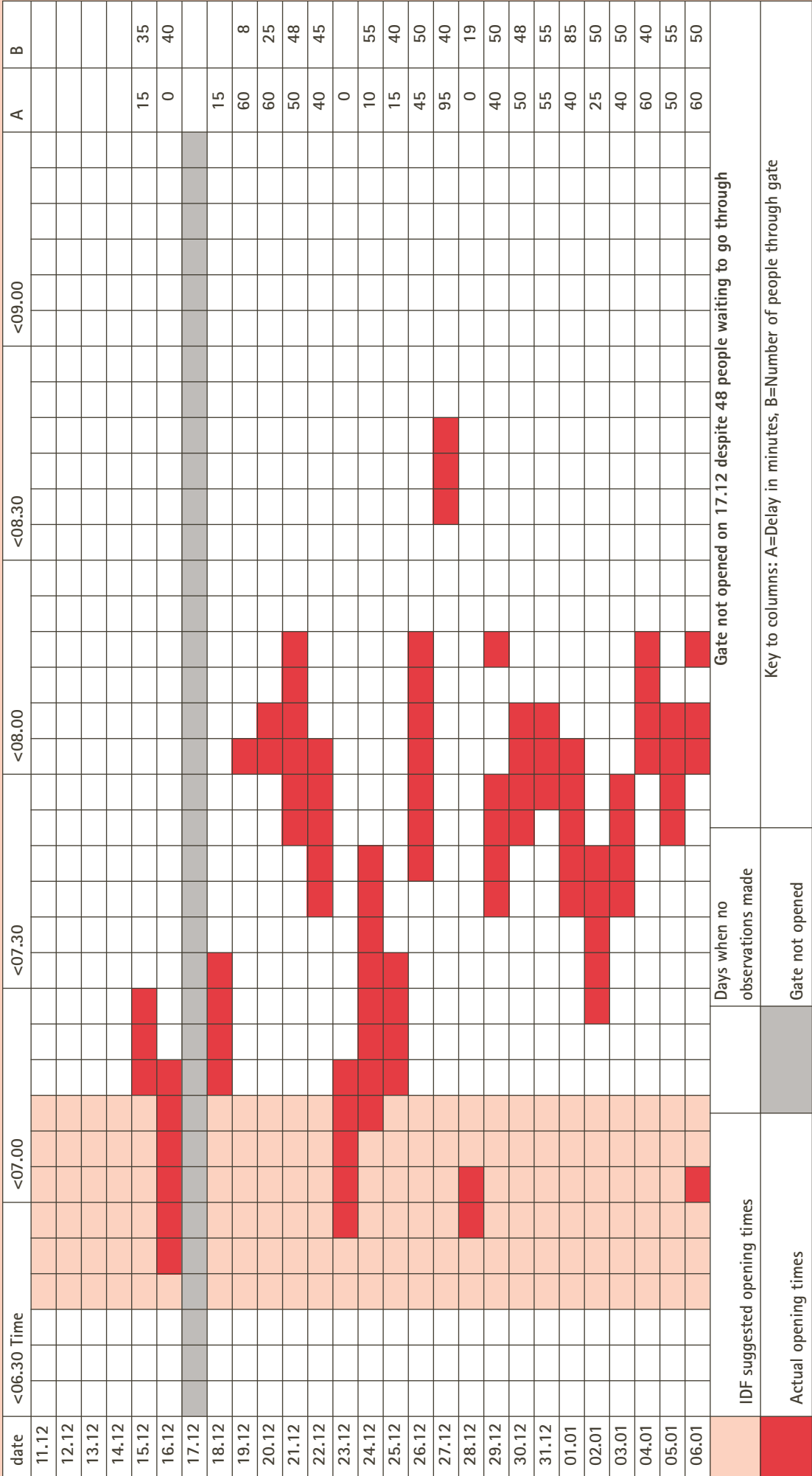


Figure 5: Cross-section of the West Bank and Israel, showing the Coastal and Western Aquifers.

Figure 7: Gate opening.

TIMINGS AND DURATION OF OPENING AT JAYYOUS NORTH GATE – MORNING

This is an analysis of the opening and closing times of the Jayyous North Gate from 11th December 2003 to 6th January 2004



measured in the thousands. Clearly, this is an unusual and unpredictable factor controlling human behaviour in the rural landscape. It is more haphazard than the worst aspects of failing public transport, less predictable than tidal waters and with wider psychological impacts on the freedom of movement and on human rights. In terms of landscape development one community's security becomes another's burden.

To compound the situation, only 40% of farmers from Jayyous have permits to pass through the Separation Barrier to their land (Figure 8). Since mid-January 2004, permits have been re-issued only where a farmer has purchased an Israeli deed to his farmland. Farmers who hold Ottoman, British and Jordanian deeds are now required to hold an Israeli deed for land which is not, under international law, part of Israel. Farmers are placed under economic pressure to raise the fee for the Israeli deed and psychological pressure to agree to Israeli control of Palestinian land. The pressure is increased by the use of an antiquated (pre-1918) Ottoman law, which stipulates that if land has not been cultivated for three years it returns to state ownership. The 60% of farmers who, for want of permits cannot access their land, may lose it to ownership by the Israeli state.

In addition, part of the Jayyous farmland between the Separation Barrier and the Green Line has been 'developed' as a quarry for building stone and aggregates, and a small Israeli 'settlement', Zufin, has been established (see 'What's in a settlement?' below). As many people in the village are separated from their livelihood, Jayyous looks increasingly like a community cut off from its economic future. This situation will impact on the future use and ownership of the land between the Green Line and the Separation Barrier. As the 'security installation' zone is enlarged new patterns of landscape will develop which will differ from the 'dead' zones around the Berlin Wall and rural areas of the Iron Curtain across Cold War Europe, since (presently) some Palestinians can still access their land. Nevertheless, the process of separation, the control of access and resources and the associated economic and psychological pressure on the land and people around Jayyous will change its character. Evidence of change in farming practices is occurring – during 2004 some Jayyous farmers removed 'mobile' assets, e.g. poly-tunnels, and set them up on the less fertile land nearer their village.



Figure 8: The Separation Barrier in the landscape.

Figure 9: Israeli settlement in the West Bank: houses stand above Palestinian olive trees and farmland. While they cultivate the valley floor the Palestinians are not welcome on the slopes.



### What's in a settlement?

Students could be encouraged to consider the seemingly innocuous term 'settlement'. It has a special meaning in Palestine. Misunderstandings can and do arise. To the people living in the West Bank 'settlements' are Israeli, thus the word has political connotations. Under international law, the Israeli 'settlements' in the West Bank and Gaza are illegal. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states, *'The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.'* Despite this, some 200 Israeli settlements have been established in the West Bank, ranging from small

'starter' settlements of just a few caravans to one with over 20,000 inhabitants (Figure 9). Israel argues that, because the area was captured in 1967 and the settlers are not forced to live in the West Bank, the Geneva Convention does not apply.

The settlements represent a major change in the population of the area, and appear closer to historical patterns and processes than those of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For example, some Israelis use similar language in describing their 'settlements' as that used by 'frontier' people of North America. Many political discussions focus on Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, but hardly ever mention Israeli



withdrawal from the West Bank. While there has been a withdrawal of 7000–8000 settlers from Gaza, the number in the West Bank has reached 200,000 and continues to grow.

Since summer 2004 one Israeli settlement, Zufin (see Figure 4), has been expanded through Israeli activity on Jayyous farmland between the Separation Barrier and the United Nations Green Line. By the end of the year land belonging to the Mayor of Jayyous – Tawfiq Salim – was at the centre of a dispute about the accuracy of maps and the legal status of claims to land as plans to extend Zufin were realised – with up to 1500 new homes to be built on the land owned by farmers from Jayyous.

## Conclusion

My time in Palestine has offered an unusual opportunity to write something about the geography of an occupied country. As a life-long pacifist I cannot in any way condone those Palestinians who, because of their frustration in this situation, become suicide bombers, or indeed any of the violence found in the day-to-day lives of the people of both Israel and Palestine. I hope by reporting what I have seen in this article it will facilitate understanding and further discourse on this situation. It is only by understanding that any real solution will be achieved.

As political and security situations change, classroom geography needs to address the impact of these factors on the landscape and the lives of people living there. One way of investigating such issues in the geography classroom is through insights into the ways in which these factors affect the lives of people at a local level. One considera-

tion is the paradox that one country's security may be another community's restriction – as the situation in West Bank Palestine illustrates. Such situations raise human rights issues covered in the citizenship curriculum, which as this case shows are effectively explored through geography. However, it also presents new factors that will need to be considered when studying the devel-

opment or decline of economic activity.

The geography of security brings a completely new meaning to the traditional term 'defensive position' when considering choices of settlement sites. The challenge is for teachers to include topics like this in lessons, so that the full power and contemporary relevance of geography is understood. ■

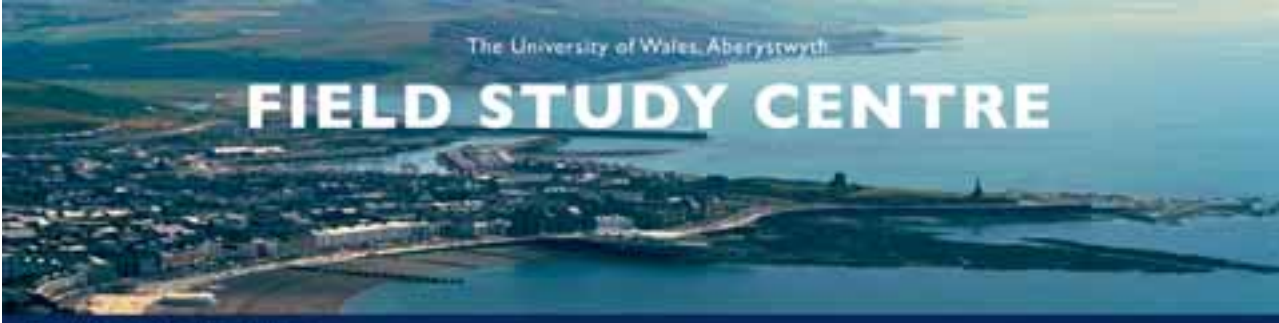
## Notes

1. In June 2004 the route of a section of the Separation Barrier was questioned by the Israeli High Court after a case brought by Palestinians living just to the north of Jerusalem. In July 2005 the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that the Barrier was illegal under international law, a decision that is to form the basis for a United Nations Resolution.
2. Between November 2003 and February 2004 the author was a volunteer human rights observer in West Bank Palestine with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and was involved with the WCC's programme monitoring the impact of the Separation Barrier being constructed by Israel along the western edge of the West Bank. Most of his time was spent in the 'village' of Jayyous, which is situated in the northern West Bank some 25km east-north-east of Tel Aviv.
3. Much of the information included in the water issue is from conversations with Abdul-Latif, a hydrologist with the Palestinian Hydrology Group, based in Jayyous village.
4. Some of the evidence collected by the author during his time in Palestine was presented by the Palestinian legal team to the International Court of Justice during the adjudication in The Hague.

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 Fourth Geneva Convention – <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/92.htm>  
 Geographical Association – [www.geography.org.uk/news/powerofgeography](http://www.geography.org.uk/news/powerofgeography)  
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