



Jerusalem 1948: The Phantom City

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*This essay is the introduction to **Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods of the New City and their Fate in the War** by Musa Budeiri, Rochelle Davis, Dalia Habash, Ahmad Jadallah, Nathan Krystal, Terry Rempel, Salman Abu Sitteh, Salim Tamari, Hanna Tleel, and Khalil Tufakji. It will be published by the Institute of Jerusalem Studies & Badil in early 1999 (Jerusalem).*

Talbieh, Baq'a, Qatamon, Ain Karem, Lifta—these, and several other destroyed communities and deserted villages within Jerusalem's Western neighborhoods, seem to have been overlooked by history. Most of them were occupied, resettled, and

eventually—in the case of Ain Karem, Lifta, and Talbieh—gentrified by Jewish immigrants who came to Israel after the war of 1948. For fifty years now their memories have been kept alive by thousands of Palestinians uprooted from their ancestral communities who had become refugees on the other side of the armistice lines, as well as in Amman, Beirut, Damascus, and other distant Arab and foreign resting-places of the diaspora. One striking feature of this displacement is that (with the exception of the villages of Beit Safafa and Abu Ghosh) the Israeli military forces managed to accomplish a total transfer of the Arab Palestinian population from the western suburbs and villages to the other side of the borders. John Rose, an Anglo-Armenian Jerusalemite who managed to stay on in Baq'a, provides one of the rare descriptions of the fate of these neighborhoods and of the few non-Jewish families who had managed to stay in them (mostly Christians affiliated with denominational churches and convents). "By the end of 1948," he wrote, "all unoccupied houses in the Arab suburbs had been totally vandalized and nothing was left in the way of worthwhile loot. Nerves were frayed and, as one observer said, we were living 'as if it were in a concentration camp on the edge of a battlefield.'"¹ Rose continued to live in Baq'a for four years following the war, when—in 1952—he crossed over to what became known as East Jerusalem. His story is unique testimony coming from one of

the few non-Jewish inhabitants who remained in the Western suburbs.

In a parallel but much more limited process, the Jewish community that inhabited the Old City was also relocated to the Western city after the war, thus ensuring that the armistice lines separating the two parts of the city were also the lines of an ethnic/national divide.

Jerusalem 1948 is an attempt to provide a reconstruction of this process of displacement and expulsion and to account for the fate of Arab Palestinians who lost not only their property and homes, but also a whole world that exemplified Jerusalem and Palestine before 1948. Current debates on Jerusalem have been so mystified by the ideological claims put forth by Israelis, Palestinians, and the world community that we forget that before the war there was an "ordinary" city called Jerusalem, a city divided by communities, neighborhoods, ethnicities (of various nationalities) as well as by class. The religious identity of the city, with its sacred geography, has since permeated our conception of the city to the detriment of understanding its worldly character. We have also come to think of it as an Eastern and Western city, divided by nationality and united by the military might of Israel. These divisions are now drawn retroactively to define the contours of the city before the ruptures of war, and even when we try to transcend them in an act of historical re-creation, we are compelled to use them as analytical categories.

The pre-war Jerusalem that emerges from these portraits is one that is fundamentally unrecognizable today, a city of considerable social mobility, of ethnic diversity, and of communal conflict that is

¹ John Rose, *Armenians of Jerusalem: Memories of Life in Palestine* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1993).

tempered by a fair amount of mutual dependence and local solidarities. This ethnic hybridity was exemplified in the coexistence of traditional, messianic, and secular trends, lending a cosmopolitan character to the city under the British colonial aegis. Nowhere is this cosmopolitan culture more evident than in the social and intellectual milieu of life in the western part of the city as narrated in the diaries of Khalil Sakakini, who had escaped the ghettoized closeness of the Old City to the modernity of Qatamon in the 1930s (*Katha Ana Ya Dunya*, Jerusalem, 1954). One gleans from such accounts of contemporary life in the 1930s and 40s and from the ethnographic contributions to *Jerusalem 1948* a picture of an evolving and vibrant city whose life was cut short. In the first two chapters of the book Davis uses archival material and oral histories to reconstruct the fabric of the city's everyday life during the Ottoman and Mandate periods.

The dynamism of these western communities contrasted visibly with earlier growths of the new city towards the north and southwest. While the Palestinian Arab notables and *ashraf* had established manorial residencies in Sheikh Jarrah and Wadi al-Joz before the turn of the century, the mandate economy gave rise to a new class of professionals, merchants, and civil servants. The Arab middle classes whose households benefited from the creation of a new bureaucratic apparatus in the capital began to move in the late 1920s from the congestion of the Old City to the bourgeois suburbs of Qatamon, Talbieh, and Baq'a.

These new Arab communities displayed several patterns of growth depending on a

combination of family networks and their links with the Ottoman State and neighboring village communities. The three elements which combined to create these moves were government allocation of state land (*iqta'*), family *waqf*, and religious endowments (mostly Orthodox Christian property) to members of the denomination. These family-based housing schemes grew at the same time as Christian monastic, Jewish, and Templar (German) communities began to establish themselves in the Western hills.

One of the earliest documented cases of Arab family neighborhoods was the emergence of the Nammari and Wa'ri quarters (*ahya'*) in upper and lower Baq'a. While more established families such as the Husseinis, Nashashibis, and Khatib clans established their residencies in the northern neighborhoods, the Nammari clan had acquired land in the 1870s from villagers in Malha and Beit Jala.² The Wa'ris, by contrast, had prevailed on the Ottoman Governor of Jerusalem to transfer state land in lower Baq'a, both lands being registered as family *waqf*.³ By the late 20s the area had its own market (Suq anNammari), which served as a wholesale market for neighboring villages and a retail market for the local area.

Religious endowments and church properties brought in a second wave of Arab suburbanization from the Old City, much of it involving Greek and Russian orthodox properties in Musrara, the

² Taher AnNammari, *The Nammari Quarter in Baq'a'*, unpublished ms. (Jerusalem, November 1995).

³ Nammari, *ibid*.

Russian Compound, Talbieh, and Qatamon. Here we have a combination of families registering their property as church endowments to protect it from encroachment by the state and of religious endowments bestowing long-term leases and grants on their constituency.

By the early forties most of these suburbs extended to and began to overlap with the village properties of the Jerusalem hinterland. This residential expansion brought them into daily contact with two previously separate communities: the suburbanized and expanding villages—discussed in Tamari's chapter—of Lifta, Malha, Deir Yasin, and Ain Karem; and modern Jewish settlements like Bikur Hayim, Yamin Moshe, Mea She'arim and Rehavia. The village economy was brought into the urban fabric of Jerusalem through the demand for skilled builders (stone masons and cutters), as well as for the quarries that produced the famous Jerusalem stone. Village produce was now pouring into the city as a result of improved transportation: the Jaffa Jerusalem railroad (which went through Battir), new bus lines, and improved asphalt roads.

The "seam" of these communities (areas bordering and within Musrara, Romeima, and Talbieh) constituted the beginnings of Arab-Jewish shared communities in which economic inter-dependence re-enforced social coexistence. Hadwai's unique 1946 property map (which appears in *Jerusalem 1948*) indicates the ethnic mix of real estate holdings in the seam areas, reflecting these emerging realities. From this map one can see that ownership patterns still indicated a city largely divided by confessional and

ethnic lines (it is still early to use the word 'national' in this context), but that new mixed living areas were emerging.⁴

While Arab secular historians tend to create a portrait of exaggerated harmony between Arabs and Jews for the pre-48 period (see, for example, Aref al Aref, *Al Mufasssal fi Tarikh alQuds*; Muhammad Adib Al Amiry, *Jerusalem*)—Zionist historiography tends to suggest that the conflict is perennial and that Jews, at best, were accorded the status of a protected community (*Dhimmi*) under Ottoman and other Islamic regimes. Quotidian relations at the turn of the century between the two communities, collected from contemporary testimonials and narrated in the book, conform to neither version. Broadly speaking, we can say that patterns of employment, investment, and public spending by the Mandate authorities created new arenas of social integration. With the rise of cultural modernities and the globalization of European life style, this period also witnessed the beginning of "mixed" communities in middle-class neighborhoods in Jaffa, Haifa, and areas of Jerusalem such as Romeima, Shamma, and Musrara. Militating against these trends, however, were the increasing diffusion of Zionist ideology among Jewish immigrants to Palestine and the rising tide of Arab Nationalist sentiment, undermining the confessional boundaries between Palestinian Christians and Muslims, while

⁴ The reader should be careful, however, not to make assumptions about the correspondence between property ownership and ethnic use of that property, since much of the living space in Jerusalem was rented, quite frequently from owners of other ethnic groups.

reinforcing the division between Arabs and Jews. Many Jerusalem Jews, unlike the majority of their co-religionists in Hebron and Tiberius, were not Arabic speaking—an additional factor that was crucial in setting the two communities apart.

At the heart of the contestation over territory in Jerusalem was the issue of zoning laws and the delineation of the municipal boundaries during the Mandate period. While Palestinian Arabs constituted a majority of the population in the Jerusalem District, Jews predominated within the municipal boundaries (1947: 99.4 thousand Jews vs. 65.1 thousand Arabs).⁵ Reviewing the literature on the selective demographics of Mandate Jerusalem, British historian Michael Dumper suggests two main reasons for these population discrepancies. First, estimates counted Jewish migrants who arrived in Jerusalem before 1946 and later moved to Tel Aviv and other localities. Second, while excluding Palestinians who were working in the city but living in its rural periphery (the daytime population such as the commuting workers from Lifta and Deir Yasin), they included Jewish residents living in suburban areas such as Beit Vegan, Ramat Rahel, and Meqor Hayim. The latter were incorporated within the municipal population through a process he refers to as "demographic gerrymandering."⁶

Administrative incorporation within the metropolitan area was not, however, the

determining factor differentiating Arab and Jewish communities. Organizations of the Jewish Yishuv chose to establish some of their new Jerusalem suburbs within the Western and north Western hinterlands inside the expanded boundaries of the city. Here the expansion was accomplished along European lines, including a master plan for street and housing schemes, as was the case with the "garden suburbs" such as Talpiot and Rehavia, both designed by Richard Kaufman.⁷ Rochelle Davis, in her analysis of the evolution of these communities, discusses the organized character of the Jewish communities in contrast to the unplanned and family-based nature of Arab suburbs.⁸



Of the several works that have narrated the course of the war and the tragic displacement caused by it, the majority have taken a Zionist perspective, not that of the Palestinian Arab participants. The publication of Bahjat Abu Gharbiyyeh's war memoirs a few years ago has contributed in a modest way to rectify this imbalance.⁹ *Jerusalem 1948* likewise

birth registration, see Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine* (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), p. 165 (note to table A8-14). Dumper claims that these Jewish neighborhoods were excluded from municipal boundaries. Sami Hadawi, however, includes them as part of the municipal boundaries during the mid-1940s in his survey of property distribution in the city.

⁷ Dan Bahat, *The Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp. 131-132.

⁸ Rochelle Davis, "Ottoman Jerusalem: The Growth of the City outside the Walls," in *Jerusalem 1948*.

⁹ Bahjat Abu Gharbiyyeh, *Fi Khidamm anNidal al-Arabi al-Filastini* (Memoirs of Bahnat Abu Gharbiyyeh 1916-1949) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993).

⁵ Walid Mustafa, *al-Quds, Imran wa Sukkan*, (Jerusalem: JMCC, 1997).

⁶ Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), pp. 61-62. On the so-called

seeks to enrich our understanding of the Palestinian Arab experience of the war. Nathan Krystall's chapter, for instance, describes the military conquest of West Jerusalem, the consequences of war in terms of the de-Arabization of these communities, and the subsequent dispersal of their inhabitants. Also included are the war diaries of Constantine Mavrides, a Greek resident of the city who witnessed the massive relocation of Arab refugees from the Qatamon and Baq'a and the counter relocation of Jewish refugees from the Old City. These diaries, which include entries in Greek by the author from May 14th to December 30th, 1948 (translated by Y. Tleel and introduced by Musa Budeiri), provide a unique "third party" perspective.

One major conceptual problem confronting the contributors was how to avoid anachronistic and therefore potentially misleading terminology in designating the Arab communities being examined in these essays. The term 'West Jerusalem' itself is particularly problematic since it uses a designation that was the result of border delineation based on 1948 war conditions. The communities that were built west of the city in the 1920s and 30s—in addition to villages like Ain Karem, Lifta, or Malha—had no particular corporate existence outside their relationship to the Jerusalem urban administrative nexus at large and the economic web that linked Jerusalem to Jaffa, Haifa, and the rest of the country. Since we were dealing primarily with the **fate** of these communities and their inhabitants, we decided to use the now common term 'West Jerusalem' (defined according to the city's current, that is post-

1967, boundaries) to reconstruct these lost communities and assess the fate of their refugees and their properties.

A similar problem arose with terms of ethnic identification: 'Palestinians' in the Mandate period included both Jews and Arab natives of the city. 'Arab' was a designation that increasingly came to mean Christians and Muslims together, as opposed to Jewish Palestinians, who—especially after the 1938 rebellion and the massive migration from Europe—became identified, consciously or unconsciously, with the Zionist movement. To complicate matters further, there were Arabic speaking native Palestinian Jews—particularly in Tiberius, Safad, Hebron, but also in smaller numbers in Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem. There was also a sizable number of native Jerusalemites who were neither Jews nor Arabs, but definitely Palestinian. These included the Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, and Ethiopians of the Old City, and the German Templars of the New City. All of these were Jerusalemites and Palestinians, in identity if not in citizenship, and therefore it would not do to use the term in its exclusive contemporary connotation of 'Palestinian Arab'. A solution we found to this dilemma was to use the term 'Arab' in reference to Christians and Muslim Jerusalemites who were Arabic speaking and to use denominational terms (Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, etc.) when applicable. Since confessional associations played a critical role in the expansion of the Western suburbs of the city, it made sense to use these functional designations, although they might seem politically incorrect in today's jargon. The main victims of these approximations are

the non-Arab Palestinian minorities (such as Greeks and Armenians), who have sometimes been subsumed under these ethnic categories.

The fiftieth anniversary commemorating the establishment of the state of Israel and the dispersal of Palestinians from their homeland has raised anew the debate about the causes and conditions of their exile. *Jerusalem 1948* addresses in detail the atmosphere that preceded the war and the military operations that accompanied the dislocation of the Palestinian Arab communities from the Western suburbs and villages, as well as the relocation of the inhabitants of the Jewish quarter to Israeli-held territory. It also addresses the question of land loss and property claims in light of the findings of the Palestine Conciliation Commission (discussed in essays by Rempel, Habash, Tufakji, and Jadallah). Many problems haunt any attempt at a systematic assessment of these property claims. West Jerusalem's land titles were only partly recorded in the land registry since they were not all part of the land settlement survey that was initiated by the Ottomans in 1858 and continued (but not completed) by the British Mandate authorities. However, virtually all of these land claims can be documented from the land tax records, and these records can be the basis for establishing the authenticity of the claims, where Tapu records are unobtainable. Salman Abu Sitta, in his meticulous research on these records, provides a preliminary tabulation of these properties.¹⁰ More difficult, however, is

the process of tracing the fate of Jerusalem refugees and their location. The UNRWA registry has records for all Palestine refugees who were eligible for relief services and who sought shelter in one of the five UNRWA field areas (West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria). Since a substantial number of West Jerusalem exiles were middle-class refugees, many of them do not appear in these records.

The Unified Registration System (URS) of UNRWA, the vast database of refugee registration, utilizes four categories of urban Jerusalem refugees and a fifth category of Jerusalem district refugees, by village.¹¹ The urban categories are: 'New City refugees', 'Jerusalem general' (i.e. unspecified), 'Jerusalem Poor', and 'Jerusalem Old City'. The last two categories refer to Jerusalem residents whose livelihoods were affected by the war, but who were not displaced from Israeli territories. For purposes of tracing the fate of Jerusalem refugees, the first two categories are the most crucial, as can be seen in the table below, which shows the places of residence of refugees alive as of 1997 according to their place of origin:

¹¹ *UNRWA Registration Manual (Codes)*: 95.10 Place of Origin in Palestine/Jerusalem Subdistrict. The manual contains listings for Towns, Villages, and Tribes. Amman HQ, no date.

¹⁰ Salman Abu Sitta, *Palestinian Property in West Jerusalem*, forthcoming, 1999.

Table 1
Jerusalem City (West) Urban Refugees
from 1948 War in UNRWA Records
By Host Region, 1997

<i>Place of Refuge</i>	<i>Born < Jan 1948</i>	<i>Born > Dec 1947</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Currently in West Bank</i>			
W. J'lem Refugees	12,427	41,226	3,553
<i>Currently in Gaza</i>			
W. J'lem Refugees	296	515	811
<i>Currently in Lebanon</i>			
W. J'lem Refugees	707	703	1,170
<i>Currently in Jordan</i>			
W. J'lem Refugees	8,420	18,077	6,497
<i>Currently in Syria</i>			
W. J'lem Refugees	978	919	1,897
GRAND TOTAL			93,935

Source: Data derived from UNRWA, Relief and Social Services Dept. URS (Amman HQ) May 22, 1997 (includes New City and Unspecified Jerusalem categories; 'old city', 'Jerusalem Poor', and villages excluded). The figures include refugees who are living today and their descendants.

URS data, with all its limitations, shows that the bulk of urban refugees from Jerusalem ended up living in the West Bank, most of them taking up residencies in East Jerusalem (and its suburbs), in

Ramallah, and in Bethlehem.¹² Jordan contains the second largest number of urban refugees—almost half the figure for the West Bank, with Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon containing very few concentrations. These patterns, while expected, are drastically reversed for rural refugees. URS data shows that while the global figure for UNRWA registered Jerusalem rural refugees (and their offspring) is 110,439 (URS; May 1997), of those more than two-thirds (73,908 refugees) live today in Jordan, and only 36,130 live in the West Bank.¹³

What does this mean?

First, it means that the majority of Jerusalem UNRWA-registered refugees stayed within the vicinity of their old homes. Particularly, most urban refugees, who tend to be better off and with substantial documentation for their lost property, stayed within eyesight of their West Jerusalem properties.¹⁴ Secondly, it indicates that the poorer refugees from villages in the Western hinterlands of

¹² URS-Amman; May 1997. I have excluded from these figures the two categories of "Jerusalem Poor" and "Old Jerusalem," so that the data corresponds to urban refugees who actually were evicted from Israeli-held territory.

¹³ URS-Amman; May 1997. For a discussion of these figures, see Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem 1948*. I have excluded all data for Jerusalem villages that were not held by Israel after the war of 1948, but included refugees from Abu Ghosh and Beir Naquba.

¹⁴ For data on East Jerusalem residents who are refugees from West Jerusalem, and other areas occupied by Israel in 1948, see Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 1967* (East Jerusalem; Jerusalem, 1968), Tables 17 and 18 ("Population Aged 15+, by Place of Personal Residence before the 1948 War").

Jerusalem—most of whom live in camps—followed UNRWA services to Jordan before 1967, when employment possibilities were more available in Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa, and after the war of 1967, when many Jerusalem refugees were apprehensive that UNRWA services would not be available in the areas that had come under Israeli rule.

These figures have great relevance and implication for future claims by Jerusalem refugees over their properties seized by Israel in the Western suburbs and villages. For the many exiles continuing to live either in the annexed Eastern part of the city or in its immediate vicinity, their claims for the return of their property (and residence) are particularly poignant since Israel has already established (and expanded several fold) Jewish private residencies in the Old City (Jewish Quarter), in Silwan, Ras al-Amud, Neve Ya'coub, Atarot, Abu Tor, etc.—all areas in which Jews had **some property and residence claims before 1948**—and in more than a dozen newly established colonies in areas where no Jewish claims existed before. Palestinian claims for their properties in the Western city (and its rural hinterland) are fully substantiated, both in records derived from the land registry (whether in Tapu or land tax records) and in the records of the Palestine Conciliation Commission discussed here. The fact that Israel continues to claim the city to be united and indivisible, subject to the same administrative laws of the state, makes the legitimacy of these claims all too obvious, and their denial equally ludicrous.

Final status negotiations over the future of the city have created the atmosphere and

the conditions for pressing these historical rights of Arab Jerusalemites to the forefront. The fact that most of these internal exiles are still alive, or have immediate offspring who are alive, renders their patrimony more present than historical. We hope that *Jerusalem 1948* will throw some new light on their predicament half a century after their exile.

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