



CLOSURE ACTS

JUDY PRICE

Interview with Ramzi Safid, a night-time security guard at Rafat quarry about the closure of the quarry and confiscation of machines.

At a quarry to the west of Ramallah and bordering the Qalandiya refugee camp ? where Ramzi works as a night-time security guard ? excavation had been halted for over four years (until very recently) with all machinery closed down by Israel. The reasons given were that the noise and dust was dangerous for a nearby settlement. However the quarry also neighbours a military training ground and the Separation Wall, so one assumes that these factors have played a part in the attempt to bring the operation to a standstill. As a consequence, of the 100 workers who relied on work at the quarry only a skeleton of twenty-five workers remain, contributing to the huge unemployment in the West Bank.

In my field research I visited another quarry east of Qalandiya Refugee Camp and Qalandiya checkpoint (Qalandiya checkpoint is one of the permanent structures that now exist within the West Bank, which Israel calls a 'terminal?'). The quarry is situated near an Israeli settlement and is subject to petitioning by the settlers demanding that the site be closed down due to the emissions of dust particles. In addition, the quarry owners, a family from Ramallah, have only been allowed to excavate a third of their land with the remaining two thirds used as an Israeli military training ground and as no-man's land between the quarry, Qalandiya checkpoint and the settlement.

With an increase of areas in the West Bank being used as quarries for private Israeli companies, Israel is no longer completely reliant on trading with quarries owned by Palestinians (most of these are family run). The result is that some Palestinian quarries have come under closure acts from the Israeli military. With many Palestinian quarries operating in Area C, under Israeli administration and security, many Palestinian quarries have become economically unviable due to Israeli-imposed restrictions on work. These include: having to apply for permits from Israel; being able only to excavate part of the land; land being confiscated for military training; proximity to a settlements; explosives not being permitted for breaking up the stones; and the use of ineffective machinery which is time consuming. In addition the quarries in Area C are completely unregulated. Work conditions in the quarries are not monitored, giving rise to long working hours, a lack of protective clothing and masks, and low salaries.

There is also no regulation of the environmental hazards of quarries in close proximity to, sometimes even inside, residential areas. In the case of a town near Nablus called Jama'een, where I spent a considerable amount of time filming and speaking with local residents about the impact of the quarries, the air is so polluted with dust that many of the elderly people find it difficult to leave their homes. There is a continuous source of traffic from the quarries through the town, which has only one main road, full of lorries laden with stone and debris.

Cluster: White Oil

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