



## West Jerusalem and the Politics of Refugees

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In the Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles signed in 1993, it was agreed that the issue of Jerusalem would be negotiated in the final status negotiations, originally scheduled to begin in May of 1996 but now, according to the recent Wye agreement, slated to start as of last November. With the negotiations imminent, it is perhaps useful to scrutinize just what is meant by Jerusalem. In more than one sense, the Jerusalem referred to in the Declaration of Principles is ambiguous. Israel, after the annexation of the Eastern part of the city following the 1967 War, has continually proclaimed that Jerusalem, both east and west, now constitutes a

united city. But when one examines the multitude of studies, documents, and meetings of reconciliation concerning the status and future of Jerusalem, it becomes apparent that the terms established for negotiation in recent years have only been centered on the parts of Jerusalem occupied in 1967. Any suggestion of including territory taken in the 1948 War in negotiations is seen as questioning Israeli sovereignty. So what exactly does "Jerusalem" refer to? Numerous assumptions about the history of the city have effectively been employed to eliminate 1948 Jerusalem, and indeed much of 1967 Jerusalem, from possible negotiation. Likewise, the discussion of the refugees from 1948 Jerusalem has been shelved pending final status negotiation along with consideration of the other refugees from 1948 Palestine. In recent years, however, new strategies have been engaged to raise the profile of these refugees as an issue for the Jerusalem negotiations and in so doing to question the delineated boundaries of what constitutes a negotiable Jerusalem.

In this paper I will argue that the elimination of possible Jerusalems from the status of "negotiable" has resulted from the predominance of certain narratives concerning both the history of the city and the refugees. Specific narrative strategies based on a highly selective use of historical evidence have gone into the creation of these narrowed discourses, some of which I will explore here: in particular, the narratives of the expansion outside the walls of the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and within these narratives, the

subsuming and sublimation of the lives and roles of the Arab, Greek, and Armenian Jerusalemites into what comes to be seen as an essentially Jewish Jerusalem. In contesting this pre-scripted history of Jerusalem and its excision of the Arab inhabitants, we must turn to sources neglected by most historiography to understand the social history of the different communities, the socio-economic make-up of the neighborhoods in the New City, and the life and work patterns of its numerous residents. In the conclusion I will discuss some of the breaks in these exclusionary narratives and the places in which the issue of the 1948 Jerusalem refugees has emerged in the discourse surrounding the Jerusalem final status negotiations.

First, I would like to mention a few points of historical background pertinent to my discussion of Jerusalem. Despite its significance to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem in the early nineteenth century was still a provincial town in terms of size and socioeconomic importance. The developed areas of the city were located within the city walls, although there were numerous religious buildings, mills, and houses located outside the walls. The expansion of the city began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to a number of factors, including Ottoman reforms, the growing Western presence in the Holy Land, and Jewish immigration to the city. Because of the pressures of overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions in the Old City, people began to build outside the walls, and this area came to be known as the New City. The various types of

expansion and growth in Jerusalem completely transformed the city. By 1947, the New City contained approximately 70 percent of the population of Jerusalem—some 128,500 out of a total of 164,500—and was spread out primarily to the north, west, and southwest.

**Population of Jerusalem According to Residence and Property Ownership, Estimates in 1947<sup>1</sup>**

|                        | Old City | New City | Total Popula. | Land Ownership (in dunams)   |
|------------------------|----------|----------|---------------|------------------------------|
| Jews                   | 2,400    | 97,000   | 99,400        | 4,830                        |
| Muslims and Christians | 33,600   | 31,500   | 65,100        | 11,191                       |
| Total                  | 36,000   | 128,500  | 164,500       | 19,326 (3,305 of state land) |

During the British Mandate, Jerusalem had served as the capital of the Administration, giving it a new political status as well as facilitating its continued religious importance, particularly for Western Christians. Jerusalem was also an important site for receiving Jewish immigration, and the Jewish population

grew rapidly. In addition, Palestine in general during the British Mandate period was characterized by Arab urbanization: many moved from the countryside to take advantage of the economic opportunities available in the cities, and also, in the case of Jerusalem, to attend the multitude of schools and training programs that proliferated in the city. Jerusalem was also a target of internal Christian migration, with the various churches offering free or low-rent places of residence and jobs.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the British Mandate in 1948, the majority of Jews and Christians lived in the New City while a Muslim majority remained in the Old City. In terms of land ownership, Jews owned less than a quarter of the total land inside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and 26 percent of the land of the New City. During the war in 1948, the city was divided, with the Israelis acquiring jurisdiction over what became known as West Jerusalem (encompassing the majority of the New City), and the Jordanians over the East (the Northeastern part of the New City and the Old City). The refugees created in the fighting are estimated to be somewhere around 30,000, mostly from the approximately 13 Arab neighborhoods of the New City. Around 2,000 Jews were also evicted from the Old City.

### Rewriting Jerusalem

The current academic and popular scholarship on Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> al-'Arif, *Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-Quds*, Jerusalem: Maktabat Al-Andalus, 1992. [3rd edition, Arabic], p. 430. He cites as the source Mr. John Martin, the advisor to the British representative to the United Nations, Mr. Blake Sykes.

<sup>2</sup> Daphne Tsimhoni, *Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1948: An Historical, Social and Political Study* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1993), p.18.

20th centuries does not provide an adequate historical account of those Jerusalemites who were to become refugees in 1948. It deals almost exclusively with the Jewish sector of the city<sup>3</sup> or the Ottoman and British administrations. Absent is any substantial discussion of the presence of the Arab and other communities, either as residents or as active members and creators of the economic, social, and cultural life of the city. More often than not they are referred to as "the non-Jewish communities." This label lumps together Palestinian Arabs (both Christian and Muslim), Greek Jerusalemites, and Armenian Jerusalemites, among others; it overlooks the economic bases of the different communities, their class differences, and their varying access to resources; and it obscures individual

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, works by U. O. Schmelz ("Notes on the Demography of Jews, Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem" in *Middle East Review*, Spring-Summer (1981), and *Modern Jerusalem's Demographic Evolution* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1987)); by Ruth Kark (*Jerusalem Neighborhoods Planning and By-laws, 1855-1930* (Jerusalem: Mount Scopus Publications, 1991)); and by Yohushua Ben-Arieh (*Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Emergence of the New City and Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: the Old City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986)). Exceptions to this trend are a number of articles by Alexander Scholch ("Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century 1831-1917 AD" in *Jerusalem in History*, ed. K.J. Asali (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1990); Michael C. Hudson ("The Transformation of Jerusalem, 1917-1987 AD" in *Jerusalem in History*; Tarif Khalidi ("Palestinian Historiography: 1900-1948" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 10.3 (1981), pp. 59-76; and Kark and Landman, "The Establishment of Muslim Neighbourhoods in Jerusalem, Outside the Old City, during the Late Ottoman Period" in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, July-December (1980), pp. 113-135.

activities not necessarily stemming from communal affiliation. Finally, the label has obviously exclusionary implications, characteristic of Israeli state discourse and practices, in defining people as either "Jews" or "non-Jews."

While this elision of Palestinians from the historical record is hardly unique, here it is accomplished in a number of distinctive ways. First, by defining the specific terms in which to discuss the growth of Jerusalem, it becomes possible to exclude those who do not fit into these terms. For example, *Mishkenot Sha'ananim* is the first Jewish housing project, completed in the 1860s, and is described in all the academic and popular texts<sup>4</sup> as the first neighborhood to be established outside the walls of the Old City. While there is no doubt that this is true, the assumption often accompanies it that therefore these were also the first people to live outside the walls. *The Jerusalem Guide*, published in London and Jerusalem, illustrates this conjectural leap: "In 1860, Sir Moses Montefiore founded Mishkenot Shaananim, Abode of the Tranquil, *the first homes* outside the walls, on a hill facing Mount Zion."<sup>5</sup> However, evidence from family histories reveals that even before this neighborhood was established, there were Arab, Greek, and Armenian people living outside the walls, some in summer homes, others in property belonging to the various churches, and some also in private

<sup>4</sup> See Kark, Schmelz, and Ben Arieh.

<sup>5</sup> Giora Samis and Diane Shalem, *The Jerusalem Guide* (London and Jerusalem: Abraham Marcus Ltd., 1973). [Italics added.]

year-round homes. In fact the area that the new Jewish neighborhood faced, Mount Zion, housed the residences of the Dajani family, built adjacent to the walls around the tomb of David.

The blindness of scholars to the "non-Jewish presence" is in part the result of the paradigm set up by this emphasis on "neighborhoods" as indicating the presence or absence of people living there. Problematically, this paradigm focuses entirely on the one community that built organized neighborhoods and treats the other methods of building homes and communities as aberrant. Set up by Jewish building societies or philanthropic endeavors, these first Jewish neighborhoods and many subsequent others kept rules, regulations, and detailed records that make understanding this particular aspect of building growth in the New City a reasonably ordered endeavor.<sup>6</sup> For the Jewish population, philanthropic and building societies began constructing low-cost housing outside the walls—of 79 known building projects for Jews begun during Ottoman rule, 52 were of this kind. The remaining 27 were either private or commercial ventures.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, building in the New City for the Arab population was of two types. First, it was largely a family enterprise and was closely linked to economic resources and class bases; it was primarily the wealthy upper and middle

class elite who could afford to buy a plot of land and construct their own homes outside the walls. In many cases, these homes were built using the entire family's savings, with both men and women over a number of generations contributing to the purchase of the land and the building of the house. A grandmother in the Kalouti family, living in Bab Hutta in the Old City, saved money until in 1927 she and her sons were able to buy a parcel of land in Qatamon. The house was built in the early 1930s, although the grandmother had died by that time; eventually, a second story was added and her two sons and their families lived there until 1948.<sup>8</sup> George Fasheh's father explained that in order to buy the land for their house in Qatamon, his wife had sold her gold jewelry.<sup>9</sup> These two examples reveal both the upwardly mobile intentions of a rising middle class and the role of the entire family—not just the husband/father—in contributing to the capital accumulation necessary to realize these aspirations.

The comments of one government official, an Ottoman Jew, describes the situation in the year 1900 as such:

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Y. Kalouti, 30 May 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Rawan and Dima al-Damin, *Al-Tahjir fi Dhakirah al-Tafulah - Shahadat Filastiniyya Hayya (Exodus in the Memory of Childhood - Living Palestinian Witnesses)* (n.p., West Bank: Al-Lajna al-Wataniyya al-Filastiniyya lil-tarbiyya wa-al-thaqafa wa-al-'aloum, 1997, [Arabic]), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on this subject, see Ruth Kark, *Jerusalem Neighborhoods: Planning and By-laws, 1855-1930* (Jerusalem: Mount Scopus Publications, 1991), pp. 186-189.

<sup>7</sup> Kark, pp. 186-189.

*The total number of new homeowners amounts to 111. Of these, 56 are Jews, 27 Christians and 27 Muslims; and [one must also count] the municipality, which has put up a building with the revenue collected from all the city's residents.*

*This precise number is not very large at all, and indeed it is a faithful reflection of this stagnant period in the building of Jerusalem. ... If we see that in this year 54 gentiles have built houses in Jerusalem, we know that 54 large buildings have been added; whereas, of the 56 Jews, few have built new houses, most of them being simply former homeowners, each of whom has made some small addition to his old home....*

*The 27 Christian houses are worth (at least) 756,500 piasters. The 56 Jewish houses are worth 263,000 piasters. The 27 Muslim houses are worth 242,000 piasters. The municipality building is worth 9,000....*

*The value of each of the Muslim houses comes, on the average, ... to 1.5 times the value of each Jewish house, and the value of each Christian house - to twice the latter....*

*Among the Christians, the proportion of wealthy builders is 54 percent; among the Muslim-33 percent; and among the Jews, only 12 percent. Besides, the*

*costliest of the Jewish houses reaches a value of 20,000, while the costliest of the Muslim and Christian houses come to much more.<sup>10</sup>*

Building expansion did not always stem from individual family decisions to move outside of the Old City. Some building starts reflected the communal living styles of the Old City and the villages. Al-Namariyya referred to a residential area of lower Baq'a. Here the land was bought in the late nineteenth century by a resident of the Sharaf neighborhood of the Old City, 'Abdallah Ibrahim Mohsin al-Nammari, from villagers in Bethlehem, al-Malha, and Beit Jala. He created a family *waqf* for the land registered in the Islamic courts and moved his large family there, building houses for some of his children. The Nammari family continued to live in this area until 1948.<sup>11</sup>

The second type of expansion outside the walls occurred under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Church. It was a practice of the Church to lease land (not necessarily for payment) to its laity for building outside the city. Both the Greek Colony and Qatamon received their impetus as

<sup>10</sup> Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Emergence of the New City*, (New York: St. Martins, 1986), p. 455, citing Yellin, *Writings*, I, pp. 386-8, Iyyar 5660 (1899-90); (translated from the Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> Landman, Shimon. *Ahya' A'yan al-Quds Kharij Aswariha fi al-Qarn al-Tasi' 'Ashr (The Elite Neighborhoods in Jerusalem outside the Walls in the Nineteenth Century)* (Tel-Aviv: Dar al-Nashr al-'Arabi, 1984). [Translated to Arabic from the Hebrew *'Ha-Biniya ha-Aravit Mekhutz l-Homot Yerushalaim be-Meah ha-Tesha'-'Esre*], pp. 58-62; al-'Arif, p. 469; al-Nammari, *Hayy al-Namamreh fi al-Baq'a*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., n.p.

residential areas from the interest of the Greek Orthodox Church in providing housing for their members.

Given the particular way that subsequent historiography has downplayed or overlooked these different types of building, it is useful to examine some of the documents from the period to determine how the events were recorded at the time. A clear picture emerges that Jews were not the only residents active in building outside the walls. The *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* reported in 1881 that of 2,500 residents living outside the walls, 1,510 of them were Jews. A letter regarding the building activity of this period written by a member of the American Colony in 1883 is also revealing. Aunt Maggie writes: "The activity of rebuilding is by no means confined to the Jews. Catholics, Greeks, Mohammedans, and Protestants are all taking part in it. There are at the present time more than one hundred buildings going up, all of stone, and most of them carefully cut stone."<sup>12</sup>

Because Arab expansion outside the walls was essentially a private enterprise based on land availability and family capital without the formal, regulatory processes undertaken in the establishment of the Jewish neighborhoods, the records that do exist for Arab building are of a much different sort—family papers and Islamic court and church records—and these have been little accessed by researchers. Another reason that the Arab

expansion is hard to trace has to do with the role of the churches in the residential expansion of the city. Buildings owned by the church, regardless of their purpose, were attributed on maps and in records as Greek Orthodox church property, although they may have been residential buildings of Greek or Arab members of the church. Other churches, most prominently the Latins and the Armenians, also held property in the New City and leased it out to the members of their congregation.

Consequently, documentation for Arab building projects of the sort available for Jewish building projects is largely absent. This does not mean, however, that there is an absence of significant sources that would shed light on this topic. Unfortunately, scholars of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jerusalem history have largely neglected these sources, undoubtedly because in their rush to "prove" what they already believed—that the only significant contribution to the city was from its Jewish residents—they have conveniently ignored them. First of all, the role of these churches in building the residential areas of the New City has yet to be systematically studied. The topic would greatly benefit from an examination of the history of the churches and their land and building records during this period. Second, family archives would prove to be an invaluable source of information about the individual family purchases as well as the family *waqf* lands that played a role in building the New City.

This exclusion of the Palestinians from the historical record concerning the growth of the city relies on using the specific terms established for defining the city's growth and ultimately leads to the almost complete

<sup>12</sup> Bertha Spafford Vester, *Our Jerusalem: An American Family in the Holy City, 1881-1949* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1951), pp. 86-87 (Letter from Aunt Maggie, 17 January 1883).

elision of any discussion of Palestinian life in the city. The claims to being the first to build outside the walls of the Old City and to expand the city are mobilized to lay the ground for claiming the entire city as Jewish. For example, Yehoshua Ben-Arieh writes in his detailed two-volume study of Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "Thus, behind the Christian-Muslim area just outside the Old City, a new city began to take shape, a city that in time grew larger and more vibrant: Jewish Jerusalem."<sup>13</sup>

Ben-Arieh delineates the Arab expansion as a "Christian-Muslim area" which presumably remains stagnant while Jewish Jerusalem becomes a city in and of itself, growing larger and more active and alive. Similarly, D. Amiran's study of the development of Jerusalem from 1860 to 1970, which appears in the *Companion Volume to the Atlas of Jerusalem*, describes the Greek Colony and the Arab suburb of Qatamon in the southwest of the city as a place where "a large portion of the houses were spacious single-family homes within well-cared for gardens, in which lived the senior British officials, the wealthy non-Palestinians who were stationed in Jerusalem for work or business, and a few rich Arab families."<sup>14</sup> However, the published autobiographies and collected oral histories of people who lived in these areas portray a very different picture of the

city. One example is John Melkon Rose—an inhabitant of the Greek Colony from the 1920s to 1948 with his British father and Armenian Jerusalemite mother—who describes his neighbors as mostly Greeks, Arabs, and a few foreigners. Similarly, the neighborhood of Qatamon, as evidenced in a number of autobiographical sources of its former residents, was largely Palestinian, with a majority of Christian Arabs, but also with numerous Muslim Arab, Greek, and Armenian Jerusalemite families.<sup>15</sup>

The type of sublimating scholarship that I have discussed is used to assert that there was little Palestinian Arab presence outside the city walls and thus by implication that there were few refugees in 1948 and little property loss. This has been a common practice of much of the Israeli and Zionist scholarship concerning all of Palestine and not just Jerusalem. However, in the case of Jerusalem, this elision is particularly noticeable given the multitude of books published on the subject of Jerusalem in the modern period. This mobilization of history reveals itself in the complete absence of any discussion of how the Arab Jerusalemites were part of the economic, social, and cultural life of the city or even of how the Arab and Jewish communities interacted in this shared space.

However, this overwriting of the Arab presence in the city has not been completely smooth. For example, the Arab neighborhoods that were taken over in

<sup>13</sup> Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Emergence of the New City*.

<sup>14</sup> Amiran, D. "The Development of Jerusalem, 1860-1970" in *Urban Geography of Jerusalem: A Companion Volume to the Atlas of Jerusalem*, ed. D. Amiran, A. Shachar, and I. Kimhi (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1973), p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Sakakini Hala. *Jerusalem and I: A Personal Record* (Amman, Jordan: Economic Press Co., 1990), 2nd edition; Jamil Toubbeh, *Day of the Long Night: A Palestinian Refugee Remembers the Nakba* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1998).



1948 have been renamed. Thus, Talbiyyeh has become Komemiyut, Qatamon has been renamed as Goneim, Baq'a has become G'eulim; in Hebrew meaning "Independence," "Defense," and "Liberation," respectively.<sup>16</sup> Abu Tor, which still has a considerable Arab population, is called Givat Hanania. As one can see from existing maps, this has not been a totally successful venture. As the Arab names in parentheses underneath the Hebrew ones suggest, the original names used by the original Arab inhabitants are still in use.

The Arab presence continues to resurface not only in names, but also in terms of aesthetics. One reads nowadays in housing advertisements in the *Jerusalem Post* of West Jerusalem houses for sale or rent that are "Arab houses"- "**Musrara**, Apartment in Arab Building, unique, 80 meters, gallery, renovated, stylized ...".<sup>17</sup> In this context, the term "Arab" receives a novel accent. It is not a warning to a potential owner or some sort of political statement, but rather an indicator of prestige and quality—these homes were almost all made of stone, of beautiful architectural design, and had gardens around them; residences extremely different from the modern, inexpensive large-scale group housing built by and for the Zionist immigrants and later during the Israeli state.

Unchallenged, these elision narratives I have described will inevitably constitute the taken-for granted historical framework

for future negotiations concerning Jerusalem—meaning that there will be no recognition of the Palestinian presence in pre-1948 Jerusalem or of any claims to property or rights in that part of the city. In recent years, however, challenges have been forthcoming. Palestinians are well aware that Israeli negotiating terms for Jerusalem are not likely to include anything other than the territory occupied in 1967. However, in early 1995, Faisal Husseini publicly announced that if Israel claims rights to land in East Jerusalem (land occupied in 1967), the Palestinians will demand the property they own in West Jerusalem. He reminded Israelis that 70 percent of what is now West Jerusalem is made up of Arab neighborhoods and nearby villages that were taken in the 1948 War. Numerous anxious articles appeared in the Israeli press immediately following his statements, showing maps and interviewing former Palestinian and current Israeli homeowners.

In addition, a Palestinian non-governmental organization, the Land and Water Establishment, has initiated a campaign to register Palestinian claims to property in the Western part of Jerusalem. Along with the office in Jerusalem, two Palestinian lawyers, located in Amman and Kuwait, are also registering documented land claims in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> In February of 1996, they announced that they had documents for 3,000 properties in West Jerusalem and they intended to "claim from

<sup>16</sup> Anton Shammas, "Al-Falafel: Tabaq Isra'il al-Qawmi!" *Al-Mulhaq*, 285 (22 August 1997).

<sup>17</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 27 November 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Land and Water Establishment Press Release, 6 February 1996.

Israel compensation or the return of the property."<sup>19</sup>

In terms of negotiating strategies, Salim Tamari advocates in his volume on *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations* that "[c]ompensation for lost properties in West Jerusalem should be subject to the same procedures that apply to other 1948 refugees. If Israeli negotiators insist on special privileges for Jewish residents in East Jerusalem colonies (for example, Ramot, Gilo), then Palestinian negotiators should insist on the unimpeded return to previously Arab neighborhoods in West Jerusalem (for example, Katamon, Talbieh, Lifta)."<sup>20</sup>

The Jerusalem refugees and their properties have taken on a different role in the current debate than that of the other 1948 refugees. More than a symbol of Palestine lost, they are being used as a counterweight to Israeli claims on East Jerusalem and as a force to be mobilized for potential gain. As such, they are being partially reworked back into the dominant narratives of the history of the city and are expanding the borders of what constitutes a negotiable Jerusalem.

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<sup>19</sup> "Palestinians claim West Jerusalem properties," UPI Report, 29 February 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Salim Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II* (Washington, DC: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1996), p. 48.

# Jerusalem Quarterly File No. 5

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