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## JQ 93 – UNRWA Archives (Part 1)



INSTITUTE OF JERUSALEM STUDIES

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# JQ 93 — UNRWA Archives (Part 1)



* Peer reviewed article.

EDITORIAL

# The Spectacular and the Protracted: The Palestinian Struggle Continues

Palestine experienced a number of dire developments as this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* was in preparation. In the last days of December 2022, Benjamin Netanyahu formed a far-right Israeli government that includes Jewish supremacists from Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionist party and Itamar Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit ("Jewish Power") party, among others. This government has advanced anti-Palestinian legislation, passing a law that strips Palestinians convicted of "terrorism," or those who accept financial aid from the Palestinian Authority, of their citizenship or residency, and has announced plans to enlarge Israeli settlements in the West Bank. It has ramped up Israel's policy of demolitions, destroying some fifty Palestinian buildings in Jerusalem and the West Bank in the first two months of 2023. It has launched destructive airstrikes on Gaza and Damascus. Perhaps most conspicuous has been the scale of the violence that it has unleashed on Palestinians through aggressive raids in the West Bank. On 26 January, Israeli forces killed nine Palestinians in a raid on Jenin refugee camp. On 6 February, after a ten-day siege of Jericho and its surroundings, Israeli forces raided 'Aqbat Jabr refugee camp, killing five Palestinians. On 22 February, Israeli forces launched a lightning daytime raid in the crowded old city of Nablus, killing eleven and wounding more than one hundred. Yet again, on 26 February, Israeli settlers went on a nighttime rampage in the town of Huwwara south of Nablus (and in nearby villages of Burin and 'Asira al-Qibliyya), torching dozens of homes, businesses, and vehicles while the Israeli army stood by.

In the aftermath of the raid in Nablus on 22 February, demonstrators took to the streets across the West Bank and Gaza (and also in Haifa). Protestors were urged on by the "Lions' Den" (*'Arin al-Usud*), a Nablus-based militant group that emerged after Israel's assassination of Ibrahim al-Nabulsi in August 2022. The militants called for marches and processions, accompanied by chants of *takbir* (customary exhortations of God's greatness), at midnight on 23 February. This call spread quickly and widely on social media; one video that circulated online showed prisoners in Lebanon's notorious al-Rumiyya prison calling out the takbir in solidarity with Palestinians.

Acts of resistance and protest are increasingly being described as "disobedience" (*'isyan*). Israel's campaign of siege and closure on Shu'fat refugee camp in February, accompanied by what were viewed as particularly vindictive and demeaning actions against civilians, was met with a call for civil disobedience – as described in this issue's Letter from Jerusalem by Hasan 'Alqam. In the same month, Palestinian political prisoners – who have been especially hard-hit by the draconian measures introduced by the new Israeli government, in which Ben-Gvir serves as security minister – began what they described as a collective disobedience campaign, to be followed by an open hunger strike beginning on the first day of Ramadan in March if their demands went unmet.

The beginning of 2023 has thus produced a sense of acceleration – accelerated death, destruction, and dispossession, accelerated discontent, protest, and resistance – with momentum seemingly gaining after each new incident. Violence at this speed becomes hypervisible, spectacular. At the same time, Palestinians continue to be subjected to slower forms of violence and wage more protracted struggles, even if these are overshadowed by more dramatic developments. The material in this issue of *JQ* wrestles with these multiple temporalities: the swiftness of expulsion in 1948, and the longue durée of demolition described in Yara Sa'di-Ibraheem's "Jaffa amid Theoretical Transformations," for example, or the refugee "relief and works" explored in this issue's focus on UNRWA. As shown by the articles, essays, and interviews that make up this first of two parts of the special issue – guest edited and introduced by Maria Chiara Rioli and Francesca Biancani – the long history of UNRWA is characterized by both moments of acceleration (the Nakba of 1948, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and so on) and more minor historical contingencies.

Indeed, the history of UNRWA is an ongoing one; the agency continues to adapt to and with the conditions of Palestinians within and beyond Palestine. In these turbulent times of continued strike actions by Palestinian teachers, lawyers, engineers, physicians, and workers in other sectors, UNRWA claims its share of the headlines. UNRWA employees launched yet another labor dispute over wages and benefit packages in November 2022, followed by intermittent work stoppages and the closure of the main UNRWA headquarters in Jerusalem. The issues, including punitive measures against strike leaders, continue to be unresolved, and affect thousands of employees and beneficiaries of the educational, health, and other services provided to Palestinian refugees.

Finally, *JQ* joins colleagues and collaborators of Professor Elia Zureik in mourning his sad passing on 15 January 2023. Zureik was, along with Salim Tamari, coeditor of one of the seminal works on UNRWA's archives, *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2001), and we are republishing their contribution to that book here, with an introduction by this issue's guest editors. The Institute for Palestine Studies is fortunate to have had a collaborator of the caliber of Elia Zureik, whose work appeared in various IPS forums over the years, including a piece in *JQ* 89, coauthored with David Lyon, on coronavirus surveillance and Palestinians. We also include in this issue tributes to Elia from a number of his colleagues, which speak to his generosity, sharp intellect, critical approach, and bold engagement in public and policy issues.

**Errata**
**Winter 2022 Issue (*JQ* 92):**

- On page 97, the following source should be removed from endnote 6: David Kroyanker, *Dreamscapes: Unbuilt Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Tower of David, 1993).
- On page 140, endnote 2 should read as follows: Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, transl. T. S. Presner et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 76.

**Spring 2022 Issue (*JQ* 89):**

- On page 99, the correct information is: Fatima Barnawi died in November 2022 in Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

# Phantom Archives in a Dispersed History

Francesca Biancani and
Maria Chiara Rioli
*Guest Editors*

On 8 December 1949, the United Nations established the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to assist Palestinian refugees expelled from their homes and displaced from their towns and villages after the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948–49.[1] Over the decades since then, UNRWA came to influence the shape of Palestinian identity and self-representation, as well as the social, educational, and cultural history of the Palestinian diaspora in the Middle East and beyond. It also had profound impact on the domestic politics of the countries hosting the refugees and UNRWA operations. Despite its often invoked, and in fact quite problematic and controversial, apolitical nature, the organization not only operated in a politically saturated environment, but UNRWA can also be considered a political arena in itself, a dense field of multi-scalar power relations whereby the allegedly apolitical norms of international humanitarianism were deeply shaped and manipulated locally, becoming an incubator of Palestinian political identity and agency.

A fair assessment of the importance of UNRWA at the crossroads between international, regional, and domestic levels begs the question of why UNRWA remains understudied and under-theorized. Despite the centrality of the Middle East in the history of modern "organized compassion" and its integration within shifting international orders over time, global histories of humanitarianism tend to have a Middle Eastern blind spot, so to speak. As Keith Watenpaugh rightly observes, the region is conspicuously absent in the

global history of both human rights and humanitarianism.[2] Recent regional histories of Middle Eastern humanitarianism mostly focus on the Levant in the interwar period as the breeding ground for contemporary human rights thinking in response to the Armenian genocide. This leaves us to wonder why the significance and role of UNRWA, the only UN humanitarian agency created in response to a regionally specific humanitarian crisis and with a mandate separated from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) after World War II, is marginal in most accounts of later neo-humanitarianism.

Recent historical and anthropological scholarship offers an important corrective to this. Riccardo Bocco, Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal, and Lex Takkenberg provide relevant sociological and juridical accounts of UNRWA,[3] while Ilana Feldman, Jalal Al Husseini, and others demonstrate UNRWA's emphasis on technocratic developmentalism and its imbrication within the contemporary "full-blown humanitarian industry . . . with its increasing professionalization, standardization, and evaluation metrics."[4] Most importantly, they investigate UNRWA as a prism of divergent claims and aspirations: Palestinian refugees came to inhabit institutional taxonomies while at the same time making use of them to constitute themselves as autonomous and political subjects, despite being inscribed within a present of eternal emergency.[5] New works provide accounts of the social and cultural history of UNRWA, as in the case of educational policies,[6] or use UNRWA's photo and film archive, alongside other institutional and private collections, to explore the forms and meanings in how Palestinian refugees are represented.[7] Work in critical development studies has complemented these narratives, focusing on recent UNRWA organizational crises, setbacks, and chronic lack of funding, and highlighting the profound limits of UNRWA's humanitarian action in the context of a technocratic, apolitical mandate.[8]

Despite this relevant scholarship, the establishment of UNRWA in the aftermath of the 1948 war for Palestine and its daily management and operations in connection with a number of humanitarian, political, and religious institutions of the time remains largely overlooked. Likewise, little has been written about the transformations wrought on UNRWA's internal politics and operations by such turning points as the 1956 Suez crisis, the 1967 war, the first intifada, the Oslo accords, and the second intifada. A social history of UNRWA, from its involvement in the life and networks of the camps, to its role in the broader history of Middle Eastern and global humanitarianism and beyond, still lacks source-based historical investigation.

## Archival Labyrinths

In this context, the question of archives is a substantial one. The "phantom sovereign" expressed by UNRWA is in some way reflected in its "phantom" archives.[9] UNRWA's archives have undergone a troubled history of displacement and dispersion. Since the 1990s, various inventory projects have addressed the UNRWA archives' multiple collections over a number of locations.[10] However, financial limitations and political factors hampered this work, leading to the current situation whereby, with the

exception of the UNRWA visual archive, only irregular and limited access to archival material is possible.[11]

In the second half of the 1990s, when the availability of precise quantitative data became a pressing concern for Palestinian negotiators in the context of the faltering Oslo agreements and the breakdown of bilateral talks, the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, with funding from the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Swedish Government, the Ford Foundation, and the Cairo office of the Canadian International Development Agency, deployed a series of initiatives to identify, examine, and digitalize the UNRWA archives, as well as the relevant collections of the International Red Cross located in Geneva and Bern, and of the American Friends Service Committee. These efforts resulted in *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis*, edited by Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, still a fundamental compass for all advocates of Palestinian epistemic justice. The passing of Elia Zureik on 15 January 2023, while this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* was in the final stages of production, prompted us to revisit his work and his claims about the restoration, preservation, and accessibility of Palestinian archives. With that in mind, we are republishing Zureik and Tamari's introduction to *Reinterpreting the Historical Record* in this issue.

The present issue of *JQ* is the first of two special issues that focus on the UN agency for Palestinian refugee relief and its troubled history, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach, engaging and connecting historical, anthropological, and sociological methods. Originally conceived as a single issue, the number and variety of contributions has led us to publish two separate issues, with diverse but complementary scopes and contents. This issue concentrates on the history of the UNRWA archives from their creation to the present; the trajectories and various placements of the written, oral, and visual collections; the politics behind their material and digital preservation policies; their appearance, dispersion, or cessation; conditions of access or denial; and intertwining curatorial practices, critical archival theory, and politics.

Anne Irfan and Joe Kelcey's article "Historical Silencing and Epistemic In/Justice through the UNRWA Archives" places the question of UNRWA archival opaqueness and random accessibility squarely within the important critical scholarship on archives as dispositive, reaffirming dominant epistemologies. Irfan and Kelcey explore the curation of UNRWA's central registry archive, now stored in Amman and previously located in Vienna, Gaza, and Beirut. UNRWA's headquarters, as its central registry pertaining to UNRWA's fields of operations, have been moved several times: scholars have little or no solid information on whether and which documents were lost or destroyed during these phases, especially as a consequence of the Lebanese civil war. Moreover, Irfan and Kelcey point out that

> the under-representation of refugee voices in the archive and the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a small and predominantly non-Palestinian cadre of senior management, is suggestive of a neo-colonial institutional set-up. This points to a decidedly undemocratic model of governance vis-à-vis the agency's

main constituents: Palestine refugees. It also contrasts with accusations that the agency is biased toward Palestinians – and poses a challenge to UNRWA's own claim that it is a neutral actor on the question of Palestine.

Jalal Al Husseini draws on the archives of UNRWA, the Arab Development Society (ADS), and the International Committee of the Red Cross to unpack the partnership between UNRWA as an international agency and local institutions. "Dilemma of Local Development Partnerships: UNRWA and the Arab Development Society in Jericho (1950–80)" engages development and humanitarian studies to show how refugee (geo)politics, local development, and host authorities shaped how UNRWA service delivery worked or – not infrequently – did not work. Al Husseini shows the fundamental irreconcilability between humanitarian and developmental priorities, and forms of intervention at the local level. His work illuminates the tensions between the refugees' coping strategies and stances vis-à-vis UNRWA, whose aid they feel provisionally entitled to pending the implementation of their right of return, and the ADS's aim to develop Palestinian society beyond humanitarian assistance, irrespective of refugee status.

The importance of looking at UNRWA beyond its institutional archives is also evident in Halima Abu Haneya's contribution. Combining oral history and ethnography, she navigates Shu'fat refugee camp, whose history has been revisited by a number of important contributions over the last decades,[12] to go beyond official and institutional narratives of Palestinian life after the Nakba. Her work adds to academic and civic efforts by historians, curators, activists, and associations to collect, archive, and use Palestinian oral histories.[13] Abu Haneya explores the diverse paths that brought the Palestinians she interviewed to live in Shu'fat camp, as well as the processes that produced their identification with and their sense of belonging to Shu'fat camp as Palestinians, refugees, and Jerusalemites. As Abu Haneya's interviews trouble the notion that "refugee" is a clear, stable, or self-evident category, Nadim Bawalsa's *Transnational Palestine*, reviewed in this issue by Maria Chiara Rioli, also contributes to an effort to think more critically about Palestinian mobilities (voluntary and involuntary) and displacement. Through a study of Palestinian migrations to Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bawalsa powerfully argues that any history of Palestinians' exclusion from Palestine – and consequently, their articulation of a Palestinian right of return to Palestine – must begin before 1948.

This special issue also includes an interview by the editors with UNRWA officers Valeria Cetorelli and Dorothée Klaus. Cetorelli and Klaus retrace turning points in the history of UNRWA archives, from the use of Red Cross cards created in 1948–49 to computerization of the family files in 1979 and digitization in the 2000s, and provide information on its latest endeavors, such as the scanning and classifying of documents to reconstruct family trees in the refugee registration information system – a process of archival preservation that involved Palestinian refugees. As a result, in 2021–22, some fifty thousand registered refugees whose families had fled to Lebanon as a result of the destruction of their villages in Palestine in 1948 were linked back to their ancestors through their digitized family

trees. While UNRWA collections remain largely inaccessible to scholars, such efforts demonstrate the need to replace the chimerical regime of documentary (non)consultation, not only to respond to scholarly needs by making documents available to scholars from various disciplines in a transparent way, but also, and more importantly, to acknowledge and realize the legitimate rights of Palestinians to re-appropriate their own histories and cultural heritage. Encouraging precisely such a paradigm shift in archival custody and policy of consultation is a main goal of these special issues.

Finally, the current issue is enriched by historical photographs, mainly related to Shu'fat and Jericho, whose geographies are discussed in several articles here. A number of the published photographs were generously made available by the UNRWA Film and Photo Archive,[14] while UNRWA donated others to the Institute for Palestine Studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, forming part of the IPS collections in Beirut. This represents another unexplored case of record circulation, bespeaking UNRWA archival fragmentation.

An increasing interest and attention to Palestinian refugee archives and the availability of funding from Arab, European, and international institutions for research activities and cultural heritage preservation contribute to drive the archival and scholarly work on UNRWA and the opening of its collections. The articles, essays, and interviews in these special issues distill critical knowledge from scholarship and draw on institutional and non-institutional written, oral, and visual sources. They offer a kind of collective call to advocate for and explicitly demand a radical change in the regime of conservation and access to UNRWA records. This could serve to retrace the journeys of an archive, as much "phantasmatic" as tangible, and situate the history of UNRWA in a global framework;[15] but foremost, it should serve to reconnect refugees – Palestinian women, men, children – to their own history.

Although this introduction is the fruit of joint research, Francesca Biancani is author of pages 6-7 (and endnotes at page 11), and Maria Chiara Rioli 8-10 (and endnotes at page 11-12).

In this special issue, Rioli's and Al Husseini's researchs have received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreements No 835758 and No. 101004539.

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*Maria Chiara Rioli is tenure-track assistant professor at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and Co-PI of the ITHACA – Interconnecting Histories and Archives for Migrant Agency project. She is the author of* A Liminal Church: Refugees, Conversions, and the Latin Diocese of Jerusalem, 1946–1956 *(Brill, 2020).*

**Endnotes**

1 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV). Assistance to Palestinian Refugees, 8 December 1949, A/RES/ 302(IV).

2 Keith David Watenpaugh, for example, notes that Michael Barnett, in his authoritative history of modern humanitarianism, *Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), "devotes little if any attention to the relief and development operations that took place in the Eastern Mediterranean in the interwar period" and "avoids the work of the UN, national government development agencies, and independent aid organizations that worked among Palestinians displaced in the wake of the creation of the state of Israel." Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 206 note 3.

3 See: Riccardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2/3 (2009): 229–52; and Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal, and Lex Takkenberg, eds., *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From Relief and Works to Human Development* (London: Routledge, 2014). This fundamental edited volume also contains historical information and appraisals, such as Kjersti Berg's chapter, "From Chaos to Order and Back: The Construction of UNRWA Shelters and Camps, 1950–1970" in Hanafi, Hilal, and Takkenberg, eds., *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees*, 109–28.

4 Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 6. See also by Ilana Feldman: "Humanitarian Care and the Ends of Life: The Politics of Aging and Dying in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 1 (2017): 42–67; "Reaction, Experimentation, and Refusal: Palestinian Refugees Confront the Future," *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 4 (2016): 411–29; "Humanitarian Refusals: Palestinian Refugees and Ethnographic Perspectives on Paternalism," in *Paternalism beyond Borders*, ed. Michael Barnett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 292–315; "Punctuated Humanitarianism: Palestinian Life between the Catastrophic and the Cruddy," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 2 (2016): 372–76; "What Is a Camp? Legitimate Refugee Lives in Spaces of Long-term Displacement," *Geoforum* 66 (2015): 244–52; "Looking for Humanitarian Purpose: Endurance and the Value of Lives in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," *Public Culture* 27, no. 3 (2015): 427–47; and "The Challenge of Categories: UNRWA and the Definition of a 'Palestine Refugee,'" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 387–406.

5 See: Jalal Al Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-building Process," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (2009): 51–64; Jalal Al Husseini, "L'UNRWA et les réfugiés palestiniens: Enjeux humanitaires, intérêts nationaux," *Revue d'études palestiniennes* 86 (2003): 71–85.

6 See Mezna Qato, "A Primer for a New Terrain: Palestinian Schooling in Jordan, 1950," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (Autumn 2018): 16–32.

7 On these aspects, see the exhibition "More than the Humanitarian Gaze**:** Jørgen Grinde's Photography from the Middle East in the 1950s," curated by Kjersti G. Berg, Olaf Knarvik and Synnøve Marie Vik of the University of Bergen Special Collections Library, and its catalogue, with essays by Nadi Abusaada, Yazid Anani, Joe Sacco, Sanabel Abdel Rahman, Øyvind Vågnes, Ilana Feldman, and Mezna Qato. For relevant reflections, see Issam Nassar, "Photography and the Oppressed: On Photographing the Palestinian Refugees," *International Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 8, no. 1 (2020): 38–57.

8 See Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "The Changing Faces of UNRWA: From the Global to the Local," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 1 (2019): 28–41; Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "UNRWA Financial Crisis: The Impact on Palestinian Employees," *Middle East Report* 286 (2018): 33–36; Noor Tayeh, "Refugee Camps in Gaza: Between Upgrading and Urbicide," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 51, no. 3 (2022): 3–22.

9 Sari Hanafi, "UNRWA as a 'Phantom Sovereign': Governance Practices in Lebanon," in Hanafi, Hilal, and Takkenberg, eds., *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees*, 258–80.

10 On these topics see Vincent Lemire and Maria Chiara Rioli, "Archives and Potentiality in Jordanian Jerusalem (1948–67)," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 92 (Winter 2022): 143–53.

11 The UNRWA Photo and Film archive, containing 30,520 records, is accessible online at the link unrwa.photoshelter.com (accessed 10 March 2023).

12 See Kjersti G. Berg, "Mu'askar and Shu'fat: Retracing the Histories of Two Palestinian Refugee Camps in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 88 (Winter 2021): 30–54; Laura Khoury, "Shu'fat Refugee Camp Women Authenticate an Old 'Nakba' and Frame Something 'New' while Narrating It," in *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*, ed. Nahla Abdo and Nur Masalha (London: Zed, 2018), 136–58; Laura Khoury, "Spaces of Truth: Palestinian Refugee Women Reframe Concerns of Jerusalem and Resist Judaisation," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 17, no. 2 (2018): 169–92; Sylvaine Bulle, "Domesticating and Enlarging One's Territory: Day to Day Politics in a Confined Space – the Shu'fat Refugee Camp in East Jerusalem," in *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes*, ed. Anna Grichting and Michele Zebich-Knos (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 169–80; Sylvaine Bulle, "'We Only Want to Live': From Israeli Domination towards Palestinian Decency in Shu'fat and Other Confined Jerusalem Neighborhoods," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (Summer 2009): 24–34.

13 See Rosemary Sayigh, "Nakba Silencing and the Challenge of Palestinian Oral History," in Masalha and Abdo, *Oral History*, 114–35.

14 The guest editors and the *Jerusalem Quarterly* editorial team express their gratitude to the staff of the UNRWA Film and Photo Archive for their constant availability in the preparation of this issue.

15 See, in this direction, Are John Knudsen and Kjersti G. Berg, eds., *Continental Encampment: Genealogies of Humanitarian Containment* (New York: Berghahn, 2023).

# Historical Silencing and Epistemic In/Justice through the UNRWA Archive

Anne Irfan and Jo Kelcey

**Abstract**

This article explores how historical silencing and epistemic in/justice occurs in and through the curation of UNRWA's central registry archive, now stored in Amman and previously located in Vienna, Gaza, and Beirut. Drawing on extensive work in the central registry and related archival collections, and critical archival theory, we show how the power dynamics of international aid, and the politics of the Palestine question, shape the collection's structure, content, and accessibility. We investigate the curation and selection of agency records, their organization, and their transparency or opacity to outsiders. In so doing, we illuminate how the curation of UNRWA's archive informs, shapes, and even distorts knowledge production on Palestinian refugee histories. By highlighting the interconnection between historical silencing and UNRWA's archives we expand understandings of the agency's complex, and at times contradictory, role in pursuing justice for Palestine refugees. Specifically, we unpack how the agency's curation of its archive can help promote its own preferred self-image, and how this speaks to tensions at the heart of UNRWA's role.

**Keywords**

UNRWA; archive; epistemic justice; history; refugees; Palestine; silencing; exclusion.

UNRWA has often been described as a quasi-government or even a quasi-state for millions of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.[1] Active since

its creation by UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) in 1949 – and therefore virtually contemporaneous with the Palestinian refugee crisis – it provides services more typically the domain of the modern nation-state, including large-scale primary education and healthcare programs, municipal services in the camps, and registration procedures. While much has been made of the agency's so-called quasi-state nature in socioeconomic and humanitarian terms, its role in documenting Palestinian refugee history is no less important. UNRWA is the only organization in the world that has continuously collected and maintained data about Palestinian refugees since the Nakba. The agency was created the year after the Nakba, began operations in 1950, and is still functioning today, meaning that its records span almost the entire duration of the Palestinian exile.

This has an added importance in view of Palestinian statelessness, which means there is no centralized national records bureau. While the Palestine National Archives can be found today in Ramallah, managed by the Ministry of Culture for the Palestinian Authority (PA), their contents reflect the significant constraints of the PA's jurisdiction.[2] The earlier archive created by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) over the long 1970s was largely seized and many documents were subsequently destroyed by the Israeli army in its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, with a remainder traced years later to the Algerian desert.[3] Today, Palestinian researchers contend that the PA neglects the PLO's institutions in favor of its own.[4] And although the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit has begun its own archival collection, it is limited in its ability to access materials outside Palestine.[5]

The importance of UNRWA's collection in this fragmented archival landscape is manifold. UNRWA's records collate Palestinian refugee data from across the Levant, spanning six decades. They also shed light on the complexities of the relationship between Palestinians, the international aid regime, the Arab host state governments, and Israel. In this context, UNRWA's archive comprises something of a de facto Palestinian national archive.[6]

UNRWA is not the only UN agency charged with responding to the Palestinian refugee crisis. Twelve months before the UN General Assembly (UNGA) established UNRWA, it mandated the UN Conciliation Council for Palestine (UNCCP) to resolve the crisis. After UNRWA began operations in May 1950, the two UN agencies operated in parallel, with UNCCP managing political negotiations while UNRWA was mandated to provide essential relief. UNCCP had become inactive by the end of the decade, but not before collecting information on the extent of Palestinian losses from 1947 to 1949 and the refugees' resulting compensation entitlements.[7] In 2003, Michael Fischbach's monograph *Records of Dispossession*, based on findings in the UNCCP archive, confirmed the collection's value to researchers – but the UN responded by closing it.[8] Since then, researchers, including one of the authors of this article, have been unsuccessful in their efforts to access the UNCCP files. While anyone can apply for access, applications usually remain in limbo, or receive a rejection months or even years later. In such a setting, the UNRWA archive gains added value as an alternative source of relevant information.

In this article, we examine the UNRWA central registry archive using the conceptual framework of "epistemic injustice," a term coined by philosopher Miranda Fricker. This concept denotes injustice in relation to knowledge production, with

two particular forms identified. "Testimonial injustice" occurs when assessments of a statement's credibility are based on prejudices about the speaker. "Hermeneutical injustice" takes place when exclusions and underrepresentation mean that a pool of knowledge is structurally distorted.[9] Through these ideas, Fricker builds on Gayatri Spivak's pioneering earlier work on "epistemic violence": the systematic silencing of subaltern voices within the colonial-imperial project.[10] More recently, political theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay has built on both scholars' ideas in her writings about the "potential history" that was erased by the colonial-imperial project's hierarchical and selective forms of knowledge production. Through Azoulay's work, we might think about possible alternative histories, narratives, and analyses.[11]

Both forms of epistemic injustice identified by Fricker are relevant to questions around UNRWA's central registry archive. The latter is one of a number of data sources collected and held by UNRWA.[12] It contains legal, financial, and administrative documents about UNRWA's various programs, its dealings with governments, and its personnel. Much existing scholarship on Palestinian refugee history and UNRWA draws heavily on the documents stored in this archive, which is akin to the agency's institutional memory.[13] Comprising tens of millions of documents, this archive has considerable potential to support future research. Since its records transcend both geographical and temporal boundaries, it can help counter the dispersal that has plagued the Palestinian nation since the Nakba.

Yet while UNRWA's programs may exhibit the trappings of public services, the agency is ultimately an international aid organization. As such, its decision-making power – including in relation to its archive – is concentrated in the hands of a small and overwhelmingly non-Palestinian team of bureaucrats and technocrats who comprise its senior management. Its archive accordingly risks reproducing the kind of silencing and distortions outlined above. With this in mind, it is germane to reflect on how the central registry might influence the production of Palestinian refugee history. Here we ask: is the UNRWA archive a source of epistemic justice, injustice, or both?

In this article, we examine this question from several angles. In the next section we discuss some of the key themes that have emerged from critical archival studies, and their relevance to Palestinian history. We then turn our attention to the structure, content, and administration of the central registry itself, examining the limitations these elements place on research and what they reveal about the agency's role in shaping Palestinian refugee experiences. We use examples from our own research into the history of UNRWA's education program to illustrate our core arguments. We conclude by reflecting on how our findings speak to bigger questions about voice, agency, and ownership in the context of structural disempowerment and disadvantage.

## Critiquing the Archive

The UNRWA archive is far from unique in the questions it raises. In fact, archiving per se is inherently interconnected with issues of epistemic in/justice, as scholars of critical archival studies have shown definitively. In the words of Jacques Derrida,

"There is no political power without control of the archives."[14] This perhaps should be unsurprising; constructing an archive entails the collection and curation of documents, thus embedding the process in questions around which narratives and voices are preserved and prioritized. Such questions are especially potent when it comes to archives with marks of officialdom, such as those belonging to the state or to a prolific international institution like the UN.

Archives can accordingly play a key role in processes of "historical silencing," a term coined by Michel-Rolph Trouillot and a concept that arguably serves as a de facto branch of epistemic injustice. Trouillot identified "the making of archives" as the second of four key moments at which historical silencing can occur. He named the others as: first, the making of sources; third, the making of narratives; and fourth, "the making of history in the final instance."[15] Building on Trouillot's influential work, Ann Laura Stoler has written at length about the processes behind the construction of archives, arguing that researchers should treat the latter as "cultural artifacts of fact production."[16] Stoler advocates for a critical approach that treats both individual files and the archival collection as a whole as "subjects," by paying attention to taxonomies and implicit assumptions. This is known as reading against the archival grain, as opposed to reading along it.[17]

As a result of such scholarship, historians and researchers have increasingly taken a critical approach to archival work, examining not only the contents of archives but also their curation and construction. Rosie Bsheer, for example, has conducted a comprehensive study of the subject in contemporary Saudi Arabia, showing that the Saudi regime's efforts to construct a new national archive form part of its state-building efforts in the twenty-first century. Bsheer contends that the curation of the archive's contents is deliberately designed to selectively erase certain histories and thus cement the state's preferred narrative.[18]

On occasion, such scholarship has shaped events outside the academy. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, five elderly Kenyan men sued the British government for torture they had suffered during its repression of the anti-colonial Mau Mau uprising fifty years earlier. Their case made critical use of documentary evidence that the United Kingdom government had secretly moved and hidden, amounting to nearly nine thousand archival files from thirty-seven former colonies. Rather than being handed over to post-colonial governments at the point of independence, or held in the (open) National Archives in Kew, London, these files had been stored in secret at a site in Hanslope Park, outside London, and their existence essentially denied. As a result of the Mau Mau survivors' case, in 2011 a British High Court judge forced the UK government to release the files. Their contents included evidence of the systematic abuse and mistreatment of Mau Mau prisoners held in British camps in Kenya in the 1950s, alongside other colonial atrocities. While these files are now accessible at the British National Archives in London,[19] there are still questions about how many more may remain hidden, or may have been destroyed.[20]

How is all this relevant to Palestinian history? There can be no question that the Palestinian people in general, and Palestinian refugees in particular, constitute "subalterns" as described by Spivak. Their subaltern status is multifaceted, comprised

of: their statelessness in an international system characterized by nation-state normativity; the resulting denial of their "right to have rights";[21] and their manifold structural political, economic, and military disadvantages. As subalterns, they have been subjected to many kinds of epistemic injustice and violence of the type outlined by Fricker and Spivak, with their accounts regularly discredited or simply ignored.

Discussions of the implications are nothing new. In his influential 1984 essay "Permission to Narrate," Edward Said wrote about the denial of the Palestinian people's right to construct and share their own narratives.[22] Later that decade, Palestinian accounts of the Nakba were verified by the declassification of documents in the Israeli archives, and subsequent publications by Israel's "New Historians."[23] Although Palestinians had been recounting the facts of their expulsion for forty years at that point, it took the discovery of written documents by Israeli historians for such a narrative to be taken seriously in much of the Global North. With all this in mind, it is no overstatement to say that record keeping has a particular pertinence to the Palestinian struggle for justice.

Moreover, the seizure and/or destruction of historical records has been a regular and prolific element of what historian Rashid Khalidi calls the "hundred years' war on Palestine."[24] In 1948, the Haganah looted many Palestinian family libraries, particularly in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the collection of the prominent Nusseibeh family and the private papers of leading intellectual Khalil al-Sakakini. Their contents were classified as "Abandoned Property" and later showed up in the Jewish National Library of Hebrew University.[25] To take one specific example, the diary of Ottoman Palestinian soldier Ihsan Turjman was "lost" in 1948 and found at the Hebrew University Library in the 1970s. In 2011, scholar Salim Tamari published the diary along with his own extensive notes and account of its retrieval.[26] Such acts of retrieval have worked to counter the silencing of Palestinian histories but can come up against overwhelming challenges. It is important to observe that the vast majority of Palestinians cannot access Israeli archives, meaning that those documents not lost or destroyed have often been simply rendered inaccessible.[27] Such exclusions feed directly into the Palestinian people's marginalized status – in the words of Azoulay, "[Palestinian] noncitizenship is predicated on an imperial archival regime . . . archival designations . . . have made [the Palestinian] 'an infiltrator'."[28]

The events of 1948 were in some ways repeated during the 1982 Israeli siege of Beirut, where the PLO had established a parastate that included the Palestine Research Center, active from 1965. As part of its attack on Palestinian structures, the Israeli army looted the Research Center's library, along with the contents of PLO offices across the capital and in the south of Lebanon. Shafiq al-Hout provides a microcosmic example of their practices when recalling how an Israeli officer seized his Palestinian passport after expressing shock that such an item had ever existed.[29] The looted PLO documents were taken to Israel, where some of them were published in Raphael Israeli's controversial 1983 volume *PLO in Lebanon*, accompanied by a set of flawed translations.[30] At the end of that year, the PLO negotiated the return of the library to their office in Algiers, in exchange for six captured Israeli soldiers.[31]

As this shows, archiving and record keeping are not merely academic concerns when it comes to the Palestinian cause. In fact, many Palestinians have seen archival retrieval and construction as key elements of their struggle for justice. While considerable work has been carried out on the importance of oral history and testimonials in recording Palestinian history – particularly when it comes to the Nakba[32] – activists have paid no less attention to written documents.[33] Examples can be found in the work of the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), founded in 1963 in Beirut, the aforementioned PLO Research Center, and more recent moves by the PA to archive its own collection.[34]

Nor have such archiving efforts been limited to top-down actors. Many grassroots activists, predominantly Palestinians themselves, have worked to retrieve, restore, and retain historical evidence, often with a view to the place of such work in the wider national struggle.[35] In so doing, they have provided valuable sources for historians working in this area.[36] Examples include audio, visual, and audio-visual collections such as the Nakba Archive, Palestine Remembered, Palestine Open Maps, and Zochrot.[37] In Lebanon, the American University of Beirut houses the Palestinian Oral History Archive, curated by researchers and containing testimonies from Palestinians displaced to Lebanon in 1948 as well as other Palestinian communities in the country.[38] These archives challenge many of the epistemic injustices that plague institutional collections. Notably, many are digitized and freely available online, thus countering some of the aforementioned barriers to accessing physical records. The oral history collections foreground the voices and experiences of forcibly displaced Palestinians, while the map collections make innovative use of sources created by colonial authorities, to visually depict the losses and erasures suffered by the Palestinian nation.[39]

Other archives exist in what are arguably the most subaltern of sites: the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. In Shatila camp, for example, Mohammad al-Khatib curates and runs the Memories Museum, which holds artifacts and documents collected over the years from his Palestinian refugee family, friends, and neighbors. Miles to the south of al-Khatib's project, Mahmoud Dakwar has established a similar museum in the Khalil al-Wazir mosque in the town of Ma'shuq, between al-Buss and Burj al-Shamali camps. Both men see their work as important in maintaining pre-Nakba history for the generations born in exile.[40] Both collections provide an alternative to the depersonalized and clinical approach that characterizes institutional and state archives.

With all this in mind, it is safe to say that the issue here is more complex than simply the absence of a Palestinian archive. In fact, Palestinian history is recorded in numerous archives, but in ways that are fragmented, dispersed, and limited.[41] At the same time, these archives' curation often serves to uphold Palestinian silencing and disempowerment, under what Azoulay calls "the imperial archival regime." UNRWA's central registry functions within this broader archival context, illuminating some elements of this history while at the same time engendering more silences. In the following section, we turn our attention to its contents, organization, and curation.

## UNRWA's Central Registry

UNRWA's central registry comprises millions of documents dating from the late 1940s. Although the agency was established in 1949 and began operations in 1950, its archive includes some documents inherited from the voluntary agencies that operated under its predecessor, the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR). In keeping with an approximate twenty-five-year window for archiving, the most recent documents in the archive date from the late 1990s and early 2000s. Documents stored in this archive include code cables sent to and from UNRWA's headquarters and between field offices, internal staff memos, technical reports, and drafts of reports for public consumption, along with a great deal of correspondence between UNRWA, other UN agencies, and host state government representatives. However, UNRWA's policies and processes for archiving are opaque and researchers must navigate the central registry without clear information as to procedures for retention and classification.

To the best of our knowledge, two studies have been conducted on the potential of UNRWA's central registry to inform research and policy. The first was led by Howard Adelman, a professor affiliated with the Refugee Studies Center at York University in Canada. Conducted in the mid-1980s, Adelman's research was funded by the Ford Foundation; he described it in a report that also includes an inventory of the central registry.[42] A feasibility study was later carried out in the 1990s by Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik. This study was motivated by the political process at the time, and the potential of the archives to contribute to the restitution of refugee losses during final status talks. Tamari and Zureik went on to publish many of their findings in an edited volume with IPS.[43]

### Definitional Differences

Before considering which documents the central registry contains and whose perspectives these sources convey, it is essential to recognize that UNRWA does not and has never served all Palestinians, nor even all Palestinian refugees (nor has it claimed to). As such its archive does not provide a comprehensive account of the post-Nakba Palestinian experience. In fact, from the beginning, UNRWA has used a narrow definition of who constitutes a "Palestine refugee": "A person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the outbreak of the conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, lost both his home and means of livelihood."[44]

Developed with operational rather than legal considerations in mind,[45] this definition is used to determine eligibility for UNRWA's services rather than to confer legal status.[46] Consequently it is narrower than the legal definition provided by the 1951 Refugee Convention, from which UNRWA-registered Palestinians are excluded. Eligibility for UNRWA's refugee status also mimics discriminatory national laws in host states in that it is only conferred on the descendants of Palestine refugee males, with female refugees unable to pass on their status to their children. By contrast, the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, includes a legal definition of refugees applied to all other displaced populations worldwide:

> [A refugee is a person who] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[47]

From the beginning, Palestinians were partially excluded from the Refugee Convention on the grounds that they were served by an existing UN body (in this case, UNRWA). Consequently, they were not eligible to avail themselves of the services provided by UNHCR.[48] Their exclusion has been especially stark since 1967, when the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees removed the Convention's original temporal and geographical restrictions, thus extending it to all nationalities – except UNRWA-registered Palestinians.[49]

While Palestinian exclusion from the UNHCR regime is a subject for discussion in itself,[50] it is worth noting that even international instruments designed specifically for the Palestinians have invoked a more comprehensive definition than that used by UNRWA. For example, in 1948, General Assembly Resolution 194 called for the implementation of return or compensation for all refugees who wished to return to their homes, regardless of whether they had lost their means of livelihood.[51] In 1982, the UNGA actually asked UNRWA to issue ID cards to all Palestinian refugees, regardless of their receipt of services, and thus create a full registry, but resistance from host governments rendered this impossible. UNRWA's records therefore do not and have never included the entire population of displaced Palestinians. Although UNRWA's nomenclature – "Palestine refugees" versus "Palestinian refugees" – supports a distinction between the smaller group of refugees that the agency serves, and the much larger number of Palestinian refugees globally, this distinction is not always clearly articulated in the agency's communications and policy reports. This can give the false impression that UNRWA serves the majority of Palestinian refugees.

Nevertheless, a significant number of Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA: currently 5.7 million of an estimated global population of eight million.[52] Moreover, the agency has a back catalog of thousands of Palestinian refugees who registered in the past but who are no longer in need or receipt of UNRWA services.[53] And during periods of heightened need, such as the 1956 Suez crisis and occupation of Gaza, the 1967 war, the Lebanese war, and the first intifada, the agency has extended humanitarian aid to non-refugees.[54]

UNRWA's records capture these instances and shed light on the global, national, and subnational political environments within which the agency operates, and which have shaped interpretations of its largely flexible mandate.[55] This makes the central registry inherently valuable to anyone researching Palestinian history. Further, although UNRWA is one of the few UN agencies to support a specific national population, its status as a subsidiary agency to the UNGA means that it remains

subject to international norms and the political machinations of the post–World War II international system. UNRWA's records thus capture both the specificities of the Palestinian issue and the agency's particular institutional features, while also offering a valuable lens into more general phenomena, including post-war internationalism, humanitarianism, human rights, international refugee law, and development aid.

**The Unwritten Record**

While UNRWA's records span almost six decades, the extent of documentation differs based on the time period and host state in question (what UNRWA refers to as "fields of operation"). For example, education-related records pertaining to UNRWA's early years (the 1950s) are sparser than the records that exist for later decades. Meanwhile, there is noticeably less documentation on refugee affairs in Syria than in other host states. Unsurprisingly, there is more documentation related to events of geopolitical significance (particularly the armed conflicts that have punctuated Palestinian exile) and in sites where UNRWA has had an expanded presence.

Accordingly, the archive contains a wealth of information related to the initial period of the Lebanese war (1975–82). For much of this period the agency's headquarters was located in Beirut. Even after UNRWA officially relocated to Vienna, a considerable staff presence remained in the city and maintained close contacts with the PLO there. Documents from this time include monthly situation updates that recount incidents including the death of students and teachers, school closures, and damage to schools. By contrast, documentation on the latter period of the Lebanese war is much sparser. This may be because most of the agency's non-Palestinian staff (whose perspectives and documents dominate the UNRWA archive) had left Lebanon by this time, following a period of kidnappings and killings of Palestinians and international UNRWA staff and the ousting of the PLO from Beirut in 1982. It also reflects the shifting locus of the Palestinian struggle to the West Bank and Gaza following the outbreak of the first intifada in late 1987 and the resulting expansion of UNRWA's operations in these areas.

Assuming that the number of sources available relates to factors that influenced the creation (or not) of documents, there may be several explanations for the variability. First, given that UNRWA is a temporary agency focused on providing humanitarian aid, its staff may not have considered it necessary to ensure detailed documentation of their activities. This could be especially pertinent during the earliest years of its operations, when UNCCP was responsible for political negotiations. More generally, the agency's humanitarian culture and the emphasis it has long placed on its "apolitical" role is at odds with the longer-term agenda of preserving and protecting the archives to support restitution for the refugees.[56] This may have contributed to an "act now, document later" (if at all) institutional culture.

An alternative explanation is that documents were not created because of the politically sensitive nature of UNRWA's work. This may be especially relevant when it comes to documentation related to UNRWA's early years. The agency's initial remit

to develop large public works programs was a poorly veiled attempt by its Western donors to resettle the refugees through economic integration.[57] As a result, relations were often tense between UNRWA's senior management, the refugees, and the Arab host states that opposed these plans. Even the Jordanian government, which was amenable to UNRWA's underlying goal of resettling the refugees,[58] was reluctant to sign official documents with the agency. Meanwhile in Syria and Egyptian-controlled Gaza, relations between UNRWA and the respective governments and military were shrouded in distrust.[59] It is therefore reasonable to assume that the agency arrived at many of its activities and policies through verbal communications and informal entente, rather than officially documented processes and agreements.

A combination of these factors likely affected the creation of sources related to UNRWA's education program. UNRWA was never intended to provide education to the refugees, and this service is almost entirely absent from early blueprints for its work. Schools for refugees were first established by individual refugee teachers themselves; UNRWA eventually took charge following considerable pressure from the refugees for investment in education.[60] Even in the case of curriculum choices – a hotly contested and politically consequential policy for which UNRWA points to longstanding agreements with the host states – formal agreements are lacking.[61] Instead, the earliest acknowledgement of this policy that we identified occurs in the write-up of a conference that was convened by UNESCO in May 1952 to discuss education for the refugees.[62] The lack of official policy documentation may reflect the grassroots establishment of the schools. It is also suggestive of an institutional environment whereby policy emerged in response to precedents and custom, rather than by way of more centralized and formalized decision-making processes.

**Archival Destruction and Loss**

Silencing does not only occur at the level of document creation. It also refers to preservation practices. In our research we encountered two incidents when documents related to UNRWA's history were willfully destroyed. The first occurred in early 1950, before UNRWA had begun operations, and concerned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which provided aid to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Israel from the time of the Nakba until the onset of UNRWA's operations. In 1950, the ICRC deliberately destroyed ninety percent of the documents it had amassed during its eighteen months of operations. According to Jalal Al Husseini, it did so to reduce the cost of shipping materials from Beirut to Geneva once the organization concluded its operations in early 1950.[63] Of the remaining documents, a large number were handed over to UNRWA and others sent to ICRC offices in Geneva.[64] When compared to the wealth of documents preserved by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) who provided relief in Gaza during this same period, this incident highlights how the geographical fragmentation and decentralization of relief operations across host states impacted document preservation and, by extension, the refugee histories that can be produced based on these archives.[65]

The second case of document destruction occurred in 1969, when UNRWA legal officer Pascal Karmy authorized the destruction of at least forty-five files. Recording this incident in the mid-1980s, Howard Adelman found memos suggesting that these files pertained to the agency's early dealings (around 1950–56) with the Jordanian government, the establishment of an agricultural school in Gaza, and discussions with the Egyptian, Libyan, and Iraqi governments about possible resettlement schemes. Files related to UNRWA's relations with specialized UN agencies (UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and UN Children's Fund) were also considered for destruction, but it is unclear whether this was carried out.[66] It is therefore entirely possible that records related to the establishment of the agency's education program – including its curriculum policy – were destroyed. The loss of these historical documents for research and future refugee claims is impossible to quantify. However, the reason given by UNRWA's legal officer was that they were of no legal interest – an interpretation of UNRWA's work in keeping with the agency's humanitarian culture and apolitical self-conception long claimed by its senior management.[67]

In addition to the deliberate destruction of documents, UNRWA's headquarters has been moved several times, along with the central registry. When the Lebanese war broke out, UNRWA moved its headquarters and central registry from Beirut to Vienna. After the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993, the agency's headquarters and central registry were moved again, this time to Amman. It is unclear whether documents were lost or destroyed as a result of these moves. However, in 1985 Adelman wrote that the agency's archives office had been hit by shelling in the Lebanese capital three years prior, resulting in the destruction of a number of documents stored there. It is reasonable to assume that at least some documents destined for the central registry were lost. Adelman himself appears to have been given a number of documents from the archive, which were subsequently stored at the Refugee Documentation Center at York University in Canada.[68] The fragmentation and dispersal of the agency's archives thus mirrors the experiences of Palestinians themselves. It also underscores the need for a comprehensive effort to preserve and protect the agency's sources that goes beyond the patchwork approach that has hitherto prevailed.

**Curation, Classification, and Bias**

How are documents produced by UNRWA selected for inclusion in the central registry? The United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (UNARMS), based at the UN Secretariat in New York, encourages UN agencies to follow the archiving practices and procedures they have developed. Although UNARMS can provide technical support and guidance, each UN agency sets its own archival policies and, crucially, finances them. As a result, preservation practices and the categorization of documents vary greatly across UN agencies. The financial responsibility that each agency bears for archiving materials is especially significant in view of UNRWA's precarious budget. Raising money to support the preservation of archives is likely to be a low priority for a cash-strapped agency like UNRWA. As previous incidents of

archival destruction illustrate, UNRWA's humanitarian orientation tends to skew its policy priorities toward day-to-day operational considerations, rather than the longer-term and future-oriented potential of its archives. Along with donors' tendencies to earmark their contributions for specific purposes, this orientation may prevent or dissuade the agency from diverting funds toward the preservation of the archive.

During our research, one UNRWA staff member told us that there used to be a twenty-five-year historical window for documents to be moved to the central registry. However, the specific criteria that UNRWA used to determine which documents should be archived were unclear. Within and across files it was not uncommon for us to find multiple copies of the same document. Although this provided an indication of the importance that UNRWA attached to specific decisions, programs, and events, the lack of clearly communicated criteria for archiving made it difficult to assess *why* some issues were deemed historically relevant. Indeed, many of the UNRWA staff we spoke to, including those based in Amman, were unaware of the existence of the central registry. The lack of clarity about the archive within the institution was compounded by opaque classification criteria. The documents in the central registry include strictly confidential, confidential, and non-classified documents, with classification ideally determined by the author at the point of creation. Although this leaves classification open to individual interpretation, it can still provide useful insights into the organizational culture and the significance that the agency's top decision makers attach to particular events and activities. At the same time, these categories need to be weighed against the fact that some politically sensitive matters may not have been documented at all. In these cases, silencing manifests through the failure to document the most contentious and consequential decisions and actions taken by the agency.

Researchers also need to be aware of the perspective that dominates many of the sources included in the central registry. Documents in this archive are almost always authored by, or intended for, the agency's senior management, which has been overwhelmingly dominated by men from Western Europe and North America. A crude measure of this is captured by the fact that while more than 90 percent of UNRWA's staff are Arabic-speaking Palestinians, almost all of the legal and policy-related documents in the central registry are in English. In this respect, the sources reflect the agency's internal power structure: despite being one of the most important employers of Palestine refugees in the region,[69] official policy is the purview of a small group of non-Palestinians.

This should not, however, be construed to mean that Palestinians lack political agency. Grassroots resistance has been a persistent feature of UNRWA's operational environment since its inception.[70] Reflecting this, the central registry collection includes references to Palestinian teachers who were fired from UNRWA for their political activities throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. We also came across documents authored by senior UNRWA staff that referenced Palestinian discontent with the education program, chronicled strike action by agency teachers, and called for greater provision of UNRWA aid in the camps alongside the implementation of refugees' full political rights.[71] While this material acknowledges the refugees' activism, it was often difficult

to ascertain how the resulting tensions were resolved by the agency: silences that could indicate any number of official or unofficial resolutions. These instances further point to the need to distinguish between UNRWA's officially articulated decisions and policies, and the ways in which these decisions are interpreted, implemented, appropriated, and transformed by agency staff and the refugee communities.

**A Partial Archive**

As outlined above, the central registry is part of a fragmented archival landscape that documents the historical experiences of Palestinian refugees. As UNRWA is a subsidiary agency of the UN General Assembly, the UNARMS collection in New York also contains a wealth of documents relevant to the agency's history. These holdings are largely accessible to those researchers who can travel to the United States, and many of its documents, including a large number pertaining to UNRWA, have been recently digitized. The UNARMS contents include communications with UNRWA's New York–based liaison office, press releases, preparatory documents for the UNRWA commissioner-general's annual speech, and correspondence between UNRWA's directors and commissioner-generals and the UN secretary general. As such, this archive sheds light on issues of geopolitical significance and reveals how UNRWA fits into the larger post–World War II international system.

Since its establishment, UNRWA has also worked closely with other specialized UN agencies to deliver services to the refugees, principally the World Health Organization on its health program, and UNESCO on its education program. From the 1950s until the 1980s, UNESCO was heavily involved in determining the direction and structure of UNRWA's education program. For example, when the Israeli authorities complained in 1967 about the host state textbooks used in UNRWA schools, it was UNESCO and not UNRWA that set up and oversaw the work of an international committee to review all textbooks and determine their appropriateness for usage in UN-administered schools.[72]

UNESCO's influence and involvement in UNRWA's education program waned in the 1980s when it was defunded by the United States government, for reasons strikingly similar to the reasons given for defunding UNESCO, and arguably UNRWA, four decades later.[73] However, when examining the first forty years of UNRWA's operations, sources stored in UNESCO's archive in Paris can greatly enrich our understanding of UNRWA's education program and the rationale behind it. The existence of so many documents in UNESCO's archive that are relevant to UNRWA's history underscores the diffuse nature of UNRWA's operations and decision-making. Not only does the agency provide services to Palestine refugees in different national contexts, but its policies (written and unwritten) are influenced by a range of subnational, national, and global actors, each intervening on the basis of different logics and motivations. The relevance of the central registry for understanding UNRWA's impact and importance is heightened when its sources are consulted alongside the archives of other actors within this complex ecosystem.

## Archival Access Criteria and Procedures

Both of the coauthors of this article found accessing UNRWA's central registry in Amman to be a time-consuming and opaque process that required gaining the permission of the commissioner-general's office. One of us also had to acquire access permission from the specific UNRWA department she was researching (education). In keeping with UNRWA's operational focus and the political sensitivities that have long enveloped the agency, we were both advised by researchers who had previously gained access to the archive to present our research plans in as innocuous a way as possible (that is, not critical of UNRWA), in order to heighten our chances of approval. While the details of access processes varied by visit, in all cases we were broadly required to submit short descriptions of our research plans.

In an early visit in 2011, one of us was allowed to request particular files from a supplied inventory. However, all subsequent visits were much more restricted in terms of access. The standard practice involved submitting a short description of the research, on the basis of which an UNRWA archivist in Gaza would determine which files were relevant for our work. It is important to note that UNRWA's permission process contrasts with the procedures for accessing many other UN archives where researchers can communicate directly with archivists and prepare for their research using finding aids which provide an inventory of available files.

UNRWA's alternative system creates a number of limitations for researchers. Most obviously it risks denying researchers access to files that could be significant and even decisive for their research. The risk is heightened by the fact that the agency has not divulged its criteria for preserving and categorizing files, making it almost impossible for researchers to ascertain what they may be missing. In the case of education-related research, for example, files related to the agency's budget, its broader relations with host states, and personnel-related issues (for example, on teachers and UNRWA's powerful teachers' union) may all be relevant even if they have not all been sorted and explicitly tagged and filed as education-related. More generally, it was difficult to ascertain what share of UNRWA's overall documentation was related to education (that is, how well has the agency documented its administration of the schools compared to other programs?).

We also experienced changeable criteria for accessing and using the central registry over the course of our research. Between us, we visited the archive repeatedly from 2011 to 2018, and found different policies in effect on each occasion. With no archivist in place, responsibility for managing access to the collection seems to fall on various staff members tasked with this role in addition to their other duties. We were also unable to identify a standard set of policies on how the archive could be used. Regulations are inconsistent on matters such as which documents can be accessed, who determines access requirements, and whether documents can be photographed or copied. Some visits are time-limited (for example, a maximum of ten days) and supervised; others are flexible and unattended.

On one occasion in 2016, one of us was granted permission to access the archive and scan relevant documents. By the time she arrived in the archive several months later, the policy had changed: scanning was no longer permitted but photocopying documents was allowed. These policy shifts were not communicated ahead of time, and often implied that additional resources (financial and time) would be required, resulting in a scramble to manage different procedures within the time frames allotted to undertake the research in Amman.

Although restricting access to archives can be justified in terms of protecting and preserving valuable documents, UNRWA's policies appeared to be driven by other considerations. Indeed, the condition of the archive suggests that its preservation is not a priority concern of the agency. The central registry is kept in a dank basement in the Amman headquarters complex. While documents are filed into the usual archival cardboard boxes, many of these boxes are falling apart. One of us witnessed a box that literally fell apart when staff tried to move it. Another of us opened a box to find several dead cockroaches inside. Nor were there policies about consuming food and drink around the files: on several occasions one of us was offered coffee and tea while reviewing the documents. Instead, the recommendation that we present our research as innocuously as possible and the fact that previous researchers have been provided with more expansive access to the central registry suggests that access is subject to the vagaries of the political climate within which UNRWA operates. This obviously runs counter to the goals of much independent research, especially that which seeks to advance understanding of Palestinian history and UNRWA's role, by promoting well-evidenced critical reflection about the agency's work.

## Archival Meanings: UNRWA's Complexities and Contradictions

Scholarship from the field of critical archive studies underscores the politically consequential nature of archives. Decisions about which sources are included in an archive, how they are classified, and the conditions under which they can be accessed, shape in turn the research that is conducted and the outputs produced. These decisions inform how we understand the historical significance of particular events, and the connections that we draw between the past, present, and future. The political relevance of archiving is especially pronounced when exploring histories of social injustice and questions concerning subaltern populations, since the documentation of these experiences can facilitate restitution claims. The Palestinian Question is a case in point. As the largest repository of documentation concerning UNRWA's activities, the central registry's structure, policies, and practices are unavoidably politically significant. A better understanding of the intent and impact of the agency's archival policies can therefore illuminate the role that UNRWA has played for generations of Palestinian refugees. With this in mind, we discuss in this closing section how the varied forms of silencing described above relate to Fricker's conception of epistemic in/justice.

The factors that have shaped the creation and curation of UNRWA's central registry highlight the ways in which the archive may explicitly or inadvertently reproduce structural and testimonial biases. In the first instance, the agency's narrow definition of a refugee means that the documents kept in its archive reflect the agency's interactions with the subgroup of Palestinian refugees who receive its services. In other words, research that draws on the archive should not be considered comprehensive of the Palestinian refugee experience. Instead, the archive provides a lens into the ways in which an internationally oriented aid program has shaped the lives of refugees whose experiences of displacement and dispossession in 1948 resulted in their registration with UNRWA. Further, since UNRWA's definition applies only to the children of male refugees, it excludes the descendants of those female refugees who registered with the agency but married non-refugees. Thus, from the outset the central registry offers a selective lens onto Palestinian refugee experiences.

Hermeneutical injustices also stem from the destruction and loss of historical records, and the absence of any clear communication of archiving policies and practices, including the criteria for curating and classifying documents in the registry. As previously described, our experiences of working there revealed highly changeable and opaque policies and procedures. It is important to note that these policies and procedures can be especially difficult for Palestinian and other Global South researchers to navigate, since they often necessitate flexibility in travel plans and even last-minute changes to travel that are difficult if not impossible to accommodate when traveling on visas.

These forms of silencing limit researchers' ability to understand the decisions UNRWA has made on behalf of the refugees, and how they have created institutional path dependencies that continue to affect the lives of millions of refugees. These silences, however, are also revealing. Notably, they speak to an organizational culture that is often at odds with the preservation of institutional memory and the future restitution claims that this can facilitate. Specifically, the archive reflects UNRWA's humanitarian orientation, which projects a temporary and apolitical view of the agency's role. Accordingly, biases are not necessarily the result of deliberate or intentional choices on the part of the agency. They often appear to be a consequence of the low prioritization accorded to the archive in the face of pressing operational considerations. This reflects the incomplete nature of the international regime that exists for Palestinian refugees which, since the demise of UNCCP, has been dominated by an ostensibly apolitical and humanitarian approach, limiting meaningful multilateral involvement in political processes that concern the refugees' future. Nevertheless, UNRWA does benefit from a somewhat flexible mandate.[74] As such, there is considerable potential for its archive to contribute to these processes should its senior management so choose.

More broadly, the fact that the central registry is split across national contexts,

has been transported to a new venue multiple times, and comprises only one (albeit important) set of historical documents pertaining to UNRWA's operations, speaks to both the multiple forms of fragmentation that have shaped Palestinian exile and the incomplete nature of UNRWA's support to the refugees. The relevance of archival silencing for understanding Palestinian refugee history is all the more apparent when we consider the different forms of testimonial injustice present in the central registry. The underrepresentation of refugee voices in the archive and the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a small and predominantly non-Palestinian cadre of senior management, is suggestive of a neo-colonial institutional set-up. This points to a decidedly undemocratic model of governance vis-à-vis the agency's main constituents: Palestine refugees. It also contrasts with accusations that the agency is biased toward Palestinians – and poses a challenge to UNRWA's own claim that it is a neutral actor on the question of Palestine.[75]

The hermeneutical and testimonial injustices that surround the central registry thus shed light on the seemingly simple but disarmingly complex question of what UNRWA is – and by extension, the role it plays in relation to the question of Palestine. As Randa Farah has argued, UNRWA is neither fixed nor homogenous.[76] Whereas outwardly the agency presents an image of continuity, the patchwork of documents included in the central registry reveal that it is fraught with tensions arising from local and regional entanglements and geopolitics. These tensions underscore the opposing influences exerted on the agency and speak to the contradictions inherent in its quasi-state status. Much like a state, UNRWA's decision-making is shaped by the interests of an array of political constituents. However, its set-up – mandated by the UNGA and reliant on external funding – means that these constituents rarely prioritize the perspectives of the very people they are meant to serve: Palestine refugees themselves. The complexities, contradictions, and silences of the central registry reflect this paradox. As such, it not only mirrors the dispersals and fragmentations of Palestinian refugee experiences, but also speaks to the broader political consequence of archives in determining which histories are recorded, validated, excluded, and silenced.

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*The coauthors participated in equal partnership in the preparation and writing of this article.*

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# The Intertwined History of Shuʿfat Refugee Camp in Jerusalem: The Making of Refugees

Halima Abu Haneya

**Abstract**

Shuʿfat refugee camp in Jerusalem is the only Palestinian refugee camp under direct Israeli control. This essay traces the history and origins of the establishment of Shuʿfat refugee camp through oral history interviews with the camp refugees. The author also highlights the role of UNRWA in the establishment of the camp, and Jordanian policies in Jerusalem and regarding refugees during its period of rule in Palestine. Oral history narratives are complemented by the available literature on the history of Palestine and Jerusalem, and by documents and correspondence of the Arab municipality of Jerusalem dating back to the early 1960s. The author discovers that not all camp residents were refugees expelled from their towns and villages in 1948; many of them were given UNRWA refugee cards upon an agreement between UNRWA and the Jordanian government in the mid-1960s.

**Keywords**

Shuʿfat Refugee Camp; Jerusalem; UNRWA; oral history; refugees.

In December 2019, I interviewed eighty-three-year-old Abu Firas at his home in Ras Khamis, a neighborhood of Shuʿfat camp. Abu Firas recounted his expulsion in 1948 from Qatamun, a southern neighborhood of Jerusalem, and its aftermath:

> In 1948, I was twelve years old, studying in the ʿUmariyya School in Baqʿa al-Tahta near Qatamun. We were living in a beautiful house. My father was a butcher, with his own shop in

> Qatamun. People of Qatamun, mostly Christians, were considered of good economic and social status in Jerusalem as most were working as government employees during the Mandate era . . . . We were six sons and two daughters and when the Jews started their attack on Qatamun, my father was worried about us and decided that we should leave. We first settled in Bab Hutta in the Old City of Jerusalem. We rented a small house until the Jews started shelling the Old City. One of the shells landed close to our own house. We were afraid and this time, my father decided to leave for Jordan. We lived in Suwaylah for several months. We worked in selling bread and *ka'k* to earn our living there. In early 1949, we returned to Jerusalem and again rented a new home in Bab Hutta. Since we lost our house and business in Qatamun, we decided to start a new life in our new location. My brothers and I worked in a slaughterhouse in Shu'fat village [four kilometers northeast of the Old City], traveling there daily on foot.[1]

Eventually, Abu Firas's family bought land and built a family house in Ras Khamis, neighboring Shu'fat, where they have lived since 1960 – before the establishment of Shu'fat camp in 1965. Over the years, the house, built several meters outside the original boundaries of Shu'fat camp, has become absorbed into the camp area. As Abu Firas's story illustrates, his trajectory from Qatamun to Shu'fat was not a simple, linear one. Abu Firas's experience is only one of many such stories – individual but often echoing one another – that together tell the story of Shu'fat camp. The collective story of the unique history of Shu'fat camp, which was constructed some fifteen years after the Nakba of 1948–49, is one that weaves together individual threads with multiple twists and turns.

This article sheds light on the original homes of the camp's residents, their gathering in the Old City of Jerusalem, and the establishment of the camp in its current location in the mid-1960s. It offers a more nuanced example of the workings of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in dealing with refugees and non-refugees, and of Jordanian policies in Jerusalem and the relocation of refugees from Mu'askar camp in the Old City of Jerusalem to Shu'fat camp.[2] It also highlights the life conditions of the refugees in the camp until 1967, when the camp came under Israeli occupation and, like the rest of Jerusalem, under direct Israeli jurisdiction – the only Palestinian refugee camp to do so.

Scholars, in particular Kjersti Berg, have written about the establishment of Shu'fat camp some fifteen years after the 1948 expulsion, and the relocation of refugees from Jerusalem's Old City to Shu'fat, drawing mainly from official documents and archives.[3] This paper gives major attention to refugees' voices and self-narratives to provide details of their social history. I conducted most of my fieldwork, including nineteen semistructured and narrative interviews with camp refugees to collect oral histories, between June 2018 and June 2019. Interviews focused on the life stories of refugees, mainly elder refugees who had witnessed the 1948 war, the establishment of Shu'fat camp in 1965, and the 1967 war.[4]

Figure 1. "Winter snow covers Shu'fat refugee camp, near Jerusalem in the West Bank. Shu'fat camp in which 4,000 Palestine refugees are registered with UNRWA, lies just north of Jerusalem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The camp was built in 1966 to re-house inhabitants of Muscar [sic] camp which was located in the outskirts of Jerusalem." Photo by Myrtle Winter Chaumeny. ©1977 UNRWA Archive.

Most previous studies have researched Shu'fat camp either as part of the Jerusalem periphery or as part of Jerusalem in general and did not examine Shu'fat camp as their main subject of research.[5] Focusing on Shu'fat camp in this article, I turned to oral history and self-narratives because previous research did not give adequate attention to refugees' voices in drawing the history of the camp.[6] The oral histories that I collected are also supported by newly released documents and correspondence of the Arab municipality of Jerusalem dating back to the early 1960s.[7] This essay draws on oral history and self-narratives to add to – not replace – these official archives, although these official sources may challenge the narrators. Oral history is a key source for weaving collective social history, providing testimonial evidence on past events and thereby empowering the narrators to challenge the official story and deconstruct any previous hegemonic discourses.[8]

Additionally, oral history empowers marginalized voices by giving them the opportunity to reproduce their past and to participate in writing a collective history that lives between their words. This article considers individual narratives as more than self-expression; they can become part of a broader effort of writing a collective history. Oral history grasps areas often neglected by official archives and documents, uncovering individuals' daily practices that, taken together, produce collective history from below. Oral histories are often better suited than state archives and official documents for conveying refugees' aspirations, dreams, fears, and pain. Suffering the transformation from citizens into refugees in one's own homeland is not a small thing, nor merely a matter of how one's status is registered in some official record.

It means living trauma, unsettled feelings, dreams deprived, and unquantifiable pain. Perhaps every refugee experienced a different journey, but oral history enables us to "understand how and when certain behaviors and attitudes may have originated or changed, in addition to information about current practices and behaviors."[9] Centering oral histories can thus help us to grasp various elements of the history of Shu'fat camp refugees that are invisible in official documents. This essay uses oral history to help reconstruct the pre-war life of Shu'fat camp refugees and the changed circumstances they experienced after being expelled from their neighborhoods, villages, and towns in 1948, and help explain for us the refugees' sense of belonging and identity.

## In the Aftermath of the Nakba

The 1948 Nakba resulted in the expulsion of about two-thirds of the Palestinian people, a process that unfolded differently depending on space and time.[10] To the west of Jerusalem, news of the Dayr Yasin massacre on 9 April 1948 pushed inhabitants of the surrounding villages to leave their homes and land out of fear for their lives and their families' lives. Not all Palestinians left their villages immediately; many remained in their homes on alert for attack by Jewish militias until their towns and villages were captured. This was the case for residents of Bayt Thul, a village west of Jerusalem and ten kilometers from Dayr Yasin. Recalling the effect of the Dayr Yasin massacre, Umm 'Umran said:

> After Dayr Yasin we were afraid that the same thing will happen to us in Bayt Thul. The people remained on alert. Those who owned cattle had already moved their cattle to other villages and towns where they had relatives or friends, a long time before the occupation of the village. We continued with our normal daily routine inside the village during the day, while in the evening we used to leave our homes to spend the night in the caves on the outskirts of the village in preparation for the moment rampaging armed Jews would occupy and destroy the village.[11]

The villagers' fears were realized at midnight on 18 July 1948, when their village was overrun while they sheltered near the area.[12] Their first refuge after expulsion was not the Old City of Jerusalem. Several refugees recalled how the people of Bayt Thul fled to villages in the Ramallah area that were nearest to them. For example, some found refuge in Rafat until the early 1950s when news spread about empty houses in Jerusalem's Jewish quarter. When they heard that people had begun to reside in these houses, they moved to the Old City to do the same. Bayt Thul villagers joined refugees from Lydda, some of whom recalled finding refuge in Birzeit near Ramallah before leaving for Jerusalem to live in empty houses in the Old City.[13]

Non-refugee residents from the Ramallah villages of Qatanna, Bayt 'Ur, and Bayt Liqya also migrated to Jerusalem in the early 1950s after hearing of empty houses there, joining refugees in the Old City.[14] This explains why people from these Ramallah villages live in Shu'fat camp today, although their villages were not occupied nor their inhabitants expelled in 1948.

Meanwhile, many other urban refugees, especially those who fled from the new Jerusalem neighborhoods southwest of the Old City, such as Qatamun, Baq'a, and Talbiyya, or from further west, such as the Latrun area, made the Old City of Jerusalem their first place of refuge.[15] Jerusalem was familiar not only to those fleeing its western urban neighborhoods, but also to rural refugees from its surrounding villages. Jerusalem had been a destination for these *fellahin* before the Nakba, whether to sell their agricultural products or shop in the city's markets, to benefit from the city's health and educational services, or to pray in al-Aqsa Mosque. Thus, Jerusalem was the main place most would think of to seek refuge. At the beginning of expulsion during the Nakba, rural refugees filled the compounds of al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City roads, not knowing where else to go.[16] Some made Jerusalem a temporary station until they had the opportunity to travel to Jordan and settle there. Others found a temporary place to live with relatives in the Old City, or rented homes or rooms in its different quarters.[17] Refugees not financially capable of renting a living space were housed by the Red Cross (ICRC) in the partially destroyed Jewish quarter.[18] During and after the 1948 war, Jewish residents of the Jewish quarter (around 1,250, although the exact number is not known) fled or were evacuated from Jerusalem as their homes were battered by the war, most ending up in the western part of the city, which came under Israeli control.[19]

The refugees whom the ICRC settled into the Jewish quarter were from different backgrounds, cities, towns, and villages, but most were rural refugees from the villages of Ramla, Jerusalem, Bir al-Saba', Gaza, and Haifa districts.[20] The gathering of refugees in the Jewish quarter grew into what was called Mu'askar refugee camp after the ICRC handed over its management to UNRWA in 1949.[21] The Arabic term *mu'askar* (camp) can refer to a refugee camp or a military camp, though mostly the latter. The refugees interviewed in Shu'fat camp were not familiar with the name "Mu'askar camp" in the Old City; they referred to it as the Jewish quarter or Sharaf quarter. This may indicate that the name Mu'askar camp was used primarily in formal documents of UNRWA and the Jordanian authorities. Arab Jerusalem municipality correspondence also uses the term Mu'askar Camp or Mu'askar quarter (literally, camp quarter), which may indicate a desire to avoid using the designation Jewish quarter and thus, especially as it was inhabited by refugees, to reference it simply as the camp (*mu'askar*) quarter, a name that was adopted officially with the passing of time.[22]

## UNRWA Assistance to Old City Refugees and the Poor

On 14 March 1951, Jordan and UNRWA signed an agreement with respect to UNWRA's work in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Jordanian administered areas (the West Bank, including Jerusalem), taking into consideration Jordan's annexation of the West Bank.[23] As outlined in Article III of this agreement, UNRWA was to prioritize the employment of Palestinian refugees when employing personnel to provide services in the refugee camps. The Jordanian government assumed responsibility for paying for

Figure 2. "Students line up during a morning assembly in the schoolyard of the UNRWA Boys' School in Shu'fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s." Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

water and leasing the land, exempting the refugees from any payments. This also applied to Shu'fat refugee camp after its establishment in the mid-1960s.

When it first assumed its responsibilities in 1950, UNRWA continued activities begun by the ICRC and other international humanitarian organizations.[24] UNRWA found itself facing a chaotic process of refugee registration and assistance. Non-refugees and poor people, who did not meet UNRWA's criteria of refugees, which includes losing both home and means of livelihood, were also included in assistance rolls. Thus, although UNRWA was mandated to serve Palestinian refugees, it also served other categories of non-refugees that registered to receive assistance.[25] UNRWA faced this situation in the Old City of Jerusalem, where it served refugees and poor Palestinians in Mu'askar camp. UNRWA's current director in Shu'fat refugee camp confirmed this in an interview:

UNRWA does not only serve refugees, but also non-refugee poor Palestinians. Those who were moved from the Old City of Jerusalem in the 1960s were not only refugees who left their villages, but also poor people who joined the refugees in Mu'askar camp, especially migrants originally from Hebron and Ramallah villages who arrived in the Old City in the early 1950s. Some of those poor people received UNRWA cards in the Old City. Meanwhile, others were given UNRWA cards upon their arrival in Shu'fat camp in accordance with an agreement between UNRWA and the Jordanian government. They all now carry UNRWA cards.[26]

Among the poor non-refugees who registered as eligible to receive assistance were

those who lost their livelihood but not their home, whom UNRWA called "economic refugees," mainly residents of frontier villages in the West Bank, poor people in Jerusalem and Gaza, and Bedouins.[27] Nonetheless, all were given the same UNRWA cards as refugees and with the same benefits.

Referring to her family members and some neighbors in the Old City of Jerusalem, Umm 'Izzat said, "We all had UNRWA cards. I remember we used to get food rations from an UNRWA center in Bab al-Sahira [Herod's Gate] . . . that was in the 1950s."[28] Umm 'Izzat was not a refugee expelled from her home by war. She was living with her family in al-Wad Street in the Old City during the war. However, she noted that her father, who after 1948 served in the Jordanian police, owned a building in Mamilla before 1948 that was rented to others. After the war and Israeli occupation of the western part of Jerusalem, they were eligible for UNRWA assistance as they had lost a source of their livelihood – the rental from this house.

After assuming responsibilities in 1950, UNRWA managed food distribution offices that were located to be easily accessed by Palestinian refugees, wherever they were gathered. In Jerusalem, approximately twelve thousand people of refugee status in the Old City of Jerusalem were receiving assistance from UNRWA.[29] In the Old City, humanitarian agencies established one of the first food distribution offices in the Islamic Girls School, inside the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, in 1948. In 1950, UNRWA assumed responsibility for the administration of this school-based center until, with the beginning of the school year, it left the school and opened another center in the Tuma-Tuma area, near Bab al-Asbat (Lion's Gate), to the east of the Haram al-Sharif.[30]

In a manuscript diary, Husayn Fakhri Khalidi, supervisor and custodian of al-Aqsa Mosque and supreme guardian of the Holy Places in Jerusalem, recorded that in 1951 the Islamic Waqf Department in Jerusalem called for these offices to be moved outside the al-Aqsa Mosque compound; it viewed the chaotic food distribution process as desecrating the holiness of the site.[31] Letters exchanged in 1951 described this situation and called on the Islamic Scholars Commission, UNRWA, the Jordanian Ministry of Construction and Development, and the Ministry of Interior to find another location to distribute food. According to Khalidi's diary, this distribution office in Jerusalem served about seven thousand people from Jerusalem and its surrounding villages and neighborhoods, including Thuri and Silwan.[32] Khalidi's diary includes a letter from Hasan Abu al-Wafa al-Dajani, the comptroller-general of the Waqf, dated 22 October 1951, which states:

The Jerusalem military governor in 1948 allowed the distribution of food rations in the building of the Islamic Girls' School at King Faisal Gate [Bab al-'Atm] and when the aforementioned school was needed, UNRWA asked for allocating another place and it was allowed to use the current location, known as Tuma-Tuma. The [Islamic] Council did not know that the distribution process would have such difficulties.[33]

Following several protest letters from Khalidi, chief shari'a judge Muhammad Shanqiti, and other waqf officials between June and October 1951, the distribution office was moved to a location near Bab al-Sahira, inside the walled Old City but outside the al-Aqsa compound.

## Closing Mu‘askar and Establishing Shu‘fat Camp

This situation continued until 1963, when the Jordanian government decided to close Mu‘askar camp and move the refugees who were living there. The Jordanian government chose a plot of about two hundred dunums (fifty acres) from Shu‘fat village, north of Jerusalem, for their relocation.[34] This decision was justified on economic and humanitarian grounds. It was thought that the Old City refugees would form a significant burden on Jerusalem’s economy and exhaust its infrastructure, without paying for services due to their status as refugees. Nor would they pay taxes of any kind to the government.[35] Moreover, the economy of Jerusalem was based on tourism, so the Jordanian government wanted to prioritize the tourist sector in its planning projects.[36] In 1963, the Jerusalem municipality proposed a development project for the Old City of Jerusalem, turning the Jewish quarter into a “development center, with public buildings and parks.”[37] The project was intended to benefit the municipality economically, attracting tourism to generate income. The poverty of Mu‘askar refugee camp was incongruent with its urban modernization project, giving the Jordanian authorities a justification to close it and move the refugees.

From a humanitarian point of view, the neglect of houses in Mu‘askar camp in the Old City meant the further deterioration of living conditions for camp residents. According to Nazmi Jubeh, destruction in the Jewish quarter during and after the 1948 war had been significant, with many buildings either destroyed or damaged by shelling.[38] Jubeh points out that immediately after the war, Jordanian authorities destroyed several damaged buildings that had posed a danger to public safety in the quarter.[39] Given these conditions, authorities deemed it necessary to relocate the Old City refugees.

In a decree dated 5 October 1963, then Jordanian prime minister Husayn ibn Nasser ordered the transfer of Palestinian refugees gathered in Mu‘askar camp to a new location prepared by the “relevant authorities.”[40] The decree also banned any refugee moved from Mu‘askar camp from returning to live there. The Arab municipality of Jerusalem, according to the decree, would be responsible for the demolition of the damaged houses in the camp after the transfer of refugees was completed. Meanwhile, by 1965, UNRWA had established five hundred housing units in the new location in Shu‘fat, northeast of Jerusalem.[41] UNRWA also built two schools in the new location, one for boys and one for girls, offering free education up to tenth grade. It also built a health center to provide free basic health services for the refugees. One thousand five hundred people were moved to the new location in 1965.[42]

The refugees transferred to the new location were disappointed with the conditions there, including the small size of houses, too few rooms, and lack of infrastructure. Yusuf, a member of the Popular Committee in Shu‘fat camp, described the UNRWA-built houses as measuring 7.5 by 15 meters each, divided into three rooms of three by two meters, with each room to accommodate up to six refugees.[43] Commenting on the beginning of life in Shu‘fat camp, Umm Ayman recalls: “Each house had a number and the head of each household was given the number of his new house, according to a list with UNRWA employees.”[44] She added:

Figure 3. "Shu'fat camp for Palestine refugees, near Jerusalem." Photo by George Nehmeh. ©1974 UNRWA Archive.

> UNRWA divided the camp into several neighborhoods and some people asked to be given homes in the same neighborhood as relatives and UNRWA agreed to this. This is why some neighborhoods of the camp are named after the place of origin, for example, Harat al-Thawala [neighborhood of Bayt Thul people] or Harat al-Walajiyya [neighborhood of al-Walaja people].[45]

At that time, UNRWA houses lacked basic infrastructure; they were without electricity, water, or sanitation. UNRWA erected several public toilets without doors in the camp streets, one for men and one for women in each neighborhood, as confirmed by the camp refugees. "When we needed to use the toilet, my father always accompanied us to the public toilet in the camp and waited for us in front of the toilet until we finished because they were without doors. You know, we were little girls and could not go there alone, especially at night," Umm Ayman said, laughing.[46] "The toilets were built in a kind of spiral way that they can stay without doors and no one can see through," Yusuf recalled.[47] He explained that doorless pit toilets with spiral design were preferred to ensure good ventilation, especially since they were without windows.

UNRWA also installed one water tap in every camp neighborhood, which were supplied by a container that provided a limited amount of water for only two or three hours a day for the use of all the camp residents.[48] The amount of water was insufficient to meet the camp needs, forcing families to recycle the little water available, using it sparingly. Some refugees also used to bring water from the neighboring village of 'Anata, one kilometer east of the camp. This was confirmed in interviews, including with Umm 'Umran, who said, "When we finished washing clothes, we used the same water to clean the floors of

the house . . . I used to bring water from ‘Anata. I used to carry two large tins full of water and walk the whole way from ‘Anata to the camp.”[49] Staple food items were distributed by UNRWA to all the camp residents. Umm Ayman recalled that UNRWA also ran a *takiyya*, or free public kitchen, at the entrance of the camp, where cooked food was distributed to the refugees: “As a youth, I used to carry a big metal jug that my mom gave me and have it filled with food from the *takiyya*. Sometimes we got *mujaddara*, other times lentil soup.”[50]

Though a number of the camp refugees remained jobless, UNRWA tried to mitigate unemployment. UNRWA offered camp refugees jobs in its different facilities, abiding by the original agreement signed with the Jordanian government in 1951.[51] Some previously unemployed refugees got jobs in UNRWA facilities, receiving fixed salaries that enabled them to improve the living conditions of their families. Umm ‘Umran recalled:

> My husband worked for UNRWA as a gardener and he was getting seventy-five Jordanian dinars per month, which was considered a large amount at that time. When he started working for UNRWA and getting a salary, UNRWA stopped providing us with food support. UNRWA regulations stipulated that upon employment UNRWA employees would no longer be entitled to this benefit unless they agreed to a cut of five Jordanian dinars from their salaries. He agreed to this salary cut so that we could continue to receive food support. With his work with UNRWA, our economic circumstances subsequently improved and we were able to extend our house and build a wall around it.[52]

Meanwhile, UNRWA provided refugees who lost shops in the Jewish quarter with new shops built in the camp as compensation, while those who had been working in the Old City but outside the Jewish quarter maintained these jobs.[53] Some women refugees also undertook work such as sewing and embroidering from home to supplement their husbands’ income and to help support their families.[54]

## Shu‘fat Refugee Camp under Israeli Occupation

A new episode in the lives of the camp refugees began with the 1967 war. By June 1967, 3,300 Palestinian refugees were already living in Shu‘fat refugee camp.[55] In addition to the natural increase in the number of camp refugees, more Old City refugees continued to be brought to the camp until June 1967.[56] When the war broke out, a large number of camp refugees, like other Palestinians in the West Bank, left their homes and headed east for fear that Israelis would carry out massacres similar to those committed in 1948. Some reached Jordan; others stopped in Jericho and stayed there until the war ended.[57] Some of the camp residents did not go very far and recalled hiding in caves east of the neighboring villages of ‘Anata and Hizma (the current location of Anatot military camp), where they spent several days until they were informed that anyone who left the caves carrying a white banner of surrender could safely return home. “We used whatever cloth we had around; we were able to leave the caves and returned home,” recalled Umm ‘Umran.[58]

In the wake of the 1967 war, new refugees arrived in Shu'fat camp, including refugees from the Mughrabi quarter near the Buraq Wall (Western Wall), which Israeli forces razed, displacing more than a hundred households. Other refugees joined the camp from the Latrun area villages of Yalu and 'Imwas, which were completely destroyed during the 1967 war along with the village of Bayt Nuba.[59]

With the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel defied international law and incorporated the eastern part of Jerusalem and the surrounding neighborhoods, including Shu'fat refugee camp, into the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality.[60] With this annexation, Israel decided to transform Jerusalem into a settler-colonial city with a status different from the rest of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.[61] The Shu'fat camp, the only Palestinian refugee camp in Jerusalem, subsequently fell under direct Israeli control.[62] In June 1967, immediately following the war, Israel conducted a population census.[63] Shu'fat camp refugees recalled how Israeli officials visited the camp houses during the census to conduct a headcount of the household members. They also mentioned that some people tricked the Israeli officers to ensure the return of their relatives who had fled to Jordan and not yet returned by filling in false statistics, including the names of their absent relatives. This plot succeeded because the Israeli government employed a number of different officers to carry out census work. When a different officer visited the refugee family, a new family member would pretend to be an absent family head in Jordan and would provide additional family member names that were then counted in the census. This was the practice not only in Shu'fat camp, but all over the newly occupied neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem recorded during the Israeli census, including residents of the Shu'fat camp, were granted the status of permanent residents in the city and received blue identity cards.[64] This status distinguished them from Palestinians in the rest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, allowing them the ability to access and work in Israel, and to benefit from certain social and health services.[65] However, they were not considered citizens of Israel, with respective citizenship rights.[66] They were allowed to keep their Jordanian citizenship, granted in 1949, and were treated as having the same status as foreign residents who wish to stay in Israel as stipulated in the "1952 Law of Entry to Israel."[67] This "permanent residency" status is automatically revoked if a person leaves their place of domicile to reside in another country. Israel considers living outside the boundaries of Israel – which includes anywhere outside the expanded municipal boundaries of Jerusalem – for seven or more years, for any reason except for study, as a change of domicile.[68] This situation also applies to residents of Shu'fat refugee camp, leaving them vulnerable to yet another displacement.

## Identity and Sense of Belonging

The ongoing threat of being again displaced and losing refugee status reinforces among the inhabitants of Shu'fat camp a shared identity of memories of their experience of expulsion and loss. As noted earlier, most Shu'fat refugees originated from villages west of Jerusalem, many of which are now Jewish urban neighborhoods or suburbs of Jerusalem. Being geographically so close to their places of origin only intensifies their refugee identity and

Figure 4. "A young pupil stands to answer the teacher's question at the UNRWA Girls' School in Shu'fat camp, Jerusalem." Photographer unknown. © 1989 UNRWA Archive.

desire to return.[69] First-generation refugees that lived the experience of expulsion in 1948 or 1967 expressed a profound melancholic longing for their place of origin. Their interviews often evoked a nostalgia for the past. When I asked Umm Khalil if she still remembers the location of her home in 'Imwas, she said, "Of course, I know where it was!"[70] Umm Khalil's daughter, who joined the interview at this point, said that they used to visit 'Imwas and that her mother showed them where the house once stood.

Abu Firas also described his house in Qatamun with emotion: "We have a very beautiful house! It is two stories." He used the present tense, as if still seeing the house in front of him. "Our house is still standing as it is in Qatamun until today. Although we have built a new life outside Qatamun, we remain in the hope that we will return some day. But with the passing of years, our hopes have withered and we realize that we will not be able to live in our house again."[71]

Only a few refugees who witnessed the 1948 Nakba are still alive in Shu'fat camp. The vast majority were born after the Nakba and the 1965 transfer from the Old City to their current location in Shu'fat camp, and so do not have first-hand memories of their original villages. Nonetheless, they identify with their original villages and express readiness to return to their original villages if given the opportunity.

Although Shu'fat camp, like other Palestinian refugee camps, was established as a temporary space pending a political solution, the refugees developed distinct identities and feelings of belonging within the camp. Some individuals express a sense of belonging to the group, whether that group is the "group" of Palestinian refugees,

the group of residents of Shu'fat camp, or the group of residents from their village of origin. There are also expressions of collective belonging to the place, as when individuals consider themselves to be representing the entire group of camp refugees, using "we" as opposed to "I" when discussing issues concerning the camp. They may also consider themselves representing refugees from the same place of origin who live in the Shu'fat camp. For example, a refugee originally from Lydda spoke on behalf of all refugees from Lydda, saying, "We are the *Liddawiyya*." The groupings are not necessarily exclusive, as the inhabitants of Shu'fat express multiple kinds of belonging – as Shu'fat camp refugees who also belong to their place of origin, in addition to being Jerusalemites living in Jerusalem.

## Conclusion

Empowering Shu'fat refugees to weave their collective history helped reveal new information not discussed in previous works or present in archives and official documents. The most significant finding concerns the composition of the Shu'fat camp residents, which includes both refugees and non-refugees comprised of three different groups and backgrounds. First, there are refugees expelled from their towns and villages in the wake of the 1948 war. People of this group were doubly displaced: first in 1948, when they were thrown out of their towns and villages and gathered in the Old City of Jerusalem, and again in 1965, when they were moved from the Old City to Shu'fat camp. Second, there are the long-term inhabitants of the Old City of Jerusalem that migrated to the city before 1948 and settled in the Sharaf quarter, particularly migrants from Hebron, who were also moved to Shu'fat camp, and their homes later destroyed in the 1967 war aftermath. Finally, there are the migrants that arrived in the Old City during the 1950s. They were mainly poor Palestinians from Hebron and Ramallah villages seeking work in Jerusalem, who settled in the Jewish quarter or what was then called Mu'askar camp. People of the second and third groups were non-refugees, who were only transformed into refugees when they were moved to Shu'fat camp and their homes were destroyed.

It is important to disaggregate these experiences, to avoid flattening the history of Palestinian refugees. The stories of the Shu'fat camp refugees – their origins, expulsion, refugee life, and the places and events they encountered – all shaped who they are today. At the same time, although each refugee's story may be distinct, with its own individual details, taken together they are capable of weaving an integrated collective history from below. The collective experience of Shu'fat camp's inhabitants emerges as these marginalized voices are heard to reveal forms of collective identification and belonging that have developed over decades of struggle and survival as Palestinians, as refugees, and as Jerusalemites.

*Halima Abu Haneya holds a PhD in social sciences from Birzeit University in Palestine. This article is based on a chapter of her PhD thesis, approved in 2021, under the title, "Thwarting Settler-Colonial Policies through Urban Self-Development: The Case of Shu'fat Refugee Camp in Jerusalem."*

**Endnotes**

1 Author interview with Abu Firas, eighty-three years old, originally from Qatamun, west of Jerusalem, at his home in Ras Khamis, 23 December 2018. For more on the interview process, see note 4. Of the six interviewed people of the first refugee generation that experienced the Nakba, four interviewees, each from a different background, were fully aware of the Nakba and expulsion events. Abu Firas, who was originally from Qatamun neighborhood in west Jerusalem, was from a middle-income family that first found refuge in 1948 in the Old City of Jerusalem but not in the Jewish quarter. They moved to Shu'fat in 1960, and so did not experience the 1965 relocation process. Umm 'Umran was a poor villager from Bayt Thul. She first took refuge in Rafat village and then moved with her family to the Old City of Jerusalem to occupy empty houses there. She experienced the relocation in 1965. Umm Khalil, originally from 'Imwas village, arrived in the camp after the 1967 war when her village was destroyed. Umm Jihad, originally from Hebron and married to a man from Dura village, outside Hebron, lived in a rented house in the Sharaf quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem before 1948 rather than the empty houses in the Jewish quarter. In 1965, her husband alone moved voluntarily to Shu'fat camp to obtain an UNRWA house. She initially refused to move to Shu'fat with him and remained in the Old City with her children, joining her husband in the camp only after 1967.

2 The name "Mu'askar" camp was mentioned in the official documents of the Palestinian municipality of Jerusalem in the 1960s and its official correspondence with the Jordanian authorities. It was also used in *al-Difa'* newspaper in the 1960s. The name also appears on the official UNRWA website. Kjersti Berg's research seeks to revive the "erased history" of Mu'askar camp in the Old City of Jerusalem, and to historicize UNRWA's humanitarian role. By the 1960s, about five hundred refugee families were living in Mu'askar, the boundaries of which were actually blurred with the neighboring quarters. Kjersti G. Berg, "Mu'askar and Shu'fat: Retracing the Histories of Two Palestinian Refugee Camps in Jerusalem," Jerusalem Quarterly 88 (2022): 30–54.

3 Berg, "Mu'askar and Shu'fat."

4 I prepared for the interviews and guided narrations by planning a general interview framework and establishing open-ended questions to allow the interviewees full expression. Many of the interviews were recorded after obtaining interviewees' consent. If interviewees refused to be recorded, I took written notes of their narrative. Recorded and written notes were then transcribed for analysis. In this article, I used familial names for the refugee interviewees (for example, Abu Firas, Umm Jihad) and initials for the well-known personalities in the camp.

5 See Fadwa Allabadi and Tareq Hardan, "Marriage, Split Residency, and the Separation Wall in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 65 (Spring 2016): 69–85; Noura Alkhalili, "'A Forest of Urbanization': Camp Metropolis in the Edge Areas," *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 2 (May 2019): 207–26.

6 See Jeannie O'Donnell, "Shu'fat Camp: Life on the Edge for Jerusalem Refugees," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 6 (Autumn 1999): 43–51; Usama Ibrahim Badawy and Muain Qasem Jawabrah, "Step towards Upgrading Perspective for Shuafat Refugee Camp – Jerusalem," *European Journal of Academic Essays* 1, no. 4 (August 2015): 27–37; Berg, "Mu'askar and Shu'fat."

7 Correspondence in 1966 between the Jerusalem mayor at that time Rawhi al-Khatib, Jerusalem governor Anwar al-Khatib and the Jordanian government, represented by the Guardian of Enemy Property and the Ministry of Development and Reconstruction. In 2017, fifty years after the Israeli authorities confiscated the documents of the former Arab Jerusalem municipality in the wake of the 1967 war, the correspondence was declassified.

8 Alexander Freund, "'Confessing Animals': Toward a Longue Durée History of the Oral History Interview," *Oral History Review* 14, no. 1 (2014): 1–26.

9 Emma White, David Uzzell, Nora Räthzel, and Birgitta Gatersleben, "Using Life Histories in Psychology: A Methodological Guide" (Surrey, UK: Research Group on Lifestyles, Values, and Environment, 2011), 6, online at resolve.sustainablelifestyles.ac.uk/sites/default/files/RESOLVE_WP_01-10.pdf (accessed 15 March 2023).

10 See, for example, Adel Manna, *Nakba and Survival: The Story of Palestinians Who Remained in Haifa and the Galilee, 1948–*

1956 (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

11 Author's interview with Umm 'Umran, eighty-four years old, originally from the destroyed Bayt Thul village, west of Jerusalem, at her home in Ras Khamis, 26 December 2018.

12 Walid Khalidi, ed., *All that Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

13 Author interview with Umm Ashraf, sixty-five years old, originally from Lydda, at her home in Shu'fat refugee camp, 9 December 2018.

14 Author interview with Iman, fifty-two years old, originally from Qatanna village, northwest of Jerusalem, at her apartment in Ras Khamis, 29 December 2018.

15 Salim Tamari, ed., *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and Their Fate in the War* (Jerusalem and Bethlehem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies and Badil Resource Center, 2002), 1.

16 Author interview with Nazmi Jubeh of Birzeit University, 20 June 2019.

17 P. J. Vatikiotis, "The Siege of the Walled City of Jerusalem, 14 May–15 December 1948." *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995): 139–45.

18 Meron Benvenisti, *Jerusalem: The Torn City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 70.

19 Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 69. Meron Benvenisti claims that 1,700 Jews fled from the Jewish quarter in the 1948 war, while other sources mention 2,000 civilians and 350 Haganah troops. 'Arif al-'Arif writes that 1,249 Jews of the quarter surrendered to Arabs in 1948, 913 of whom were women, children, and elderly who were released and handed over to the ICRC to move them to the Jewish neighborhoods outside the walled city, while the rest, including 332 male fighters and four female fighters, were taken as prisoners of war. Men were transferred to detention centers in Jordan and the women were returned to Israel. See: Michael Dumper, "Israeli Settlement in the Old City of Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 32–53, at 33; Vatikiotis, "Siege of the Walled City," 144; 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Nakba: nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis wa al-firdaws al-mafqud, 1947–1949* [The Nakba: the Nakba of Jerusalem and the lost paradise: 1947–1949], 2nd ed. (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 2013), 478–81. The figures provided by al-'Arif in this regard are likely closest to the truth, considering the sensitive posts that he held in Jerusalem, as *qa'imaqam* from 1933 until 1948 and, under Jordanian rule, as mayor of Jerusalem from 1951 to 1955. These positions granted him access to official documents and data to use in his writings. See Michael Fischbach, "Aref al-Aref," in *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, ed. Philip Mattar (New York: Facts on File, 2005); and Bernard Wasserstein, "'Clipping the Claws of the Colonisers': Arab Officials in the Government of Palestine, 1917–48," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2 (1977): 171–94.

20 O'Donnell, "Shu'fat Camp," 46; Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 70. According to Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps, the Shu'fat camp refugees represent seventy-two places of origin. See "Jughrafiyyat al-mukhayyam" (Geography of the camp), *Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps*, online at palcamps.net/ar/camp/88/ (accessed 9 February 2023). However, much of the existing literature, including the UNRWA website, mentions fifty-three to fifty-five places of origin. According to my interview with the UNRWA director of Shu'fat camp, the Old City refugees originally came from fifty-seven villages; after the relocation to Shu'fat camp, refugees of six villages did not move to the new location and handed their refugee cards into UNRWA, relinquishing their refugee status, and left to live outside the camp. The refugees who remain in Shu'fat camp today therefore represent fifty-one villages. However, due to technical reasons concerning the UNRWA office in the camp, the director could not provide me with any official statistics regarding the origins of the refugees who remained in the camp or those who relinquished their refugee status. Author interview with F. O. M., UNRWA director of Shu'fat camp, at the UNRWA offices in Shu'fat camp, 27 March 2019.

21 Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 70; O'Donnell, "Shu'fat Camp," 46; Dumper, "Israeli Settlement," 36.

22 This explanation was supported by K. T. of the Maps Department at the Arab Studies Society – Orient House, during an interview with him at his office in Dahiyat al-Barid, 24 February 2019. The Arab municipality of Jerusalem also used the term "Camp of the Returnees" in correspondence to refer to Mu'askar camp in the Old City. In fact, refugees in general were referred to as returnees (*'a'idin*) during

the Jordanian era in Palestine, as seen, for example, by the term's wide use in *al-Difa'* newspaper in the 1960s.

23 United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS), vol. 120, no. 394, 1952: 277–94. *UNRWA* was established to serve the Palestinian refugees by a UNGA resolution in 1949. UNRWA is responsible for serving all registered Palestinian refugees in its areas of operation. Its definition of Palestinian refugees is "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." UNRWA provides Palestinian refugees with free services of education, health, social services, and relief. See: Lance Bartholomeusz, "The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2010): 452–74, at 462; Alex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998), 256; and UNRWA, "Palestine Refugees," online at www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees (accessed 15 March 2023).

24 Besides the ICRC, the other international humanitarian organizations that assisted the Palestinian refugees in the wake of their expulsion in 1948, and before UNRWA assumed its responsibilities in 1950, included the League of the Red Cross Societies (LRCS) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). In 1954, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established to handle all other cases of forced migration including Palestine refugees residing outside UNRWA's five areas of operation. See Ricardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2010): 229–52.

25 Bartholomeusz, "Mandate of UNRWA," 456.

26 Author interview with UNRWA director in Shu'fat camp.

27 Bartholomeusz, "Mandate of UNRWA," 456. For further information on persons eligible to receive UNRWA services, see Takkenberg, *Status of Palestinian Refugees*.

28 Author interview with Umm 'Izzat, seventy-eight years old, from Jerusalem, at her family home in al-Wad Street in the Old City, 6 February 2019. Her family owned their home in the Old City and did not move to Shu'fat camp in the 1960s.

29 Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 68; Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 60.

30 Tuma-Tuma refers to the yard in front of the sealed twin gates of the Jerusalem wall: Bab al-Rahma and Bab al-Tawba that are together known as the Bab al-Dhahabi (Golden Gate). They are located at the eastern part of the wall near Bab al-Asbat (Lion's Gate). Palestinian Jerusalemites have always referred to the twin gates as Tuma-Tuma, applying the name also to the empty yard in front of them, outside of the city wall. The origin of this name is unknown. 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Mufassal fi tarikh al-Quds* [A detailed history of Jerusalem], 5th ed. (Jerusalem: al-Ma'arif Publishing House, 1999), 432.

31 Archived at Khalidi Library as: KHD sij 10.

32 Archived at Khalidi Library as: KHD sij 10-052.

33 Archived at Khalidi Library as: KHD sij 10-053.

34 Nazmi Jubeh, *Harat al-yahud wa harat al-maghariba fi al-Quds al-qadima: al-tarikh wa al-masir ma bayna al-tadmir wa al-tahwid* [The Jewish quarter and the Moroccan quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem: history and destiny between destruction and Judaization] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2019), 49; Badawy and Jawabrah, "Step towards Upgrading Perspective"; Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 70; O'Donnell, "Shu'fat Camp," 46.

35 Interview with K. T. of the Maps Department at the Arab Studies Society – Orient House.

36 Ibrahim Dakkak, "Jerusalem's Via Dolorosa," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 136–49.

37 Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 70. This is confirmed by correspondence between the Arab Jerusalem municipality and the Jordanian government in the 1960s. Copies of the written correspondence were obtained by the author.

38 Jubeh, *Harat al-yahud*, 47–48.

39 Author interview with Nazmi Jubeh, 20 June 2019.

40 A copy of the decree was obtained by the author.

41 "Profile: Shu'fat Camp, Jerusalem Governorate" (UNRWA, 2015), online at www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/shufat_refugee_camp.pdf (accessed 9 February 2023).

42 Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 70; Jubeh, *Harat al-yahud*, 49.

43 Author interview with Yusuf, fifty-five years old, member of the Popular Committee in

Shu'fat camp, at the committee headquarters, 30 June 2018.

44 Author interview with Umm Ayman, sixty-one years old, originally from Jaffa, at the Women's Center in Shu'fat camp, 25 October 2018.

45 These subdivisions of the camp were in fact similar to other Palestinian refugee camps. For example, the neighborhoods in Dahaysha camp also reflect the names of the villages of origin of the camp refugees such as Zakariyya, Bayt 'Itab, and so on, helping the refugees to maintain their social relations and traditions and strengthen their solidarity. See Alessandro Petti, "Creative Refugee Heritage. Part III – Justification for Inscription," *Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2017), 66.

46 Author interview with Umm Ayman.

47 Author interview with Yusuf.

48 Amir S. Cheshin, Bill Hutman, and Avi Melamed, *Separated and Unequal: The Inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 131.

49 Author interview with Umm 'Umran.

50 Author interview with Umm Ayman. *Mujaddara* is a traditional Palestinian dish, consisting of rice or cracked wheat and lentils.

51 UNTS no. 394, 1951.

52 Author interview with Umm' Umran.

53 Author interviews with Umm Jihad, eighty-five years old, at her home in Shu'fat camp, 31 January 2019; and Umm Ayman.

54 Author interviews with Umm Ayman; Umm 'Umran; and Umm Ashraf.

55 O'Donnell, "Shu'fat Camp," 47.

56 Benvenisti, *Jerusalem*, 70.

57 Author interviews with Umm Ayman; Umm 'Umran; and Abu Firas.

58 Author interview with Umm 'Umran.

59 Tom Abowd, "The Moroccan Quarter: A History of the Present." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 7 (2000): 6–16; Nur Masalha, "The 1967 Palestinian Exodus," in *The Palestinian Exodus: 1948–1998*, ed. Ghada Karmi and Eugene Cotran (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1999), 63–109, especially 85, 97–99.

60 O'Donnell, "Shu'fat Camp," 47.

61 The settler-colonial city is distinguished by the "dynamic of displacement and replacement . . . . Its significance for the positioning, control, and regulation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies within city and surrounding environments . . . The settler colonial city was a site where the appropriation of Indigenous land was coupled with aggressive allotment and property speculation." Penelope Edmonds, "Unpacking Settler Colonialism's Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City," *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 4–20.

62 Omar Karmi, "Breathing Life into a Dead Horse: Jerusalem Identity Card Holders Ponder a Future Behind or In Front of the Wall," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 22–23 (2005): 6–15; Yudith Oppenheimer, "Barkat's Disengagement Plan," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 49 (2012): 79–80; "Profile: Shu'fat Camp, Jerusalem Governorate," 1.

63 Leah Tsemel, "The Continuing Exodus: The Ongoing Expulsion of Palestinians from Jerusalem," in Karmi and Cotran, eds., *Palestinian Exodus*, 111–20, at 112.

64 Badil Resource Center, "Displaced by the Wall: Pilot Study on Forced Displacement Caused by the Construction of the West Bank Wall and its Associated Regime in the Occupied Palestinian Territories" (Bethlehem and Geneva: Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights and the Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2006), 13.

65 Nancy Hawker, *Palestinian-Israeli Contact and Linguistic Practices* (London: Routledge, 2013), 11; Karmi, "Breathing Life into a Dead Horse," 7.

66 Candace Graff, "Pockets of Lawlessness in the 'Oasis of Justice'," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 58 (2014): 13–29.

67 Tsemel, "Continuing Exodus," 112.

68 Tsemel, "Continuing Exodus," 113.

69 It was estimated that approximately 86 percent of the Palestinian refugees live within a hundred-mile radius of their original living places from where they were expelled in 1948. See Robert Bowker, *Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity, and the Search for Peace* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 66.

70 Author interview with Umm Khalil, eighty-seven years old, originally from 'Imwas, at her home in Shu'fat refugee camp, 3 January 2019.

71 Author interview with Abu Firas.

Figure 5. “Students raise their hands to answer the teacher’s question at the UNRWA Girls’ School in Shu‘fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s.” Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

Figure 6. “Eager students ready to answer the teacher’s question at the UNRWA Girls’ School in Shu‘fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s.” Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

Figure 7. “Palestine refugee students engaged in class at the UNRWA Girls’ School in Shu‘fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s.” Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

Figure 8. “Palestine refugee students file into their classrooms at the UNRWA Girls’ School in Shu‘fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s.” Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

Figure 9. “Palestine refugee children play during recess in the schoolyard of the UNRWA Girls’ School in Shu‘fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s.” Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

Figure 10. “Palestine refugee students file into their classrooms at the UNRWA Girls’ School in Shu‘fat camp, Jerusalem, 1980s.” Photographer unknown. © 1984 UNRWA Archive.

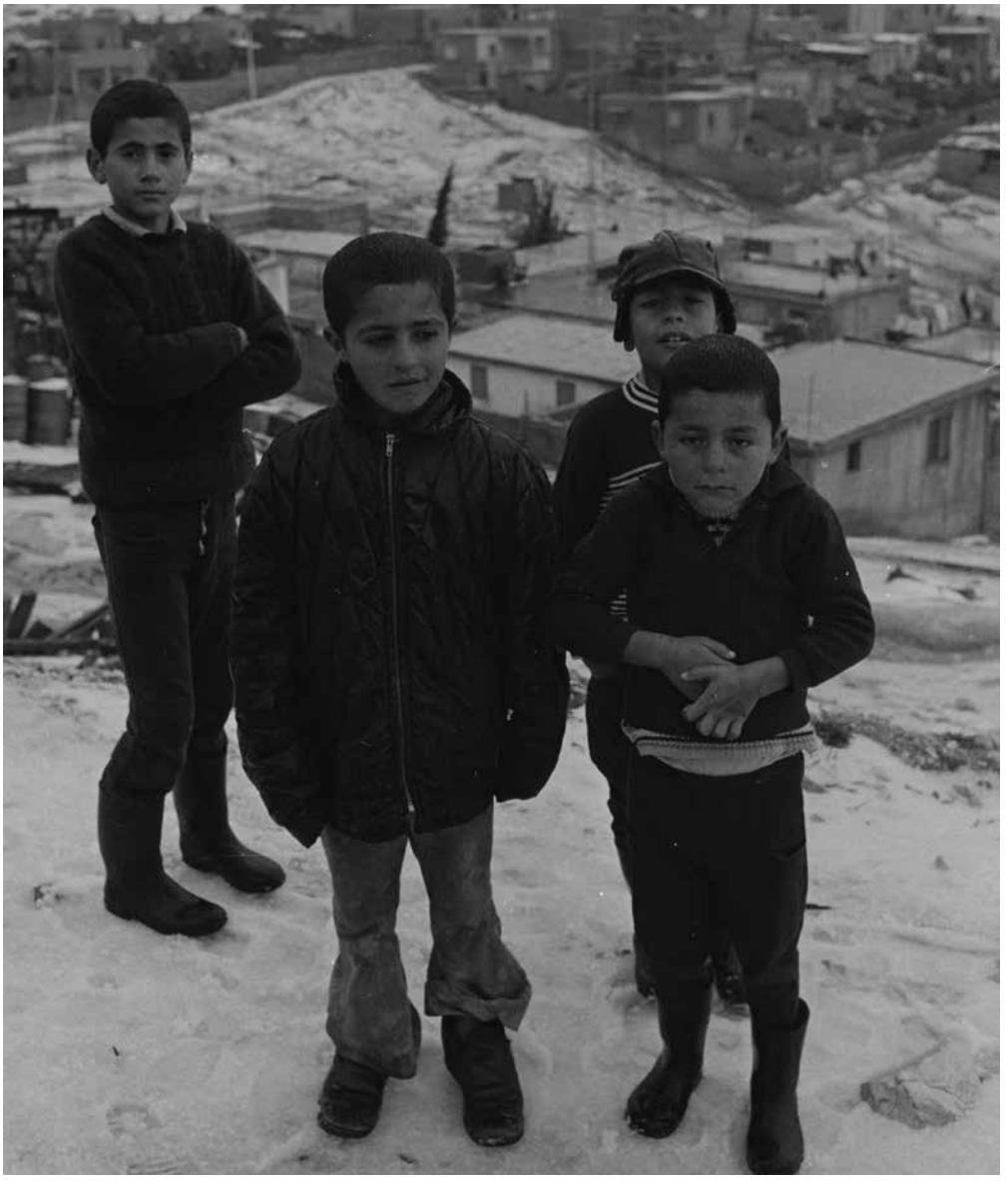

Figure 11. "Shu'fat camp for Palestine refugees, near Jerusalem." Photo by George Nehmeh. ©1974 UNRWA Archive.

Figure 12. “Education is UNRWA’s biggest program. The agency runs 635 elementary and junior secondary schools for almost 350,000 Palestine refugee students. UNRWA has eight schools for refugees in the Jerusalem area, including this one at Shu‘fat camp. In the West Bank, however, schools have been closed almost continuously since the start of the Palestinian uprising in December 1987.” Photo by George Nehmeh. ©1989 UNRWA Archive.

# The Dilemmas of Local Development and Palestine Refugee Integration in Jordan:

## UNRWA and the Arab Development Society in Jericho (1950–80)

Jalal Al Husseini

**Abstract**

In this article, Jalal Al Husseini analyzes the relations UNRWA maintained over three decades (1950–80) with the Arab Development Society (ADS), a Palestinian philanthropic non-governmental institution specialized in agricultural development and vocational/technical training operating in Jericho, West Bank. Based on ICRC and UNRWA archives, it first provides a novel insight into the internal debates that unfolded among Palestinians, both refugees and non-refugees, about how to envisage refugee socioeconomic status between, one the one hand, minimal integration in the name of the right of return for refugees (as championed by camp refugees), and quasi-assimilation (as promoted by local assistance institutions, UNRWA, and their international donors) on the other. It also highlights the ideological and operational commonalities between UNRWA and the ADS that allowed for joint working partnerships. Assessing the modalities of such partnerships, the author shows how financial, operational, and political challenges (mainly the refugees' opposition to any initiative likely to threaten their right of return and interim refugee status) limited their outcomes before finally bringing them to an end. Overall, this article explains why, despite UNRWA's embeddedness in the local context, its ties in the local institutional context have remained limited.

**Keywords**

UNRWA; Jordan; Palestine refugees; right of return; human development assistance; agriculture; resettlement; vocational training.

A number of academic studies have been devoted to the history of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).[1] Generally geared to institutional approaches, such studies have analyzed key dimensions of the agency's mandate, including: its relations with its stakeholders, including the UN system, host and donor countries, and the refugee communities; the development of its bureaucracy and internal politics between international and local employees, and between headquarters and the five field offices;[2] its impact on permanent solutions to the Palestine refugee issue; and the evolution of its mandate from short-term relief and collective socioeconomic resettlement in the 1950s toward a more individual so-called human development approach since the early 1960s that facilitates individual reintegration through educational, medical, and social relief, and camp improvement and income-generating activities. One aspect of UNRWA's history remains understudied: its relations with civil society organizations, whether the social activity centers for youth, women, and persons with disabilities it established in refugee camps during the first two decades of its existence,[3] or larger non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sharing the same human development approach to Palestinian refugee communities. This article investigates UNRWA's relations with larger NGOs, noting that such organizations have been relatively few and their relations with UNRWA sporadic and inconsistent.[4]

The Arab Development Society (ADS) (*Jam'iyyat al-mashru' al-insha'i al-'Arabi*) was established in 1945 by Musa Bey 'Alami (1897–1984), a scion of

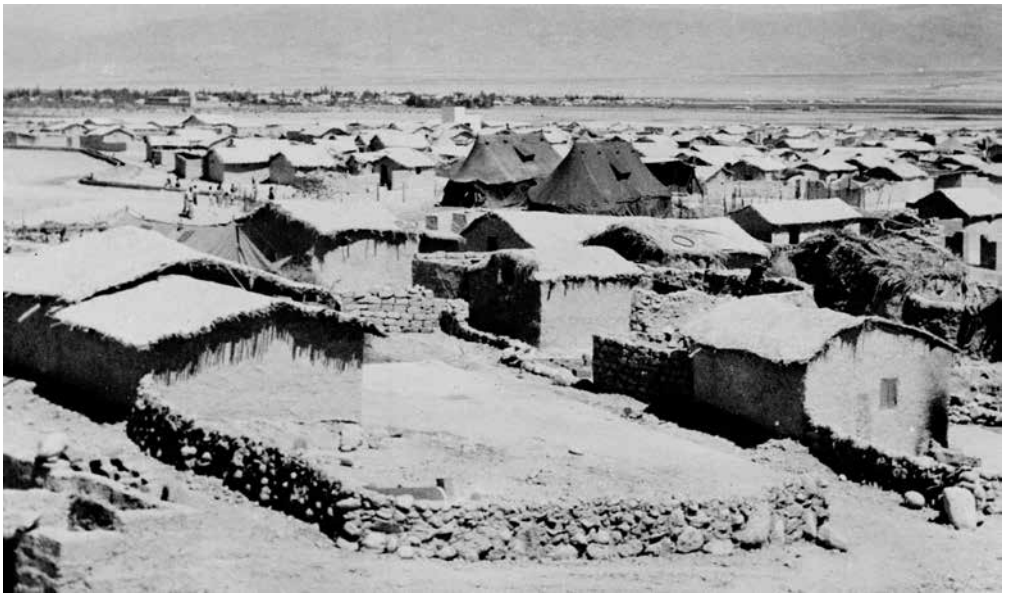

Figure 1. "Prior to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Aqabat Jaber was the largest camp in the area with more than 60,000 Palestine refugees. In 1967, thousand fled the war east across the Jordan River. UNRWA still provides its services to the 2,600 Palestine refugees still living in Aqabat Jaber camp." © UNRWA photo, undated.

a notable Jerusalemite family who held political positions in the Palestine Arab leadership during the British Mandate. Funded by the Arab League and run by a board composed of prominent Palestinian personalities, the ADS initially aimed to help Arab village communities resist the Zionist movement's expansion across Palestine by modernizing their agricultural, health, and education infrastructure. During the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the ADS activities were suspended; they resumed in 1949 in the Jordanian-controlled area of Jericho in the Jordan Valley (close to the Israeli border) with a new focus on the socioeconomic rehabilitation of Palestinian farmers who had become destitute in exile. Many of them lived in the refugee camps of 'Aqbat Jabr and 'Ayn al-Sultan that had been established near Jericho by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – one of the "voluntary agencies" tasked in December 1948 with registering and providing for refugees' basic needs under the guidance of the UN Relief for the Palestine Refugees (UNRPR).[5] UNRWA, which took over on 30 April 1950 with a new mandate combining long-term socioeconomic reintegration and short-term (and declining) relief, and the ADS thus shared similar concerns for the long-term well-being of refugees, irrespective of the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This prompted them to establish working relationships, notably through technical and financial support and joint livelihoods projects.

Based on the analysis of archival documents from UNRWA (1960–80), the ICRC (1948–50), and ADS internal reports and secondary sources, this article investigates such relationships over three decades (1950–80).[6] It takes as the main research issue the extent to which the agency's support for the ADS local developmental initiative on behalf of Palestine refugees paved the way for the increase of human development assistance and self-reliance beyond emergency relief-based humanitarianism. How were the commonalities and differences between the two organizations' ideological underpinnings and operational modes of operations coordinated and to what outcomes and impact? How was the apparently apolitical notion of human development reconciled with the refugees' unflinching claims for their right of return?

Tackling those questions, the article first shows how, in early 1949, at a time when the Palestinian refugees still expected a prompt return to their homes in Israel/Palestine, the idea of socioeconomic reintegration of the refugees through employment and vocational/technical education was developed in place of humanitarian assistance (what would today be named the "humanitarian/development nexus"). This occurred simultaneously both within the United Nations system on the one hand, and by Palestinian notables from Jerusalem supported by the Jordanian authorities, on the other. The article then explores the ideological, political, and operational factors that made it possible for the ADS and UNRWA to develop an operational partnership despite initial refugee opposition and reluctance within the agency itself. Finally, after examining the implementation and outcomes of such a partnership, the article reflects on the opportunities and limits of partnerships between UNRWA and its local institutional environment.

## Toward an ADS/UNRWA Partnership: Early Refugee "Reestablishment" Plans in Jordan

In September 1949, about eighteen months after the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli conflict and with the failure of the UN-sponsored Lausanne peace conference to settle the refugee issue, the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) established the Economic Survey Mission (ESM). The ESM was tasked to find practical ways to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement, and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees pursuant to the provisions of Article 11 of Resolution 194 (III) of the UN Assembly General (December 1948) and to promote economic conditions for peace and stability in the Near East.[7] However, due to Israel's unwillingness to discuss the issue of refugee repatriation, the ESM limited its mission to the economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees in their main Arab host countries.[8] Its recommendations, which served as a basis for the drafting of UNRWA's founding through General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949, were sustained by the "more-work-less-relief" formula and the handover of the agency's relief services (including education and health) to the host authorities by December 1950. Recognizing that the refugees – the vast majority of whom resided in Arab host countries bordering Israel – still held as a matter of right and justice to their return to their homes, and opposed long-term resettlement in lands further away from Palestine, the ESM suggested that the only immediate constructive step in sight was to give able-bodied men an opportunity "to work where they now are."[9] Since the region and its populations were considered to be not ready for large-scale development, the ESM recommended the implementation of internationally subsidized small/medium scale "relief work" projects, mainly in agriculture (afforestation, road construction, irrigation, and the like). Such relief work would employ refugees as a first measure toward their gradual rehabilitation and removal from the ration lists within nine months after the start of the projects. Public works, according to the ESM, would also add to the productivity of national and regional economies and lay the basis for subsequent larger developments offering a permanent livelihood to more people in the years to come.[10]

The ESM socioeconomic approach was largely informed and supported by international stakeholders, including the UNCCP and the voluntary agencies. While the UNCCP privately agreed, as early as March 1949, that return looked like an elusive option despite the Arab leaders' "unrealistic calls for a full return of the refugees,"[11] the ICRC president indicated to the UK foreign secretary in September 1949 that "now resettlement [outside Israeli-controlled Palestine] is the crucial issue and the relief supplies . . . no more than a palliative."[12] Two months later, he publicly urged the UN General Assembly to take firm decisions concerning the reestablishment (later called reintegration or resettlement as from 1950) of the refugees.[13] The ICRC stance was not only based on pragmatic views, namely the impossibility of the large-scale return of the refugees; it was also underpinned by more "Orientalist-like" developmentalist considerations regarding the future of the Palestinian society as a whole: The end of the "pre-1948 regime of *Effendis* [notables] and *fellah* [farmer] required," as an

Figure 2. "Aqabat Jaber camp for Palestine refugees near Jericho was once home for 45,000 persons. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, most inhabitants fled east across the Jordan River. Today, only 2,700 remain in the camp." © UNRWA photo, undated.

advisor to the ICRC put it, "immense education efforts amongst refugees"; beyond relief, it was crucial "to take advantage of the exile of these uneducated Arabs and teach them the basics of cleanness and hygiene, of children's education, of civic-mindedness and to train cadres amongst the most educated of them."[14]

The reestablishment approach was also promoted as early as March 1949 by certain segments of the host's civil societies in the territory of Palestine then under the military control of Jordan – "Arab Palestine" (later the "West Bank"). Emphasizing the need to wrest camp refugees from the grip of destitution and idle dependence on relief aid, local charities attempted in 1949 to counter the refugees' opposition to any initiative unrelated to their right of return and convince them to access local labor markets.[15] More ambitiously, "Arab [non-refugee] circles in Jerusalem" informed the UNRPR in May 1949 that they were preparing an agricultural reestablishment plan in the Jordan Valley that aimed to durably improve the lives of camp refugees: the Arab Development Society (ADS) project, to be discussed below.[16] It is no coincidence that such initiatives originated from Jordan-controlled territories. Since December 1948, King Abdallah I of Jordan had initiated steps unparalleled in the Arab world to integrate into his kingdom Palestinians (refugees and non-refugees) on both the east and west banks of the Jordan River under his control. Such steps included granting them Jordanian citizenship beginning in December 1949 as a prelude to the annexation of "Arab Palestine" (the West Bank) in April 1950. Presented as a

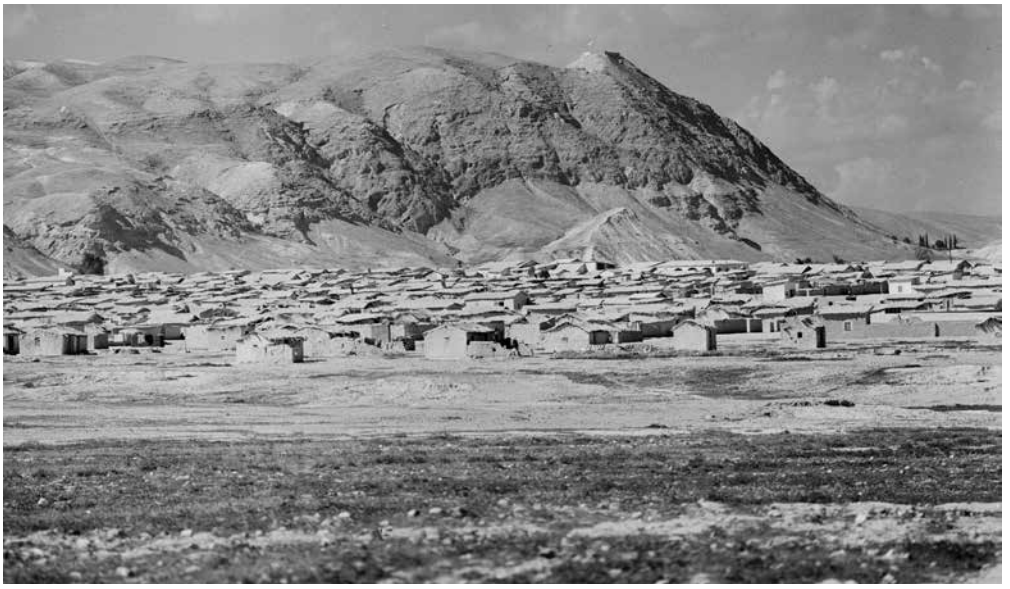

Figure 3. “This refugee camp near the ancient city of Jericho sheltered over 50,000 Palestine refugees in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Today, the scene is similar, but the camp is almost deserted – population, 3,700. In the face of the June 1967 hostilities, the refugees fled to east Jordan where they became refugees for the second time in their lives. Although thousands applied for permission to return after the fighting was over, few permits were granted to the inhabitants of the camps near Jericho on the West Bank.” Photo by Myrtle Winter Chaumeny. © UNRWA.

temporary arrangement pending the implementation of Resolution 194 (III), and more particularly the return of the refugees to their homes, such integration aimed to boost the country’s drive toward institutional and economic development.[17] Jordan was also the only Arab host country that fully supported the ESM works approach and actively engaged UNRWA in the industrial and agricultural development of the country. The creation in 1951 of the Jordan Development Bank that aimed (until 1966–67) to encourage economic development and raise the living conditions of the Jordanians, including the “Jordanians of Palestinian origin,” best illustrates Jordan’s (temporary) assimilationist approach.[18]

The Arab Development Society was thus created with the permission and blessing of Jordanian authorities in June 1949. Its initial objective was to set up a farm that would house and employ refugees for land reclamation (up to four thousand acres) and agricultural production (animal husbandry, fruit trees, vegetables, and cereals) in barren state lands northeast of Jericho that had been considered unfit for agriculture by the British Mandate authorities. However, encouraged by previous experiences of fresh water pumping in nearby areas,[19] ‘Alami was confident that his project would “open up great possibilities for developing vast areas in Jordan, thereby giving hope and work to the refugees now stagnating in the camps.”[20] The sale of the farm’s products would in turn allow for the establishment of vocational education facilities to promote access for young refugees to the local job market.

Figure 4. "Every morning and evening these women go to fetch water from Elisha's fountain ['Ayn al-Sultan] for their families who live in Aqabat Jaber, which lies in the shadow of the mount of temptation near Jericho. Displaced from their homes in Palestine in 1948, a large number of refugees stayed here in the Jordan valley because of its many springs which provide them with water. Elisha's fountain provides water for this camp, as it did for the ancient city of Jericho more than 6,000 years ago. As a result to the 1968 Arab Israeli war, only 2,273 persons out of 52.000 remain in the three camps in Jericho, most of them concentrated [across] the Jordan River into east Jordan." © UNRWA.

Unfortunately, when the ESM toured the region in September 1949, the ADS was still struggling to pump sufficient water suitable for irrigation. Its hydrological experts rapidly concluded that the project was not promising and did not select it as suitable for international support.[21] Suspecting that the ESM decision reflected less on any technical concerns than on the aim of Western powers to resettle the refugees as far as possible from the borders with Israel, the ADS continued to pursue its pumping efforts.[22] These eventually came to fruition in January 1950: irrigation water was found in sufficient quantity and the construction of the farm began. Echoing the ICRC grand narrative of social development in situ replacing relief as laid out above, the ADS enshrined its project within the regeneration of the Palestinian people as a whole – a regeneration that did not suppress Palestine's traditional agrarian society, but sought to empower its main actors, the farmers. As the triumphal ADS put it:

> Following a war that pushed 1,000,000 of his people into homeless squalor, the Arab has found his world more closely united than it has been for 1,000 years . . . he admits the incompatibility of feodary and progress; he has noted the relationship of feudalism to ignorance, poverty to feudalism, foreign control to poverty and ignorance to foreign control. He is determined to raise his world above all of it. Today, his attention is directed to a search for the bootstrap that will achieve this end . . . . In the desert that is the valley

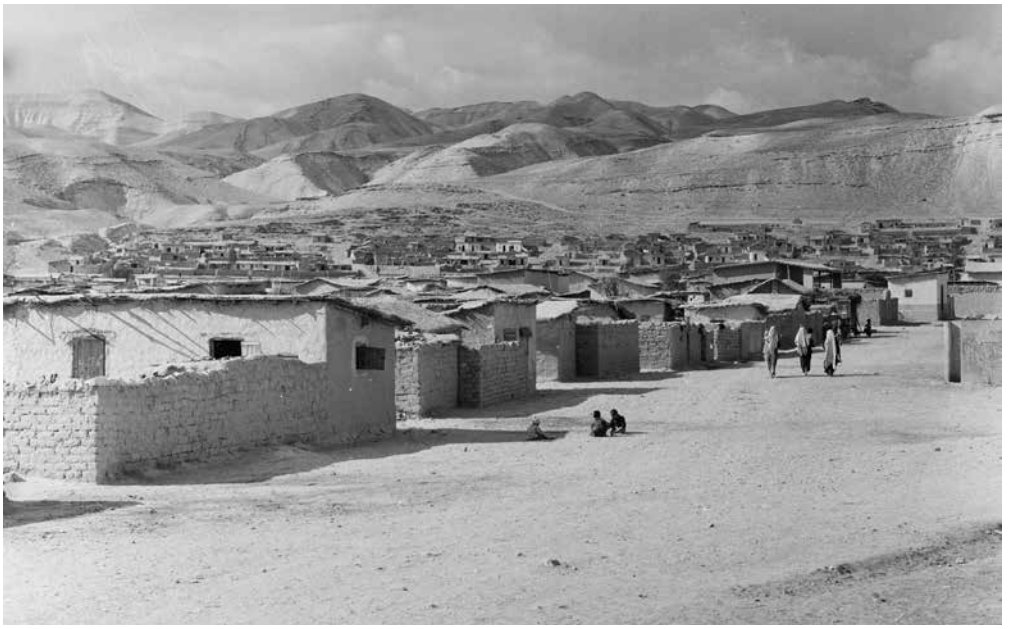

Figure 5. "Aqabat Jaber camp, 1973." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA.

> of the River Jordan, close to the spot where John the Baptist baptized Jesus, Arabs look at a humming little settlement . . . and know that this, on a small scale, is the route they must sooner or later travel.[23]

**The Basis for a Durable ADS/UNRWA Partnership: Shared Narratives, Practices of Refugee Rehabilitation, and Host Country Development**

By 1952, the ADS had reclaimed 620 acres of barren land and related irrigation systems, planted more than fifty thousand forest and fruit trees, constructed many kilometers of asphalt roads, and built a model farm to house camp refugees participating in the project. The farm eventually consisted of sixty buildings equipped with electricity and sewerage systems including housing units for use by workers and trainees, and facilities for the ADS administration and medical and educational activities. The deliberate contrast with the tent or shack housing of the nearby refugee camps was striking.[24] In the next ten years, the land reclaimed by the ADS reached one thousand acres, new methods of irrigation suitable for subtropical irrigation were introduced, and modern poultry and dairy farms began selling their products on the local and regional markets. Some two thousand refugee heads of families were then employed in the farm, and some 160 boys aged eight to eighteen years were given full-board accommodation for academic education, followed by three years of training in agriculture and craft trades such as carpentry, mechanics, tailoring, weaving and shoemaking.[25] Trained graduates were expected to become self-reliant by accessing the local labor market or, alternatively, prosperous Arab countries such as Libya, Iraq, and the Gulf countries where there was high demand for labor.[26]

Figure 6. "Refugee conditions, Ein El Sultan, West Bank." ©1973 UNRWA.

The successful development of the ADS attracted the attention of UNRWA. The ADS was indeed one of the only local social institutions in the Near East engaged in activities that were in line with the "resettlement" projects that the UN General Assembly tasked the agency to implement in the early to mid-1950s in lieu of relief assistance: land reclamation, social inclusion, and construction of permanent housing and livelihoods (training and placement) projects.[27] Both institutions, as the UNRWA commissioner-general would write to Musa ʻAlami in 1968, had similar goals, namely "equipping young refugees with the technical knowledge they need to lead productive lives."[28] They also shared a keen awareness of the long-term societal impact of their educational programs on the regeneration of the Palestinian community as a whole. UNRWA's operational interest in the ADS also lay in the fact that some of the latter's activities covered gaps in its own delivery of services. For instance, the children trained at the ADS were predominantly refugee orphans, a category whose specific needs were not targeted by UNRWA.[29] Moreover, in the mid-1950s, the ADS started delivering relief and micro development services in the form of providing drinking water and works projects, and setting up of small businesses and agricultural cooperatives to West Bank frontier villagers who had not lost their homes but had lost their only means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. They had been registered as "other claimants" by the ICRC and then by UNRWA, receiving only half of the ration provided to eligible refugees with specific funds.[30]

Shared developmental approaches to the refugee issue and operational complementarity swept away voices within UNRWA that continuously questioned the relevance of engaging in partnerships with the ADS. As UNRWA's chief education

services put it in 1968, what was the relevance of the agency supporting "skilled farmers without a land [that would be turned into] agricultural slaves . . . in the Jordan Valley, this freak of nature, 400 meters beneath sea level."[31] What is more, UNRWA was plainly aware of the rural-urban transition that had affected the refugee communities since their exodus: predominantly farmers in 1948, a majority of them (and more so among their children) had resorted to employment as workers in construction and small industry or as technicians and white collar workers in the fast-expanding towns and cities of the Middle East and the Gulf countries.[32] UNRWA facilitated that transition and was therefore not necessarily in line with a project like the ADS whose prime goal was, in its own words, "not to produce white collared young men seeking office jobs and lazing about in the towns . . . [but to] produce cultivators (*fellahin*) better equipped with agricultural knowledge and experience."[33]

Reluctance within UNRWA to engage in agricultural projects was compounded by the failure of governmental vocational training centers in the region (al-Qaddura center in Tulkarm in the West Bank and the Bayt Hanun center in the Gaza Strip) to find decently rewarded employment for its graduates, in the agricultural sector particularly. The ADS also lacked evidence that its graduates found durable employment. While they were expected initially to remain and work in the Jordan Valley, the dearth of agricultural employment there and in Jordan more generally, compelled them, as the ADS believed, to seek employment in the fast-growing economies of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, as well as in South America.[34] However, the ADS did not monitor their whereabouts. This, as an UNRWA official put it, made it hazardous for UNRWA or any donor to engage in common projects with it.[35] Brushing off such critiques, UNRWA commissioner-generals generally held that what was needed was to improve the ADS training services and encourage native citizens to help their development.[36] Supporting this would also show ADS's international supporters, some of whom were also UNRWA donor countries, that the agency was "at least doing something in that direction."[37] Internal UNRWA opposition to partnerships with the ADS, however, may explain why they were few and why not much was done to sustain them when they faced challenges, as we will see below.

Another factor of rapprochement between UNRWA and the ADS was their common positioning vis-à-vis donor countries on the one hand, and refugee communities on the other. Both ADS and UNRWA were subsidized by Western states and private institutions that, in the 1950s, made them appear to Jordanian opposition parties (including communist, Ba'thist, and Islamist parties) as pawns serving Western political agendas – stemming the spread of communism in the region and preserving the state of Israel. This did not help UNRWA or the ADS to convince the refugees of the apolitical nature of their actions, despite continuous awareness campaigns stressing that their developmental programs did not prejudice the provisions of Article 11 of Resolution 194, namely, in refugee parlance, the right of return.[38] Reflecting on its various works and larger-scale resettlement plan of the 1950s, UNRWA mainly ascribed their failure, beyond the meagerness of the physical resources and funding made available for development, to the refugees' reluctance to engage in any project

likely to involve permanent resettlement given their "strong desire to return to their homeland . . . that springs mainly from the natural longing of the people for their old homes, strengthened and encouraged by . . . resolution (194) of the General Assembly." Such attitudes also "influenced the policies of Near East Governments," which eventually abandoned the idea of implementing them – including Jordan after the mid-1950s."[39] For both the refugees and their host countries, the preservation of UNRWA and its general programs became one of the main guarantors of the United Nations' commitment to ultimately solve the refugee issue through the implementation of the right of return.

The ADS, whose leader Musa 'Alami belonged to the discredited former ruling Palestinian elite, was not immune to refugee criticism. 'Alami's publicly held views that the choice under the present circumstances was not one between settlement and return, but between demoralizing life in camps and the restoration of dignity and usefulness as productive members of society, were considered patronizing and serving Western agendas. Camp refugees, who were already resisting UNRWA's attempts to transform their tents into housing units refused to settle in the farmhouses, lest this lead to the dismantlement of the camps and be interpreted as a renunciation to their right of return. These houses eventually only hosted orphan students and trainees – an "Arab boys' town" as it came to be known.[40] Tensions with camp refugees reached a critical point in 1955–56. Triggered by rumors that Jordan would join the pro-Western, anti-communist Pact of Mutual Cooperation (the "Baghdad Pact"), anti-government demonstrations and riots erupted across the country. Refugee communities participated in those activities under the banner of opposition to resettlement. Government institutions and UNRWA, whose storehouses in Hebron were ransacked, were not the rioters' only target: in Jericho, a crowd of some thirty-five thousand persons, mainly camp refugees, stormed the ADS facilities and set them on fire, while shouting hostile slogans calling its management "imperialists" and "traitors."[41]

Such hostile stances subsided in the late 1950s, when UNRWA abandoned its collective reintegration schemes and related handovers of UNRWA services, opting for a more gradual individual reintegration approach based on academic and vocational/technical education and inclusion in the local or regional economy.[42] The refugees approved of such an approach since it did not seem to threaten their refugee status and its main symbols: the refugee camps and its high concentration of UNRWA relief, educational, and health installations. As UNRWA confirmed in 1957:

> Although the desire of the refugees for repatriation and their opposition to permanent resettlement continue unabated, there are signs among them of a growing appreciation of the desirability of self-support and of rehabilitation, in the broad sense of an improvement in their conditions of life and prospects for the future. This shift is noticeable not only in the increased demands for assistance in individual self-support projects, but also in the substantial rise in interest in vocational training of all types and even in the frequent requests for more and better housing.[43]

The refugees' new approach, allowing for upward social mobility in the context of exile, prepared the ground for the safe elaboration and implementation of livelihood projects.

**The ADS-UNRWA Partnership: Technical and Financial Support and Joint Livelihood Projects**

Relations between UNRWA and the ADS took two main forms: unilateral logistical administrative and financial support from UNRWA to the ADS; and joint livelihood projects aimed to promote the inclusion of youth refugees in the labor market. In retrospect, the unilateral support provided by UNRWA on behalf of ADS was the most impactful component of their relationship, proving instrumental in guaranteeing the development of the latter's educational and commercial activities despite occasional host authority intrusions. Such support first consisted of the agency regularly encouraging its refugee school students to attend the ADS vocational training center and exchanging trainers with ADS. More significant was UNRWA using its international agency status for the tax-free import of material and cattle needed by the ADS for the expansion of its commercial farm and vocational training facilities. This arrangement ended in October 1959, when the Jordanian authorities decided that they would no longer accept to clear goods for UNRWA involving commercial transactions.[44] UNRWA also served as a funds transfer platform whenever international donors (such as Switzerland, Denmark, and Ireland in 1966–67) expressed interest in financially supporting the ADS, but could not do so because their internal regulations did not allow them to fund private entities. Finally, UNRWA proved decisive in guaranteeing the ADS's survival in the wake of the 1967 war that had resulted in the exile of 'Alami to Beirut and the destruction of part of the facilities. UNRWA appointed a liaison officer tasked with assisting the ADS administrative staff in the absence of 'Alami, repaired damaged material, and purchased its agricultural products. The idea of a (temporary) UNRWA custodianship of the ADS was even considered by both parties, but Israeli occupation authorities opposed it.[45] While the latter were supportive of the "integrationist" dimension of the ADS project and appreciated UNRWA's support for it, they insisted that, as an NGO, the ADS had to operate under their direct aegis.[46] A compromise was eventually reached, whereby UNRWA support to the ADS would assume the looser label of "provisional sponsorship." Such a designation also suited 'Alami since it affirmed that the ADS administration should in principle remain "in Arab hands."[47]

Attempts to establish formal UNRWA-ADS joint ventures in the fields of technical and vocational training were less successful. Three of them were implemented, but were either delayed or ended shortly after their inception. Project 1 in 1955 consisted of UNRWA funding five years of schooling and vocational training for UNRWA-registered refugee children at the ADS. Project 2 in 1966–67 provided for UNRWA to channel Swiss Technical Aid funds to the ADS on the condition that the ADS allocate such funds for the training of UNRWA school students in its vocational center. Project 3, the largest project, extended the "emergency" aid delivered by UNRWA to the ADS in the wake of the 1967 war: UNRWA was to directly contribute as a sponsor to

the running costs of the ADS training center, combined with a three-year enrollment of some forty UNRWA-registered boarding students. The mixed outcomes of such projects are due to a variety of factors that compounded the inherent difficulties originating from a sensitive context marked by the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict, chronic instability, and the political dimension of the refugee issue.

**The UN's "Original Sins"**

Despite apparent ideological and operational commonalities between their mandates, relations between UNRWA and the ADS remained strained. Notably, this was due, according to UNRWA officials, to 'Alami's "imperious attitude," as he tended to ignore UNRWA's operational advice.[48] This attitude may be explained by 'Alami's resentment of the agency and the entire UN system that originated from the ESM decision to reject his project as unrealistic in 1949. The belief either that UN officials were not fully competent or that their decisions served a hidden pro-Israeli political agenda or both continued to haunt 'Alami. Another explanatory reason for his uneasy attitude toward the agency is the opinion he may have held (together with most refugees and host country officials) that the true nature of UNRWA's existence was less the expression of the international community's support for the Palestine refugees than an unquestionable entitlement owed to the Palestinians at large for the predicament that befell them in 1948 and the United Nations' responsibility in it.

**Financial Issues**

Financial constraints have from the outset plagued UNRWA's existence. Essentially based on voluntary contributions of the members of the international community (as an expression of its temporary status), its budget has rarely allowed it to develop specific projects outside the already difficult fulfilment of its quasi-governmental education, health, and relief responsibilities. For example, Project 1 was prematurely abandoned a few months after it was launched in 1955, as UNRWA felt that its limited educational budget could not sustain the five-year financing of academic and vocational education of refugee children.[49]

**The Refugee Status Requirement**

A concern that affected all three projects was the donor country requirement that at least half of the child beneficiaries of the projects be persons duly registered as bona fide refugees (or their descendants),[50] and not "economic refugees," registered by both the ADS and UNRWA, such as the frontier villagers or needy Jericho villagers trained by the ADS.[51] Concern was also heightened by the significant number of fraudulent registrations with the agency, including host community families with forged former Palestinian IDs, undeclared deaths, and duplicate refugees.[52] The preparation for Project 2, for instance, dragged on for several months until UNRWA made sure that the Swiss contribution would be spent on a population of children at least half of whom were bona fide registered refugees.

### The Multiple Significations of UNRWA's Eligibility Regulations

The incompatibility between UNRWA's eligibility regulations and the refugees' multi-dimensional attachment to UNRWA services played a key role in the failure of Project 3. UNRWA eligibility rules excluded refugees who received free residential training in sponsored training centers from the ration program.[53] Most trainees affected by the suspension of the rations protested and angrily left the ADS center without the required prior authorization.[54] In so doing, they fell under another eligibility rule that permanently froze assistance to trainees interrupting their training without prior permission.[55] This further fuelled the refugees' anger at both the ADS and UNRWA, demonstrating the importance that UNRWA's active ration card had come to play in refugee communities. It provided access to relief assistance and, as the agency itself acknowledged, a tangible asset upon the strength of which substantial sums could be borrowed.[56] It also constituted, especially in Jordan where refugees were citizens, a formal proof of their refugee identity and possible evidence for their claim to return to their original homes. In June 1969, claiming that the "alteration of the refugee status of the trainees' families had resulted in such difficulties in recruitment and in retaining trainees of the ADS, and in general to such frictions," the ADS decided that it was preferable to forego UNRWA's support.[57] Despite conciliatory steps by the agency, including a possibility to revert the training leavers to their prior status as recipients of rations, the ADS refused to rescind its decision, thereby formally ending their partnership.

UNRWA-ADS relations did not recover after the failure of Project 3. During the 1970s, UNRWA had little contact with the ADS and even stopped playing its traditional role as a channel for international funds.[58] Nevertheless, the ADS remained under its radar: In 1980, Musa 'Alami, then eighty-three years old, fell ill, which raised concerns about the society's future. UNRWA proposed to take over temporarily the management of its vocational training center with 'Alami's consent and to provide additional funding, pending its handover to any future local entity or UN body.[59] Eventually, Arab solutions were found to ensure the sustainability of the ADS. A new Palestinian director was appointed and the society somehow returned to its original foundations by benefitting from the support of the Joint Jordanian-Palestinian (PLO) Fund for the Steadfastness of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Homeland, a body created by the Arab League in the wake of the 1978 Baghdad Arab summit to help local institutions resist Israeli occupation. UNRWA welcomed these developments with some relief.[60]

## Conclusion

Since its inception, UNRWA has constituted a lifeline for the Palestine refugees despite recurrent budgetary challenges, acting as a quasi-governmental institution directly providing essential basic services to an ever-growing number of beneficiaries, from 957,000 individuals in 1950 to nearly 6.4 million in 2021.[61] Throughout the years, it has established operational standards for its educational, health, relief, and social services that have inspired host country authorities to institute similar programs across the Near East and prompted them to conclude

operational partnerships with UNRWA, in Jordan especially. However, UNRWA's relations with its local institutional environment (especially with institutions that shared the same belief in refugee socioeconomic rehabilitation) have remained underdeveloped, limiting the scope and overall impact of its humanitarian/developmental action in the host countries. The in-depth analysis of the operational ties the agency maintained over two decades with one key local non-governmental institution operating in the West Bank, the Arab Development Society, provides key information in this regard, showcasing the relatively limited importance local institutions came to play in UNRWA's development strategies and practices.

The key commonalities between UNRWA and ADS activities and objectives prompted the agency to provide unilateral logistical, administrative and financial support to the latter. Such support at times proved essential for the survival of the ADS, as when it played a key role in rehabilitating its damaged facilities in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. However, establishing durable project-based partnerships proved to be more difficult. Among the constraining challenges lay financial and administrative issues traditionally faced by developmental projects such as insufficient funding, host authorities' restrictions, targeting and, to some extent, lack of commitment from segments of UNRWA's own staff. More intractable difficulties stemmed from the refugee communities' opposition to any developmental initiative or eligibility regulation that appeared to threaten their refugee status and/or their entitlement to humanitarian services. The combination of those challenges contributed to distance UNRWA from any long-term partnership with local institutions and to prioritize relations with governmental entities. Reflecting on UNRWA's experience with the ADS in 1980, the agency's commissioner-general acknowledged that its experience with the ADS brought its officials to "exercise great caution in expanding . . . activities . . . by stepping into the shoes of existing NGOs."[62] Such distancing has proven durable; despite UNRWA's calls for greater collaboration with its local institutional environment since the mid-2000s, partnerships have remained very limited.

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**Endnotes**

1 The main historical studies on UNRWA are: E. H. Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees*: *A Study in Nonterritorial Administration* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1971); Milton Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1989); Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to the Palestinians* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Francesca Albanese and Lex Takkenberg, *Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Since the early 2000s, a series of articles have widened the scope of research on UNRWA, including anthropological approaches and new topics such as refugee protection and refugee participation in refugee camps. Several were included in: Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal, and Lex Takkenberg, eds., *UNRWA and Palestine Refugees*: *From Relief and Works to Human Development* (London: Routledge, 2014); and "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees 60 Years Later," special issue of *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2009).

2 The field offices are in: Jordan (east bank), the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Syria.

3 These centers were established in 1952–53 to provide some social activities (sports and voluntary work for male youth, embroidery, and other traditional crafts for women) in isolated camps where there was little chance of obtaining work and establishing social relations with the host communities. Later, in the 1960s, centers were established for disabled people. Today, most of these centers function independently from UNRWA, except in Jordan where they remain under the agency's umbrella.

4 UNRWA's historical archives contain only one file documenting such relations in the series Re 300 (V) "Projects for Sponsorship": the Musa Bey Alami – Arab Development Society, Part I (1960–67), Part II (1968–75), and Part III (1976–80).

5 Besides the ICRC that operated in today's West Bank and Israel (for the Jewish refugees and the Arab displaced persons that remained in Israel), the League of Red Crescent Societies operated in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (East Bank), and the American Friends Service Committee in Gaza. All three agencies began their relief operations in December 1948 and handed over their services to UNRWA on 30 April 1950.

6 The ICRC archives have been accessible for researchers since 1996. I consulted the ICRC archives at the ICRC headquarters in Geneva in 1998 on behalf of the Institute of Palestine Studies for an analytical report on the ICRC archives about its missions in Palestine as a delegation during the first Arab-Israeli conflict and for relief assistance for refugees and non-refugees (February 1948–50), and as the Commissariat of the ICRC for the Palestine Refugees in the current West Bank and in Israel proper under the umbrella of the UNRPR (December 1948 – June 1950); see Jalal Al Husseini, "Red Cross Palestine Refugee Archives (1948–1950)," in *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis*, ed. Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001). There are no specific regulations for accessing UNRWA archives. I consulted the UNRWA-ADS archives in Amman in 1997 within the framework of an academic program conducted by the Centre d'études et de recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (CERMOC). UNRWA, which participated in the program in a supervisor capacity, opened its archives to involved researchers.

7 See United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), *Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East*: *An Approach to Economic Development in the Middle East*, UNCCP, UN doc. A/AC.25/6, 28 December 1949, 16. UN General Assembly Resolution 194, Article 11, resolved that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date and that compensation for the property of those choosing not to return . . . should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible." Moreover, the UNCCP was instructed to "facilitate the repatriation, resettlement, and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation."

8 The ESM team, who toured the region in September 1949, was headed by Gordon Clapp, chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States.

9 United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), *Final Report*, UN doc. A/AC.25/6, 28 December 1949, 15–20.

10 Such larger developments were to fall under the responsibility of the host governments, UNCCP, *Final Report*, 3, 19.

11 As UNCCP members put it in a meeting with the ICRC even before the start of the Lausanne

Peace Conference, in March 1949; see Lettre de Escher à P. Ruegger (Pdt CICR), 6 March 1949, ICRC Archives: series G.59/I/GC/E, box 845, file: "Correspondance avec le Commissariat."

12 However, the ICRC warned the UN General Assembly about the limited time frame set by the ESM for the termination of relief as a result of socioeconomic rehabilitation (nine months); disturbances were to be expected. "Troisième rapport général d'activité du Commissariat du CICR pour l'aide aux réfugiés en Palestine (période du 1er octobre au 31 décembre 1949)," 91–98, ICRC Archives, series G.59/I/GC/E, box 858.

13 "Troisième rapport général d'activité."

14 In: Personal and confidential document by Max Wolf (advisor ICRC), 26 July 1949, ICRC Archives, series G. 59/I/GC, box 840, file XIV: "Correspondance diverse 1948–1950"; and Major Lüscher, "Rapport sur l'organisation des camps," 20 December 1948, 11, in ICRC Archives, series G.59/I/GC/E, box 860.

15 Such as the General Committee to Care for the Affairs of Displaced Arabs in Palestine based in Nablus; see Bahjat Sabri, *al-Lajna al-'amma li-l-'inaya bi-shu'un al-nazihin al-'Arab fî Filastin min khilal milaffat baladiyyat Nablus wa awraqiha* [The general committee to care for the affairs of displaced Arabs in Palestine from the files and documents of the Nablus municipality] (Nablus: al-Najah University, 1991).

16 "Note sur l'entretien du Dr Gloor avec M. le Dr M. al-Husseini," in ICRC Archives, series G. 59/I/GC/E, box 854, file X: "Correspondance diverse 1948–1950," subfile "Correspondance diverse, novembre 1948 au 30 juin 1949." The UNRPR, whose mandate was limited to the administration of relief aid, nevertheless provided the ADS with a small financial contribution for the initial development phase of its project.

17 In December 1948, pro-Hashemite Palestinian notables gathered in Jericho and proclaimed their wish to see Jordan annex what remained of Palestine; such a resolution was upheld in other similar conferences in Ramallah and Nablus and would lead to the granting of citizenship to the Palestine refugees on both sides of the Jordan river (and to indigenous West Bankers). King Abdallah also attempted to reach a peace deal with Israel until the early 1950s; see Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

18 See *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA 1 May 1950–30 June 1951* (A/1905 add. 1), par. 84.

19 In nearby lands owned by Muhyi al-Din Effendi Husayni, fresh water had been successfully dug for in the 1930s. See ADS, *The Arab Development Society – Jericho* (Jerusalem: Commercial Press, 1953), 12. Other further experiences of water pumping and salt and mineral extraction from the Dead Sea were successfully conducted during the British Mandate period on Palestine. See Nadi Abusaada, "Consolidating the Rule of Experts: A Model Village for Refugees in the Jordan Valley, 1945–55," *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 10, no. 2 (2021): 366.

20 ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 13–14.

21 UNCCP, *Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East II* (Technical Supplement), December 1949, 70. The ESM did not totally condemn the project, but believed that irrigation water for this tract of land could better be obtained by conserving the surplus waters of Wadi Qilt (in the hills closer to Jerusalem) and conducting the water to the tract by means of a concrete-lined canal.

22 ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 12.

23 *Bootstrap: The Arab Development Society's Jordan Valley Project* (Beirut: Near East News Association, 1953), foreword.

24 ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 18–21. The ADS aimed to provide a scheme of refugee resettlement alternative to the UNRWA's, which manifested itself in building more permanent structures than tents or temporary shacks set up in many refugee camps. See, Abusaada, "Consolidating the Rule of Experts," 374.

25 Successful trainees were offered scholarships to gain higher education in universities such as the American University of Beirut and Brigham Young University in the United States. See Mohammad Qutob, "Resilience through the Decades: The Arab Development Society," *This Week in Palestine* 278 (June 2021).

26 ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 22.

27 Following the failure of the ESM "relief works approach" to employ a substantial number of refugees (15,000 whereas the refugee labor force was estimated at 250,000), the UN General Assembly Resolutions 393 (December 1950) and 513 (January 1952) invited UNRWA to reorient its efforts toward

larger-scale resettlement schemes, notably through direct interventions to increase the economic absorption capacity of the local economies (including the expansion of vocational training), install refugee communities in empty territories of the Sinai, Syria, and the Jordan Valley, and promote the emigration of refugees to other Arab countries.

28 Letter dated 30 January 1968 from the Deputy-Commissioner-General, J. Reddaway to Musa 'Alami, in UNRWA Archives, series Re 300 (V): "Musa Bey Alami – Arab Development Society, Part II (1968–1975)" (hereunder referred to as UNRWA Archives II).

29 As acknowledged by UNRWA in *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA 1956–1957* (A/3686), par. 9–10.

30 In 1955, the frontier villages population totaled about two hundred thousand inhabitants living in 111 villages (ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 23). The UNRWA standard definition of the Palestine refugee stipulates that it is "a person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the conflict in 1948, and who, as a result of this conflict, lost *both* his home and his means of livelihood." The limitation of services to frontier villagers and to other economic refugees (Jerusalem poor, Gaza poor, and compromised cases in Lebanon) to half-rations was decided upon by the ICRC and the other voluntary agencies and pursued by UNRWA after May 1950. See UNRWA, *Consolidated Eligibility Instructions*, 1 November 1961.

31 See Chief Education Services (van Diffelen) to G. P. Cassels (Chief, UNRWA operations – West Bank), 2 January 1968, UNRWA Archives II.

32 The few refugee agricultural settlements set up with the assistance of UNRWA and the Jordanian authorities failed to become self-reliant; see Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876–1983* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 158–62.

33 ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 25.

34 See letter from Musa 'Alami to Deputy Commissioner, 21 January 1968 (UNRWA Archives II). The letter did not give any indication about the number of alumni who had migrated or found jobs in Jordan.

35 UNRWA official John Defrates recognized that UNRWA shared the same monitoring difficulties: "They have the same difficulty which we share to find out what happens to the young ones when they leave the training center." Letter from Defrates to Norman Bentwich, Jewish Society for Human Services, 8 October 1965, in UNRWA Archives I.

36 Letter from Commissioner-General to Director of Liaison Europe and D.C. (New York), Subject: Information on Musa Alami and the Arab Development Society, 12 March 1963, UNRWA Archives I.

37 Executive Cabinet Meeting of 31 November 1968, in UNRWA Archives I. Associations called Friends of the ADS were established in the 1960s in the United States and Great Britain. Qutob, "Resilience through the Decades." Founded by the former commissioner-general of UNRWA, John Davis, in 1968, the American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) also offered political and financial support to ADS. The initial ADS funders were non-governmental British (Oxfam) and U.S. (Ford Foundation) organizations as well as the U.S.-sponsored Point IV Program that aimed to provide technical and financial support to the economies of countries "threatened" by the rise of communism.

38 Such reassurances were a mainstay of all UN General Assembly resolutions about UNRWA in the 1950s, when the focus was on resettlement and the handover of UNRWA services to the host countries.

39 UNRWA, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA 1954–1955* (A/2978), par. 35. The number of reinstalled refugees, that is, who were thinned out of the rations lists, remained low, at 24,000 in 1957, while the number of registered refugees was at 933,500 persons. UNRWA, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA 1954–1955* (A/3686).

40 See Cecil Hourani, "The Arab Development Society's Project in Jericho, Jordan," *UNESCO International Social Science Bulletin* 4 (1953); and H. A. Fisher, "Up Go Walls at Jericho," *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 May 1954, republished in ADS, *Arab Development Society – Jericho*, 54–55, 62.

41 Based on Musa 'Alami and ADS witnesses in: Geoffrey Furlonge, *Palestine Is My Country: The Story of Musa Alami* (London: John Murray, 1969), 188–89; Amelie Marie Goichon, *Jordanie réelle (I)* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve and Larose, 1967), 473–76. These events reported in the Jordanian media referred to wide-scale damage suffered by the

ADS facilities (*al-Difa'*, 19 December 1955). The damage resulted in the ADS temporarily losing export markets. Financial support from the U.S. oil company ARAMCO enabled the ADS to resume its operations.

42 From 1969–70, the education program became the first program in terms of budget.

43 UNRWA, *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA 1956–1957* (A/3686), par. 39.

44 See letter of UNRWA Director, John H. Davis, to Musa 'Alami, 1 July 1959, UNRWA Archives I. UNRWA would thus only be allowed to import material used for its educational activities. This incident triggered a heated exchange of letters between UNRWA and 'Alami, who seemed to accuse the agency of having played a role in Jordan's decision.

45 See memorandum drafted by Musa 'Alami, "UNRWA's Custodianship of the ADS Projects," 25 July 1967.

46 See for instance "Minutes of the Meeting Held at the Area Office in Jericho [. . .] on 3 October 1967 between the Arab Development Society and UNRWA," in UNRWA Archives, series Re 300 (V): "Musa Bey Alami – Arab Development Society," Part I.

47 See letter from Deputy Commissioner-General to Cassels, 3 January 1968, UNRWA Archives II.

48 Interoffice Memorandum from AD/ADM to Director, 30 April 1960, UNRWA Archives I.

49 See "Memorandum – From Chief, Education and Training Division to Director," 17 May 1960, UNRWA Archives I.

50 This, as the UNRWA deputy commissioner-general clarified, was a principle already applied in other cases of support with local organizations. Letter from Deputy Commissioner-General Reddaway to Geoffrey Furlonge, subject: Swiss Technical Cooperation, 14 September 1966, UNRWA Archives I.

51 In November 1960, the ADS delivered academic instruction (seventy-nine children) and vocational training (eighty-one students) to seventy-eight bona fide refugees, seventy-one frontier villagers, and eleven needy West Bankers. Letter from Area Officer to Deputy-Commissioner-General Reddaway – Survey, 10 November 1966, UNRWA Archives I.

52 In September 1949, the percentage of "false refugees" was estimated at 5 percent of the number of registered persons in Gaza; less than 10 per cent in Lebanon and Syria; and 30 percent in "Arab Palestine" (West Bank) and in Transjordan, in UNCCP, *Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East* (A/AC.25/6, part I), 1949. Efforts to "rectify" ration lists were made difficult in Jordan because of the pressures exerted by the refugees on the host authorities. The latter interrupted all investigations on the grounds that continuing them threatened public security – as explained in *Special Report of the Director Concerning Other Claimants for Relief* (A/2978/Add.1), par. 73.

53 UNRWA, *Consolidated Eligibility Instructions*, 1 November 1961, Chapters I and IV.

54 This affected twenty-two interns; sixteen other interns were classified as Children Registered for Services (CRS) and were on the waiting list for receiving rations.

55 UNRWA, *Consolidated Eligibility Instructions*, Chapters I and IV.

56 *Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA 1953–1954* (A/2717), par. 63. The general distribution of rations whereby all refugee families below a certain level of income were entitled to rations was replaced in 1982–83 by the more restrictive Special Hardship Cases regime whereby only the poorest refugees belonging to specific vulnerable social categories (such as female-headed families) received rations.

57 See Note for the Record of Commissioner-General Michelmore, 17 June 1968, UNRWA Archives II.

58 See letter from Defrates (UNRWA Deputy Public Information Office) to Save the Children Sweden (STC), January 1974, UNRWA Archives II.

59 See DUO/West Bank (Skinner) to Commissioner-General, 2 September 1980, UNRWA Archives, series Re 300 (V): "Musa Bey Alami – Arab Development Society," Part III (1976–1980) (hereunder UNRWA Archives III).

60 Interoffice memorandum Deputy Commissioner-General to Director Education, 18 December 1980, in UNRWA Archives III.

61 See UNRWA, "What We Do: Relief and Social Services," online at www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/eligibility-registration (accessed 1 March 2023).

62 Interoffice memorandum Deputy Commissioner-General to Director of Education, 18 December 1980, UNRWA Archives III.

INTERVIEW

# UNRWA Archives of Palestine Refugee Family Files

Interview with Dr. Valeria Cetorelli and Dr. Dorothée Klaus

On 23 February 2023, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 guest editors Francesca Biancani and Maria Chiara Rioli e-interviewed two officials of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) – Dr. Valeria Cetorelli, Head of Refugee Registration and Eligibility, and Dr. Dorothée Klaus, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon – to explore UNRWA's projects and activities involving its historical archives. The editors and interviewees wish to thank Dr. Lex Takkenberg, former UNRWA Chief Ethics Officer, for his review and comments on the transcription of this interview.

**When were the Palestine refugee family files created and where are they located?**

UNRWA was established by UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 and began operations on 1 May 1950. Since then, the agency has maintained and updated family files of registered Palestine refugees to determine their refugee status and service eligibility. The files now span up to five generations and document life events, such as births, marriages, migrations, and deaths, from the Nakba until today. During its more than seventy years of operations, UNRWA has regularly improved and modernized its registration procedures, including moving from paper to digital records. As per international best practices, the historical documents remain in the locations where they were originally archived – in the agency's five field offices in Beirut, Damascus, Amman,

East Jerusalem, and Gaza City. The digital records are currently stored in the agency's web-based refugee registration information system.

**What is the extent of the historical archives? How many documents do they contain and what are the main typologies of documents?**

The historical archives contain nearly thirty million documents that fall within two main categories: registration cards and supporting materials. The oldest registration cards are Red Cross cards from 1948–49. During these two years, the Red Cross together with the American Friends Service Committee provided emergency assistance to those affected by the hostilities. These cards listed the name, age, and sex of family members who were receiving assistance and attested to their place of residence in Palestine before displacement and their place of residence at the time of registration. In 1950, the cards were handed over to UNRWA which, based on field investigation reports, reregistered those families who were deemed to meet the agency's operational definition of Palestine refugees, having lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. UNRWA used master cards to enter information about registered families following a similar format to that previously used by the Red Cross. Updates to these master cards were made until 1957; newborns were added to the list of family members, deceased persons were crossed off, separate cards were filled for newly married couples, and place of residence was amended for those who moved to another area. From 1958, the registration procedure became more systematic with the introduction of index cards where vital events and changes of residence were recorded using a standardized coding system. Updates were based on re-investigation reports, civil certificates, and other evidentiary documents that were archived as supporting materials in the family files.

**When and how did the archives experience a "digital turn"?**

The computerization of the family files began in 1979 on an IBM mainframe. Copies of the index cards were regularly sent from UNRWA's field offices to the then headquarters in Vienna to be reflected in the IBM file structure. In 1996, the index cards were replaced by field registration databases on a Paradox server that maintained the same standardized coding system. Batches of updated records were regularly sent to the new headquarters in Amman to be integrated in a unified database. The electronic updates built upon documents in the family files, which continued serving as references in day-to-day operations. To halt their deterioration by wear and tear, UNRWA embarked on a project to digitize them between 2004 and 2009. In 2010, the agency launched a web-based refugee registration information system on a Microsoft server; the digitized documents were saved in a secure data storage and made retrievable for operational use through a virtual private network. However, due to funding shortages, the digitization project was halted with about one third of the documents in the family files not yet scanned and the content of scanned documents not yet systematically classified. Digital records were not created for those refugees

who died before 2010; information about them can, to this day, only be found by manually reviewing all historical registration cards and supporting materials, which is a complex and time-consuming process.

**Is there an intention to complete the digitization of historical documents and ensure all refugee records are electronically stored in the current refugee registration information system?**

Besides constituting the backbone of UNRWA's operations, the family files have been referred to consistently, and by very different parties, as the main source to identify the eligible population for return and compensation as per UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III). Their preservation and accessibility are therefore an integral part of the protection of Palestine refugee rights under international law. UNRWA is committed to continuing its efforts to eventually establish a comprehensive e-archive of these files. This will not only involve scanning, reviewing, and classifying all documents in the files, but also retracing family trees and linking, through these documents, all currently registered refugees back to their ancestors who were displaced from Palestine in 1948.

**What is the estimated timeline for developing this e-archive? Are the required resources available?**

Since last year, UNRWA has been able to use small project funding to design and pilot a rigorous process to scan, review, and classify documents, identify all family members across generations and reconstruct family trees in the refugee registration information system. The pilot has focused on ten villages in northern Palestine that were destroyed in 1948 and whose inhabitants fled, nearly all to Lebanon. A total of about fifty thousand registered refugees originating from these villages have been linked, through their digitized family files, back to their ancestors who were displaced in 1948. Building on the experience of the pilot, UNRWA is now fundraising to scale up the project. If the required funds are raised, it is estimated that it will take around two years to complete the digitization of historical documents and an additional six years to retrace family trees of all 5.9 million currently registered refugees.

**How is the project managed?**

In the coming months, the pilot team, including registration assistants and officers, data analytics and quality assurance specialists, and senior supervisors under the technical leadership of the UNRWA head of refugee registration and eligibility division, will continue working on the files village by village and later move to towns and cities. Given the importance of this project in relation to Palestine refugee status and associated rights, a special steering committee comprising representatives of host countries and interested donor countries will be regularly briefed on key activities and outcomes for review and discussion. This committee shall also support in finding an adequate implementation format that allows UNRWA to proceed within an acceptable timeframe and resource envelope to complete the planned undertakings.

**Have any refugees been given the opportunity to view their family tree and documents attesting to their family history?**

The pilot team consists of twenty-five young Palestine refugees in Lebanon who, due to restrictions on their social and economic rights in the country, have little chance to find a meaningful occupation despite possessing high academic qualifications and skills. For them, the project means much more than just employment. They have all used the opportunity to retrace their own family tree through their files; they have been able to reconnect with dispersed family members and learned about family history that they did not know of. They have urged that the project be scaled up to offer many Palestine refugees the gift of their family trees and digitized historical documents as a contribution to better understanding their origins and identity through their ancestry. However, UNRWA is aware that the exposure to documents reflecting the trauma and hardship experienced in 1948 may need to occur in a managed setting to meet ethical considerations. The format within which this may occur will have to be yet further explored through participatory studies and advised by academic specialists. Information security and data privacy are further considerations to be taken into account.

**Will the family files continue to be updated once the e-archive project is completed?**

Regular registration operations will continue without interruption. An e-UNRWA mobile platform was launched this month to further promote the right to register for all Palestine refugees and facilitate reporting of life events both within and beyond UNRWA's fields of operation. By creating an e-UNRWA account, refugees can now view their registration records, request any updates and submit evidentiary documents in digital format through their smartphones. The e-UNRWA mobile platform is fully integrated with UNRWA's refugee registration information system. This means that, once the e-archive project is completed, any newly registered refugees will be automatically linked to their 1948 ancestors and their digital documentation added to the family files.

**Will it be possible to use the family files for research purposes? What content will be displayed to the public on the e-archive?**

The research community has long showed interest in inventorying and analyzing the richness of information that is contained in the family files. In preparation for scaling up the e-archive project, UNRWA is establishing a research advisory board of renowned Palestinian, Arab, and international academics to support the production of consolidated multidisciplinary research on the Nakba and Palestine refugee history as evidenced in these files. Again, access to files is currently difficult in the absence of a tailored data protection and privacy support structure to accompany any researchers. A respective framework needs to be created in the near future to make the richness of information available for research purposes. It is envisioned that the e-archive will have a public interface displaying an aggregate overview of the places of origin, numbers, and life trajectories of those who were displaced in 1948 and their descendants, now unto their fifth generation, for whom a just and durable solution is still outstanding.

Figure 1. "Jerusalem Old City: area near Wailing Wall, after demolition," 1967 (?). Photographer unknown. Verso of photo: **"**UNRWA was authorized by the General Assembly after the June 1967 hostilities in the Middle East, by Resolution 2252 (E.S.V.), 'to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure, to other persons in the area who are at present displaced and are in serious need of immediate assistance as a result of the recent hostilities.' Arab families who were living in this area qualified for this assistance, as their homes were demolished, following the hostilities." UNRWA Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.

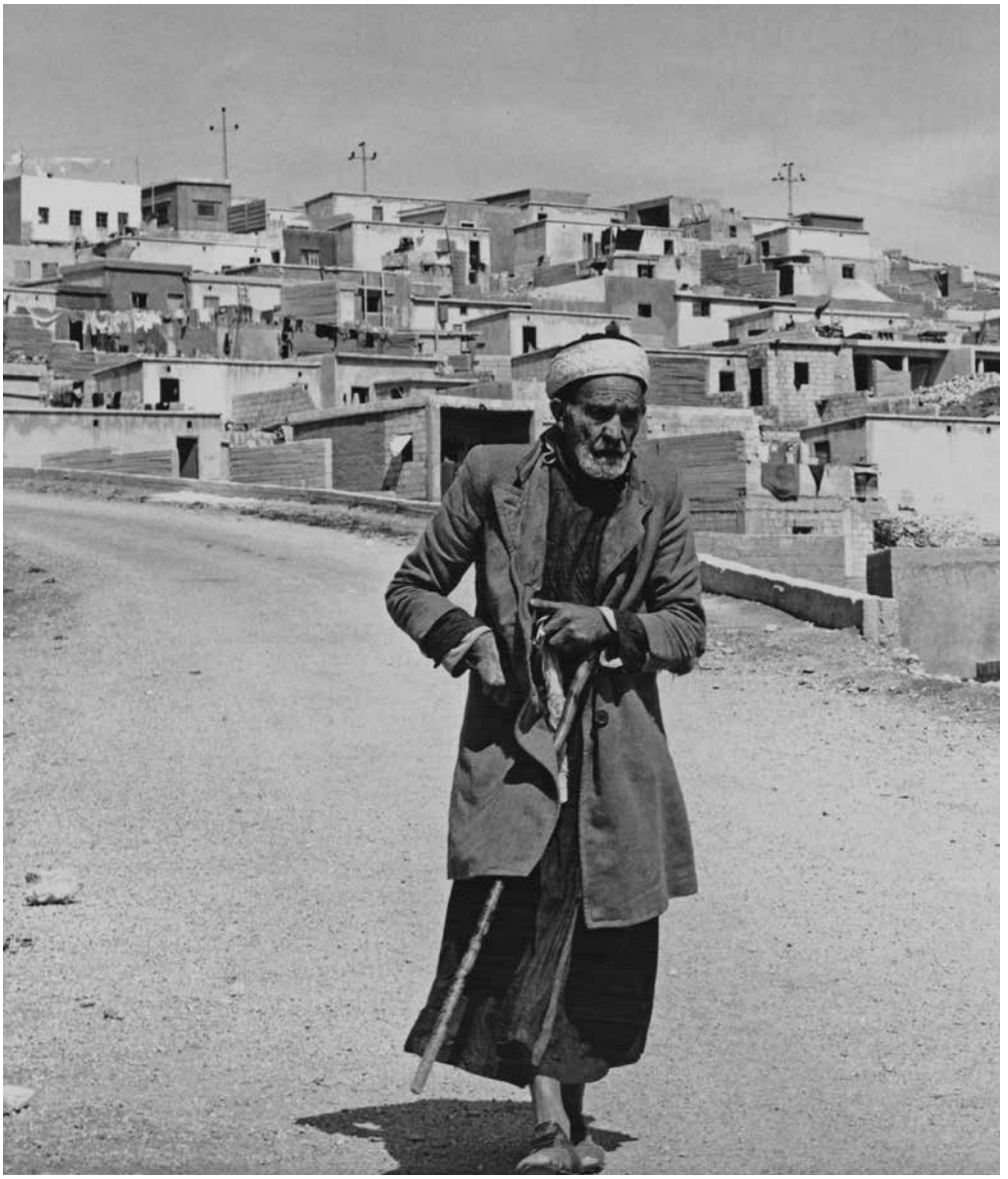

Figure 2. "One of the older Arab refugees at UNRWA Shu'fat camp," June 1968. Photographer unknown. Verso of photo: "Some 3,300 Arab refugees, who fled from the fighting in Palestine, in 1948, lived in Mu-askar camp, within the walls of the old city of Jerusalem. It was a camp in name only consisting of insanitary, improvised shelters, squeezed in under arches, in dark cellars and in corners of crumbling ruins, even some on rooftops. Just a month before the outbreak of the June 1967 hostilities, these refugees were rehoused in a new UNRWA camp in Shu'fat, three miles to the North of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Although these concrete UNRWA shelters, built at an average cost of $150.00 each, provide little more than a roof and four walls, the living conditions are a decided improvement on what they had before. The population today (June, 1968, statistics) is 2,800 – a number of the refugees having left in the face of the June 1967 hostilities." UNRWA Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.

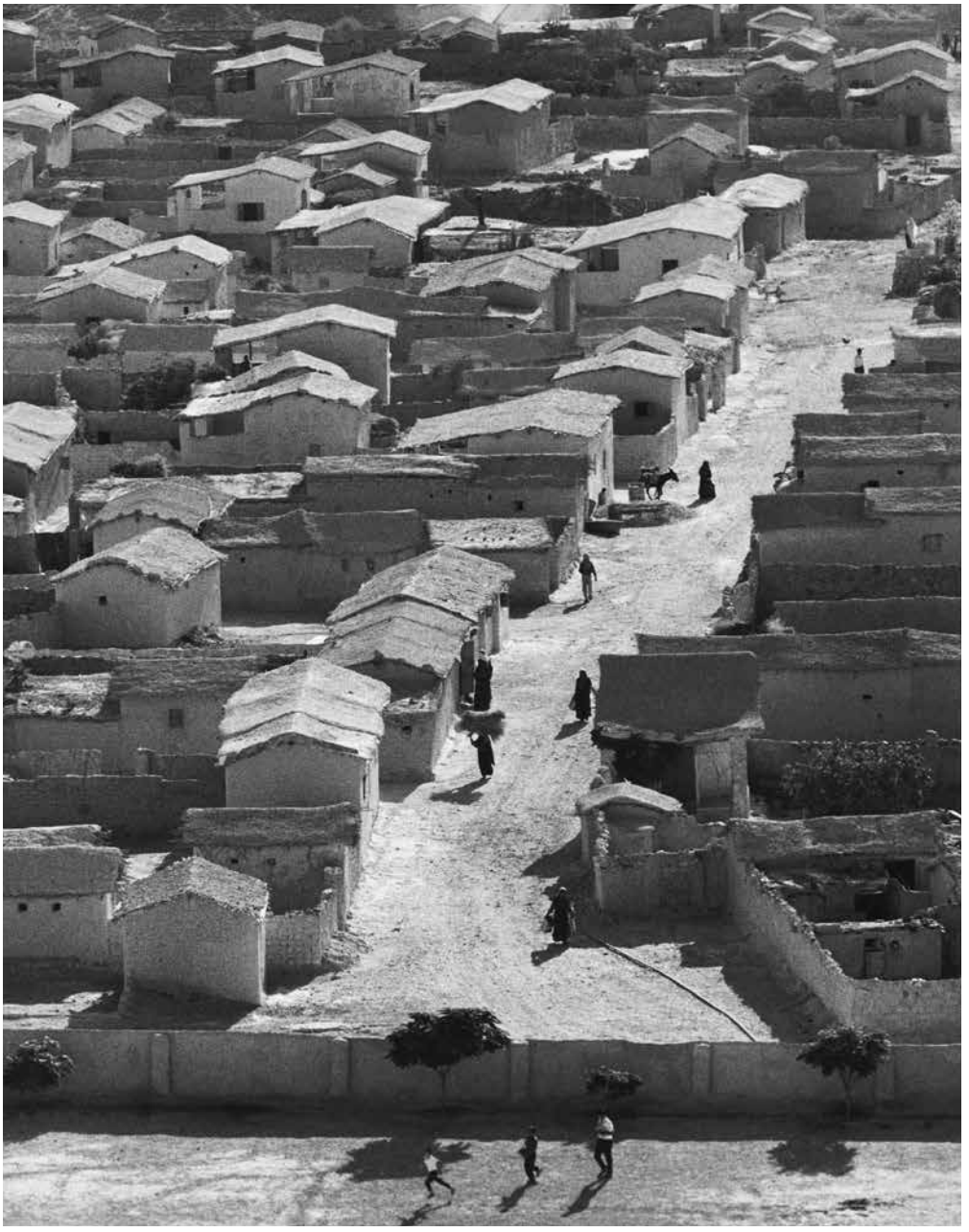

Figure 3. “Nuweimeh Refugee Camp, Jordan.” Photographer unknown. UNRWA Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.

Figure 4. “Continuing Exodus: Jordan Valley.” Verso of photo: “A new temporary bridge to replace the destroyed Allenby Bridge enables Arab families to continue crossing the Jordan River to the East Bank.” UNRWA Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.

# Jaffa amid Theoretical Transformations: Demolition as a Research Prism

Yara Sa'di-Ibraheem

**Abstract**

This essay argues that the theories and terminologies deriving from paradigms of "colonial" and "post-colonial" cities marginalize some aspects of the structural violence that Palestinians experience in coastal cities of Palestine within the 1949 Armistice demarcation or Green Line, particularly in Jaffa. These theories often preclude the tracing of power structures and the escalating violence against spaces and society. This results in the literature dealing with the Palestinian city either as a historical space, which often explores Jaffa before the Nakba, or as part of the globalized present without framing it, either historically or politically. Consequently, this essay proposes to use "demolition," a concept that stems from Jaffa's reality, as a prism. It focuses on different forms of demolition through micro-geographical research on three houses in various neighborhoods in Jaffa, each embodying different aspects of "demolition."

**Keywords**

Demolition; post-colonial/colonial city; displacement; dispossession; Jaffa.

**Editor's note:**

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Since the beginning of the twentieth century and with the establishment of the colony of Tel Aviv, the city of Jaffa has been framed through the dichotomy of the poor Black city versus Tel Aviv, the modern White city. This binary was articulated in the Arabic and Hebrew press and in political discussions regarding Jaffa before the Nakba.[1] Dr. Yusuf Haykal, Jaffa's last mayor (1945–48), sought to move beyond

this classification by undertaking several modernization initiatives to develop the city's infrastructure, as well as highlighting the colonial goals of the Zionist movement in Jaffa.[2] Haykal's plans were thwarted by the events of the Nakba and its displacement of approximately 95 percent of the Palestinian population of Jaffa, and the subsequent transformation of Jaffa from a major Palestinian urban space to a part of the administered areas of the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality.[3] Nevertheless, the dichotomy between the Black city and the White city has been sustained in references to the relationship between Jaffa and Tel Aviv within dominant and critical discourses alike, in journalism, academic discourse, and political writings.[4] Borrowed from the theory of the "colonial city," these terms are used to highlight the gap that exists between the wealth of settler cities – which serves as the infrastructural basis to seize natural resources – and Indigenous peoples' cities, structured to serve colonial policies and goals, including turning the Indigenous population into a source of cheap labor.[5] While this discourse may serve as an analytical tool to examine Jaffa's position in certain periods, the Judaization of the city in recent decades and the continued alterations of the space raise questions regarding its relevance to Jaffa's current reality: Is the relationship between the two cities still based on duality and contradiction? Or has the expansion of the "White City's" frontier over decades "whitewashed" Jaffa in various ways? What are the repercussions of using this theory?

In parallel with the "colonial city" framework and in response to neoliberal urban renewal schemes, a discourse emerged describing Jaffa as a "mixed city" that suffers from the crises facing neoliberal cities, such as gentrification. This discourse, which crystallized in the 1990s, shifted the analytical focus from colonizer-colonized relations to class relations.[6] While most writings in this mode do not totally ignore the national dimension and the Palestinian history of the city, they tend to treat the present as a new and different phase according to post-colonial theory. Here, too, questions must be raised about the consequences of treating the Nakba as a mere historical event, and about the relevance of these theories while exploring the living reality in Jaffa. Is it possible to use the term "mixed cities" in a colonial reality? Are the implications of the mixed city discourse, such as cultural pluralism, possible in a reality of continuous Judaization? Is it possible to isolate the neoliberal discourse from the goals of Zionist colonization? And what are the consequences of borrowing struggles and slogans such as "the right to the city" and "the right to housing" in a reality of neoliberal policies and a context of settlement and colonization?

The questions regarding the suitability of these theories and their implications for discussing Jaffa's reality are not technical or hypothetical, nor confined to academic debates. Rather, they reflect mainstream narratives and popular political imagination and thus they affect the types of solidarity that are possible.[7] In addition, these theoretical framework theories preclude the tracing of power structures and the escalating violence against space and society, thus giving way to the research dealing with Palestinian cities either as historical spaces, exploring their dynamics

before the Nakba, or as part of the globalized present without historical or political context.

The theories and terminologies deriving from the paradigms of "colonial" and "post-colonial" cities thus marginalize aspects of the structural violence that Palestinians experience in the coastal cities of Palestine, particularly in Jaffa, and point to the political and academic impasse in addressing the transformations of Palestinian cities within the 1949 Armistice demarcation or Green Line. Consequently, I propose in this essay the analytical tool of "demolition" as a term rooted in Jaffa's reality.[8] In this, I follow Professor André Elias Mazawi's reflection on his academic trajectory:

I didn't read the theories at first. The Jaffa framework, the massive demolitions that were taking place in the Old City . . . what I saw of demolitions there, and then what I saw while wandering between the spaces of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, made me feel like I was moving from one galaxy to another . . . I wandered around Jaffa in spaces full of demolitions, demolitions screaming about what was before it, what happened and why it remained . . . [all of which] transformed into a Knowledge paradigm.[9]

Hence, I use demolition as an intellectual and analytical window to the current reality in Jaffa by tracing the geography and temporality of house demolitions, the changes they underwent, and the ways of looking at and describing them. I address the following questions: What might "demolition" as a research prism contribute when thinking about Jaffa in the present? And how does such an approach engage with prevailing global theories? To delve into these questions, I focus on different forms of demolition through micro-geographical research of three houses in different neighborhoods in Jaffa, each of which embodies aspects of demolition.

## Three Jaffa Houses

The demolition of historic neighborhoods in Palestinian cities within the Green Line (New Haifa, Tiberias, and 75 percent of Old Jaffa) was part of a systematic policy of erasing Palestinian urban history.[10] This was accompanied by the loss or looting of many archives bearing this history. As an example, the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality's website states: "The archive of the pre-1948 Jaffa municipality has been lost." Furthermore, many documents and files are not accessible to the public because of their classification as confidential or censored, such as the list of Palestinian owners whose properties were "transferred" to the Custodian of Absentee Property after the Nakba. For these reasons, documents relating to the Palestinian past before 1948 are minimal. Nur Masalha, Ahmad Sa'di, and others have pointed to the various problems inherent in Israeli archives concerning their contents and accessibility.[11] In this context, Ann Stoler underscores the need to treat archives critically rather than as an impartial information source.[12] In this study, I chose to use another kind of archive, that of "technical" libraries, which include urban plans and

maps dealing with infrastructure and engineering aspects. While these archives also constitute a source of colonial knowledge, some of them contain "cracks" that could unveil confidential data, such as disclosing the names of the displaced Palestinian homeowners.[13]

By combining information from engineering archives, historical maps, satellite images, and conversations with *Yafawi*, I present in the next section an alternative archive of three Palestinian houses that embody different types of demolition, enabling us to follow the development of the space continuously, not fragmented according to economic policies or theoretical limitations.

### 1. A House in the Jabaliyya Neighborhood

The first document in this property's file in the engineering archives in the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality is dated August 1932, and it consists of an application for a building permit for two rooms, a kitchen, and a toilet. On the permit forms, the logo of the municipality of Jaffa is displayed, including the following details: The name of the applicant, Taha Ahmad al-Mashharawi, and the construction site, al-Jabaliyya neighborhood (Block no. 35 and Plot no. 34). According to a map from 1936, the existing building was built on 'Umar Ibn al-'As Street (see figure 1). The subsequent documents in the file revolve around the request to connect the building to the sewage system in 1958. In these documents, a new address appears for the building: street number 185 and house number 17. Under "Ownership" is the name: "The Development Authority entrusted by the Israel Land Department."

Changes in addresses and ownership reflect the "legal" sequence of Israel's seizure of Palestinian refugees' property. After the Nakba and the displacement of the vast majority of the population of Jaffa, Israel placed the refugees' property under the administration of the "Custodian of Absentee Property" (CAP).[14] According to a survey conducted by the CAP in 1951, the number of abandoned buildings in Jaffa reached 6,162, of which only 658 were assessed to be in good condition, 114 were condemned to demolition, and the rest were deemed in need of restoration.[15] These buildings had been rented and used since 1949. Moreover, although the law stipulates that the profits generated from renting these buildings were to be saved for the benefit of the "absentees," part of it was nonetheless spent on settling new Jewish immigrants.[16] In 1953, the Development Authority (Transfer of Property) Law was passed; it enabled the moving of the absentees' properties from the CAP to a body named the Development Authority, which also operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance.[17] The Development Authority entrusted the day-to-day maintenance and rental of these properties to Israeli governmental companies, such as Amidar and Halamish. This move provided the new possibility of disposing of the property of the "absentees" by selling it on the free market. This possibility was not widely taken up in the three decades after the law's enactment; it was largely postponed until the 1990s when urban renewal schemes were implemented in Jaffa, including infrastructure development and the

creation of a beach promenade from the rubble of thousands of destroyed buildings in al-ʻAjami and Jabaliyya neighborhoods.

Before the 1990s, the governmental companies used various tactics to force residents to leave their homes, including the neglect of infrastructure, demolition of thousands of buildings, and prohibition of renovations and new construction. Another tactic was the imposition of heavy costs on "tenants" who were obliged to repair their houses with Amidar or otherwise be expelled.[18] These policies and practices are reflected in the file of al-Mashharawi building, which includes a February 1969 letter from the Tel Aviv municipality addressed to the Amidar company warning that the building was in a "critical" condition and must be restored immediately. Apparently, the house was not restored; rather, it deteriorated to the point of becoming "hazardous" for housing, leading to its demolition, as directed by a letter dated 26 August 1981, sent by the Tel Aviv municipality to Amidar, entitled: "Order to demolish a dangerous house." The house in the Jabaliyya neighborhood was one of more than three thousand buildings demolished by the early 1980s in the al-ʻAjami and Jabaliyya neighborhoods. While the demolition order is the last document in the building's file in the municipality's engineering archive, aerial photographs (satellite images) reveal that since 2005, the building lot and the one adjacent to it have been converted into a playground (see figure 2) named Etrog Park, while ʻAmr Ibn al-ʻAs street was changed to Beth-Pelet.[19] "Etrog Park" is one of the sixteen playgrounds in al-ʻAjami neighborhood; most have mushroomed since the 1990s, built on lands of refugee homes and orchards that were confiscated and demolished. It may be easy to frame these parks within the analysis of the globalized discourse about the "neoliberal city" and, in particular, the phenomenon of green-gentrification: the building of parks as part of urban renewal schemes in the slums. However, presenting this analysis in isolation from the historical context turns into a cover for the practices of changing Palestinian space and erasing its historic symbols. This can be unveiled through a genealogy of Israeli "greenwashing," including the planting of trees to cover the physical traces of Palestinian history, a policy most closely associated with the forests planted by the Jewish National Fund since the 1950s on the ruins of hundreds of destroyed Palestinian villages.[20]

Another reading of the neoliberal framing regarding the construction of the playgrounds can be made by inquiry into how Jaffa Palestinians use these places. For example, protests and demonstrations took place in 2021 in the "Garden of the Two," known among Jaffa residents as Ghazazwa Park, having been a gathering place for workers from Gaza since the 1967 war.[21] Demonstrators were denouncing the displacement of residents of the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, along with families from Jaffa protesting after receiving evacuation orders from their homes by Amidar. Such practices exemplify how Jaffa residents are currently using these parks and the re-appearance of the themes of demolition and displacement.

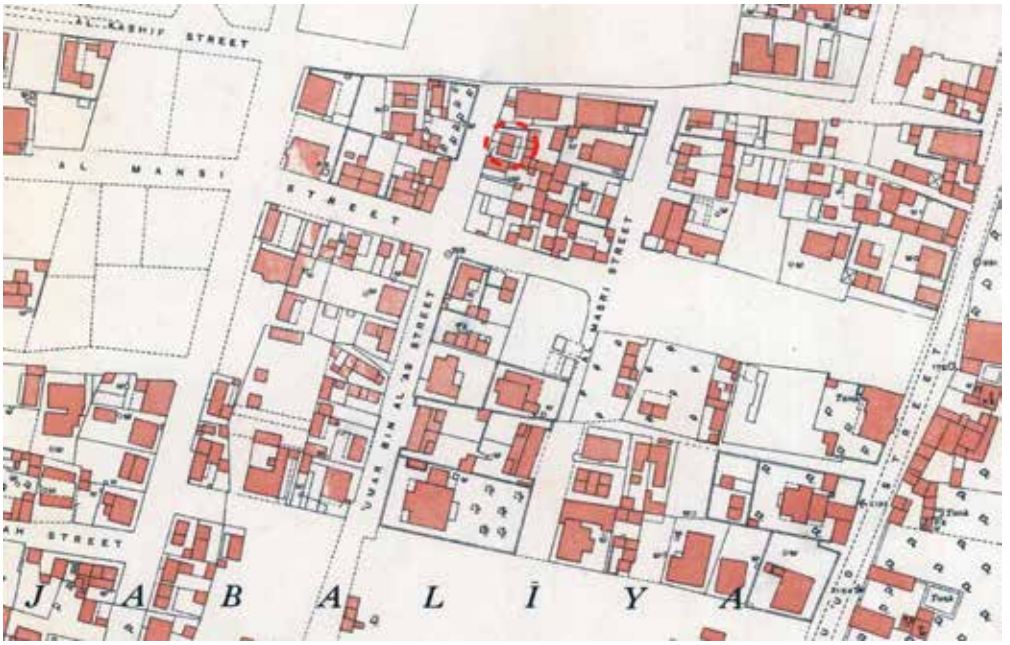


Figure 1. A historical map dating to 1936; in the circle, the al-Mashharawi building.

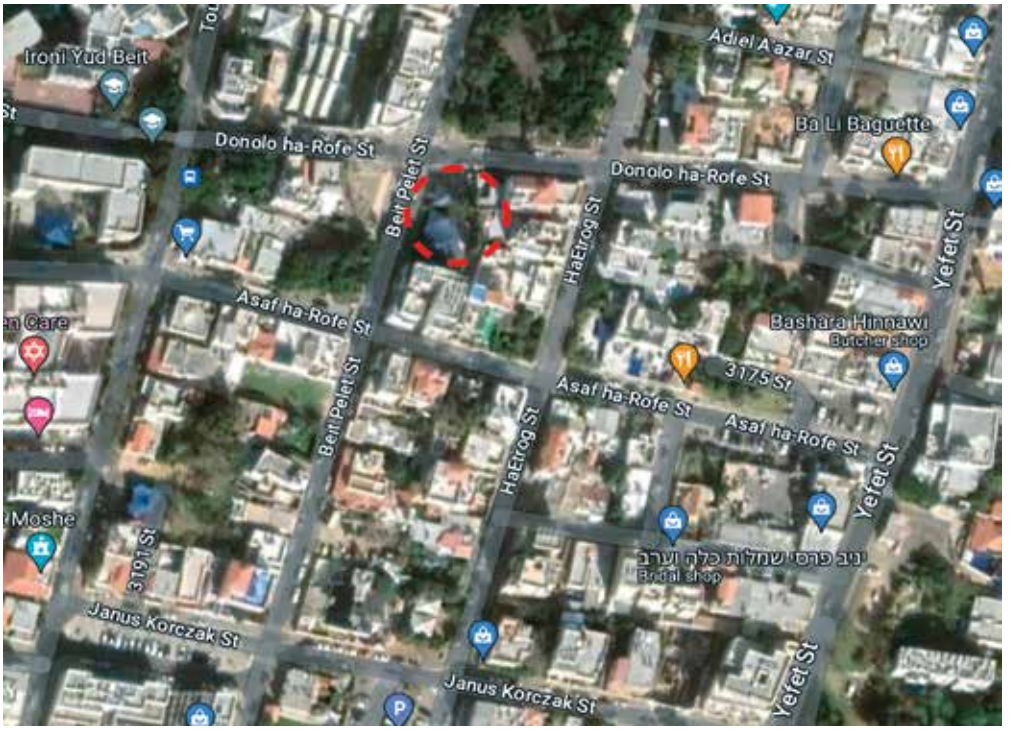


Figure 2. A Google satellite image from 2021; taken from the GIS program, "Etrog Park" is indicated.

## 2. A House in Suknat al-Haresh

On 7 December 1936, Ahmad al-Jarbi submitted a building permit application to the Planning Commission of the City of Jaffa for his house, located on Plot 32, Block 41 in al-ʻAjami (figure 3). The building is in the neighborhood of Suknat al-Haresh, on a hill north of al-ʻAjami and south of the Old City. The correspondence between al-Jarbi and the architect of the municipality of Jaffa is the first document in the property's file in the engineering archive. In 1944, al-Jarbi sold his house to a lawyer named Yaʻqub Hanna. According to later records, Hanna submitted a request through his architect Harry Lurie to renovate the house by adding two floors and a basement to the original one-story building. On 27 June 1947, he paid a fee to renew the permit, and this receipt appears as the last document in the file prior to the Nakba. The next document, dated 31 July 1969, twenty-two years later, comprises a sale contract for the building (according to Israeli registration, the location appears as Plot 32, Block 7021) between the Development Authority (entrusted by the Israeli Land Administration) and three Jewish Israeli citizens: Ysha'yahu Ben Porat, Jan Tiroche, and Dan Uri. (In later documents, Tiroche is the only one mentioned.) The building became identified by its new address: Building no. 8 on "Hatsedef Street" in the "Maronite Quarter." The street was renamed *hatsedef* (Hebrew for seashell) by the Israeli naming committee in the 1950s, while Suknat al-Haresh was renamed for the Maronite Church, one of the most prominent landmarks remaining in the neighborhood following the extensive demolition of houses.[22]

In 1972–73, the Tiroche family submitted a renovation request, which was approved. The purchase agreement included an article stipulating the buyers' awareness that the building is located in an area classified as a "green zone" according to the 1956 city plan, namely an area planned to be free of buildings. This "green zone" included northern and western parts of al-ʻAjami (Suknat al-Haresh and the beach, respectively). However, while the buildings near the beach were demolished and the rubble became a landfill, the structures in Suknat al-Haresh were sold to Ashkenazi Jews and renovated, turning it into a place detached from its surroundings (see figure 3). While no further documents on this property exist in the file of the engineering archive, the neighborhood appears in plans from the 1990s as a residential area, and most of its buildings are listed "for preservation." The house under discussion re-emerges in the Israeli media in articles about the most expensive neighborhoods in Israel. In press interviews with the Tiroche family,[23] the house is portrayed as one of the Tiroches' achievements and proof of their ability to foresee potential in the "slum." Recounting the story of the house, their son told the interviewer: "I was born in 1966 in a house on Hatsedef Street in Jaffa, and I have lived in the same street up to this day, in a house my father bought when it was still a ruin and renovated with his partner." The interviewer describes the uniqueness of the house and its exceptional beauty as a result of

the renovations undertaken by the Tiroche family, listing its famous visitors, including well-known Israeli musicians and politicians. In 2009, the son initiated the "Incubator for Young Israeli Artists," turning parts of the house into a gallery.[24]

The Tiroche family's story reflects another aspect of neoliberal policies, especially "privatization," which is rarely discussed. Selling refugees' houses on the free market allowed the emergence of colonial narratives of individual heroism. Tiroche, as in White colonial stories, discovered the beauty of the dilapidated "primitive house," saving it and incorporating it into civilized space. Thus, although demolition in the Jabaliyya neighborhood was complete, Tiroche's purchase of the house in the Suknat al-Haresh neighborhood made destruction a temporary and metaphorical case – the building was "saved," but its Palestinian origin and history were erased. So, while demolition constitutes a basis for enabling the colonizer to impose and justify his appropriation of the space, neoliberal policies allow a second Judaization/occupation of the Palestinian space to take place, this time through real estate companies and personal initiatives. Perhaps the most dangerous thing about the investors' "heroism" and "savior narratives" is their imposition of a new starting point, which becomes the reference point in talking about Jaffa space and classifies what preceded it as a separate historical stage.[25] As for actual demolition in Suknat al-Haresh, it was canceled considering the change in population: namely, the replacement of undesirable residents (Arabs and Mizrahi Jews) by affluent Ashkenazi residents. This is in contrast to the fate of thousands of houses that were demolished in the surrounding neighborhoods.


Figure 3. Part of al-'Ajami neighborhood. An aerial image from a mostly intact Jaffa in 1949 (left) and an image from 1990 (right) that shows the spaces between the buildings due to the demolition of thousands of buildings, as well as the park that was constructed along the shoreline on the landfill of the buildings' debris. In the two photos, "Hatsedef Street" is indicated. The aerial photos of Jaffa, P/53, 7398, 1949 and Jaffa, AM/225, 3008, 1990 were retrieved from the Micha Granit Maps Library at the Department of Geography, Tel Aviv University.

### 3. A House in al-ʻAraqtanji Neighborhood

The building file in the engineering archive of the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality concerning plot no. 71 in al-ʻAraqtanji neighborhood does not contain any document from before the Nakba. The "disappearance" of documents is not unusual, as noted above. However, the *tabu* (property registry) document from 1959 contains names of Palestinians, Salem Khoury and George Andoni, who might be the owners, as they are registered as the owners of one-twelfth of the property. The rest of the property is registered under the Development Authority. According to the documents in the property's file, the building, until the last decade, was under the management of the Amidar Company and housed several Jewish and Palestinian families after the Nakba, like other Palestinian refugees' houses. The file includes a letter from 1962 from a Jewish family complaining about overcrowding in the building. Such letters are rare, as the properties' archives are mostly devoid of records concerning the tenants during Amidar's management of the absentee properties. However, in interviews with Jaffa residents who lived in the post-Nakba years and until the 1980s in such houses, all of them underscored the overcrowding they suffered from, including the sharing of bathrooms and kitchens. Moreover, some interviewees recalled the demonstrations that took place in protest of these living conditions. As one Jaffa activist stated:

There were protests organized by Maki [the Israeli Communist Party – a so-called Jewish-Arab party] calling for "an apartment for an apartment." By this, however, they meant for the Jews and not for the Arabs . . . The Jews wanted to leave because the houses were collapsing . . . So they [the government] created new solutions and neighborhoods on Jaffa's outskirts for them. As for the Arab [residents] – they had nowhere to go.

These policies led to the "return" of al-ʻAjami neighborhood in the 1980s to an area with an Arab majority. Despite the continuous neglect and demolitions, the new situation created opportunities for social activism as youth and women's groups, as well as religious institutions, organized struggles against municipal policies and government companies.[26] This period, as described by the same interviewee, was a kind of "breathing space," but it lasted only for a limited period. The shift in planning policies in the 1990s, the increase in the sale of refugee homes, and the rise in property prices brought an end to this "breathing space" and imposed a new reality on the Arab residents of Jaffa, including the house on ʻAraqtanji Street.

Since 1998, documents in the building's engineering file emphasized the hazardous state of the house. Nevertheless, according to residents who protested in 2016 against the change in the building's status, the Development Authority sold the building to an Argentinian citizen, who converted it into a yeshiva boarding school for religious students of Rabbi Eliyahu Mali and members of his Zionist biblical association.[27] This is not the first *garin torani* (Torah nucleus) that settled in Jaffa, clearly stating that their main goal is to Judaize places where the presence of Jews is not dominant.[28] It should be noted that this group, like other groups of Jews who move to Jaffa, receives support and facilities from the municipality.[29]

## Reading Jaffa through Demolitions

After the Mashharawi building in the Jabaliyya neighborhood was demolished at the beginning of the 1980s under the technical pretext of being unstable, two decades later its land was transformed into a playground as part of preparing the infrastructure to attract middle-class and wealthy Jewish residents. The story of the Ya'qub Hanna house in Suknat al-Haresh reflects the neighborhood's transformation into a frontier of Judaization in the 1960s and 1970s by a wealthy class of Jews, who invest in art and are attracted by the "hidden" beauty of Arab houses. On the other hand, the story of the house in al-'Araqtanji illuminates the political initiatives to Judaize Jaffa in the last two decades by religious settler groups with declared settler-colonial views, thus turning an additional street in Jaffa into another Judaization front.

The various and ongoing politicized methods of demolition can be explained in light of Stoler's reflections on ruins: ruins, Stoler argues, are not automatically found or discovered, but rather formulated, manufactured, and attributed this role as part of a general political temporal project.[30] For Stoler, ruins are not only a noun but also a verb and a political process (ruination). As it appears from the cases presented above, the demolition of Jaffa took many forms and took place at a varying pace over decades. Sometimes the demolitions proceeded slowly; at times they were sudden and rapid; at others, they took blunt, direct, or metaphorical forms – the building surviving destruction while stripped of its history and Arab street names converted to numbers and then to Zionist, Jewish, or Hebrew names. It also appears that demolition can serve multiple functions, whether constituting a temporal barrier between two eras – the Palestinian era and the era of the so-called civilized colonist – or justifying displacement and the seizure of property. It may also serve as an obstacle that hinders movement in the city, further fragmenting it geographically and temporally.

While the theory of the colonial city is confined to the logic of dualism and thus hinders the reading of Jaffa in recent years, using demolition as an analytical concept may contribute to tracing the structures of violence used against the Palestinians. It also provides a means to track and link attempts to erase the Palestinian space by the colonizers, regardless of their policies and identities (politics/religiosity/class or the like) and methods. At the same time, different forms of demolition reveal the policies and discourses used and their various repercussions in a dialectical way with the ongoing Nakba. The importance of revealing and shedding light on these intersections comes in light of post-colonial discourse and neoliberal methods disconnected from the Palestinian context, which turn the Nakba and the Palestinian identity of the city into a mere historical event. By placing demolition at the core of spatial change in Jaffa, by turning it into a prism through which Jaffa space can be seen as a site condensed with historical meanings, it is possible to fully acknowledge the ways in which demolition is, as Stoler writes of ruins, "a corrosive process that weighs on the future and shapes the present."[31]

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22 The name reflects the official policy of non-recognition of the Palestinians as a national minority and their positioning as an assortment of insular religious minorities. See Ahmad H. Sa'di, *Thorough Surveillance: The Genesis of Israeli Policies of Population Management, Surveillance, and Political Control towards the Palestinian Minority* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

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JERUSALEM NEIGHBORHOODS

# Silwan, the Bleeding Wound

Nazmi Jubeh

*Translated from the Arabic by Aline Bazouni*

**Abstract**

Silwan neighborhood, immediately south of the outer walls of Jerusalem's Old City, has been the site of an ongoing Zionist settlement campaign using all of the diverse tools of demographic displacement. This settlement drive in Silwan has reached blatant proportions, enploying claims of "state lands," Jewish land ownership before the Nakba, "absentee property," creation of archaeological and heritage sites, national parks, and historical cemeteries based on biblical narratives, outright property confiscation under various pretexts, demolitions of buildings without permits, and more. In contrast, exacerbated by high Palestinian population growth on the one hand and the looting of their land on the other hand, the distinct neighborhoods that form Silwan have been turned into pockets of poverty and slums. Despite this, these residents have developed their own ways to struggle to resist Zionist settlement and maintain families in their homes.

**Keywords**

Silwan; Wadi Hilwa; City of David; Batn al-Hawa; Wadi al-Rababa; al-Bustan neighborhood; Ras al-'Amud; Holy Basin; settlement; archaeology.

Recently, media coverage has been extensive about Zionist attempts to uproot Palestinian residents from a targeted section of the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, to make way for its colonization by settlers. There are multiple reasons why local and international media have focused on the Shaykh Jarrah colonization efforts. What is happening – the uprooting and displacement of

Palestinian refugees for the second time – is related directly to refugees' right of return. The plethora of foreign institutions and consulates based in Shaykh Jarrah meant that the issue of the neighborhood garnered special international concern. The social and cultural environment of the neighborhood is likely a major reason behind the ability of residents to be heard when they raise their voices and organize protests to appeal to the media. We bring up the issue of Shaykh Jarrah, which we have dealt with before extensively in this journal,[1] as a complementing and contrasting counterpoint to the situation that another Jerusalem neighborhood – Silwan – has been living through for decades.

It is not possible to understand what is happening in Silwan in isolation from the overall battle for survival being waged ceaselessly throughout Old Jerusalem, inside and outside its walls. Certainly, it is also broadly related to the survival of the city's identity and culture, and the outcome will determine its future. Silwan's situation encapsulates all control of space strategies and tools used to manipulate the population and influence demographics. It clearly demonstrates the battle of existence by the indigenous population against the armed occupation forces who use a seemingly limitless array of tools that were conjured before and after the Israeli occupation in 1967 to achieve their settler-colonial goals.

This article will attempt to draw a general picture of Silwan, with its various subdivisions, and focus on the motives and mechanisms of settler colonialism therein, and its impact on Silwan, and on Jerusalem in general.

## Silwan and Its Neighborhoods

Silwan, the village just outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, constitutes an important part of the history of ancient Jerusalem (seen in the archaeological site Talat al-Duhur) and the walled city, where the ruins of ancient Jerusalem are located. We will not retrace the history of Silwan, but Silwan village was built on the slopes around the Silwan spring, the only water source in Jerusalem, and the irrigation source for the crops in the valleys. The village structures were built on the western slope of Ras al-'Amud hill, less than four hundred meters from the eastern wall of the Old City. Arab historians and geographers mention Silwan as "a locality" in the city of Jerusalem in the tenth century CE – not a date for the establishment of Silwan, but confirmation that Silwan was at that time a significant village. The lands of Silwan village were adjacent to the walls of Jerusalem from the eastern and southern sides, extending eastward to the borders of al-'Ayzariyya (Bethany) and Abu Dis, with lands stretching even beyond them in the east toward the Jericho road. On the western side, the lands of Silwan extended to the northern slopes of Jabal al-Mukabbir and reached the eastern slopes of Jabal al-Nabi Dawud (Jabal Sahyun/Mount Zion). Silwan lands are also located on the southeastern slopes of Jabal Zaytun (Mount of Olives). An important portion of Silwan lands, especially Wadi Hilwa, was located within the walls of Byzantine Jerusalem from the fifth century CE until the end of the Fatimid period, in the eleventh century CE, when the areas of the walled city were constricted to approximately their current location. The areas outside the walls were used as agricultural lands belonging to the village of Silwan.

Sixty families resided in Silwan in 1596.[2] Its population consisted of about ninety-two families in 1870 and by the end of the nineteenth century it had reached about a thousand people.[3] The British Mandate census in 1922 shows that the population of Silwan increased to 1,901 inhabitants.[4] The population growth continued steadily, reaching 2,968 people in 1931, living in 630 houses.[5] In the 1945 census, the population of Silwan reached 3,820 people.[6]

Figure 1. Silwan in 1873, from the scale model of Jerusalem prepared by Stephen Illés, currently on display in the Citadel Museum in Jerusalem. Rehav Rubin, "Stephan Illes and His 3D Model-Map of Jerusalem (1873)," *Cartographic Journal* (2007): 71–79.

Silwan remained a beautiful village consisting of rows of houses perched on rocky contours at the foot of the mountain, outside the boundaries of the British Mandate's municipality of Jerusalem. It stayed as such until it was annexed to the Jordanian municipality of Jerusalem in 1961. Silwan grew rapidly during the second half of the twentieth century. The population of Jerusalem increased dramatically, which led to the overcrowding of the Old City. This in turn prompted the construction of new

buildings on the various lands of Silwan and the movement of residents from walled Jerusalem to areas of Silwan, especially al-Thawri and Ras al-'Amud, but also toward Wadi Hilwa and Batn al-Hawa neighborhoods. This movement gained significant momentum after 1961 when Silwan became part of the Jordanian municipality of Jerusalem.

Despite the expansion that Silwan witnessed during the British Mandate period, evident in the population statistics, a larger population increase and the acceleration of the construction process in Silwan took place after 1967, when lands were confiscated all over Jerusalem, and the population was restricted to specific areas. This increase in pressure on Silwan, being very close to the Old City, left no empty lands remaining there; all agricultural lands gradually disappeared, especially the orchards directly south of the Old City, known as al-Bustan. Most of the neighborhoods in Silwan grew haphazardly, without infrastructure and without planning, and in very complex social and economic conditions.

Today, by simply wandering in the alleys of Silwan neighborhoods, it is readily apparent that most residential buildings are unfit for human habitation; the buildings are extremely overcrowded, confined to narrow spaces, and built on top of one other without the minimum conditions for healthy housing. The vast majority of Silwan residents live below the city's poverty line, and diseases related to poverty prevail in their neighborhoods. Today, Silwan, with all of its various historical neighborhoods, is home to an estimated sixty thousand people: it is one of the cities that make up Jerusalem.

Silwan is considered an integral neighborhood of Jerusalem, the southern flank of Old Jerusalem, adjacent to the southern wall of al-Aqsa Mosque. It embraces the Old City from the southern and eastern sides, and hosts the site of the ruins of ancient Jerusalem, an area misleadingly called the "City of David." Silwan is also considered the main element of the so-called Holy Basin. Due to its important location, Silwan is the target of a fierce settlement campaign.

The settlement drive in Silwan takes the various forms that have been used in the settler-colonialization of all of Palestine. Indeed, there is no colonial law for direct or indirect ways to seize, appropriate, and control property and lands from under the feet of their owners that has not been used in Silwan.

Below, I will try to describe in brief the situation of the different areas of Silwan, based on the local names of each neighborhood, with a focus on settlement activities taking place there. Although each area requires a detailed survey, the aim here is to present a comprehensive picture. The geographical boundaries of each component will be put forward in general terms only, since no clear boundaries exist. Due to the lack of previous detailed studies, the author will also draw on his rich memories of Silwan, where he resided for a significant period of his life before and after 1967.

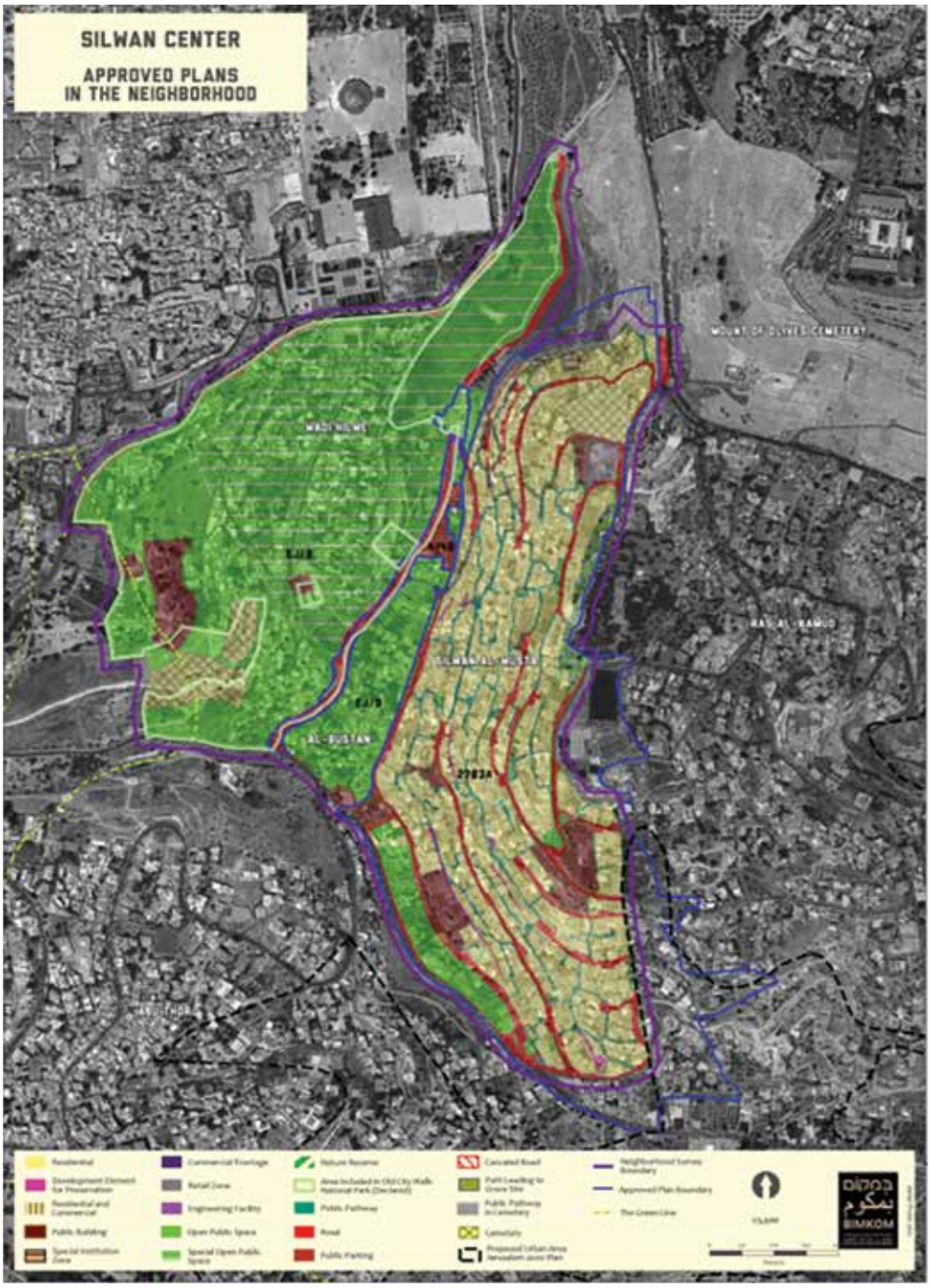


Figure 2. Part of the Silwan neighborhood and Israeli plans. Map from Bimkom, "Silwan Center – Approved Plans in the Neighborhood," 2013; online at bimkom.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/2.9-Silwan-Center-A2-s.pdf (accessed 2 March 2023).

**Wadi Hilwa**

This Silwan neighborhood is located to the south of the Ottoman walls of Jerusalem. It begins outside Bab al-Maghariba (Silwan Gate/Dung Gate) and extends south to reach what is now known as al-Bustan neighborhood. In the east, it reaches Wadi Sittna Mariam (Valley of Our Lady Mary/Kidron Valley) and on the west, Jabal al-Nabi Dawud (Jabal Sahyun/Mount Zion). Until 1967, several dozen houses were spread out on both sides of the valley and some on the western slope of Jabal al-Nabi Dawud. Agricultural lands occupied the largest area of the neighborhood; its population totaled less than two hundred. The site of ancient Jerusalem, the spring, and the pond of Silwan were essential components in forming the neighborhood, hence the historical and symbolic importance of Wadi Hilwa.

Today, Wadi Hilwa has an estimated population of about six thousand inhabitants.[7] Most of its homes were built without a permit, due to the suspension in issuing licenses during and since the British Mandate period, except in rare cases. Plans to transform the area into a swath of natural and archaeological parks continue to this day.[8] Yet, despite the many British, Jordanian, and Israeli plans for the area, the neighborhood continued to grow steadily; these residents of Jerusalem imposed a status quo on the ground, without regard to others' "official plans." The neighborhood attracted residents, especially during and after the British Mandate period, because it was attached to Old Jerusalem, and residents did not need transportation to access the walled city, which they considered to be their center of life. From the neighborhood, the muezzin calls to prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque could be heard clearly. Today, as a result, buildings are crowded throughout the neighborhood, poor housing and signs of poverty are obvious everywhere, and the neighborhood lacks basic infrastructure, parking, and spaces between the buildings.

Interest in the Wadi Hilwa neighborhood became keen in the second half of the nineteenth century, when biblical archeology schools began seeking ancient Jerusalem linkages to bolster a biblical narrative. The archaeological hill in Silwan (Talat al-Duhur/Ophel), named the "City of David," became so famous that excavations soon spread to nearby areas. They took on organized forms after 1923 at the hands of international specialists and amateurs fascinated by biblical narrative–based archeology.[9] These excavations continue today, extending from the southern wall of al-Aqsa Mosque to continue the excavations where Umayyad palaces were located,[10] through extensive excavations in a plot known as the parking lot of Wadi Hilwa (the Israeli "Giv'ati parking"),[11] all the way to the Silwan pond and its surroundings. On the eastern side, the excavation area extends to Wadi Sittna Mariam and passes through the new tunnel dug three to four meters under the street and buildings of Wadi Hilwa, from the Silwan pond to inside the walls.[12]

Figure 3. The eight-meter-wide tourist double tunnel under the Wadi Hilwa neighborhood; online at emekshaveh.org/en/biannual-summary-2022/ (accessed 14 March 2023).

To the south of al-Aqsa Mosque, a large tourist center was established for an estimated half a million visitors annually, most of whom are Israelis. The center puts forward a Jewish history of the region through inventive films, models, and sound and light shows, even if the results of the excavations do not support this narrative (there is near unanimity among serious researchers, including large numbers of Israeli historians and archaeologists, that the difference between the results of the archaeological excavations and the biblical narrative is vast) Elad, the Hebrew acronym for Ir David (City of David Foundation), a militant settler organization, was given the license to operate the entire site by the Israeli government.[13] It is the only "park," natural or archaeological, managed by a non-governmental organization instead of the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority. Elad is also the main funder of the excavations that take place in that area, including the digging of the wide tunnel under Wadi Hilwa.

The Israeli attempts to take control of Wadi Hilwa, renamed Ir David (City of David), using legislation and more direct methods, relied on six simultaneous strategies. The first was to control the archaeological sites: the archaeological Silwan hill, spring, and pond and their wide surroundings; the car park mentioned earlier, and its extension to the southern walls of the Aqsa Mosque; and the new tunnel dug under Wadi Hilwa.[14] All were placed under the administration of Elad Foundation, making the latter a kind of local government within its areas of control, a move unacceptable even to a large number of Israeli archaeologists. The second plan relied on having each area of Wadi Hilwa (along with other parts of Silwan, as we will see below) designated a "national park." A third plan involved claiming property associated with Jewish occupants prior to 1948; several properties that met the Israeli definition were found and transferred to Elad. The fourth route was to purchase or control real estate through brokers, searching for any legal loopholes or social problems, or resorting to forged documents, to undermine Palestinian ownership of property. Lawyers whose sole task is to search for mechanisms to control property in Wadi Hilwa do full-time work for Elad Foundation. A fifth mechanism was to focus on taking over the property of Palestinian absentees, defined as Palestinians who were not present in Jerusalem in June 1967. This definition applies to many lands, whether the absentees are the sole or partial owners of a property, whether they reside outside Palestine or only outside the Israeli-defined Jerusalem municipal boundaries. The combination of these activities enabled the various branches of the Israeli occupation to control many properties in Wadi Hilwa.

The cultural landscape of the northern part of Wadi Hilwa will be transformed after Israel establishes its cable car project, which has already acquired the necessary Israeli licenses. This project is now in the final stages of planning. The Israeli Supreme Court gave the green light for its implementation on 15 May 2022, rejecting all objections. It is not known when it will be fully implemented.[15]

The number of properties that Elad Foundation managed to control and register in its name in Wadi Hilwa is not known with certainty, since not every transaction that takes place is transparent. A case may arise after many years, when the Palestinian owners find that their property was silently taken over years before without them knowing. Elad announces "in due course" the control of the property, and then the residents find themselves evacuated by the police. They must go to the Israeli courts to try to prove the invalidity of Elad's control over their property. The court cases extend over years, come at high costs, and rarely end in favor of the Palestinians. Today, the number of Jewish settlers in Wadi Hilwa is estimated at 350, about one-third of the total number of settlers in all of Silwan.


Figure 4. An aerial photo showing the neighborhood of Wadi Hilwa, the locations of the excavations, and the land under Israeli control in the name of archaeology, in Wadi Hilwa. Circled in red is the archaeological hill of Silwan which Israelis control. Online at emekshaveh.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Silwan-Map-Original-Updated-with-Legend_English-1.jpg (accessed 14 March 2023).

**Wadi al-Rababa**

Wadi al-Rababa is the natural extension of Wadi Mamilla, which begins at the Mamilla cemetery, west of Bab al-Khalil (Jaffa Gate). That valley continues along the western wall of the Old City, forming first the huge Sultan's Pool, then runs east at the so-called Jurat al-'Inab with a steep slope, where it is called Wadi al-Rababa (Hinnom Valley). Part of the western side of Wadi al-Rababa is located inside the 1949 Jordanian-Israeli armistice demarcation or Green Line; the main part of the valley up to al-Bustan neighborhood in the southeast was occupied in June 1967. Wadi al-Rababa is bordered on the south by al-Thawri neighborhood (part of Silwan) and on the north by Jabal al-Nabi Dawud (Mount Zion) and Wadi Hilwa.

Wadi al-Rababa has a beautiful geological landscape, nestled between two rocky cliffs before sloping sharply to the southeast, and is filled with olive groves belonging to the inhabitants of Silwan. Some of the trees now stand untended where owners have been denied access to care for them. The lush greenery of Wadi al-Rababa links with the orchards of al-Bustan neighborhood and provides a natural park for the residents of Wadi Hilwa and al-Thawri neighborhood, as well as for other residents of Jerusalem. On the northern end, some Palestinian houses belonging to Wadi Hilwa overlook the valley, although they are geographically closer to Wadi al-Rababa.

The valley was famous in ancient times for its natural caves, used by Jerusalem residents to bury the dead. Over the ages, additional burial caves were carved out of the hills. The graves date back to the Roman era and extend to the Mamluk period, facilitating the claim for control by the Israeli Antiquities Authority over an important part of the valley by declaring it an archaeological site. At the northern end of the valley, the graves of a small Jewish cemetery were renovated in the last three decades; the cemetery was also expanded to a much larger area than its original size by the addition of new tombs planted on it to control more land, thus preventing the urban expansion of nearby Silwan inhabitants. These homes are now threatened with demolition or takeover, as they lie near an archaeological site and a Jewish cemetery. At the southeastern end of the valley sits the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Aceldama (also called Saint Onuphrius Monastery), built in 1874 on the ruins of a fourth-century Byzantine church.

To facilitate Israeli control of Wadi al-Rababa, some lands were declared absentee property, based on the fact some of the owners – although a minority – were absent from Jerusalem in 1967. As for the rest of Wadi al-Rababa's lands, which are owned by Jerusalem residents with deeds proving their ownership, they were confiscated anyway to form part of a "national park" to be established as a belt around the Old City and as part of the Old City (Holy) Basin.[16] The Israeli municipality of Jerusalem issued a decision to confiscate sixty dunums of the land in 2018. This decision should not be viewed in isolation from the other means of takeover, which we will list below. However, it is important to look at the seizure of Wadi al-Rababa as only one effort by Israel to control the cultural landscape and marginalize the Palestinian presence as much as possible, with the end point – using the massive tools in their arsenal of control – being to erase the whole of the cultural landscape.

Figure 5. Wadi al-Rababa, from the east, circa 1940: to the left the monastery and above it al-Thawri neighborhood; to the right, al-Nabi Dawud neighborhood; Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.22741/?co=matpc (accessed 7 March 2023).

Wadi al-Rababa separates Wadi Hilwa and al-Thawri (Abu Tur), precluding physical and urban communication between the two neighborhoods and constituting a barrier to the movement of residents in the area. Its use by Palestinians as a park has become very limited after several Palestinian buildings located at the top of the valley on the western side – designated no-man's land after 1948 – were converted into an Israeli cinematic club. Additionally, a settlement was planted between al-Thawri neighborhood and the valley, and directly connected by a street. The Elad Foundation, in partnership with the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority, organizes courses on "biblical agriculture" in the valley, presenting a Palestinian *tabun* (traditional oven) that they constructed on the site and a display of agricultural tools to represent life in the area two thousand years ago, using expansive imagination. A significant area of the valley was fenced off with a metal barrier to serve as an open-air biblical museum, encouraging tourists to visit and Judaize the site. Today, a visitor can witness the extent to which Wadi al-Rababa has been fully controlled into yet another site for the biblical narrative, along with Wadi Hilwa, and areas of the Old City and its surroundings. Dozens of such museums have been built in Jerusalem and its surroundings for this purpose, almost all aiming to impose proof of the existence of a Jewish heritage in Jerusalem two thousand years ago.

**Al-Bustan Neighborhood**

Al-Bustan neighborhood, part of Wadi Sittna Mariam (Kidron Valley), is located southeast of Wadi al-Rababa, and east of Silwan pond. Until the 1980s, it was a huge orchard with tall fig trees irrigated by the Silwan spring, interspersed with pomegranate trees and vegetables – radishes, onions, parsley, mint, and legumes. Many families of Silwan lived from their orchards, which provided produce that was part of the fresh food basket of Jerusalem.

The signs of today's housing crisis began in Jerusalem in the 1970s, when vast areas of the city's lands were confiscated. Most neighborhoods, including Silwan, lost their surrounding lands, confining any urban expansion to the available spaces inside these neighborhoods. Al-Bustan's orchards began to gradually disappear to be replaced by buildings. The more intense Jerusalem's housing crisis became, the faster the fig trees were replaced by buildings. By the 1990s, the orchard disappeared and was replaced by a full-fledged neighborhood, built, of course, without licenses, without planning, and without basic infrastructure. Over time, the neighborhood became overcrowded; some buildings expanded upward, rising two floors or more, as families grew. The number of houses reached ninety, while the estimated number of residents of the neighborhood was over 1,200, and perhaps as high as 1,500.

In this neighborhood, a different mechanism was used to control it: the idea was conceived that the site was a "garden" of King David in the tenth century BCE, called "Valley of the King." On the pretext of this imagined garden, the geographical space should, therefore, be returned to the way it was in that era – the existence of which has never been proven in the first place. The Israeli projects related to it are all linked to the so-called Holy Basin. Although the neighborhood had fully developed under Israeli control in Jerusalem, under the watchful eye of its municipality and its various departments, the first Israeli reaction to the neighborhood's existence came in 1995. At that time, the Jerusalem Tourist Development Steering Committee published a plan that included the establishment of an open museum on a site in the neighborhood, to celebrate the "three-thousandth anniversary" of the city of Jerusalem. Accordingly, the first version of the plan was prepared in 2000 and published in 2004. With this plan in place, the planning engineer of the Israeli municipality issued an order to demolish the "illegal construction" in the "Valley of the Kings," and in the following year the municipality delivered demolition orders to the families living in the neighborhood and carried out the demolition of two homes.

The residents of the neighborhood mobilized against this attack by forming a popular movement and organizing a series of protests that attracted wide attention, garnering solidarity at the local and international levels. The pressure prompted the Jerusalem municipality to postpone the remaining demolition orders, on condition that the residents settle the buildings' legal status. Despite what some thought was a municipal game of "bait-and-switch," the residents of the neighborhood

invested large sums of money and duly submitted a structural plan in accordance with the urban planning principles followed in the rehabilitation of neighborhoods. Their proposal was summarily rejected in 2009. The District Planning Committee insisted that the neighborhood should be an open area devoid of buildings, due to its value. The municipality suggested that the residents of the neighborhood leave their homes and be relocated in the northern neighborhood of Bayt Hanina, where it would provide buildings for them. The residents of al-Bustan neighborhood, however, rejected this offer and insisted on staying in their neighborhood.

Figure 6. Al-Bustan neighborhood in Silwan, in foreground, and to the left, the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood. Photo by the author.

In the face of the residents' staunch position, their continued sit-in in a tent they erected in the neighborhood, the considerable international solidarity for their cause, and the steady coverage of their story in the local and international media, the Jerusalem municipality modified its plan in 2010, offering to allow sixty-six houses on the eastern side of the neighborhood to be kept, after being rehabilitated, and to demolish twenty-two houses.[17] On their ruins, a garden, artists' workshops, souvenir shops, and cafes were planned to be built. Opposed to the break-up of their neighborhood, the residents presented an alternative scheme, which was rejected in 2011. The neighborhood continued protest activities until 2017. That year, the Jerusalem municipality issued demolition orders for five buildings, while demolition orders for another twenty-eight buildings were prepared and not distributed, a tactic to avoid widespread backlash in favor of successive nibbling – the long game used in all Jerusalem neighborhoods.[18]

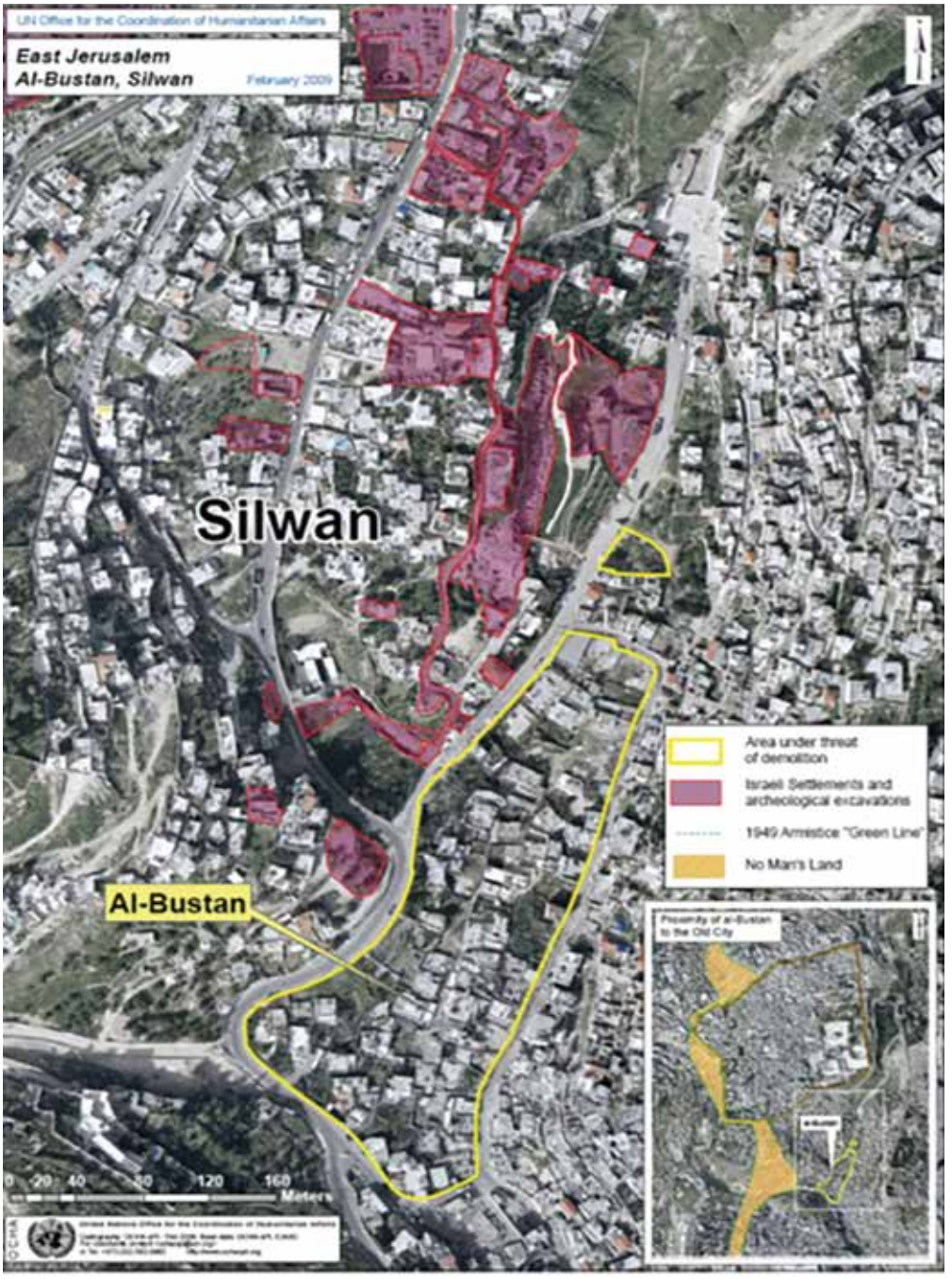


Figure 7. Al-Bustan neighborhood and its relationship with the rest of Silwan neighborhoods, including Wadi Hilwa, showing the settlers' control over the buildings in Wadi Hilwa, including archaeological sites. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – OCHA (2009), online at www.ochaopt.org/content/map-al-bustan-silwaneast-jerusalem-february-2009 (accessed 4 March 2023).

To this day, the threats to al-Bustan neighborhood are not over. The sit-in tent continues; despite it being demolished dozens of times, it is resurrected resolutely each time. The residents of the neighborhood still organize protest activities every Friday, and their tent has turned into a cultural center where residents gather and organize various activities. The residents are still holding onto their homes, rejecting the many offers made both covertly and overtly, becoming a kind of test ground proving the usefulness of mass struggle and popular resistance in protecting Jerusalem from the occupation's designs.

**Batn al-Hawa Neighborhood**

Batn al-Hawa neighborhood is located on the southeast slope of Ras al-'Amud to the east of al-Bustan neighborhood. It is an integral part of Silwan and is considered part of the well-known *al-hara al-wusta* (the middle quarter) neighborhood. In the nineteenth century, the site was part of Silwan's agricultural lands and mostly used as pastureland for sheep and goats. It had a scattering of houses belonging to the people of Silwan.

Figure 8. The Jewish Yemenite settlement, Batn al-Hawa, Silwan, circa 1890; online at commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Jewish_people_of_Yemen#/media/File:Kfar_Hashiloach_1891.jpg (accessed 4 March 2023).

A group of Yemeni Jews arrived in Jerusalem in 1881, totaling about thirty families from the city of San'a'. They were likely motivated mainly by messianic religious reasons rather than consideration of any early Zionist motives. After completing their six-month journey, they found themselves not well received by the Jews of Jerusalem, either due to racial prejudice, since they looked dissimilar from Eastern (Sephardi) Jews and spoke an Arabic little understood even by Eastern Jews, or by their extreme poverty. They did not find a place in the Jewish quarter in the Old City. Instead, it appears that they were expelled from the quarter, after Jewish religious leaders questioned their Judaic faith due to their different practice of the known rituals among the Eastern and Western Jewish sects. Some of these Yemenis found refuge in the foothills of Batn al-Hawa, where natural caves existed, including some ancient rock tombs. They lived there and were welcomed by the residents of Silwan, as was evident in a letter written by one of the members of this group in 1940.[19] The rest of the group settled near Jaffa.

The second phase of their life was represented by the purchase by some wealthy Jews of five dunams in Batn al-Hawa to establish a Yemeni settlement, and the construction of one-room houses during the years 1885–91 to accommodate forty-five families.[20] At the end of the nineteenth century, the Yemeni community numbered about two hundred people in the neighborhood. They lived in overcrowded and difficult conditions, with some of them continuing to live in caves, and depended on carrying water from Silwan spring. At the time, Jews referred to these dwellings as Kfar Hashiloach, meaning the village of Silwan, but the name "Yemeni neighborhood" or "the village of Yemen" prevailed among local residents. No problem emerged between this early settlement and the rest of Silwan's residents, and they coexisted in relative peace. During the Buraq Uprising in 1929, the British Mandate police evacuated the Jews from the neighborhood, but after calm returned in the city, some returned to their homes. Soon after, the great Arab Revolt of 1936–39 erupted, and the British Mandate police ordered the remaining Yemeni Jews to migrate to western Jerusalem neighborhoods to reduce the risk of any direct friction, despite protest from the residents of Silwan and their commitment to protect their Yemeni neighbors.

The condition of the buildings in the Yemeni neighborhood was dire; most collapsed in the 1940s. The Sephardic Jewish Committee, which oversaw the management of the Yemeni neighborhood, leased the rest of the small neighborhood to Silwani Palestinian Kayid Jalajil in 1946, for a period of three years. The Nakba intervened before the end of the contract, so Jalajil, in turn, rented or sold the remaining buildings to Palestinian families. The events of the Nakba and its aftermath maintained the case until 1967, since all property of Jews were registered with the Jordanian Custodian of Enemy Property, including the "Yemeni neighborhood," without checking the actual ownership of the land.[21] Some local stories recount that several houses had been sold to Palestinians, since a few Yemeni Jews had sold their homes after the events of 1929.[22]

Palestinians had also constructed buildings alongside those built for the Yemeni Jews. These expanded significantly after 1948, when the remaining buildings of the Yemeni Jews were inhabited by Palestinian families. The Palestinian construction expanded in the foothills of the mountain, linking Ras al-'Amud and the historical root of Silwan, to al-Bustan area, also known as Bir al-Ayyub to the east of al-Bustan. Palestinian construction increased dramatically here too in the 1980s and 1990s, due to the housing crisis in Jerusalem. Gradually, the buildings of the Yemeni Jews disappeared due to their deterioration and the vertical and horizontal expansion in the surrounding area. Today, the neighborhood appears to consist of random blocks of cement, with the buildings slapped together without spaces between them. Access to most of the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood is by foot only, and severe poverty and ill-health are prevalent among the residents.

The first signs that Batn al-Hawa may become an issue surfaced in 1970, when the powers of the Jordanian Custodian of Enemy Property in East Jerusalem were transferred to the Israeli Custodian General, whose mission was to return Jewish property to Jewish owners. Most demands by Jews to recover their property were facilitated in the eastern part of the city, including the Old City, Wadi Hilwa, Shaykh Jarrah, Ras al-'Amud, and other neighborhoods near and far from the Old City. However, no action was taken by any official Israeli authority in Batn al-Hawa – the heirs of the Yemeni Jews have not claimed any rights, and the neighborhood was not mentioned until the end of 2000.

The second step came when members of Ateret Cohanim, an extreme religious-nationalist settler organization, were appointed in 2002 as trustees of the Benvenisti Trust, which claimed ownership of 5.2 dunams in Batn al-Hawa, the site of the dwellings of Yemeni Jews.[23] With this step, the matter moved from being a property claim into a settlement case. In that same year, requests were submitted by Ateret Cohenim to the Israeli court to evict Palestinian families from the neighborhood.

After learning eventually that the cases had been moved to court, the residents of the neighborhood worked on preparing a lawsuit against their eviction. The 2018 lawsuit against their eviction claimed that the "Yemeni ownership" relates to the buildings, not the land, and since the buildings have disappeared, Ateret Cohanim has no right to evict them from their homes. The court recognized that the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property, when transferring the trusteeship to the Benvenisti Fund, did not adequately study the ownership of the land according to Ottoman law, and did not take into account the fate of the buildings. However, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected the Palestinian families' request and paved the way for Ateret Cohenim to continue filing lawsuits for the eviction of eighty-one Palestinian families, with a total population of 436 people. Ateret Cohanim was able to obtain an eviction decision from the court against eighteen families, despite the many inaccuracies in determining the location of the land and its boundaries, ambiguity about the ownership of the land and the legality of transferring "guardianship" to Ateret Cohanim, and the absence of heirs of the Yemeni Jews among the claimants. However, the Israeli courts continue to issue eviction decisions.

The situation can be seen as a debate between the Palestinian residents of the neighborhood and Israeli official offices and settlement agencies. Sometimes, financial inducements are offered; other times, threats of eviction order are reiterated. This section of the huge neighborhood has not yet been controlled by Israel, but all residents of the neighborhood are living under difficult psychological conditions, with the sword of eviction on the necks of many families whose poverty gives them no housing alternatives. All Batn al-Hawa residents are disturbed by the settler marches organized inside the neighborhood, which provoke the residents and have led in past years to bloody confrontations, and the arrests and unfair sentences targetting the neighborhood's youth and children, including home confinement for large numbers of neighborhood children under the age of twelve.[24]

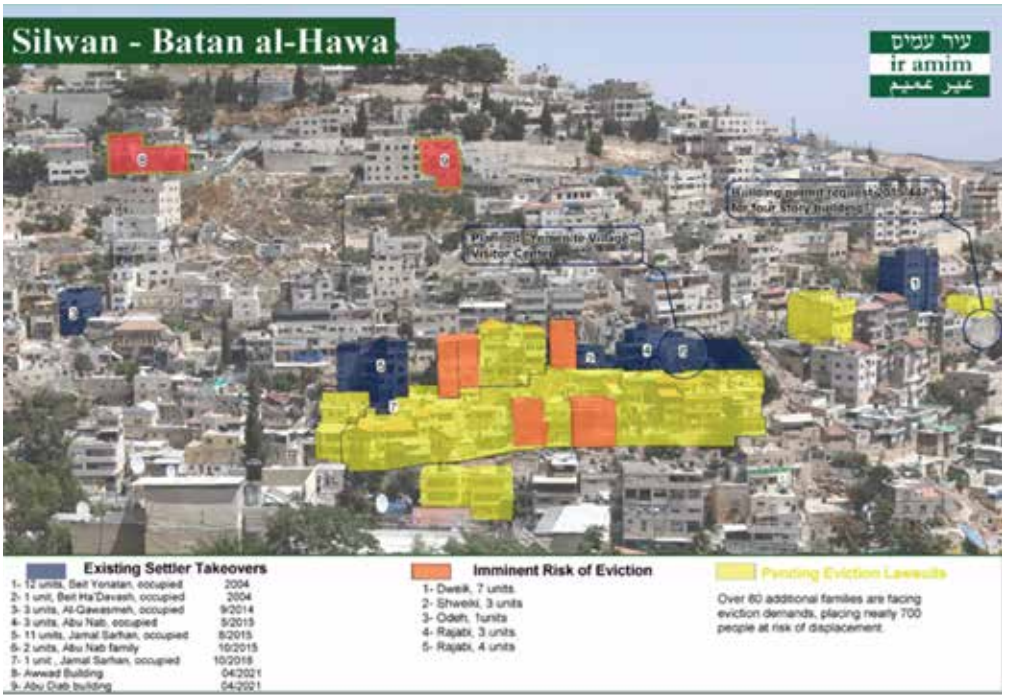


Figure 9. Batn al-Hawa neighborhood, buildings threatened with eviction; Ir-Amim, online at www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2670 (accessed 7 March 2023).

## Ras al-'Amud

Ras al-'Amud neighborhood is located on one of the southern slopes of the Mount of Olives. It is bordered on the west by a large Jewish cemetery and the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood (*al-hara al-wusta*, the "middle quarter"), on the south by the Wadi Qaddum neighborhood (Silwan lands), on the east by Abu Dis, and on the north by the Mount of Olives. The neighborhood is not far from major historical and religious sites such as the Church of Gethsemane and the Tomb of the Virgin Mary (Sittna Mariam),

and is no more than four hundred meters from the Old City walls. While it is difficult to give exact boundaries of this neighborhood, generally it extends east to the borders of Abu Dis (the Wall). It is also possible to divide it into several sections based on the local names of each neighborhood.

The neighborhood remained outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem until the 1960s, when Jordan annexed it to Jerusalem. Until 1967, the neighborhood was inhabited by the people of Silwan, along with large numbers of residents of Jerusalem, attracted by its proximity to the Old City and its elevated situation providing a suitable climate. Its location along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, and onto Amman, added more value to the neighborhood. Until the 1980s, Ras al-'Amud was a middle class neighborhood, especially the section called Shayyah, where villa-like houses sprang up before 1967.

The neighborhood developed in the same pattern that affected the city's remaining neighborhoods as space disappeared, leaving poor, dense housing conditions to proliferate. The pressure increased in the neighborhood by the Jewish cemetery expanding on two sides, and by several areas being declared archaeological sites. Finally, the construction of the "Separation Wall" destroyed the importance of the neighborhood as the link between Jerusalem and its eastern villages (al-'Ayzariyya, Abu Dis, and al-Sawahira), and the main road to Jericho, the Jordan Valley, and Jordan. The Wall turned it into the last eastern neighborhood of Jerusalem, which significantly marginalized it.

In the center of Ras al-'Amud, and at a point directly overlooking al-Aqsa Mosque, a Jewish settlement was established in 2003. This settlement, which today consists of ninety housing units and is inhabited by about 250 settlers, was called Ma'ale HaZeitim. Exactly opposite this settlement, separated by a street, was the police station built during the Jordanian administration. The Israeli authorities handed it over to the settlers in 2008, after a new police headquarters was built to the east of the Mount of Olives in the area known as E1. The former police headquarters was converted into a settlement named "Ma'alot David" and more buildings were built around it. Today it includes twenty-three housing units, in addition to two synagogues, a library, a religious school (yeshiva), and a multipurpose hall.

On the site of the former police headquarters, an argument was used that the land was Jewish-owned before 1948, and the land was acquired (in fact leased) to convert it into a Jewish cemetery that connected with the old Jewish cemetery.[25] The subject of this land, its ownership or lack thereof, and its possible uses, is a matter of complex points of view that we will not review in detail.[26] In 1990, the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property transferred ownership of the land to Irving Moskowitz, a wealthy American Jew who was a prominent supporter of settlement in the Old City.[27] Moskowitz transferred the land to the Ateret Cohanim settler association, which built the settlement and then made constant attempts to expand it at the expense of the surrounding Palestinian properties.[28] In the story of the establishment of this settlement, we can see the complicity of a large group of governmental and non-governmental Israeli parties, supported by a full and integrated legal system, at work to strengthen

Jewish settlements in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem.

This settlement fundamentally affected the urban fabric of the heart of Ras al-ʻAmud, and created a permanent point of tension. The settlement is surrounded with high walls, surveillance cameras, and heavily armed guards, as is routine in settlements located in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods. One of its aims is to create instability for the Palestinian population who surround it from all sides, and confrontations between settlers and residents of the neighborhood take place often. This single settlement succeeded in creating difficult conditions for the twenty thousand Palestinians living in the Ras al-ʻAmud area. It brings constant tension from the settlers who manifest their presence, under the protection of the Israeli police, through constant intrusive celebrations, disturbing the Palestinian residents to force them to leave. Yet, the opposite has occurred: the number of Palestinians, for reasons too long to explain, has increased dramatically in the vicinity of the settlement.

### The Remaining Neighborhoods of Silwan

Although the remaining large neighborhoods of Silwan, such as ʻAyn al-Lawza, al-Thawri, and Wadi Qaddum, have not been exposed to direct settlement, these neighborhoods have lost much of their lands, especially under the guise of being designated "green land." Wadi Qaddum was affected by the construction of the apartheid wall separating it from Abu Dis and al-Sawahira, and leading to the loss of much land where construction was prohibited due to proximity to the wall. As for ʻAyn al-Lawza, it was affected by its location between Batn al-Hawa and al-Bustan neighborhood; clear indications show settler designs on it, and many of its buildings are subject to demolition on the pretext of lacking a permit. As for al-Thawri neighborhood, it lost all of its uninhabited lands located to the south of the neighborhood, between it and Jabal al-Mukabbir, which were declared "green land." On the western side of the neighborhood, the eastern side of Talpiot settlement expanded, compounding the expansion of the original Talpiot at the expense of al-Thawri (Abu Tur) neighborhood after 1967.[29] Thus, the loss of al-Thawri lands led to the shrinking of the housing space, and densely packed buildings piled up without planning, arguably the worst in all of Jerusalem.

## Conclusion

A large minefield looms ahead for Palestinian properties in East Jerusalem, which could deprive Palestinians of their land rights. In 2018, the Israeli occupation government decided to implement what it called the "Project of Land Settlement and Rights Registration in East Jerusalem." At first glance, the project may seem important to protect the rights of owners, prevent disputes, and protect property legally, as the case may be anywhere in the world. However, in Jerusalem, something that may appear virtuous elsewhere is often engineered against Palestinian residents. If this project is implemented, Jerusalem residents will face four major challenges: The first is that while some owners are labeled "absentees" by Israeli definition, the

so-called absentee family continued – by virtue of social laws and prevailing customs – to use the property and, when they seek to register their land under the project, the Israeli "legal reality" will be exposed. The second problem is that for decades much of the real estate has not been subdivided among the heirs of owners, also based on prevailing customs; some properties are owned by dozens of people, some of whom may be considered "absentees" according to Israeli definitions. Therefore, the Israeli absentee authority will control a property share and thus will become a partner in these properties – and we know exactly the fate of such properties from past cases. As for the third challenge, it is difficult for Palestinian Jerusalemites to prove real estate ownership through identification papers, as the city's residents are not famous for preserving documents, especially since many properties have been owned by some families over centuries, during which identification papers were lost. As for the fourth problem, especially in neighborhoods that used to be villages such as Bayt Hanina, Shu'fat, al-Sawahira, and Sur Bahir, much of the land was held as common land (*musha'*) for the benefit of the community, and not formally divided between families, which will constitute an entry point for the Israeli authorities to seize them as state property.

Based on the above, two main trends prevail now. The first trend is the deliberate strengthening of the settlement movement by an integrated network of governmental agencies, settlement associations, and the Israeli legal system, supported by huge financial capabilities. This nexus is trying hard to seize any property in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City and its surroundings, what is known as the Holy Basin.[30] On the other hand, the second trend is represented by the intensification of the Palestinian challenge in defending its property. The events in Shaykh Jarrah and in al-Bustan neighborhood of Silwan, but also in Old Jerusalem and all of its surroundings, are good examples of this, where awareness and years of experience with the many "legal" tricks has birthed mass movements of increased boldness and breadth.

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**Endnotes**

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4 John Bernard Barron, *Palestine: Report and General Abstracts on the Census of 1922* (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Press, 1923), 14.

5 Eric Mills, *Census of Palestine 1931: Population of Villages, Towns and Administrative Areas* (Jerusalem: Government of Palestine, 1932), 43.

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8 Nazmi Jubeh, "Patrick Geddes: Luminary or Prophet of Demonic Planning," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 80 (2019): 23–40.

9 On the history of archaeological excavations at the archaeological hill of Silwan, see: Katharina Galor and Handswulf Bloedhorn, *The Archaeology of Jerusalem from the Origins to the Ottomans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 1–9; and Klaus Bieberstein, *A Brief History of Jerusalem* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 8–16.

10 There is another tourist advocacy center on the site of the Umayyad Palaces, called the Davidson Center. About this center, see Yousef al-Natsheh, "The Digital Temple Mount," *Jerusalem Quarterly File* 19 (October 2003): 53–58. See also "The Davidson Center," on the website of the Friends of the Israeli Antiquity Authority, online at www.friendsofiaa.org/davidson-center (4 March 2023).

11 This plot of land, owned by people of Silwan, was used as agricultural land until 1967, when the occupation's municipality turned it into a parking lot for cars and buses for visitors to the Buraq Wall (Western Wall). In 2003, the municipality transferred its administration to the Elad Foundation, which financed the archaeological excavations at the site, with the aim of building a sixteen thousand square meter tourist settlement complex known as "Kedem," a project that has gone through many stages of bureaucratic approval and aims to construct a huge multistory building consisting of multipurpose halls, parking lots, and various exhibitions dedicated to the biblical narrative. The site stands only a few meters away from the historical walls of the Old City, just outside of the Haram al-Sharif. The site was named Giv'ati in 1981 after an Israeli military brigade first formed in 1947 and today an Israeli elite "counter-terrorist" military unit. See the 5 November 2013 position paper of Emek Shaveh on this plot of land, the excavations, and the construction project, online at emekshaveh.org/en/position-paper-kedem-compound/ (accessed 4 March 2023).

12 On the tunnel, see Nazmi Jubeh, "Tahwil majari al-Quds al-Rumaniyya ila 'darb al-hujjaj': mas'a yamini Sahyuni wa ifanjili aded li-tazwir al-tarikh" [The diversion of Roman Jerusalem sewers into the path of the pilgrims: a new right-wing Zionist and evangelical effort to falsify history], *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filistinyya* 126 (Spring 2021): 57–72; Peace Now, "The Disputed Tunnel in Silwan Inaugurated with American Support," 30 June 2019, online at peacenow.org.il/en/the-disputed-tunnel-in-silwan-inaugurated-with-american-support (accessed 4 March 2023).

13 Elad or Ir David Foundation is funded by massive donations from wealthy American Jews, as well as by shell companies registered in Caribbean countries known for money laundering. Some of these companies are registered in the name of the wealthy Russian Jew (who also holds Israeli citizenship) Roman Abramovich. Ont this settler organization and its activities in Silwan, see: Peace Now, *Settlement Under the Guise of Tourism: The El'ad Settler Organization in Silwan*, 12 October 2020, online at peacenow.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Elad-Organization-in-Silwan.pdf (accessed 4 March 2023).

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15 For more on the cable car project passing over the Wadi Hilwa neighborhood, see: Arab Center for Alternative Planning, "The Cable Car to Old City of Jerusalem," October 2020, online at www.ac-ap.org/en/article/599/The-Cable-Car-Project-to-the-Old-City-of-Jerusalem-Israeli-National-Infrastructure-Plan-86 (accessed 4 March 2023). See also Emek Shaveh, "The Cable Car to the Old City: Who Gains and Who Loses?" online at emekshaveh.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CableCEng_9.1.pdf (accessed 4 March 2023).

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National_English_FINAL2012_withMAPS_lowres1.pdf (accessed 4 March 2023).

17 This means that the total number of threatened homes is eighty-eight, according to the definition of the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem.

18 On al-Bustan neighborhood and the various Israeli plans, see: Ir-Amim, "The Giant's Garden: The 'King's Garden' Plan in al-Bustan – The Municipality Plan and Its Consequences for the Residents of the al-Bustan Neighborhood of Silwan and for a Future Political Solution" (May 2012), online at www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/al-Bustan%20ENG.pdf (accessed 4 March 2023); B'Tselem, "al-Bustan Neighborhood-Garden of the King," 16 September 2014, online at www.btselem.org/jerusalem/national_parks_al_bustan_garden_of_the_king (accessed 4 March 2023). On the mass media activities organized by the residents of the neighborhood and solidarity with them, see a number of Arabic reports online at www.arab48.com (accessed 4 March 2023).

19 On the content of this message, see Emek Shaveh, "Silwan/City of David: Letter from Yemenite Jews," 29 July 2013 (in Hebrew), online at emekshaveh.org/en/letter-from-yemenite-jews/ (accessed 4 March 2023).

20 It is not entirely clear if they purchased the land or received it as a gift from the Ottoman authorities. The land was classified as *miri* and could not be sold under Ottoman laws. This legal issue certainly remains murky (although not according to Israeli law). The buildings (and not the land) were registered as a waqf for Sephardi Jews in the shari'a court in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century. Swedish and American Christian organizations contributed to helping the Yemenite Jews who settled in Jerusalem; see Yaakov Ariel and Ruth Kark, "Messianism, Holiness, Charisma, and Community: The American-Swedish Colony in Jerusalem, 1881–1933," *Church History* 65, no. 4 (1996): 645.

21 For the details and accurate documentation of all legal documents related to the neighborhood from the end of the nineteenth century until the year 1948, see Amara, *al-Istitan fi ahya' al-Quds*, 117–21.

22 I did not discuss this issue, as I had no relevant documents at hand.

23 Named after Moshon Ben-Benista, who was the head of the Sephardi Jewish community in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century and who obtained building permission from the Ottoman authorities to build homes for the Yemeni Jews.

24 On the issue of Batn al-Hawa, see: Palestinian Human Rights Organization Council, "Joint Urgent Appeal to the United Nations Special Procedures on Forced Evictions in East Jerusalem," 10 March 2021, online at www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/2021/03/10/joint-urgent-appeal-to-the-united-nations-special-procedures-on-forced-evictions-in-east-jerusalem-1615372889.pdf (accessed 4 March 2023); and B'Tselem, "Batn al-Hawa Neighborhood, Silwan: The Next Target for Judaization of East Jerusalem" (December 2016), online at www.btselem.org/jerusalem/20161208_batan_al-hawa (accessed 4 March 2023).

25 The al-Ghul family of Silwan rented the plot of land from the end of the nineteenth century and continued to use it until the beginning of the settlement project.

26 For legal details, see the report by Poica: Monitoring Israeli Colonization Activities in the Palestinian Territories, "Ras al-'Amoud Neighborhood: A Hot Spot in Occupied East Jerusalem," online at poica.org/2003/06/ras-al-amoud-neighborhood-a-hot-spot-in-occupied-east-jerusalem (accessed 4 March 2023).

27 Irving Moskowitz is dedicated to creating a Jewish majority in the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem and has harnessed a significant amount of his enormous wealth to achieve this goal. He has been associated with most settlement movements, including those aimed at rebuilding the Jewish temple on the ruins of al-Aqsa Mosque.

28 See, for example, Nir Hasson, "Settler Group Takes Over Three East Jerusalem Buildings, Expanding Jewish Enclave," *Haaretz*, 4 August 2021, online at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-04-08/ty-article/.premium/settler-group-takes-over-three-east-jerusalem-buildings-expanding-jewish-enclave/0000017f-f170-df98-a5ff-f3fdf2700000 (accessed 4 March 2023).

29 The wealthy Palestinian neighborhood of Talbiyya in western Jerusalem fell under Israeli occupation in 1948.

30 Ahmad Amara has addressed this system in detail, including the settlement associations and legal tools that are used to control lands, in *al-Istitan fi ahya' al-Quds.*

LETTER FROM JERUSALEM

# Civil Disobedience: A Call for Justice from Shu'fat Camp

Hasan 'Alqam

No two days are the same in Jerusalem. Here, life is wildly haphazard. People have to change their routine almost daily, to the extent of not having a routine at all. Men and women cannot go to their workplace every day at the regular time, and sometimes they cannot go at all. Students stay tuned, dusk to dawn, to check the school notifications to see whether there will be classes or not. They might go to school the next day, then have to stay at home the day after.

In Jerusalem, mothers kiss their children goodbye differently from other mothers of the world: they smell the scent of their bodies; they gaze at them as if meeting them for the first time, carving their features onto their hearts. Every day might well become the last day for a morning farewell.

This situation is not new, but there are variable degrees of intensity. Ever since the Shu'fat camp was established by the United Nations in 1965 (to provide improved housing for the roughly five hundred Palestinian refugee families who were living in Mu'askar camp in the Old City of Jerusalem at the time!), facts on the ground have moved steadily from bad to worse. The camp has been a focus of continued Israeli repression. Nonetheless, it and its residents have survived and flourished. Almost sixty years later, Shu'fat camp today is home to around forty thousand Palestinians, but still in an area of approximately two hundred dunams, about 0.2 square kilometers.

Residents of the camp, the only refugee camp located within Jerusalem's municipal boundary, hold Jerusalem

IDs, a blue Israeli identification card but without Israeli citizenship status. The camp is separated from the rest of the city by the towering apartheid wall erected around the camp two decades ago, with Israeli checkpoints strategically fixed at all its entrances. Only two roads lead to the camp: one from Jerusalem; the other from the West Bank. Closing off the camp is rather easy for the Israeli army and the police, turning the camp into a tightly controlled dead-end pocket by the occupying government.

About one-third of the 140,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites who live in Jerusalem but outside the Wall are estimated to be living in Shu'fat camp (and an equal number in the crowded adjacent neighborhoods – New 'Anata, Ras Khamis, Ras Shahada, and Dahiyat Salam). Their living conditions are not unique since all of East Jerusalem, its suburbs and villages, experience many of the same difficulties – on the social, economic, and even the psychological levels.

Early marriage rates in the camp are high (average marriage age for males is 18–22 years, and for females is 15–18 years). Newly married couples usually live on freshly constructed floors atop the building where the young man's parents live, which means less light and air for everybody. Crowding has been further complicated by the arrival of non-refugees to the camp (usually from within the borders of Jerusalem), seeking low-cost housing in Jerusalem. With the commercial activity in the camp environs relatively well connected to other areas of Jerusalem, the location represents some income-generating possibilities. This attraction led to the building of the colossal neighborhoods for tens of thousands of people at the southern end of the camp along 'Anata Street.

Such out-of-control expansion has reflected badly on the education sector. There are elementary and preparatory schools up to tenth grade in Shu'fat camp, one for boys and one for girls, run by UNRWA. To attend eleventh and twelfth grades, the students must travel through checkpoints to reach secondary schools elsewhere in Jerusalem, outside the camp. The situation is no better when it comes to accessing specialized clinics and hospitals available only beyond the checkpoint.

Adding to the continuous stress, the fact that the whole of the camp is under no one's absolute authority, be it Palestinian or Israeli, has led over the years to the camp becoming a hub for drug trafficking, along with all other kinds of crime – a situation that serves Israeli interests.

With conditions left to simmer for so long, some boiling over is inevitable. In October 2022, a Palestinian youth shot at Israeli soldiers at the Shu'fat checkpoint leading to Jerusalem – injuring several and killing one. As a result, the access point was closed completely. This collective punishment affected forty thousand camp residents who were then imprisoned in their own houses: thousands of students were unable to reach their schools, and patients were prevented from reaching medical centers outside the camp. Thousands of workers were prevented from reaching their places of employment outside the camp for five consecutive days. Practicing their normal daily routine has been suspended, yet again. At the same time, the camp residents were again facing electricity cuts and shortages of basic foodstuffs and medicines.

As a result, the residents declared an open strike and a civil disobedience campaign

for several days (later to be the first of two). Everyone stayed at home and refused to go to work or school, or anywhere else; all shops in the camp were closed. The people of the camp were sending a message of fury to the whole world: "We do not accept to lead such a life of humiliation."

The residents' efforts to denounce the "policy of harassment and aggression carried out by the Israeli authorities," received wide solidarity. The full strike was observed across Jerusalem's neighborhoods – Qalandiya camp; Kufr ʻAqab; al-ʻIsawiyya; Silwan; Bayt Hanina; and neighboring ʻAnata – and farther in the West Bank – Dahaysha camp in Bethlehem; al-Fawwar camp in Hebron; Bayt Ummar, north of Hebron; Nablus; and parts of Ramallah all joined in.

Under popular pressure, Israel was forced to lift the sanctions and ease the blockage. Everything went back to "normal"; or so it seemed.

Several months later, in February 2023, a thirteen-year-old boy from the camp was accused of a stabbing attempt. Israeli soldiers began shooting and things went out of control again. Soldiers brutally pushed students back and banned them from crossing the checkpoints to their schools. Media outlets as well as social media platforms were filled with scenes of women being mistreated on checkpoints and soldiers harassing schoolchildren wearing their uniforms and backpacks (envisioned as "weapons" by soldiers).

This round of crackdown involved, among other collective measures, the demolition of at least seven buildings, the arrest of a hundred people, the setting up of dozens of roadblocks and checkpoints, the confiscation of money and property from former and current political prisoners, and revoking the Jerusalem residency of the families of attackers. Everyone was, once again, under continuous threat of being either beaten up, detained, or even unjustly shot dead. Anger and frustration brewed in the hearts of the camp residents. Another civil disobedience action campaign was declared.

Loudspeakers in the mosques of Shuʻfat, ʻAnata, al-Ram, Jabal al-Mukabbir, and al-ʻIsawiyya called for joining the uprising and the strike in rejection of the crimes and policies of the occupation. Activists tweeted using the hashtag #القدس_تنتفض (*al-Quds tantafid* – Jerusalem rises up) as civil disobedience took over parts of occupied Jerusalem. Everyone is rejecting the measures of the new far-right occupation government, which aim to displace the indigenous population and empty the city of its Palestinian Jerusalemites. Shortly after that, the National and Islamic Forces, as well as the Jerusalem governorate, joined in rallying against the growing Israeli crackdown, describing in a statement how Palestinians, especially in Shuʻfat, have been subjected to "retaliatory measures, abuse, torture, humiliation, and daily oppression" since the attacks.

Young protesters burnt car tires and set up barricades overnight at entrances to different neighborhoods. The civil disobedience campaign called upon commercial and public institutions to remain closed, workers to abstain from going to work (especially to Israeli workplaces), the use of cars to be restricted after ten at night, and finally, the refusal to pay taxes to the Israeli-run municipality and other state agencies. Large numbers participated in protests near checkpoints and wherever Israeli soldiers

were stationed. Once again, the civil disobedience campaign bore fruit: Israel reduced several restrictions; and again, things seem to be moving back to "normal."

However, this normality does not remain for long. Every day of life under occupation has its renewed humiliation and dangers. The never-ending abuses of human rights accumulate, and with it grows the Palestinians' will to seek justice. The nonviolent action is meant to send a strong message to Israelis that we, the people of Shu'fat camp, will not remain quiet nor submit to being collectively punished. We have a rather simple quest: to go to work to gain our daily bread; for children to go safely to schools. Is this too much to ask for? A simple question, yet too difficult (and costly) to answer.

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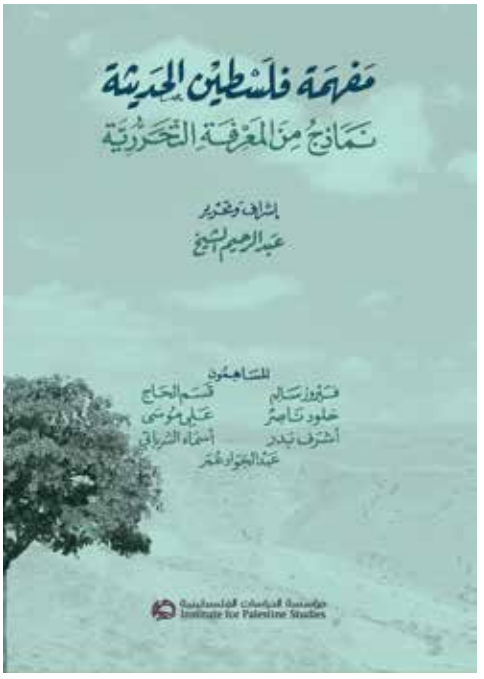
BOOK REVIEW

# Researching Palestine at Birzeit: Prospects and Limits

*Mafhamat Filastin al-haditha: Namadhij min al-ma'rifa al-taharruriyya* [Conceptualizing modern Palestine: exemplars of liberatory knowledge]. Supervised and edited by Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh, Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2021. 256 pp. $10.00 paper.

Reviewed by Jamil Hilal




**Abstract**

This book collects contributions from seven doctoral candidates at Birzeit University, focusing on different aspects of Palestine, particularly that part occupied in 1967. Palestine as history, geography, demography, and culture presents many challenges and numerous research issues that require originality, ingenuity, and imagination in thinking, methodology, theory, and narrative. The authors demonstrate originality and imagination in methodology, theory, and narrative while taking up key themes of resistance, identity, and literature. Although the papers do not ignore the general features of the Palestinian question, this review stresses the need to guard against reducing Palestine to a portion of its geography, and its population to a part of its own original citizens. The book represents a small but important step in meeting this challenge – of particular significance to Palestinian universities and social scientists – of producing knowledge that informs and concerns all the components of the Palestinian people in their diverse socio-economic, political, and cultural environments and combating setter colonialism and apartheid.

**Keywords**

Researching Palestine; colonialism; resistance; schoolbooks; identity; culture.

To review a book that is a collection of seven separate papers, each authored by a social science doctoral candidate at Birzeit University, and introduced by the editor-supervisor, is not an easy task. The book is presented as a fresh perspective

on "understanding modern Palestine" using diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. All of the papers critique, in one way or another, the Zionist settler-colonial project, and some also attempt to appraise aspects of the Palestinian political scene. Each paper discusses a subject of the researcher's own choosing, methodology, and thinking, and so each deserves to be reviewed on its own.

Editor Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh introduces the book as the birth of a "new generation" of researchers freed from the effects of colonialism in methodology and aims, freed from giving priority to Zionist discourse, and unfettered by the practice of quoting and giving dominance to theoretical frameworks current in Western academia and its Israeli branch. He sees the papers also as being free from the dogmas that the Oslo agreements implanted in Palestinian political culture. These are commendable and valuable aspirations that need persistent effort, imagination, and ingenuity to become established as a dominant perspective or paradigm – and would benefit, no doubt, from including those Palestinian communities outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Indeed, the dominance of the West Bank in the majority of the papers is very clear. Viewing Zionism and its state from a settler-colonial perspective requires thinking of Palestine as it existed before 1948 and of Palestinians in their totality as those living inside historic Palestine and those living outside it. We need to resist reducing Palestinian geography, history, and demography to that of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This should be reflected, when possible, in future research and writings.

A book on "modern Palestine" also invites research on structures that create and maintain inequality in Palestinian communities (in terms of social class, gender, and other power relations). Settler colonialism and its apartheid system are certainly responsible for creating and maintaining impoverishment, repression, and other forms of violence, but this is not the whole story. Palestinian communities inside and outside Palestine are plagued with unequal distribution of life opportunities and exist in brutal capitalist societies with various systems of repression. Palestinian communities themselves are also characterized by structures that engender and maintain inequalities. Addressing these must be part of any new approach to producing knowledge and policies to counter settler colonialism.

The impact of the fragmentation of the Palestinian political field on the life of Palestinians needs to be more visible in future research. It is tempting (though the work under review does not do so) to see any form of fragmentation as part of the neoliberal outlook of individuation in confronting the all-dominant capitalist market. We would benefit from a more robust engagement, together with an in-depth analysis of Palestinian social structure and the rise of conservative and reactionary ideologies.

## The Papers

The first paper, "From the Colonial Courts to the Land: The Daily Struggle over Time and Space in the Palestinian Jordan Valley" by Fairouz Salem, focuses on the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized in al-Ghwar (the Jordan Valley), which has faced continuous colonization since 1967. Most of the area is classified by

the Oslo agreements as Area C, which facilitates Israel's colonial control. Salem's research is based on ten in-depth interviews with landowners in the area and Palestinian lawyers, as well as reports by local and international organizations and the media. She pays special attention to Israel's use of legal arrangements to reinforce its control and discusses how Palestinians maneuver this system to resist this control. Salem argues that both place and time are subjected to colonization (though the concept of "colonizing time" needs elucidation) and both are turned into arenas of resistance that range from open confrontation to "negotiating" the colonization of Palestinian space and time and "bargaining" in Israeli courts.

Salem does not minimize the enormity of Israeli colonization and repression and gives many examples of attempts to create "uncertainty" in Palestinian conceptions of place and time. The huge decline in Palestinians living in al-Ghwar since Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967 demonstrates the enormous impact of settler colonialism on the area. Salem also includes examples of how Palestinians there use Israeli law and "negotiation" tactics to lessen or delay the implementation of violence against them. Yet, the limits of local resistance in facing a racist settler-colonial power are set by both the balance of resources on the ground and the vision, unity, and ingenuity of the Palestinian political movement. Localized and individual resistance, however admirable and necessary, cannot be a substitute for a sustainable prolonged resistance led by a unified political movement with a clear vision. This is absent at the present time.

The paper "The Demographic Question: Between Current Palestinian and Israeli Approaches" by Kholoud Nasser is concerned with demographic changes especially over the last two decades, which saw a declining fertility rate among Palestinians and an increasing rate among Israelis. This trend is viewed in the context of the Israeli strategy of fortifying the Jewish presence in historic Palestine from a political and ideological perspective. Israel implemented, and continues to pursue, a policy of ethnic cleansing and apartheid toward Palestinians; it has also promoted Jewish immigration to change the demographic composition in historic Palestine. However, a discussion of fertility needs to address the class and ethnic structure of the society, and systems of public support and solidarity for poor families. The Israeli state provides family assistance for every new child in order to encourage Jewish population growth but, as Nasser shows, adopts practices to restrict fertility among Palestinian women with Israeli citizenship. At the same time, Israel uses settler colonialism, siege, and wars in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to keep Palestinian population growth as low as possible. In contrast, the official Palestinian Authority (PA) perspective views high fertility rates as a challenge to the Palestinian aim of "sustainable development" and tends, therefore, to separate issues of economic development from settler colonialism, a position that Nasser rightly rejects.

Nasser also recognizes that fertility rates among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are still higher than those in Israel as a whole. Nevertheless, even if the demographic composition in historic Palestine has shifted in favor of Palestinians, the balance of material power (economic, military, diplomatic, and technological) has

not. This requires Palestinians to rebuild a unified political movement with democratic representative institutions, and to articulate a political vision that addresses the just concerns of the Palestinian people as a whole and also gives attention to the political future of Israeli Jews once they free themselves from Zionism.

Ashraf Badr's paper "Disgust as a Colonial Mechanism: Zionist Colonialism as a Model" seeks to disentangle the psychological makeup of the Zionist colonizer by showing how "disgust" has impacted the Zionist's psychological makeup, becoming a colonizing tool besides being a racist feature. Badr uses interviews with freed Palestinian captives and their families, as well as selected texts and narratives, to illustrate his argument. Zionism, Badr points out, employs Orientalist cultural explanations, depicting Palestinians as backward, to vindicate settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing and ultimately dehumanize Palestinians. The paper documents many examples of Israeli military, political, religious, and other discourses that seek to justify the mistreatment and murder of Palestinians. This disgust, Badr points out, extends even to Palestinian Arabs who serve in the Israeli army and police and to "Eastern" Jews from northern Africa and western Asia. However, the paper does not make clear why these Jews, considering this discriminatory attitude toward them, do not show less antagonism and disgust toward Palestinians.

Qasam al-Haj's paper "Curfews and Military Closures: The Arrest and Liberation of Palestinian Time-Space] is concerned with the colonial aim of controlling Palestinian "time and space," and Palestinian attempts to formulate popular resistance strategies to challenge Israeli colonization. The research relies on legal material, reports on the violations of Palestinian human rights, and reports on Palestinian resistance (individual and collective). Al-Haj argues that Israeli settler colonialism aims to hinder the existence of Palestinians under its control, using curfews, total military closure, and various other means. She asserts that Palestinian resistance has been successful in opposing these Israeli aims but, unfortunately, does not show convincingly enough how this was achieved. To demonstrate Israeli moves to control Palestinian time, al-Haj investigates the "state of exception" forced on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, using emergency laws to violate human rights of Palestinians during the second intifada beginning in 2000. Alongside these, she reads narratives employed by the resistance asserting Palestinian control over time and space.

Al-Haj notes the intensification of Israeli measures of collective punishment after the second intifada, including curfews, closures, military re-invasion, and severe restrictions on movement with multiple consequences on Palestinians' work, health, psychological and social well-being. This is undisputable, but what is less clear is al-Haj's assertion that resistance obliged Israel to change its methods of domination over Palestinian space and time. It may be the case, as the author asserts, that the "state of exception" does not guarantee success, but the fact remains that Israel has so far escaped accountability for a long and growing list of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Palestinians' struggle to liberate their time-space does not alone explain what happened and how: the two intifadas are two good examples of confrontation periods whose final outcomes cannot be fully explained by their internal dynamics.

Ali Mousa's paper seeks to explicate the "Dimensions of Palestinian Identity in Autobiographies and Memoirs from Nablus (1948–1967)" based on an examination of nine autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries from Nablus during the period the West Bank was under Jordanian rule. It concludes that Palestinian identity in the West Bank distinguished itself during Jordanian rule despite the participation of some Palestinians in the Jordanian political system. Nablus in particular had a special relationship with Transjordan from the Ottoman period and its elites were influential in the political and economic life of Jordan. Mousa's study finds a diversity and a complementarity of expressions of Palestinian identity in relation to the Jordanian rule, shaped by class, gender, and age differences and by the political position of each text's author. The nine texts were all written by public or literary figures (that is, the urban middle class). The complementarity is attributed to the sharpening of the Palestinian identity by the Arab defeat of 1948, the frequent friction with Jordanian rule, and the influence of the various political ideologies dominant at the time in the Arab world. These developments, Mousa claims, influenced the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964 and the articulation of the Palestinian National Covenant in 1968. Unfortunately, Mousa does not dwell on the factors that were crucial to the rekindling of Palestinian nationalism and patriotism, including the role played by pan-Arab nationalist regimes at the time and that of emerging Palestinian resistance groups, among other regional and international factors. Identifying the decisive factors in the formation of the new Palestinian nationalism and resistance requires further research to highlight changes experienced by Palestinians (particularly and primarily those in refugee camps) living outside historic Palestine.

The sixth paper, by Asma' al-Sharabati, "Images of Activism in Palestinian School Textbooks," examines images found in Palestinian Authority primary school textbooks produced in 2017 for the social studies curriculum in schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and interprets their portrayal of Palestinians, the Israeli occupation, and the Palestinian Authority. This is done with the knowledge that the Oslo accords imposed clear limitations on the PA's ability to represent Palestinians as a whole and to articulate their aspirations for freedom, self-determination, and return.

Apart from noting that the text and the pictures in the schoolbooks do not follow a specific methodology, that the pictures tended to be of low quality, and that maps do not match the texts accompanying them, the paper concludes that the pictures represent the Palestinian or the Arab self as an "other" existing outside time and space – that is, not as people with rights and real history. Palestinians appear in the photos as aggravated, distant, exiled, captive, and sad. The absence of eye contact between those appearing in the photos and the viewer (pupil) suggests to the latter that those in the photos are just "cases" for study without emotional connection. Photos of refugees or refugee camps are represented as problems that should not concern the pupil personally. Refugees are represented as subjects who suffered an injustice but are powerless. Al-Sharabati considers this compatible with how the PA perceives the refugee situation: as an issue that requires discussion and not as a cause that requires struggle. The paper also notes the tendency to show photos that have been taken from

a distance, and to display landscapes empty of people, a perspective that does not encourage pupils to be curious or interested in the places shown in the textbooks. Al-Sharabati further notes that photos of the Israeli police or security personnel are visibly clearer, endowing their subjects with a power not possessed by the viewer (pupil).

Al-Sharabati acknowledges that while images in PA schoolbooks do represent the Israeli occupation as a real problem, at the same time they tend to overexaggerate the strength of the Israeli soldier by showing him as an active agent carrying a weapon and possessing features that display determination and strength. The author also notes the exclusion of Palestinian resistance organizations and the marginalization of Palestinian activist groups. It may be true, as al-Sharabati contends, that pictures carry the political perspective of the presenter: that the PA sought to convey this image of Palestinians to highlight its project of state-building, and to promote the qualities it thinks its citizens should have. As such, the paper is instructive for educators and textbook developers.

The final paper of the book, "Post-Palestine: Palestinian Cultural Discourse and the Tragedy of Defeat" by Abd al-Jawad Omar, is the only paper (with the possible exception of Badr's paper on colonial disgust) that addresses issues that concern Palestinians as a whole. Omar argues that the notion of resistance has undergone radical changes, both in discourse and practice, corresponding to different phases of the Palestinian revolution. The acceptance of defeat (finalized with the Oslo agreements) prompted the emergence of a culture and a discourse detached from "the possibility of realization" of the liberation of Palestine. According to Omar, the PLO's political defeat produced a narrative and an aesthetic that recreated this defeat poetically as a tragedy. This narrative served strategic ends, allowing reconciliation with the "fact" of defeat, and presenting Israel as a rival and not an enemy. Omar frequently quotes Mahmoud Darwish, with his many references to tragedy, to draw attention to his attempts to engage in "poetic dialogue" with the enemy. However, Darwish has been viewed as a voice of resistance, the poet of Troy, as well as the poet who articulated dialogue with the enemy. As noted elsewhere, Darwish's poetry in his later days moved to broader human issues. Though Darwish dominates the text, he is not the only literary figure quoted in the paper. But the fact remains that a very complex relationship exists between the Palestinian political field and the Palestinian cultural field (in a wider sense) exactly because of the ongoing nature of the Palestinian Nakba.

Omar's paper is stimulating and should pave the way for investigating the complex relationship between the political and cultural fields (including the Arab and international context) that Darwish's poetry provoked. Widening the cultural sphere to include not only literature but also visual arts and other forms of culture would reveal a more varied and complex relationship between the two fields, and would do much to uncover the cultural dynamics among Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, 1948 occupied territories and in Lebanon, Syria, the Gulf, Europe, the United States, and elsewhere.

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BOOK REVIEW

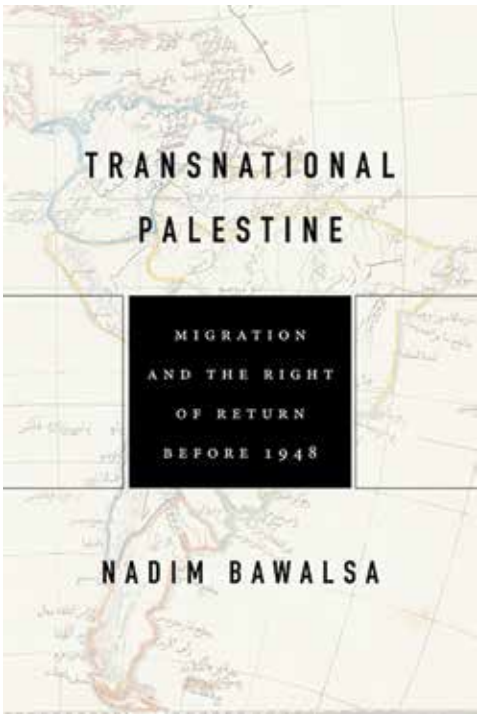
# From Palestine and (Maybe) Back: Migration and Palestinians' Rights

Nadim Bawalsa, *Transnational Palestine: Migration and the Right to Return before 1948*. Stanford University Press, 2022. 296 pp. $90.00 hardcover, $28.00 paperback.

Review by Maria Chiara Rioli

**Abstract**

The history of Palestinian migration prior to 1948 represents one of the fields in Palestinian studies that has witnessed significant expansion in very recent years. Nadim Bawalsa's *Transnational Palestine: Migration and the Right of Return before 1948* constitutes an outstanding advancement in the historiography of Palestinian mobilities and diaspora studies. Bawalsa uses a prism of sources gathered from state and private archives and libraries from Mexico to Chile, and from England to Palestine and Israel. Through his analysis of the strategies and forms of claims of citizenship in the interwar world, the author offers a groundbreaking historical appraisal of Palestinian immigration to Latin America.




Although historians have given increasing attention in recent years to Palestinian mobilities during the late Ottoman and British Mandate period, the features, biographies, and archives of Palestinian voluntary migration before 1948 remain open to numerous paths of research.[1] With *Transnational Palestine*, Nadim Bawalsa provides an outstanding historical appraisal of Palestinian migration to the Americas, and specifically to Latin America, where tens of thousands of Palestinians have moved – temporarily or permanently – since the end of the nineteenth century.

The book proposes an innovative history of the Palestinian diaspora in Latin America, historicizing migration since the nineteenth century. By doing so, Bawalsa, who has authored important articles on the subject,[2] connects, and

provides a fresh contribution to, the extensive scholarship on voluntary mobilities from Syria in the late Ottoman empire, more specifically, on Palestinian migrants before 1948. This approach is crucial to fully include Palestinians into the trails of global networks of workers, artisans, entrepreneurs, and political dissidents, but also of objects and practices, that circulated in the nineteenth century across and beyond the Middle East.

Bawalsa illuminates a wide array of unexplored records in public and private archival repositories, from Mexico to Chile (the country with the largest Palestinian community outside the Middle East), from England to Palestine and Israel. These sources are analyzed through the prism of the strategies and forms of claims to citizenship by Palestinian migrants, in particular during the British Mandate. This objective is reached through the use and analysis not only of diplomatic and consular sources but also of petitions, periodicals, and letters authored by Palestinian migrants themselves. In so doing, the author connects Palestinian migration history to the most recent works in migration and refugee studies that highlight the importance of sources authored by migrants themselves, going beyond diplomatic and institutional archival collections.[3]

Over six chapters, Bawalsa defines the historical framework of the growing migration flow from Greater Syria at the end of the nineteenth century: "Worsening political, social and economic conditions in the Ottoman empire left many with little choice but to pack up and leave" (p. 21). The Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the spike in censorship, imprisonment, and exile, and new Ottoman conscription laws "drove thousands to board ships at Beirut, Jaffa, or Alexandria in the hope of escaping, at least until things improved back home" (p. 21). A large proportion of these were Christians, whose itineraries included the return to Palestine after making large profits. Approximately six hundred thousand persons emigrated from Greater Syria to both North and South America between 1860 and 1920. A high proportion of Palestinian migrants headed to Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Most of the marriages of Palestinian migrants were within their community.

In the first two chapters, Bawalsa situates his work in the context of the scholarship on Ottoman Syrian mobilities to the Americas since the late nineteenth century. He retraces the flow of migrants from Palestine, and especially of individuals and families from Bethlehem, Bayt Jala, and Bayt Sahur who chose an intermediary economic development zone in Chile to avoid competition with other Syrian migrants. Many ended up in high positions in the banking, manufacturing, and textile sectors. Discriminatory laws and the blockade imposed by the Allies on the port cities of the Ottoman empire in 1915 acted as a contrast to the flow that had increased in the years immediately before the First World War (the number of Syrian migrants entering the United States was 5,525 in 1912; 9,210 in 1913; and 218 in 1918).

In this scenario, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the British Mandate over Palestine made the option of return increasingly difficult or impossible. As the author depicts in the second chapter, the First World War posed serious consequences on migration. After the Balfour Declaration, petitions driven

by religious interests but also in the name of the Arab cause, affirming the right of self-determination to Palestinians and contesting Zionist ambitions over Palestine, circulated globally, consolidating a transnational identification with Palestine.

With the establishment of the British Mandate, profound transformations in the status of Palestinian migrants occurred: the 1925 Palestinian citizenship Order-in-Council, analyzed in chapter 3, "in theory . . . was equitable. In practice, however, it would prove difficult to implement equitably since citizenship was significantly linked to the mandate's built-in-mission of creating a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine with a population of Jewish citizens who would contribute to Britain's modernizing global empire" (p. 75). Bawalsa points out that "over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, . . . Palestinian migrants came to occupy unique positions in a new world order defined by borders, citizenship, and nation-states. That is, while they had been considered Ottoman subjects prior to 1923, they effectively became stateless following the Treaty of Lausanne and Britain's refusal to offer them transnational recognition and representation as Palestinian citizens" (p. 75).

More specifically, the confusing time requirements of residence in Palestine constituted the main source of difficulty for Palestinian migrants to apply for citizenship. This ambiguity reflected the deliberations at the beginning of the British Mandate that had as their objective the settlement and naturalization of Jews in Palestine, therefore excluding Palestinian migrants on an ethnic and racial demographic basis.

"We shall always be Palestinians, never admit change of nationality," was how Jesus Talamas, a Palestinian migrant in Saltillo, Mexico, concluded a petition addressed to the high commissioner Herbert Plumer on 2 January 1927. Following that, a number of Palestinian migrants were denied Palestinian citizenship by the Government of Palestine in Jerusalem. Talamas's petition testified to the stateless condition common to Palestinian migrants in the aftermath of World War I and the end of the Ottoman Empire; they were left without Ottoman citizenship and denied Palestinian citizenship by the legislation of the British Mandate over Palestine, without consular and legal representation, and lost any claim to inheritance and ownership in Palestine.

The response by Mexico's Palestinians, unpacked in chapter 4, is depicted via the study of forms of activitism pursued by committees created mostly in the towns of Linares, Monterrey, Saltillo, San Pedro, and Torreon, in northern Mexico. Petitions were addressed to the high commissioner for Palestine, but also to the League of Nations in Geneva; the Colonial, Foreign, and Home Offices in London; and the Arab Executive in Jerusalem. They expressed vivid – and courageous – criticism and disseminated on a transnational scale the demand for a commitment to the principle of self-determination in the new interwar liberal world order. Bawalsa analyzes the contents and discourse of these petitions: the author argues that these documents contained an acknowledgement of British rule over Palestine, but also denounced the abuse of power perpetrated by the colonial ruler in the domain of migration, land distribution, and, for migrants, citizenship legislation. In this sense, according to Bawalsa, "the petition functioned as a mechanism of colonial control, but it also

functioned as a means of transnational political claims-making and group identification for a rising collective" (p. 136).

Periodicals in Arabic published by Palestinian migrants in Chile are fascinating sources presented in chapter 5, while chapter 6 highlights how the narrative of the Palestinian right to return began in the 1920s and not after 1948, elaborated and articulated in Palestinian newspapers, as in the case of *Filastin*.

To conclude, *Transnational Palestine* opens fundamental itineraries of research to newly understand and historicize unfulfilled Palestinian rights: "It is time to write the Palestinians into transnational histories, and the transnational into Palestinian history" (p. 7).

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**Endnotes**

1 In this growing field, see the studies of Lauren Banko and Jacob Norris and, in a long-term perspective of voluntary and forced migrations, the contributions by Mezna Qato and Kjersti Berg. See Lauren Banko, "Claiming Identities in Palestine: Migration and Nationality under the Mandate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017): 26–43; Jacob Norris, "Return Migration and the Rise of the Palestinian Nouveaux Riches, 1870–1925," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017): 60–75; and the online workshop entitled *Camp Histories: New Studies of Palestinian Migrations*, organized by Mezna Qato and Kjersti Berg in December 2021, funded by the Norwegian Center for Humanitarian Studies, and sponsored by Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) and the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies at the University of Cambridge.

2 See among the various contributions, Nadim Bawalsa, "Citizens from Afar: Palestinian Migrants and the New World Order, 1920–1930," in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, ed. Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (London: Routledge, 2015), 123–35.

3 On these perspectives, Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak, and Peter Gatrell, "What Is Refugee History, Now?" *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 1 (2022): 1–19; Peter Gatrell, "Refugees, What's Wrong with History?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017): 170–89; Paul V. Dudman, "Oral History and Collective Memory: Documenting Refugee Voices and the Challenges of Archival Representation," *Atlanti+* 29, no. 2 (2019): 33–43.

ELIA ZUREIK:
IN MEMORIAM

# Elia Zureik (1939–2023)

## My Colleague from ʿAkka, Elia Zureik

David Lyon

Photo by Mary Zureik, 2016.

I first corresponded with Elia Zureik from the UK around 1984, knowing him to be a sociologist interested in research on new information and communication technologies. I was ten years his junior and never expected to become his colleague one day. He welcomed me to Queen's University in 1990 when I obtained a position there and we became colleagues. From Elia, I not only discovered a keen and critical intellect, working on social impacts of new technologies, but also a Palestinian, researching and engaging politically with the extended aftermath of occupation. We worked together for more than thirty years. He, more than anyone, helped to establish surveillance studies in Canada and elsewhere.

But Elia also taught me much about consistently probing issues, through his exemplary work on Palestine. From his early work *The Sociology of the Palestinians* (1979), through to his

crowning achievement, *Israel's Colonial Project in Palestine: Brutal Pursuit* (2016), he devoted himself to rigorous analysis of social, economic, and political life in the disputed territory. He was involved with the UN in the Oslo agreements (1993, 1995) and thus showed practical skills as well as prodigious understanding. When Edward Said came to lecture at Queen's, he spoke admiringly of Elia. So did students fortunate enough to know him as undergraduates, and especially MA and PhD students, many of whom found a caring as well as a critical mentor in Elia.

Inspired by Elia, we devoted a research workshop – held in Cyprus to ensure that people from the "Middle East" could attend – to "Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine: Population, Territory, Power," also the title of the Routledge book (2012) that Yasmeen Abu Laban co-edited with us. While settler colonialism is the key concept of the 2016 book, the analysis, as in this workshop, showed how surveillance is deeply involved in the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, both of whom were present. During that workshop, I was in awe of Elia's even-handed relationships with people from the many different positions represented. As a colleague, he could be grumpy as well as gracious, but it was his skills as a brilliantly well-informed negotiator that struck me in such contexts. His family asked me to speak at his life celebration, which is where I said adieu to my colleague of the past thirty-two years, from whom I learned much and whose fine work will live on.

*David Lyon is former director of the Surveillance Studies Center and Professor Emeritus of Sociology and of Law at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. His newest book is* Pandemic Surveillance *(Polity Press, 2022).*

## Elia and the Israeli Gaze

### Salim Tamari

Leafing through earlier issues of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* I came across an essay by Elia Zureik titled "The Israeli Gaze" (*JQ* 66, 2016), in which he dealt with the origins of the surveillance protocols defining much of the Israeli culture of control that emerged in the 1990s. That essay took me to an earlier time of dialogue and polemics over the future of Palestine during Elia's sojourn to Jerusalem in 1995–96. During that period Elia, accompanied by his wife Mary, decided to spend his sabbatical year at Birzeit University while on leave from Queens University. After a long absence spent teaching in Canada, with brief stints in Kuwait and the UK, he was ready to come back home. His home of course was 'Akka, which he had left after the death of his parents in 1961 to relocate to the new world and a new life as a budding social scientist. But by the late 1990s, with Palestine dismembered, Jerusalem was the closest he could get to his return home.

While teaching at Birzeit Elia became engaged with the activities of the newly established Institute for Jerusalem Studies in Shaykh Jarrah (the precursor to the

office of the Institute for Palestine Studies in Ramallah), and with the refugee group in the multilateral peace negotiations emanating from the Madrid Peace Conference. A product of that year was a monograph on the use of refugee archives for policy research titled, *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (1998). Elia was a frequent presence in our Shaykh Jarrah offices, where his dynamic and combative mind engaged a large number of constant visitors: students, academics, and journalists. I particularly enjoyed his recollections of his early years in ʻAkka, where he grew up after the occupation of the city by Israeli forces following the 1948 war – tales of a rebellious youth and black humor about life in the besieged city. My only regret is that we never recorded his narrative of those formative years in his life. Perhaps hidden somewhere in his papers we will find a record of this period, and Elia's generous spirit will come back to life again.

*Salim Tamari is the founding editor of* JQ. *His most recent book is* Camera Palaestina*, with Issam Nassar and Stephen Sheehi (University of California Press, 2022).*

## My Spiritual Father

### Honaida Ghanim

I met Elia Zureik in the mid-1990s. Baruch Kimmerling, my professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, made the connection. He told me that Elia was looking for a research assistant to work with him on a research project on refugees. That was incredible – names like Elia Zureik, Edward Said, and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod were mythical characters for us few Palestinian social science students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. They bore a halo of respect and awe that only those who studied at Israeli universities, surrounded by Zionist Ashkenazi scholars – whose body language oozed a sense of supremacy – could understand.

I contacted Elia and began working with him as his research assistant – amassing material written about refugees. We worked in the office of the Institute of Jerusalem Studies in Shaykh Jarrah. Our daily meetings nourished my soul. I felt lucky to be in the heart of Jerusalem, working at the respected Palestinian institute, with a top sociologist. He shared his views on Israeli sociology, mainstream theories, and academia's role in whitewashing colonialism. He helped to expand my academic world beyond the alienating confines of Hebrew University, and to inspire my research with passion and a desire for knowledge.

Elia was the role model I wanted to follow. He, too, was a 1948 Palestinian. He, too, grew up in an estranged and fearful environment. He, too, had to study using an Israeli curriculum that aimed at dissolving Palestinian identity, using arguments that this was a democratic country, that Israel was the historic homeland of the Jewish people, and that the Arabs were to blame for the 1948 war. In the face of the

mainstream Zionist perspectives of the Israeli academy, Elia went on to publish an important book – forty-four years ago – that analyzed 1948 Palestinians through the prism of internal colonialism – a new critical discourse that debunked the dominant Zionist sociological narrative.

Back then, critical voices were small shouts fighting against the roaring sea of dominant thought. Critical theory and post-colonial theory are mainstream today, and even part of the esteemed sociological discourse in some circles in Israeli universities. Today, three decades later, much had changed: Jerusalem is not liberated. Many Palestinian offices and research spaces closed and Shaykh Jarrah, where our relationship began, resembles a military base with its cluster of settlements. Still, we would correspond and meet up whenever he visited Palestine.

After I received my PhD, Elia visited me in Ramallah. We ate stuffed vine leaves together, which I had prepared especially for him, and we talked about many things – academic, personal, and political. As he was leaving, he looked at me with his usual fatherly demeanor, and said: "You're my adopted daughter. I've adopted you. Anything you need, don't hesitate to ask me." His words moved me, although they came as no surprise. He was my spiritual father – the father of my spirit – and I treated him as such.

*Honaida Ghanim is a Palestinian sociologist and general director of the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (MADAR).*

# Linking the Four Data Sources on Palestinian Refugees

Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik

**Editor's Note**:
In homage to Elia Zureik, *JQ* is republishing (with minor stylistic changes) the introduction of the book *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis*, which he co-authored with Salim Tamari in late 2000 (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2001). The book can be purchased from the IPS website.

Irrespective of how the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is resolved, the fact remains that around one-half, if not more, of the estimated nine million Palestinians worldwide consist of refugees. The majority of the refugees – around four million people – are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The remaining, as many as one million people, including refugees of the 1967 war and others who were expelled in 1948 but who did not register with the agency, do not appear in UNRWA's registry.

While UNRWA is the main depository of data on registered Palestinian refugees, it is not the only such source. A sister UN organization, the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), possesses in its archives extensive data on confiscated Palestinian refugee property. The archives of the International Red Cross (IRC) Geneva and Bern, and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) offices in Philadelphia contain valuable information about Palestinian refugees that predate UNRWA's establishment in 1950.

In an effort to preserve a major segment of Palestinian history for national and research purposes, and to make data available to Palestinian negotiators during final status talks about the Middle East conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the Institute of Jerusalem Studies (IJS) undertook four years ago to assess the feasibility of digitizing available archival data stored in paper form. With grants given to IJS by the Swiss Development

Corporation (SDC), the Swedish government, and the Ford Foundation, efforts were undertaken to visit UNRWA offices where the archives are located, send researchers to examine the archives of the IRC and of the AFSC, and hold a workshop to discuss the findings. As well, IJS contracted a multimedia specialist to prepare a pilot study to estimate the cost and ways to electronically link various aspects of the UNRWA archival system including text and graphics. With a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency, the Cairo office, IJS was able to secure in 1999 a second estimate from a vendor regarding digitization of all UNRWA archives, and to undertake publication of the main findings of the field work in the present monograph format.

## UNRWA's Role

UNRWA is the successor to the short-lived United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR), which was established on 11 December 1948 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), and existed from January 1949 to May 1950. The purpose of the UNRPR and its successor UNRWA is to alleviate the hardships faced by the close to three-quarters of a million Palestinians who became refugees in 1948 and their descendants. For more than half a century the refugees, now in their fourth generation, have been prevented by Israel from returning to their homes.

UNRWA, which is the longest serving refugee organization dedicated to one specific group, has been caring for Palestinian refugees through thick and thin, in a region that has seen five major wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982, as well as numerous other internal upheavals, including two major Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation in 1987 and 2000. Throughout this entire period, UNRWA strove to maintain a functioning organizational and bureaucratic structure spanning the locations of refugee camps in five fields of operations in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Until l995, UNRWA's administrative headquarters were located in Vienna, after which they were moved to Gaza.

Like any other organization of its size, employing in excess of twenty thousand people consisting of doctors, teachers, and administrative staff, UNRWA has become a depository of vital information akin to census data chronicling the genealogy of Palestinian refugee life from the time of their dispersal up to the present. The purpose of this monograph is to describe the scope and nature of information stored on Palestinian refugees, with a view to recommending ways to improve access to and storage of millions of documents that, if not properly transferred to electronic medium soon, are bound to decay and become degraded thus rendering their future use in doubt.

As a start, in 1996 the two editors prepared Phase I of the feasibility report on the conditions of the UNRWA archives in Amman, Gaza, and West Bank. The report is reproduced in this monograph and details the structure of UNRWA's archives. The

archives consist of: the original family documents deposited by the refugees with the agency; basic "family fact sheets" containing interviews carried out by the agency with the refugees in 1948; a socioeconomic database containing information about families classified as hardship cases; basic information about individual refugees; administrative records of the agency; health and education records which extend back to no more than five years; and the audiovisual holdings that contain still pictures, films, slides, videos, posters, and maps.

Two years later, in 1998, Phase II of the UNRWA fieldwork commenced to complement the 1996 UNRWA site visits. Two researchers, Bassem Sirhan and Suleiman Jaber, were contracted to prepare reports on the UNRWA archives in Beirut and Damascus, which serve as headquarters for UNRWA's fields of operation in Lebanon and Syria. These three reports provide the most thorough description of UNRWA's archival structure.

## International Red Cross and American Friends Service Committee

Prior to the arrival of UNRWA on the scene, and immediately after the 1948 war, the IRC conducted the first systematic registration and provided emergency services to the refugees in the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, while the AFSC did the same for the refugees in Gaza. Both organizations compiled data on Palestinian refugees at the time, all of which was turned over to UNRWA when it was established in 1950. The archives of both organizations were visited by two researchers, who were commissioned by the editors: Jalal Al Husseini went to Geneva and Berne, and Julie Peteet to Philadelphia. Their reports are reproduced in the monograph.

## United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine

Finally, in order to round up our survey of sources on historical data pertaining to Palestinian refugees, we have commissioned two papers on the archives of the UNCCP in New York. The UNCCP was established by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), the same resolution that governs the UNRWA mandate. The UNCCP was instructed by the UN to facilitate the repatriation of the refugees, their resettlement, rehabilitation, and economic compensation. Implicit in this mandate was the need to carry out valuation of refugee property. For over a decade, between 1951 and 1964, the UNCCP undertook to document the extent of Palestinian property losses, and come up with a value figure for this property. In the process, the organization produced close to half a million documents. Recently, efforts were made to digitize the paper documents as part of the UN efforts at modernizing its records. One paper in the monograph, by Michael Fischbach, outlines the usefulness of the UNCCP archives for reaching current estimates of Palestinian property losses, and the other paper, by Adnan Abdul Raziq, assesses the state of digitization carried out by the UN, and traces some of the outstanding limitations and pitfalls that exist in the UNCCP archives and possible avenues for their rectification.

## The Monograph's Themes

The monograph presents the proceedings of the workshop, which was held on 10–11 June 1998, and, as pointed out above, contains additional papers commissioned by the editors in order to fill gaps that became apparent as a result of deliberations during the workshop. The workshop was attended by UNRWA staff, researchers from the Centre d'études de recherches sur le Moyen-Orient contemporain (CERMOC) in Amman, a representative from the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, technical experts, and funders of the workshop.

There are two overriding themes to this monograph. One, to describe in detail the organizational structure and the practices that evolved over more than half century to monitor, administer, and provide essential services to a refugee population that numbers in excess of four million people and is scattered in different geographical areas. Second, to provide the reader with a sense of how this information, all of which practically exists in archival format, could be preserved as an integral part of Palestinian history, and eventually utilized to carry out policy-related research and academic analysis.

The first organized attempts made at assisting Palestinian refugees immediately after the 1948 Nakba were undertaken by the AFSC and the ICRC. In the closing months of 1948, the AFSC was asked by the United Nations to offer assistance to the two hundred thousand Palestinian refugees who ended up in Gaza after their expulsion and flight from their homes and villages. Julie Peteet surveys the archives of the AFSC in Philadelphia, starting with January 1949, when the AFSC established field offices in Gaza, to May 1950, when the AFSC handed over its refugee files to the newly established UNRWA. The organization of the archives is meticulous. The AFSC kept detailed records on the administration of Palestinian refugees, and reflections and impressions of the AFSC's relief workers at the time. In addition to the statistical data which was turned over to the UNRWA and is not available in Philadelphia, the archives contain a wealth of qualitative information which captures the operation of the largest refugee NGO at the time in an environment where the local population in Gaza numbering around eighty thousand was ill- equipped and overwhelmed to handle a flood of two hundred thousand refugees. For researchers, the administrative material is useful in highlighting the process of organizational decision-making under highly stressful conditions. However, not surprisingly, Peteet did see the archives as a useful source for learning about the refugee experience. She describes the archives as a classic example of object construction. She remarks that "refugee voices are completely absent from these archives," and goes on to say that "for those interested in the construction of the refugee as an object of intervention and management, these documents are exceedingly enlightening."

Parallel to the AFSC activities, the ICRC offices were set up in December 1948 in Amman, Beirut, and various parts of Palestine. On behalf of the UNRPR, the ICRC provided medical and relief assistance to Palestinian refugees until May 1950, when their services were transferred to UNRWA. In preparing the chapter on the ICRC

archives, Jalal Al Husseini visited the ICRC offices in Geneva in 1998. When the ICRC terminated its refugee assistance operation in 1950, it shipped only one-tenth of its estimated ten tons of documents to its Geneva offices. The rest were destroyed in Beirut. Al Husseini discovered that none of the personal information about refugees was available in Geneva, even though between February and April 1950, the ICRC had registered 331,000 refugees in "Arab Palestine" (that is, outside the Israel armistice border of 1948), and an additional 28,000 internal refugees in what became Israel. In all likelihood, these records were passed on to UNRWA with the transfer of responsibility between the two organizations. Similar to what the AFSC archives revealed, here too the bulk of the material in Geneva deals with the administrative and organizational functions of the ICRC and chronicles reports from its field offices in various locations in the Middle East. To the extent that their records dealt with individual refugees, they related to the limited number of family reunification cases, where basic information about the applicant was preserved. However, these application forms did not include the full range of demographic and background data on the applicant. In some cases, the ICRC files contained information about the circumstances surrounding the expulsion and displacement of refugees. In other cases, the ICRC was singled out by its own functionaries for not having provided sufficient assistance to refugees to curtail their hasty departure from Palestine. The definition of what constitutes a refugee seems to be guided by administrative criteria rather than by any universal definition. Thus, the ICRC definition of refugee hinged on one losing their domicile as a result of the 1948 war. As Al Husseini points out, this definition did not accommodate those who lost their livelihood but remained in their domicile, such as the residents of Tulkarm and the Bedouins of Bir al-Sab'a region. In spite of any shortcomings, the ICRC did manage to set up thirty-six refugee camps and provide preliminary educational, health and relief services until UNRWA took over the task of looking after the "Refugees of Palestine."

Our estimate, after visiting UNRWA Headquarters in Amman, Gaza, and the West Bank, is that close to seventy million documents are stored in these sites. The survey of the UNRWA offices in Syria, which was carried out by Jaber Suleiman, covered the family files, hardship cases, and educational and health data. He estimated that there are a total of 5.3 million documents. The survey count of documents in UNRWA's Lebanon fields of operation carried out by Bassem Sirhan produced a figure of 6.3 million sheets of paper. The count for Syria and Lebanon did not include administrative records, since most of these administrative documents are stored in the Amman headquarters. Altogether, we can say that there are around eighty million sheets of paper of direct interest to the digitization project, in addition to audiovisual material.

There are important variations in the administrative practices, depending on the site in question. For example, in Syria the government kept close tabs on the refugee population from the outset and, as pointed out by Suleiman, the Syrian Ministry of Labor and Welfare maintains close coordination with UNRWA, so much so that the registration number given to Palestinian refugees by the Syrian government appears

on the refugee file maintained by UNRWA, and vice versa. As well, any changes in the family status of the refugee (birth, marriage, death, etc.) must be coordinated between the two agencies. This is in contrast to Lebanon where, although the government set up a separate administrative unit in charge of the refugees, the chaotic situation in the country made such close coordination between UNRWA and the Lebanese government impossible to maintain. Jordan also maintains a separate department for dealing with Palestinian refugee affairs, which is affiliated with the prime minister's office. Unlike Syria, Lebanon, and other Arab countries, Jordan granted Palestinian refugees of 1948 full citizenship status, and it coordinates with UNRWA routine monitoring of the camps. Even in the West Bank and Gaza where the rest of the refugees are located, the Israeli occupation authorities carried out in 1967 its census of the occupied territories and maintained the population registry until it was turned over to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the wake of the Oslo agreements. Even here, the PA, in accordance with the Interim Agreement with Israel, continues to provide the Israeli government with all updates to the population registry. At least this was the case until the outbreak of the second uprising following the collapse of the Camp David talks in September 2000.

The UNRWA registration forms contain historical and current information dating to the pre-1948 period. For example, the pre-1948 information (contained in the family files) covers issues such as birth and marriage certificates, property deeds, land registration, tax receipts, etc. The registration coding scheme makes it possible to trace changes in family and individual member status across four generations, covering social and geographic mobility of the refugees. It is thus possible to construct a demographic profile of Palestinian refugees for policy and research purposes. Through proper linkages with other documents in the files one should be able to examine relationships between health factors, education, and other demographic variables, bearing in mind that the educational and health data extends back to only five years. As it became clear in the workshop, and presented in the summary of the workshop's proceedings prepared by Martina Reiker, the process of making linkages by creating a standardized coding system for the various types of documents in UNRWA's archives is yet to be achieved. This is in spite of UNRWA's valiant attempts to create a uniform registration system. In instances when UNRWA contemplated substituting the current family/household system with an individual-based registration system, the host governments reacted with unease fearing that such a system would imply a census undertaking and as such pose "a threat to their national statistical sovereignty." In order to reduce errors and uncertainty in refugee registration and transliteration of names from Arabic to English, it is recommended that the new digitized system should be bilingual to enable searches to be carried out in either of the two languages. Eventually, this information should be made available to the refugees themselves and to future generations.

On occasion, one comes across data revealing information that has been little known so far. For example, the UNRWA archives in Syria contain information about two depopulated villages near the Syrian-Israeli border containing the Krad al-Baqqara

and Krad al-Ghannameh tribes. Although they first became refugees in 1948, to be later allowed to return to their villages in 1949 after the signing of truce agreement between Israel and Syria, Israel moved some of them in 1951 to other locations within the Green Line, and in 1956, on the eve of the invasion of Egypt, Israel expelled them to the Syrian Golan. They eventually moved to other locations within Syria in the wake of the 1967 war. As of this date UNRWA refuses to register them as refugees, after numerous attempts were made by the refugees themselves. Suleiman provides this as a "case deserving further study."

Although the UNRWA archives contained information about refugee property ownership, the extent of this information was rather limited. A more comprehensive source is the database compiled by the UNCCP and stored in New York. There is no doubt that there is overlap between the UNRWA and the UNCCP data. The UNCCP did not distinguish between refugee and non-refugee in its survey. It thus included data about Palestinians who became refuges in 1948 but did not register with UNRWA, as well as information about non-Palestinian owners of property in Palestine, and Palestinians who remained in what became Israel. Although Fischbach admits the presence of certain lacuna in the UNCCP records, they contain "the most complete and most reliable source of data indicating the number of refugee landowners and the scope of their losses available in the world." The shortcoming of these archives is due to the fact that the UNCCP did not take into account collectively owned land, waqf land, built-up areas, publicly owned land, and movable property. In short, the UNCCP records, as Fischbach admits, must be used with care, particularly in calculating Palestinian losses for compensation purposes in any future settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis.

In addition, UNCCP records have major flaws, pointed out both by Fischbach and Abdul Raziq. One of these is the absence of all records pertaining to land in the Bir al-Sab'a region, where communal and nomadic usufruct was preponderant. That land constituted a very substantial area of Arab property in pre-1948 Palestine. The inclusion of these properties will be a major task involved in the updating of these files.

One main objective of this collection of archival documents is to initiate both policy and scholarly studies on how best to use refugee records in a manner that will relate to the current debate about the future of refugees. Most pressing among them is to help in a concrete way to address the issues of claims for restitution and compensation of refugee property, and the issue of repatriation of refugees. We hope that these documents will contribute to create the basis of an integrated corpus of data that cross-references material from UNRWA, UNCCP, IRC, and AFSC archives. Another task would be to enhance the internal usability of each of those registries. In the case of UNRWA, we are proposing that future input be made in three areas:

One, the expansion of the Unified Registration System (URS) to include regular input from the various health and education field offices so that the demographic profiles are more comprehensive. This will allow not only for regional comparisons about the conditions of refugees, but will also give us time series comparisons about changes in their conditions.

Second, the incorporation of historical material located mainly in the family files, as well as in other data from the Central Registry of UNRWA archives, into the computerized system. This also entails transforming the URS from a current database into a historical database, allowing for the accumulation of biographical data over four generations of refugees.

With such horizontal and vertical expansion of the UNRWA database, the researcher can begin to examine regional differences among refugee communities, and address in a more systematic manner the tasks of rebuilding refugees' lives once schemes for repatriation are undertaken. Material is suggested in this volume about the utility of such investigations using existing data. For example, we show how the URS can be effectively utilized for tracing place of origin of refugees before the 1948 war and correlating this geographic information with their current residence, refugee camp status, material condition of the family, and demographic profiles of its members. With the enhanced incorporation of the family files, and with effective linkages to the UNCCP files, we can expand these correlations to assess losses during the war, property claims, and existing skills obtained by family members. With the preparation of claim files, such data will prove to be indispensable.

But for this type of research and policy programs to be effective we should also focus on a third area, the question of linkages. As they have been constituted since 1950, UNRWA family files are not the proper source for establishing systematic documentation for material and non-material claims by refugee household. Their utility is limited in giving a partial picture about the social conditions about the refugee household, their habitat before their exile, and the conditions that led to their expulsion from Palestine. Only by linking these files to the Refugee Property 1 (RP1) forms (covering the bulk of private property entries) that constitute the basis of the UNCCP data does one begin to acquire a holistic picture about the material conditions of the refugee families and the magnitude of their losses.

The editors hope that these collected papers will provide a modest but useful basis for the researchers and policy makers seeking sources and methods to establish a linkage between the four main data sources on Palestinian refugees.

**Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik**
**Editors, Jerusalem**
**12 January 2001**

# The Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

The Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem is an annual award launched by the *Jerusalem Quarterly* in 2017 to honor the memory and work of Ibrahim Dakkak (1929–2016), Jerusalem architect, activist, political leader, and former chairman of the Advisory Board of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

It is awarded to an outstanding submission (in English or Arabic) that addresses either contemporary or historical issues relating to Jerusalem. A committee selected by the *Jerusalem Quarterly* determines the winning essay. The author will be awarded a prize of U.S. $1,000, and the essay will be published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

Essays submitted or nominated for consideration should be based on original research and must not have been previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Essays should be 4,000 to 5,000 words in length (including endnotes), preceded by an abstract of no more than 200 words, and up-to 10 keywords.

If the submitted or nominated essay is in Arabic, the abstract and keywords should be in English.

Preference will be given to emerging/early career researchers and students.

Please submit or nominate essays and a short bio (including current or previous affiliation with a recognized university, research institution, or non-governmental organization that conducts research) via email to **jq@palestine-studies.org**, mentioning the Award. In the case of nomination, please provide a contact email address for the nominated author.

Any images should be submitted as separate files with a resolution of 600 dpi minimum, if possible. Submitted images must have copyright clearance from owners, and have captions that are clear and accurate.

The deadline for submissions and nominations is **15 January** of each year.

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