



## Cats of Jerusalem

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The solitariness of cats in Jerusalem, their scruffiness, their wariness, the mode of their survival in a city that is holy and not holy, how they mirror the old city's insular nature, its current predicament, and the people's life in that situation—all tell us about the city and the particularly peculiar nature of human relations within it. They are also a sign of our time.

What happened with me and the cats in Jerusalem is like nothing I have experienced anywhere else. While it says something about cats in general, it also says much about the specific condition of the city. Society itself is reflected in how it treats animals, and they in turn respond to the humans around them. If a society is under stress, it reacts to animals within it and they parallel that reaction: if it is violent, the violence is revealed in how it affects animals; if a society is decadent, this will manifest itself in its treatment of pets. It

*Cats in Jerusalem. Source: author's collection.*

is said that cruelty is latent in the human character, even though we usually think of children as innocent. Is civilized brutality, or instinct perverted by socialization, worse than natural cruelty? Cruelty can be diminished by cultural constraints, but if a society is left to its own devices, at the same time that it is being strangled by a colonizing power intent on disintegrating it, then it may find outlets in subterranean ways, or even turn on itself.

## **Historical and Literary Cats**

In ancient Egypt, where some gods were represented in animal form, cats were domesticated and inducted into a symbiotic relationship with human society.<sup>1</sup> They were respected and made sacred, and so a halo of mystery and reverence surrounded them. They were regarded as especially favored by the gods, and while not made into gods themselves they were taken to exhibit particular god-like characteristics. Seen as protective of their young and yet as lovers of a beneficent sun, cats typified motherhood and fertility and were associated with the regenerative powers of the sun's warmth. Reflecting attributes of a mother goddess, cats became favored by the people as well. The cats in Egypt today are the descendants of those honored cats, but live now under degraded conditions that also apply to much of the human population.

In strong contrast, in medieval times in Europe religious beliefs associated cats with evil and with witchcraft. It is a weird thing this association of cats with witchcraft; even Judas is connected to a cat in paintings of the Last Supper. And so it goes. Cats become the displaced objects for people's fears and paranoia—telling us more about the perversions of religion by the clergy and believers than about cats themselves.

All that changed again in a later period. The Romantic poets and writers reminded us that our original nature is to be found in the wilderness. William Blake's "Tiger" captures the mystery of the cat family in the famous lines: "Tiger, tiger burning bright / In the middle of the night." For him, the tiger is a symbol of primal energy and passion, a form of perfect symmetry. It stands outside convoluted human societies that distort primitive instincts and turn adult experience into a system of repression and injustice.

Wild cats today seem instinctively vengeful of humans for disrupting their habitats, for injecting their self-centered initiatives into the life of all nature and making it impossible for the rare wild animal to survive. In the colonization of America, instead of making a fresh start, humans engaged in wholesale extermination of both wild animals and of other humans they conveniently saw as savages and beasts, thinking that by relegating these humans to animal status they would stamp them with inferiority, make them worthless, and so justify their dispossession. Humanity in general has been unable to keep wild things wild, to be comfortable with ambiguities or uncertainties within or outside societies. So humans have domesticated most animals and turned them into regulated food sources or what they think are harmless



*Black Cat* by Farid Abu Shakra. Source: author's collection.

pets. As a kind of counterweight perhaps, Edgar Alan Poe's story "The Black Cat" is a catalyst of revenge for what humans have done in projecting onto the natural and the neutral their own insecurities, their perversity, superstitions, and obsessions.

Cats and other animals become entertainers for public consumption in Hollywood and in the Western cultural imagination. There is *Archy and Mehitabel the Cat* (Archy is a cockroach), Morris the Cat, Tom and Jerry, and countless other cartoons. In Looney Toons, there is Sylvester, and

also in the Pepe Le Pew series the sleek, coquettish black cat, who becomes the object of a crazy skunk's unshakable desire. Ducks, mice, ants, pigs, cats, and dogs of course are endeared as pets of one kind or another. In fact, insects and animals that have become pests proliferate because of human congestion and human filth, while finer and more delicate things become rare or extinct because they are desired for their obvious exclusivity. Curiously, humans today sentimentalize certain animals, whether a duck or a piglet or a deer or a lamb or a cow, then proceed to slaughter them in meat factories or in the wild or on the roads. And even in caring for and possessing their pets they take them away from a condition that may have been better for them. With some contradiction, in cities we often see a love for pets existing side by side with a lack of care for human neighbors. At a dinner gathering, a guest spoke disparagingly of a hopeless people who had lost a conflict, and concluded that the weak get what they deserve. Later, he described how much he loved his dog, and let him share the bed on cold nights with himself and his wife. Asked about this disparity in sentiment, for sympathy, he stormed off from the dinner table and left. Little do we consider how such symptoms speak volumes about the extent to which human societies have moved away from a natural state into distraction or decadence.

Then there is the popular musical *Cats*, based on T. S. Eliot's volume of playful poems entitled *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.<sup>2</sup> In "The Naming of Cats," Eliot tells us that cats have three different names: a regular family name, a peculiar name, and a name we can never guess that only the cat knows. His poems portray various cat-human characters, among them: "The Rum Tum Tugger," who always wants the opposite of what he is offered; "Macavity: The Mystery Cat," the "Napoleon of crime"; and "Gus: The Theatre Cat," whose name is really Asparagus.

## Pet Cats

Rum Tum reminds me of a cat I met on a recent visit to Italy. She lived mostly in the kitchen of my host's city apartment. She was in the way all the time, wanting attention, and so the kitchen had to remain closed to prevent her from taking over the whole apartment. She was later left in my care at my host's country house, out in the relative wild so to speak. The cat was at first conflicted between her habits of living in a city apartment and the freedom and sun she was getting on the farm. The first two nights, she meowed at 5 a.m. outside the window to wake me up and to say she wanted food, company, or to sleep inside. Eventually, we agreed on a language—food, affection, likes and dislikes; what her “g-rr” and “g-h-m” meant. She started sniffing in the bushes and the grass. She hunted down a lizard, flipping it up just as I saw feral Jerusalem cats do as they toyed with a mouse, bloodying the steps and door entrance, making an offering of sorts to please me. My guest cat bit off the poor lizard's tail, so I had to free it and put it far away to grow another tail.

One night she definitely refused to stay inside. As the sun had beckoned to her in the day, the moon called at night. The next morning she didn't even eat the gourmet food my hosts provided, probably having hunted something at night. She ran around free, stayed outside at night as she liked, and didn't wake me up at 5 a.m. She still walked wherever I walked, and ran and ran, ahead of me and back, wanting doses of affection, arching her back in joy. She started wanting to run around more, and disappeared into the surroundings for hours. Her whiskers became increasingly decorated with bits of dry vegetation.

I've heard that when they are close to death cats may go off alone to die quietly. (Unless in a city or on a highway the cat—or dog or deer or other animal—is struck by a vehicle, its blood and guts spread over the black asphalt. And who will pick up the dead animal and throw it into the garbage bin or put it to the side to rot away?) I remember this curiosity about cats going off to die because of what happened to an old cat we took from friends in Canada who were leaving to go abroad. She was fat and arthritic. They felt so much for their pet that they had wanted to “put her to sleep”; she couldn't move much, and they felt so responsible. So instead of euthanasia we offered to take her in and let her live a little longer. Though used to an enclosed environment, she now spent time in the garden, often sleeping outside in the sun on a bench. As her pained bones and joints absorbed more sun, she gained strength and ventured to go up steps and other minor obstacles. Then, about three months later she just vanished. We looked and posted notices, but she was gone. When I called our friends overseas to tell them their cat had disappeared, that she either went away to die or was taken in by a charitable neighbor, they were upset about what had happened. I guess they would have preferred to give her a proper funeral, to have decided her fate, to have their own sense of “closure.”

## The Paris Cat Massacre

The “great” Paris cat massacre, which occurred in the 1730s, reveals much about the sources of human cruelty. It also relates to what I say here about cats and people, and what meaning there is in other situations, as in the circumstances of habitation and occupation in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The Paris event is discussed in a chapter by Robert Darnton, based on a report by Nicolas Contat, who tells stories about what happened in printers’ shops at the time.<sup>3</sup> One anecdote concerns two apprentices, Jerome and Léveillé, who worked at the shop of Jacques Vincent situated on Rue Saint-Séverin. The workers and apprentices had dingy sleeping quarters, endured miserable living conditions, and were kept awake by the constant howling of alley cats at night. While the apprentices suffered from this profusion of alley cats, the master’s wife kept as a pet a female cat she called *la grise* (the grey one). In response to such preference for animal over human, Léveillé used his talent for mimicry to torture the masters by going on their roof at night, meowing and howling horribly to make it equally difficult for them to asleep. After several nights of this treatment, the master and mistress charged the apprentices to get rid of the cats. The apprentices collected as many cats as they could and hanged them, including *la grise*.

That the apprentices would openly kill cats in Paris which was of course made possible by the cultural accumulation of superstitions and myths about cats. Cats were fair game, although a pet culture had already developed among the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. There were common cats and luxury cats. In one sense, the apprentices exploited cultural themes that relied on human fear of cats, superstitious associations with witchcraft, the occult, and sexual powers. As Darnton suggests, the cat is “a sexual metaphor or metonym” and the killing of *la grise* is “an oblique attack on the master and his wife”: the apprentices were making a subversive statement not only to say that the wife was a witch of sorts but also that the husband was being cuckolded.<sup>4</sup> It is one way to make a statement and go apparently unpunished.

Yet this “metonymic insult” is surpassed by the political implications of the workers’ ploy. It highlights bourgeois hypocrisy and moral duplicity, the sharp differences among classes and the necessity of tyranny and oppression to maintain luxuries and privileges. It is thus an act of revolt camouflaged as a cruel joke. In his account, Contat explains: “The masters love cats, so consequently they [the apprentices] must hate them.”<sup>5</sup> In the psychology of this incident, it seems that the attack on the cats (making them objects of hatred and subjecting them to torture) is subterfuge for hatred of the masters. It is an act of resistance. For often, the oppressed find inverted outlets to escape their condition as they react to the cruelties and injustices that make them restless. How that restlessness is channeled is not always predictable, though often it is inwardly directed in self-destructive actions. In this case, the resentment took both actual and symbolic forms of violence and persecution projected onto accessible objects, like the easy-to-catch domesticated cats. By contrast in Egypt, where cats were revered, a story survives of an occupying Roman soldier who killed a cat and lost his life at the hands of the enraged people.



Pueblita. *Source: author's collection.*



Bonita. *Source: author's collection.*

## Cats of Old Jerusalem

Something similar happens with cats and people in the old streets of Jerusalem. Jerusalem cats stand apart; they are and are not like other cats. What is striking is the absolute non-pet nature of their existence and the feline grace some of them can exhibit, even under conditions of hardship. I am speaking of the many street cats, not the ones owned by west Jerusalem Israelis who have come from the West and imported that pet culture (and sometimes the pets themselves) with them, or the few cats kept by “aristocratic” Palestinian families in east Jerusalem who generally keep their pets locked up inside. That kind of culture comes with luxury. The “non-pets” are the many feral cats on the streets, mostly on the east side of the city or within the confines of the Old City walls.

These street cats are of the hardest variety, having had to survive in an environment in which they are not really welcome but allowed to remain because they are there. Maybe they help to control the mice, though probably not the rats. Mating in this closed cage over the ages, they have become more and more mongrelized. A litter has an unpredictable variety, mixed colors, big heads and small heads, long legs and pigmy legs, and other mixed genetic features—often multi-colored with no particular pattern, mottled, though occasionally one has an odd single color or two colors only; the shape and bone structure, the character, so different among siblings.

Into them has been genetically instilled generations of suspicion, so they rarely let people get close or touch them. In other cities where people feed the cats



Cats being fed on the Mount of Olives, 2009. *Source: author's collection.*

and are kinder to them, even when not their own pets, one could walk by and the cats won't move. Not these Jerusalem cats: not allowing humans to get close is instinctive. As they grow, the attrition is great. One sees blind cats, lame or otherwise handicapped cats, sick cats dying, and cats with tails cut off. Obviously, the cats here have not benefited much from human advances in medical care.

The ones that remain are tough, with highly developed survival strategies: I am strong so I get the food first; humans are abusive or unhelpful so I run away from them; this person gives me food so I accept her or him; I know where to hide my litter. And the central venue for food is usually the garbage container. One can hardly ever throw a bag into a garbage container without some cats jumping out in panic. And the garbage is also the central point for infighting. Little cats who dare go for food before being a strong adult risk being beaten, pounded repeatedly by the larger cat (though occasionally I saw several cats, perhaps relatives, taking turns to share the food). Their nature in the city enclosure is a strange blend of the tame and the feral, a forced and unnatural condition.

Human adults, other than those who offer them leftovers, don't care much for them, often don't even notice them. But many of the kids are attentive to animals on the street, mostly dogs or cats. More often than not, they abuse them, if they can catch them. They may not be quite aware they are being abusive, and sometimes they just want to "play" with them. Usually the targets are smaller animals that are not



Cats in garbage. *Source: author's collection.*

sophisticated enough to find ways of escape.

And the children: why do some abuse cats? How could one explain their cruelty to animals? Though Palestinians in general cannot afford to have a pet culture, I didn't see this kind of abuse happening in other Palestinian villages and towns. One still feels there survives a childhood innocence, care, and deference, even more in the refugee camps of Gaza than elsewhere. So it seems to be something more specific to male children in Jerusalem. They are used to talking to tourists, and can be brash on the streets. They even brandish their use of Hebrew by calling out in a silly way a greeting like "Shalom," even when the recipient doesn't want to hear that word. They are exposed to the Israelis more than are people in the West Bank and Gaza, mostly the ever-present soldiers who oversee them, who are figures of power over them. In glimpses, the children also notice Zionist colonists as they pass by on their way to their hideouts in the Old City, where their presence is imposed by force, trickery, or fraud.

In this treatment of cats there are all the signs of a damaged and brutalized environment. The behaviour of the occupier toward the occupied can only be a source of personal humiliation. In east Jerusalem, most of the adults seem to accept such humiliation grudgingly as a matter of necessity. Defenseless and lacking organized resistance, they are unsupported, and some may be more easily bribed with small advantages (such as better health care) over their compatriots in the West Bank and

Gaza. At the same time, they are sucked dry by the imposition of Israeli taxes out of which they don't get a reasonable return in services, only a small fraction of what Jewish communities get, and can easily fall under the threat of land confiscation or house demolition. They know the grand design of the Zionists is to take over the city completely, to Judaize it, getting rid of Jerusalem Palestinians or minimizing their number to a small minority that has no voice. Gradually, more pressure is exerted on the population, more Palestinians lose their residency in the city, and more areas are turned into Jewish outposts. Yet Palestinian Jerusalemites seem to accept what happens without much resistance (except when the flashpoint is Al-Aqsa Mosque). Often they acquiesce for merely the sake of survival.

The children don't understand all these intricacies, but they internalize their parents' attitudes. Perhaps in claiming power over cats they are exposing the nakedness of the brute show of force that rules their lives in every detail. Instinctively, their cruelty to animals comes from a misplaced persecution—a projection onto the animal of a power over which they will have no control or any opportunity to change. They cannot affect what happens around them, and are unequal, unfree, in the city of their birth.

Israel's grand design is even worse. Ultimately it wants to destroy the values inherent in Palestinian society, to degrade the Palestinians and render them purposeless. As they set about their goals, the Israelis neglect the general welfare of Palestinians living in occupied Jerusalem while giving preference to Jewish development. This is not merely casual neglect; it is policy.<sup>6</sup> If there is drug addiction, they look the other way; if there is small crime, they turn a blind eye. When neighborhood conflicts occur, the Israelis either allow them to escalate or permit local leaders to revert to their "tribal" customs to resolve them. Tribal structures don't exist in Jerusalem, so residents sometimes have to call in negotiators from surrounding villages or Bedouin groups. In one instance, when the local Palestinian police wanted to arrest a drug dealer in a West Bank suburb of Jerusalem, the Israeli army came in with jeeps just as the arrest was taking place and carried the drug dealer to safety (making it likely that he was a collaborator). The plan is to increase disintegration and the loss of societal cohesion—enforcing a selfish-cat type of existence on every Palestinian who remains.

When one is self-colonized, identity is subverted and one accepts its destruction, swallows it. It is much more dangerous to be self-colonized than to be merely under occupation. When one is colonized, there is awareness and a desire to be rid of the colonizer. Children sense this, as they are exposed to colonization, become victims of it, seeing fathers unable to provide or protect. What values can they then hold, what pride can there be? Their sense of oppression spills over into their behaviour on the streets, their purpose being to let off steam against something outside their little circle, something easy to persecute, and that poses no danger of reprisal. But this is not, of course, to confront the real enemy, nor what the enemy plans.



Jerusalem cat at the École Biblique, 2009. *Source: author's collection.*

## Personal Cats

A few of Jerusalem's cats are majestic—a crack in the genetic line from some pure breed, or a less degraded variety. Feline grace and regeneration can appear in a proud, insouciant walk and independence. Like the one who came around to befriend me one day. I had rented a small house just outside the Old City walls, close to the Rockefeller Museum (previously the Palestine Museum).<sup>7</sup> On an early autumn day a cat walked into the garden, golden brown in color with dark and lighter stripes, almost like a tigress, with long legs and amber eyes. She seemed to want more than just something to eat. I scrambled to find some leftover food, only to discover she wanted what was good and fresh, and without too much fat. She had decided this garden would be her home and quiet shelter against a backdrop of danger and confusion. In her manner, she recalled the idea of *ash sha'ab* (“the people” in Arabic), expressed also in the popular chant “El pueblo unido jamas sara vencido” (“The people united never will be vanquished”). One might hope that the people of Jerusalem will similarly show their pride and stand more firmly to claim their rights.

She fulfilled her *nom de guerre* somewhat differently in that she started a line of cats and had two deliveries within a few months. One of her habits was to lie in the garden and turn for me to rub her stomach. I noticed the bulging, and she delivered in March. She didn't want to eat the day she delivered. (I guess cats are not hungry right after delivery because they eat their afterbirth and lick the litter clean.) I couldn't find where she had hidden the kittens until they started walking. None of them looked anything like mother, and one of them was particularly odd, short, and pesky. I returned after a summer break to find none of the litter around, all presumably killed. Mother was still there, and she welcomed me back as if I had left only the day before.

After about two months, I noticed a bulge in her belly again. This seemed impossible, since it is commonly said that cats only mate in late winter or early spring. I wondered whether this pregnancy was her reaction to having lost the first litter. In late October, she delivered a litter of three in a fairly open spot: a cavity in the trunk of an old mulberry tree. More autumn rain was coming, and perhaps she thought the spot was protected from the rain, or maybe she felt safe enough in this garden to leave the babies so open to sight. This time she let me touch them. She later moved the litter twice, for cleanliness perhaps or out of possible danger. One spot was deep into a huge overhanging rosemary bush, a place almost impossible to see or access. She signaled them to come out using a low-pitched sound. Of the two that survived, one kitten was almost totally white, with a small patch of brown, a poor copy of her mother, “beautiful” in appearance but unattractive in character; the other one was bony and shaggy, in various shades of black and brown, a bit of white on the breast, and greenish eyes.

One day mother disappeared, and a second day passed. The two kittens were restless, searching, crying. On the third day, as I was walking to the house, I saw a ten-year-old boy coming up the street. I stopped to ask him. He knew, described her to me, and told me that two or three days before she had been run over by a car at the

intersection near the bottom of the hill, and he had taken her and put her in a garbage container. It was then that the two kittens allowed me to get close.

What happened later was a mini-drama. The white kitten was less than five months old when males began chasing her, and she was in heat. I tried to protect her from almost-rape, especially after she was bitten on the neck by a huge brown male. My many efforts were of no avail, and a litter of two males and a female was the result. A child had given birth to smaller children. She couldn't take care of them, hide them well, or defend them. One day the smallest male, who had a large head, was stretched out in the middle of the yard, with the child-mother licking him and trying to revive him. One of the neighborhood kids told me that an older boy had gone into the yard when the kittens were out and kicked the little one with his boot. Obviously, the neck was broken. I buried him in the garden under a pomegranate tree and placed a stone marker there. I know where. The harsh modern environment of cat life in Jerusalem is very different from that found in ancient Egypt where people once developed a custom of mummifying dead cats and burying them in special cat cemeteries. That particular human-animal past has degenerated into our present treatment of cats, both feral and tame.

The bony one, belatedly, was also pregnant. She must have delivered too, but I was not there to see her raise the litter, or what the little ones looked like. I imagined her as a careful mother, resourceful and protective. When I returned months later, within seconds she was on the fence, looking older, shaggier so her boniness did not show, her large, green eyes melting, as she ran after me on the edges, calling.

## Insularity

The cats seem far removed from the “holy” nature of the city. The city's religious associations have eventually produced, as priests and people practiced their religions, something like an odd type of cat existence.

I don't think a figure like Jesus, prophet of love, could have disliked cats. The gospels refer to dogs and pigs in uncomplimentary ways, that's true, but only in parables that reflect cultural differences. Though cats are not mentioned, it is not hard to imagine Christ favoring them. The Muslim prophet Muhammad is reported to have liked cats, particularly one he called *mu'izza* (the endeared one). Reportedly, a cat (I'm not sure if it was *mu'izza* or another one) was sleeping on the sleeve of his robe. It is said that he preferred to tear off the sleeve from the robe rather than disturb the cat.

Yet such concern is not what one finds with respect to cats in the city of monotheistic religions. If one were to walk down the Old City's alleys and look beyond the tourist shops and religious sites, examining instead the structure of the habitation, one would understand its inward and insular nature. Most homes are constructed around central courtyards, with people in small apartments piled on top of each other. No wonder cats are shouted away. Each complex is usually solidly gated and locked. It is not like today's Damascus where the courtyards are more

open and welcoming. Many of Jerusalem's old residential complexes are associated with religious sects. Numerous monasteries, nunneries, churches, and other religious compounds (not to mention now the massive Israeli outposts) in and around the Old City are like fortresses, to which entry is strictly controlled. This stems from centuries of self-protective behaviour in response to real or imagined dangers, dangers that now are amplified under occupation by a constructed fear whereby each is taught to survive by being cautious.

People of various religions and ethnicities had lived together peacefully but guardedly in Jerusalem for many centuries. Communities interacted in economic affairs and in more limited social ways. They greeted each other politely on the street; they were neighbors in shops; they did business together; some even were friends and visited each other on occasions. But intermarriage was taboo, and one did not switch sect or religion without consequences. Nothing changed abruptly, but at the same time suspicion grew out of people's wariness.

Even among the Christian sects there was competition and tension, especially over how to divide custodianship of sacred precincts. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is sliced into sections by traditional Christian sects, and to avoid further conflict the main keys are entrusted to a Muslim family. Often tensions boil over into fist-fights among priests and followers. And then there are the city's quarters: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Armenian, and so on.

Such a mixture of humanity is positive, normally. It could even make for what is praised as a multicultural community; and indeed it was so for a long time. But then came the British Mandate and the Zionist incursion in the early twentieth century; conflict and sectarian divisions instituted by colonial design; the occupation of Palestinian lands that became the state of Israel in 1948; and in 1967 the occupation of east Jerusalem (and with it all the other occupations).

## **Power Cats**

Into this city of a motley population has now come a power with a single-minded goal. Since 1967, Israel and its Jerusalem municipality have implemented measures to Judaize the eastern part of the city. With west Jerusalem, in 1948, the Israelis got all the forcibly vacated Palestinian stone houses without paying for them. Now in east Jerusalem, the Judaizing plans are seen in new colonial suburbs built on confiscated land with Jewish contributions, and a house here or an apartment building there taken over by hook or by crook. These spaces of colonization are fenced in and well-protected, with large Israeli flags displayed, all designed to place mini-fortresses within and outside the Old City. Zionist organizations, or more usually their intermediaries, manage to concoct excuses for taking over a building or for wooing this person or that institution to sell property. This happened with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchy and a few Jerusalemite property owners—usually by trickery, when the Zionist system finds the weaker links.



*Cat and Jet* by Farid Abu Shakra. *Source: author's collection.*

It was natural for various quarters to have existed in the Old City, and what happened between 1948 and 1967 was an unfortunate historical gap in the continuity of a Jewish quarter. But it is another thing to expand the Jewish quarter at others' expense, to make it much larger than it was, and to use sheer force to destroy a Palestinian residential quarter to create a plaza in front of the Western Wall. Israel has taken over houses in the previous no-man's land, spread out into the French Hill and Silwan, enlarged the boundaries of the city by building huge colonies to increase the Jewish population, and separated Jerusalem from its natural West Bank extensions. It has also instituted policies that make it more difficult for non-Jewish Jerusalemites to live in their city and that stifle their existence, in an attempt to Judaize the city by force. It is a creeping, many-pronged process that continues to be implemented with sacred sites and with place names (as I discuss in other chapters), as has already

occurred with the Hebron mosque, now more than 60 percent controlled by Jewish extremists, and as is planned for the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

In Silwan, just east of the Old City walls—or what some Zionist archaeologists like to call “the City of David” (although there is absolutely no evidence for that David, despite the many targeted excavations)—the plans are most insidious.<sup>8</sup> A richly funded corporation by the name of ELAD has been given free reign to implement the Zionist agenda, colonizing, taking over properties, finding excuses to evict Palestinians, and building for Jews in confiscated space—basically violating even Israeli antiquities laws that would prohibit such “development” in sensitive areas.<sup>9</sup> Archaeology is used or abused to support these nefarious activities, as when (funded by rightwing Zionist financiers from New York) a Zionist archaeologist declared the “discovery” of “King David’s palace,” despite objections by some Israeli archaeologists.<sup>10</sup> Find a structure or a pile of stones, provide no proof, and call it anything you like.

In such a situation, laden as it is with deceit and dissimulation, human relations are disrupted, turning a city that could have been a model of positive diversity into an odd cat litter multiplied thousands of times. Israel’s control mechanisms and its Judaizing designs have amplified the city’s insularities and its fragmented identities. It is one mongrel in control, posturing as a purebred, using trickery to corner or scatter a motley populace whose foremost concern becomes its immediate survival rather than developing a larger communal interest. In such predatory conditions, raw power may continue to succeed for a while in breaking life-links among people and in diverting attention. Still, it does not seem possible that it could succeed in its aim of forcing an earth-bounded people, a out of existence.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 The word “cat” and its varieties in Western languages probably derive from North African and Asiatic roots, which in Arabic is *qitta* (feminine) and *qit* (masculine).
- 2 T. S. Eliot, *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* (London: Faber, 1939).
- 3 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre, and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 74–105.
- 4 Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 95, 78, 96.
- 5 Quoted in Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 103.
- 6 See, for example, a study by Meir Margalit, *Discrimination in the Heart of the Holy City* (Jerusalem: International Peace and Cooperation Center, 2006), which details the discriminatory policies of the Israeli-controlled municipality. Margalit minces no words in saying that all state authorities do their part “to keep East Jerusalem down” through preferential treatment of Jewish areas, “deprivation” of Palestinian areas, and other racist actions (11, 177, 180).

- 7 The Palestine Museum is where my father worked until 1948. I should mention that I enter the country and city of my birth technically as a “visitor” on a foreign passport, and have to rent somewhere to live, though my family has properties in what is now West Jerusalem. In 1948 my immediate family and my grandparents were forced to leave, and were never allowed to return or to regain their properties or their contents. Israel enacted an Absentee Property “law” in 1950 to allow the government to take over any house or land whose owner (Palestinian owner, that is) was not present in the country. Most Palestinians were already refugees in other countries and were prevented from returning after 1948, so that law was de facto confiscation. Such a “law” of course contradicts international law and UN resolutions, not to mention the standards Jews and Zionist organizations have used to claim assets and properties in Europe. As with houses and lands owned by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, my family’s properties were not sold to the Israelis, and so their current occupants are there without permission or legal right. In the areas occupied in 1967, the Israelis have built many colonies on public or confiscated lands and have evicted residents in order to take over their properties, particularly in east Jerusalem, using various pretexts.
- 8 The Absentee Property Law and “security” reasons have also been applied to internal refugees, i.e. Palestinian Israelis who are still not allowed to go back to their original villages within pre-1948 areas.
- 9 Some Israeli archaeologists and activists have protested against the exploitation of Silwan through an organization for alternative archaeology (see [www.alt-arch.org](http://www.alt-arch.org)). There is inadequate support for belated and poorly funded local protests. These Israeli archaeologists are also campaigning against the disregard of ethical standards in building plans and the manipulation of information about the site.
- 10 Steven Erlander, “King David’s Palace Is Found, Archaeologist Says,” *New York Times* (August 5, 2006). It is unbelievable that totally unfounded conclusions about a discovery can be given the appearance of history and be prominently advertised as such without any proof. The whole City of David “finding” is a concoction.