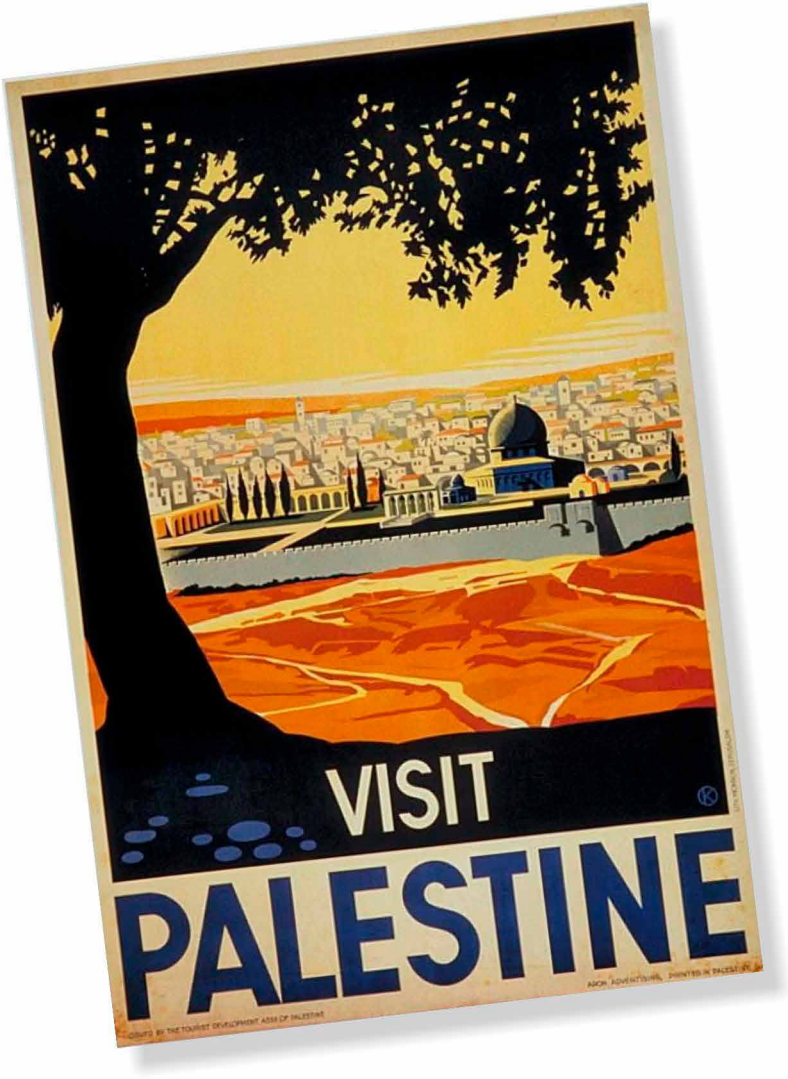
THIS WEEK IN
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Issue 330 | January 2026

Jerusalem: The Heartbeat and Unbroken Spirit of Palestine

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Cover: Visit Palestine poster, illustrated by Austrian-born artist Frank Krausz in 1936 for the Tourist Development Association of Palestine.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

You may be surprised to learn that Caliph Omar, after the first Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 637, invited the Jews to return to Jerusalem and refrained from praying at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in order to avoid providing a reason to turn it into a mosque. Better known is the magnanimity of Caliph Salah Eddin, who, following his victory over the Crusaders who had ruled the city between 1099 and 1187, spared the lives of defeated Christian soldiers, took ransom only from those who could afford it, left shrines and monuments untouched, and likewise allowed Jews to resettle in Jerusalem. This contradicts the claims made by a certain world leader and is in stark contrast to how the latest occupiers of the city are treating its Indigenous population – in violation of international human rights laws and the treaties and agreements made when the Zionist forces were enabled by Western governments to claim the so-called Holy Land for themselves and their colonially minded backers, whether in the early, mid-, or late twentieth century. This month's issue sheds light on the tremendous resilience of Palestinian Christian and Muslim inhabitants in the face of great efforts to make their lives in Jerusalem impossible.

We would like to extend our gratitude to Wasef Jabsheh, the executive chairman of International General Insurance (Jordan), who graciously adopted the gold sponsorship of the current January issue of *This Week in Palestine.*

Between the articles you will find short features that we call Faces from Jerusalem: personalities who have shaped the city's social and cultural atmosphere and community. They include Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Abu Fahmi (Ahmad Taqash), Lamis Alami, Canaan Ghoul, Claudette Habesch, Faisal Al-Husseini, Hind Taher Al-Husseini, Huda Farid Imam, Zahira Kamal, Suhail Khoury, Betty Daher Majaj, Shihab Al-Qawasmi, Raed Saadeh, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, Mazen Akram Sbitaby, Imran Al-Shawish, and Ghaleb Izzat al-Wa'ri.

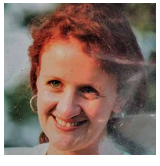
We also thank the authors who have contributed content to this issue. They include Dr. Ali Qleibo, an artist, author, and anthropologist born in Jerusalem and educated in the United States; Dr. Walid Salem, a lecturer in the Jerusalem Studies Master's Program at the Jerusalem Studies Center of Al-Quds University; Maha Abdallah, a graduate teaching and research assistant at the Faculty of Law, University of Antwerp; Omar Da'na, a Jerusalem-born independent policy advocacy and human rights expert and the author of the policy study "Jerusalem Under Apartheid"; Daoud Kuttab, an award-winning journalist from Jerusalem; Rajai M. Nuseibeh, a technology and economic development strategist building inclusive innovation ecosystems across East Jerusalem and beyond; Burj Al Luqluq Social Center Society; the National Conservatory of Music in the heart of Jerusalem; Dimitri Diliani, who currently serves as chairman of the board of directors at Anastasia Software Development Co; Kate Rouhana, the founding director of Jerusalem Story; and Elise Aghazarian, a sociologist, writer, and translator from the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem.

Our two books of the month are *Khaled and Jamila*, a novel by Anan Ameri, and *At the Turning of the Wall: A Story of a Quest and Redemption* by Arthur Hagopian.

From the entire team at TWiP, we wish you a peaceful new year and hope that respect for human rights and the appreciation of enlightened coexistence may replace the madness that seems to engulf the world!

Sincerely,

Tina Basem



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Khalif Omar's "Opening" of Jerusalem

Nuance in Conquest

By Ali Qleibo



The formal capitulation in 638 is known as the Covenant of Omar, a treaty that established the rights and obligations of the Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem under Islamic hegemony.

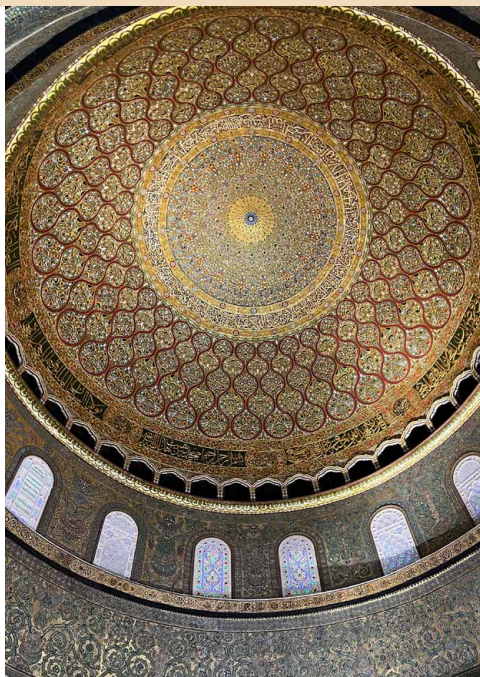
The study of Jerusalem and the broader land of Palestine presents a complex historiographical challenge, largely because narratives of history are rarely neutral. As often noted, "the victor will always be the judge and the vanquished the accused," a dynamic that permeates the contentious Israeli-Palestinian struggle over history and sovereignty. The history of the region is not a single, linear progression but a complex tapestry woven from archaeological findings, linguistic evolution, religious beliefs, and political agendas. Competing interpretations of the past, whether rooted in biblical prophecy, Islamic theology, or modern political identity, vie for primacy, underscoring the necessity of a nuanced academic approach that acknowledges the fluidity of identity and the subjective nature of historical truth.

Archaeological evidence corroborates the city's ancient importance, pushing the timeline of the first human settlement near the Spring of Silwan to between 4500 and 3500 BCE. The discovery of massive Canaanite defensive walls from the seventeenth century BCE – featuring multi-ton boulders that stand eight meters high – attests to the sophistication and strategic significance of the early city. These ancient structures stand as physical testaments to a history often overshadowed by later biblical narratives.

From the outset, revisionist biblical historiography codified the demographic expansion of the nomadic tribes into the land of Canaan in geopolitical terms. As the enemies of Yahweh, these nations, perceived as antagonists, had to be defeated, their gods conquered, abolished, and – in the case of the indomitable Edomites – converted. The Bible recounts the battles waged by the people of Yahweh and the corollary massacres against the Canaanite tribes and their descendants who were satanized, dehumanized, and objectified into their nemesis.

The very name of the city, Ur Salem, denotes its Canaanite origins and the continuity of its sacred identity. Derived from two Canaanite words – Ur meaning city, and Salem (Shalim) referring to the Canaanite god of dusk or peace – the name has evolved over five millennia to mirror the changing cultures, religions, languages, and dialects that have held sway. From its earliest Canaanite name Ur Salem, the city where the god Salem dwells, Jerusalem's name, passing through Jebus to the Roman Aelia Capitolina to Al-Quds, has reflected the tribulations of time, of war and of peace, of ideals and hopes of salvation throughout its history. "Salem," "Saleem," "Salam," and "Salameh" are popular male Arabic names that derive from the

> **The history of Jerusalem is a chronicle of continuous human settlement and shifting cultural identities spanning six millennia. An examination of key historical events, linguistic origins, and archaeological findings reveals the complex narrative of a city whose very essence is defined by overlapping claims to sanctity. The name of the city itself mirrors its layered history, evolving from the earliest Canaanite appellation, Ur Salem ("city where the god Salem dwells"), through Jebus and the Roman Aelia Capitolina, to the current Arabic Al-Quds ("The Holy").**



The splendid twelfth-centure Ayyubid arabesque design covering the interior of the golden dome rises above the sacrosanct rock whence the prophet Muhammad connected with Allah.



Caliph Omar and Patriarch Sophronius; a Byzantine representation of two staunch defenders of their respective faiths. Whereas the Syriac Damascene theologian earned the epithet the Sophy and was canonized as a saint, the caliph Omar adroit character was anchored in the logic that justice is a dynamic, rational obligation rather thana set of static rituals.

consonantal Arabic root S-L-M, among which the name Salam features in the Qur'an as one of the 99 names of Allah. "Salam" as an epithet of God denotes the state of divine purity, immaculateness, intactness (flawlessness), completion, integrity, and perfection, i.e., a totality that connotes wholeness, which is an irreducible quality of Allah.

From the earliest hieroglyphic mention of Jerusalem as Rusalimum in the Amarna texts of the fourteenth century BCE, to the Roman Aelia Capitolina and the current Arabic Al-Quds, the name traces a deep historical trajectory. The etymological connection to the Semitic root S-L-M extends into the Abrahamic faiths in profound ways, denoting divine purity, perfection, and wholeness. This linguistic thread suggests a foundational, shared spiritual legacy that transcends specific religious doctrines and anchors the city's identity in the concept of divine peace and holiness (Al-Quds).

The Muslim army's entry into Jerusalem under the Arab Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab in the seventh century CE, and his welcome by the Aramaic-speaking Banu Ghassan, Banu Lackm, Nabatean, and Christian Arab tribes who lived there together with diverse ethnic Christian minorities offers a critical case study in how historic events are codified. The event is commonly translated as the "conquest" of Jerusalem, but the original Arabic term used is fath (فتح), which carries a connotation better captured by "opening," "liberation," or "unveiling." This linguistic distinction is crucial to understanding the Islamic perspective on the event, whereby in 638 CE, the Islamic Caliphate expanded its territory to include Jerusalem under its hegemony. Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab signed a treaty with the Christian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, assuring him that Jerusalem's Christian holy sites and population would be protected under Muslim rule. Christian Arab tradition records that when Omar was led to pray at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, one of the holiest sites for Christians, he refused to pray inside the church so that Muslims would not request that it be converted into a mosque. Instead, he prayed outside, at the location of the Mosque of Omar, which still stands today, opposite the entrance to the church. Furthermore, he welcomed the Jews back into Al-Quds.

The Muslim acquisition of Jerusalem under Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab around 637–638 CE provides a pivotal example of how historical events are framed through specific cultural lenses. As the event is described in Arabic as a fath, "opening" or "liberation," rather than merely "conquest," from an Islamic perspective, this was not an occupation but the re-establishment of a city central to their faith under a just rule that guaranteed the security and religious freedom of the Christian residents through the "Covenant of Omar."

The narrative surrounding the fath contrasts sharply with the perspective that biblical historiography has imposed on the land. The biblical narrative is often presented as a geopolitical framework that justified the early Israelite expansion into Canaan by casting Indigenous populations such as the Canaanites and Edomites as "enemies of Yahweh." This victor's history, the argument goes, became the foundational lens through which subsequent generations of biblical and Western scholars have interpreted the ancient history of the Levant, solidifying a biased historical perspective that frames modern land disputes.

Indeed, the ethnic reality of the region has always been fluid and complex. The Edomites, for instance, after a period of intensive Hellenization, as evident in Bet Gibrin and Askalan, had been absorbed by the Nabateans through marriage and language and dissolved as a distinct ethnic cultural group long before the Byzantine period (fourth to seventh centuries CE), having been fully absorbed by the Nabateans who had superseded them. This integration is exemplified by Herod the Great, who was of Edomite (Idumean) and Nabataean Arab descent, despite Josephus's narrative to the contrary. While many Nabataeans

From an Islamic perspective, the Muslim acquisition of Jerusalem under Caliph Omar in 638 is generally not considered an occupation but a peaceful re-establishment of a city central to their faith under a just rule.



"The core of Jerusalem's Muslim Arab identity is found in the ancient Semitic root S-L-M. While Salem referred to the Canaanite god of dusk, the same root underpins the Arabic word salam (peace), an epithet for Allah that denotes divine wholeness and perfection. This linguistic continuity underscores an unbroken thread of spiritual significance tied to the city's fundamental identity as an abode of holiness, which finds its teleological Muslim appellation of Jerusalem as Beit al-Maqdis."

converted to Christianity during the Byzantine era, as attested by their trade cities in Al-Naqab (the Negev), they were not a distinct, resident community within Jerusalem itself during that period; the city's population was a diverse Christian populace of varied origins that included descendants from the Qaderite, Bani Lachm, and Ghassanid tribes.

Ultimately, the history of southern Greater Syria is one of continuous adaptation by countless peoples. Modern Palestinians are heirs to this extensive heritage, a complex blend of cultures that defies notions of "racial genetic purity" or "ontological cultural homogeneity." While academic study reveals the deep cultural, historical, and linguistic overlaps with Jewish and Christian narratives as well as Jebusite, Aramaic, and Arabic language and traditions, the contemporary political identity remains grounded in a modern self-identification as "Palestinian Arab," a subjective reality that informs their place in the world and highlights that competing historical narratives will always stem from the experiences of both the powerful and the marginalized.

Byzantine Jerusalem was opened by the Arab armies of Omar ibn al-Khattab in 638 CE. The formal capitulation is known as the Covenant of Omar, a treaty that established the rights and obligations of the non-Muslim inhabitants under Islamic hegemony. Initially, the area of the Dome of the Rock was referred to as Madinat Beit al-Maqdis ("City of the House of the Holy") in contradistinction to Iliya, an Arabic anagram of the Roman name of the city: Aelia Capitolina. The city of Illiya, referred to as the residential quarters, was home to Ghassanid, Lachmid, Nabatean, Qaderite, and Christian Arabs, alongside Armenian and Greek Christians, known as Rume, as well as other Christian ethnic minorities from Anatolia, Europe, and Africa.

In Madinat Beit al-Maqdis, legend, myth, and ritual meet. In Muslim narratives,



Arabic calligraphy assumes the place of iconographic representation. The name of Caliph Omar is ubiquitous in almost all Sunni mosques.

The Dome of the Rock serves as an expression of every Muslim's deep devotion and spiritual connection to Prophet Muhammad, and as a confirmation of Mecca's spiritual and symbolic link with Jerusalem.



Jerusalem was known as the first direction of prayers in the formative years of Islam, the focal point of the miraculous Night Journey, and one of three mosques to which pilgrimage is enjoined by the Prophet Muhammad. In Muslim theology, Jerusalem stands as the axis mundi and a point of connection between heaven and earth.

Because of its centrality in Muslim thought, Jerusalem serves as a definitive image and the symbol of a sacred place parallel to Mecca and Medina. The basis of Beit al-Maqdis's sanctity reflects hierophany – to use a concept favored by Mircea Eliade – which refers to the eruption of the sacred. The rock beneath the spectacular Dome of the Rock assumed its centrifugal symbolic character as witness to the Night Journey. During this journey, the Prophet is believed to have received from Allah the command to perform the five daily prayers (salat), which all Muslims are required to perform. Upon his return to Mecca, the Prophet established these prayers. It is important to note that he designated Jerusalem as the qibla, the direction Muslims face when praying. Jerusalem is therefore called Ula al-Qiblatain (the First Qibla).

From an Islamic theological perspective, Jerusalem, as the first Qibla (direction of prayer) and land of the Abrahamic prophets, an extensive litany of biblical figures and prophets that includes Abraham, Solomon, David, and Jesus, among others, is a teleologically Muslim

city. Its "opening" is not viewed as the occupation of a foreign territory but as a liberation from the perceived instability of the Byzantine-Persian wars and the introduction of a divinely ordained system of justice. The most significant symbol of this transfer of power is the Covenant of Omar (Al-'Uhda al-'Omariyya), a document that guaranteed the Christian residents security for their lives, property, freedom of religious practice, and the protection of their churches.

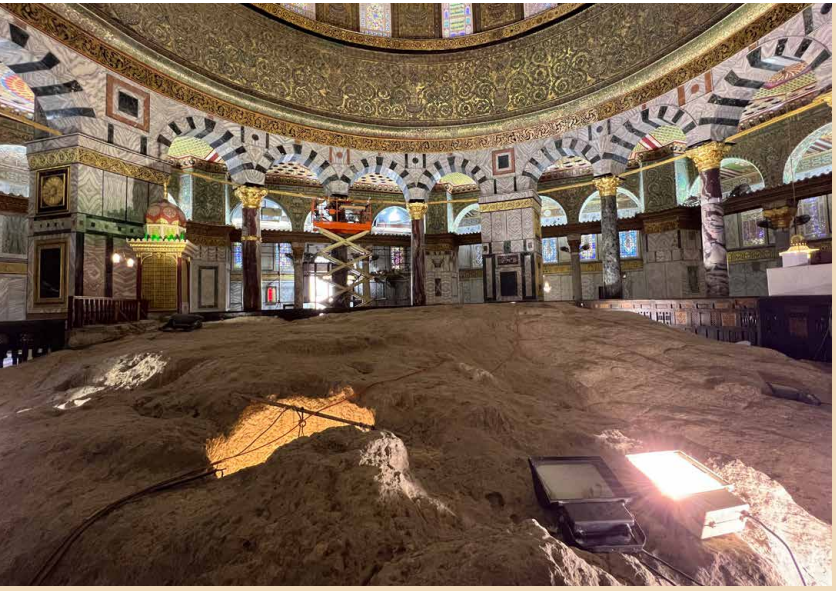
Jerusalem had assumed its Muslim theological significance decades before its liberation from Roman occupation. During the month of Rajab in the year 620 CE, almost one-and-a-half years before Prophet Muhammad's hijra (migration) from Mecca to Medina, the symbolic event of Isra and Mi'raj (Night Journey and Ascension) occurred. Whereas the horizontal voyage to Jerusalem is referred to as Al-Isra, the vertical ascension to heaven is called Al-Mi'raj. That night, according to the Qur'an, God blessed the Rock and its environs. Blessed and sanctified by God (الذي باركنا حوله), the rock assumed a new identity as the "Holy Rock" (الصخرة المقدسة). There is, however, one essential point to bear in mind: namely, that the Night Journey serves as an expression of every Muslim's deep devotion and spiritual connection to Prophet Muhammad and Jerusalem, and as a confirmation of Mecca's spiritual and symbolic link with Jerusalem.

A central point of spiritual convergence and contention in Jerusalem is the Haram al-Sharif, and specifically the "Sacred Rock" at its heart. Comparative religion highlights that this site was revered long before the rise of Judaism or Islam. The Canaanites referred to their sanctuary there as juron, a word denoting a threshing floor or a sacred high place linked with divine manifestation (theophany). This pre-Abrahamic sanctity was adopted and transformed by subsequent faiths. In the Jewish tradition, Mount Moriah became the site of the binding of Isaac and the location of the First and Second Temples. In the Islamic tradition, this same site, referred to as al-sakhra al-musharrafa, is the point from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven during his miraculous Night Journey (Isra' and Mi'raj).

This continuity demonstrates how different religions have layered their narratives and rituals onto the same sacred space, turning the site into an axis mundi within the Muslim hermeneutic – a cosmic center where heaven and earth meet. The physical reality of the site, now enshrined under the Golden Dome, is a testament to this ongoing process of shared sacralization and adaptation.

Muslim historiography and ethnographic research suggest that modern Palestinians are heirs to a complex and varied genetic and cultural legacy, claiming neither racial genetic purity nor ontological cultural homogeneity. While academic biblical study tends to indicate the deep cultural and historical overlaps with Jewish and Christian narratives, the contemporary political identity operates on a different, political level. The modern, native discourse provides narratives of Palestinian identity as "Muslim" and "pure Arab" or "Christian," shaping their position vis-à-vis the world. The contemporary political ethnic identity as "Palestinian Arab" represents a historical reality that exists alongside the multilayered historical record, demonstrating that identity is a dynamic construct shaped by both deep history and immediate political context.

The history of Jerusalem and Palestine is a continuous narrative battleground. The language we use – whether it is conquest or fath, Canaanite juron or Islamic sakhra – carries significant implications for modern claims of sovereignty and identity. A critical academic approach must navigate these competing narratives, acknowledging the subjective nature of historical memory and the enduring power of place in shaping human identity across millennia.



Al-Sakhra al-Musharrafa, the sacred rock, is the point from which Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven during the Night Journey and linked with theophany, turning the site into an axis mundi, a cosmic center where heaven and earth meet. It has come to symbolize the holy, *Al-Quds*. Hence the name of Jerusalem "Beit al-Maqdis," house of the holy.

SCAN
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Dr. Ali Qleibo is an artist, author, and anthropologist. Born in Jerusalem and educated in the United States, his books and artwork have taken him all over the world. Dr. Qleibo has lectured and held senior positions at Al-Quds University, conducted a fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute, and served as a visiting professor at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies and Kyoto University in Japan. At The Jerusalem Research Center, Dr. Qleibo developed the Muslim tourism itinerary in Jerusalem, encompassing tangible and intangible heritage. A specialist in Palestinian social history, he has authored the books Surviving the Wall, Before the Mountains Disappear, Jerusalem in the Heart, *and* Mamluk Architectural Heritage in Jerusalem *and published a plethora of articles locally and internationally.*

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi

(1944-2025)



Guardian of Jerusalem's History and Current Affairs

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi departed on January 15, 2025, yet one year later, his voice continues to resonate throughout Jerusalem. The man is gone but his legacy endures, echoing through every scholar who sought guidance, every diplomat who entered his office located in Wadi al-Joz, and every Palestinian who found in PASSIA a trusted source of reliable information and knowledge.

Born in Nablus in 1944, Dr. Mahdi chose Jerusalem as his life's mission and eternal home. In 1987, he founded the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) that over nearly four decades grew into one of the most essential repositories of knowledge on Jerusalem, covering its history, politics, society, and the evolving landscape around it.

Hundreds of studies, detailed maps, archival documents, seminars, training programs, and research initiatives stand as testimony to a man who built an institution unlike any other: an institution that guards the Palestinian narrative and affirms that knowledge itself is a form of resistance.

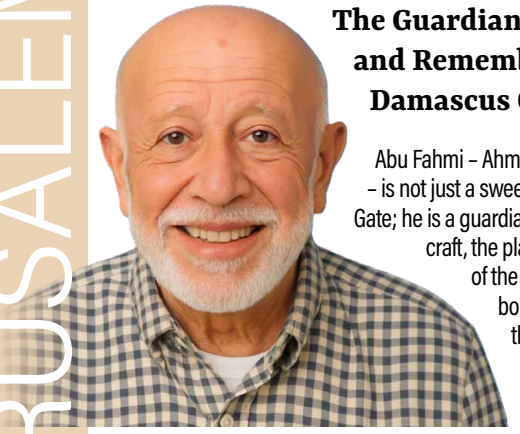
Dr. Mahdi loved Jerusalem fiercely, with the devotion of a guardian, not the rigidity of the fanatic. He defended its identity in every forum, countered attempts to erase it with documentation and scholarship, and carried himself with an integrity that earned respect across borders. His office became a meeting ground for diplomats, UN officials, researchers, and the youth of the city, a place of dialogue, listening, and insight. He was a walking encyclopedia; a national reference point whose presence cannot be replaced.

On the first anniversary of his passing, Jerusalem commemorates one of its most faithful custodians, and the research community loses a voice of clarity and conviction. Yet PASSIA continues to stand, a living testament to his vision and dedication. Human beings pass on, but honest knowledge endures.

Peace to your soul, Dr. Mahdi. Peace to the legacy you left behind, and to Jerusalem, which has lost one of its devoted guardians.

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Abu Fahmi



The Guardian of Sweetness and Remembrance at Damascus Gate

Abu Fahmi – Ahmad Taqash, 80 years old – is not just a sweets seller at Damascus Gate; he is a guardian of the roots of the craft, the place, and the heritage of the forefathers. He was born in Jerusalem, inside the walls of the Old City, and received his primary and middle education at Jami' Lulu itself, right where his current corner is located. There, he studied under Shaykha Fatima, one of the old educators of the Old City who raised generations on reading, writing, and proper conduct. Between those walls, his first sense of the city was formed, and the values he still lives by took shape. For him, the Old City is the lung through which he breathes.

He has spent nearly five decades with the same cart, the same stall, and in the same corner under the historic dome of Damascus Gate, making harisa, barazek, ka'ak, ma'moul, and the distinctive qarshalla using the original Damascene methods he inherited from his father and ancestors. People from all over Palestine – from the north, from the occupied interior – return to him, bypassing modern shops, because he offers the flavor of the homeland, the taste of authenticity, and because his presence makes them feel that Jerusalem is still alive, steadfast, and sustained by its people.

Abu Fahmi is a witness to the history of Damascus Gate before the occupation: when it was the Arab transportation hub in the gate's square, where cars arrived from Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, and where groups of pilgrims entered during Ramadan and the holidays. To him, this place has always remained "the world's gateway to Jerusalem" and the window of the soul onto its history.

As his family grew – seven daughters, two sons, and forty-five grandchildren – he moved to live outside the walls, but he continues to return every morning to his corner, as if his heart were tied there.

And despite more than 200,000 shekels in fines imposed by the occupation municipality to force him away, he has remained steadfast and unyielding, because Damascus Gate, for him, is not just a place of livelihood, it is an identity, a memory, and a right that cannot be sold.

The Struggle for Education in Times of Scholasticide

The Resilience of Al-Quds University

By Walid Salem



Centre for Jerusalem Studies group photo.

> **Palestinians are confronted with ongoing scholasticide. Al-Quds University is an example of this at the level of higher education.**

In the last decade, education in East Jerusalem bypassed the stage of Israelization and is now on the verge of scholasticide. The turning point was in 2017, when Bezalel Smotrich published the so-called "Decisive Plan" through the right-wing Shiloah Center.[1] This genocidal plan gave Palestinians three options, each of which would lead to their elimination as a people: surrender their collective rights and agree to live under Israeli control as individuals who are forbidden to claim any national identity; leave their country; or fight Israel and therefore be killed as the terrorists he claims they are.

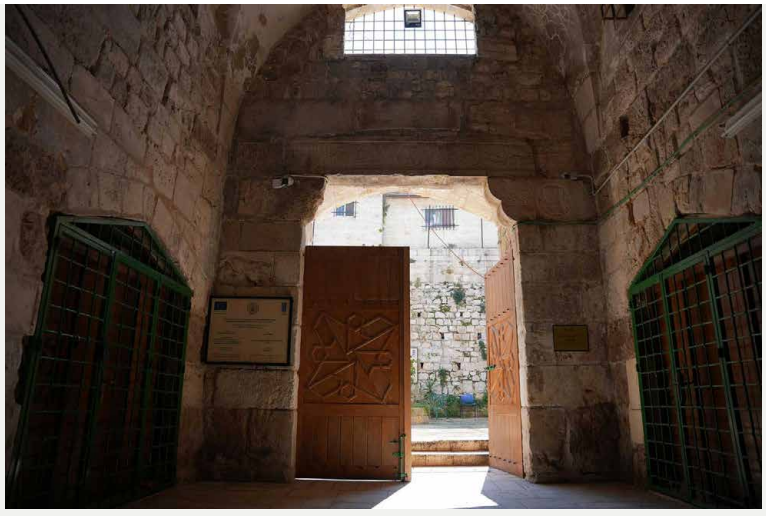
Scholasticide is the aspect of this process of elimination on the educational level. At the very least, scholasticide means the systematic destruction of education, and at its worst it refers to the total annihilation of education[2] as has happened in Gaza over the last two years.[3]

The situation in East Jerusalem meets the definition of scholasticide. The closure of the UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem in 2025, and the closure of the Palestinian Directorate of Education in 2019, are steps on the path of the systematic destruction of Palestinian education in Jerusalem. Forbidding the use of Palestinian curricula, as carried out in East Jerusalem schools, is another aspect of this systematic destruction. Six schools tried to continue using the Palestinian curriculum but were prevented from doing so.

Furthermore, teachers from the West Bank are denied the freedom to access schools as well as Al-Quds University branches in Jerusalem; professors, teachers, and students have been detained; campuses have been raided; and any schools that receive budgets from the government and the Israeli municipality have been obliged to follow the Israeli curriculum. These are only a few examples of our experience of scholasticide.

The first college that later became part of Al-Quds University was established in Beit Hanina in 1978 under the name of *Dawa wa Usul Al Dein* (Devotion and the Fundamentals of Religion) College. In 1979, the Science and Technology College was founded in Abu Dis, and in 1981, Hind al-Husseini College of Arts was established in Sheikh Jarrah. The Arabic College of Health Professions was established in Al-Bireh in 1979. The establishing of these four colleges in and around Jerusalem was an intentional act and reflects the founders' awareness of the need to highlight the centrality of Jerusalem for Palestine and the world.

An important step for Palestinian higher education in East Jerusalem came in 1984, when the above-mentioned four colleges established a coordinating committee chaired by Sheikh Saad Eddin Al-Alami under the name of Al-Quds University. By 1986, the Faculty of Law was established, followed by the Faculty of Medicine in 1994; other colleges followed in 1995.



The outdoor courtyard of the historic Center for Jerusalem Studies in the Old City of Jerusalem. Photo courtesy of Jerusalem Story.

Today, the Al-Quds University branches in East Jerusalem have spread from the Old City to Sheikh Jarrah and Beit Hanina, and one-third of the Abu Dis campus is located within the Israeli municipal boundaries of East Jerusalem, whereas two-thirds are located beyond the Separation Wall and thus accessible to students from the West Bank.

Inside the Old City walls, Al-Quds University provides education as well as community services to help the people to remain steadfast in their city through it support of four centers. The Jerusalem Studies Center in Khan Tankaz runs an MA program on Jerusalem studies. Since its establishment in 1998, hundreds of students have graduated from the center, and tens of MA theses have been produced. The center also organizes Arab education courses for foreign language speakers and conducts educational tours inside the Old City to introduce its cultural and architectural aspects to tourists and students. Moreover, the center has been producing the journal *Al-Maqdisiyyah* since the beginning of 2019. The journal has published 28 volumes in the Arabic language, and two volumes issued in the English language in 2025, all of them focusing on Jerusalem studies through writings by Palestinian, Arab, and international scholars.

Another center supported by Al-Quds University in the Old City is the Center of Community Work, which provides legal advice to the people regarding their residency rights. It supports residents forced to deal with identity card confiscation or house demolition and helps with other legal services, in addition to participating in the international advocacy campaigns for Jerusalem and Palestine.

A third center in the Old City is Dar al-Consul Innovation Hub, designed to serve both youth and small businesses. It focuses on digital transformation, freelancing, and the revitalization of traditional MSMEs. The hub includes a museum, multimedia rooms, co-working desks, and fully equipped digital workstations.

A fourth center in the Old City is a community library that is open to all residents of and visitors to the Old City and East Jerusalem. The library includes hundreds of books about Jerusalem and organizes educational lectures about the city's past, present, and future.

Outside the Old City walls, one can find Cinema al-Hamra innovation center. This hub is located in one of the city's most vibrant commercial areas and connects the local community with innovative activities. The space includes 230 desks in co-working areas, meeting rooms for new companies, training facilities, and a small exhibition space. It is used to host workshops, startup meetups, networking events, and creative programs for youth and entrepreneurs. The center's 120 experts on innovation and investment come from inside and outside Palestine and provide their expertise to new startups, assisting them in the preparation of feasibility studies and offering guidance in fundraising and finding grants for their projects.



The Dar al-Consul (DAC) complex stands at the crossroads of history. Situated in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem, every layer of the complex is peppered with the historical richness of the Old City: its foundations established during the Mamluk period, its arched halls previously housing the Prussian Consulate, and its rooftop presently home to multiple families, the DAC complex is a living embodiment of Jerusalem's enduring richness.

Situated close to Al-Hamra Innovation Center is Hind Al-Husseini Arts College, and a few kilometers away is the Beit Hanina Campus. Both campuses include several branches of the colleges located on the main campus in Abu Dis.

Regarding education, Al-Quds University works constantly to improve the quality of its education, reaching the five-star level in the QS global rankings in 2023. It was re-selected in 2026 as the top Palestinian University by the same global system for the fifth consecutive year. Therefore, it is not by accident that 96 percent of the graduates of Al-Quds University medical colleges are successfully passing the Israeli professional exams to get hired. The university was able, after a judicial struggle, to get an Israeli court ruling in 2014 to recognize the medical certificates of Al-Quds University students. Furthermore, the university promotes qualitative research by both its scholars and the students. In recent years, the students' research papers represented 50 percent of the university's annual research output.

In addition to creating special educational and research programs on Jerusalem and running various hubs and venues that provide services to the community, Al-Quds University participates in and administers a variety of funds that give grants to civil society organizations in Jerusalem, such as Sandouq Qudsuna (Our Jerusalem Fund). Furthermore, the university's campuses are always open to host civil society organization activities, whether or not they have a partnership with the university.

Moreover, Al-Quds University is increasing its partnerships with Arab and international academic institutions to promote research and joint academic initiatives and to facilitate the training of Al-Quds University students at the best universities worldwide. Examples of such partner universities include Harvard University, various German universities, and Turkish universities, including the establishment of a research center that focuses on Jerusalem at Marmara University in 2018.



The newly established Al-Quds Business Center for Innovation Technology and Entrepreneurship.

Al-Quds University combines its role as an educational institution with its responsibility to the community, supporting four centers that provide a wide range of services and facilities for East Jerusalem's residents.

To allow its students to gain hands-on training and professional experience, Al-Quds University has developed working partnerships with the Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem, which enables hospitals to benefit from newly gained research-based expertise. The university also runs a Dual Studies Program through which companies hire students who collect credit hours for their services in those companies during their education. The university furthermore renovated the late-nineteenth-century German consul's building in the Old City of Jerusalem (Dar al-Consul) and 45 apartments outside the Old City. The university was also in partnership with President Abbas' office in the development of the 2018–2022 strategic plan for Jerusalem, among many other initiatives.

In other engagements, University Society president Imad Abu Kishek is also a member of Majlis al-Awqaf, the council that is responsible for the management of the holy places in Jerusalem.

In brief, the story of Al-Quds University reveals that reaching excellence in education and serving the community qualitatively, professionally, and silently without making much noise are the best ways to support steadfastness, resist scholasticide, and avoid elimination. On the horizon, the university is seeking to become a global research university, and it is working to create the conditions to help achieve this objective.

SCAN
TO SHARE



Dr. Walid Salem is a lecturer in the Jerusalem Studies Master's Program, Jerusalem Studies Center at Al-Quds University and the editor in chief of the periodical journal Al-Maqdisiyyah, which is published by the center.

[1] Bezalel Smotrich, "Israel's Decisive Plan," Shiloah Center, 2017.

[2] For more information, please visit the English-Arabic bilingual website "The Palestinian Revolution: Learn the Revolution," edited by Dr. Karma Nabulsi and Abdel Razak Takriti, 2016, available at https://learnpalestine.qeh.ox.ac.uk.

[3] Chandai Dasai, Sundus Hammad, Ahmed Abu Shaban, and Abdel Razik Takriti, "Scholasticide and Resilience: The Gaza Genocide and the Struggle for Palestinian Higher Education," Curriculum Inquiry, October 9, 2025, Routledge: Taylor and Francis, pp. 6–7.

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Lamis Alami



From Karm al-Alami in the Heart of Jerusalem to the Halls of Political Decision-Making and Governance

Lamis Alami was born in Jerusalem in 1943, in the Karm al-Alami neighborhood that bears her family's name – an indication of deep roots and a profound bond with this place. She grew up in a city that was, and remains, a crossroads of history, politics, and culture, and she experienced early on the major upheavals that shaped the consciousness of an entire generation, from the *Nakba* of 1948 to the Naksa of 1967 and the years in between, marked by movement, experience, temporary exile, and an enduring return to Jerusalem that carried significance for both her identity and destiny.

Lamis has moved across the Arab world and Britain, carrying with her a rich human and intellectual experience that were shaped by years of study and work in Lebanon during its golden age, when it stood as a beacon of education, culture, and Arab and international openness. She studied first at Beirut College for Women, then at the American University of Beirut, and later at the University of Edinburgh – an academic path that reflects ambition in an educated and open-minded woman at a time when it was not easy for women to break prevailing social norms.

As a Jerusalemite woman who chose knowledge as her path, Lamis faced and overcame many challenges. Breaking the glass ceiling as a woman leader, she carved her way through male-dominated institutions, proving competence in senior roles. Thus, she held a significant position at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), where she played a pivotal role in developing education, particularly women's education and vocational training, guided by a vision aligned with global standards in education and capacity-building. Her experience at UNRWA was among the richest phases of her professional life, offering extensive international engagement and cross-border expertise.

Later on, Lamis took on leadership positions not only at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, where she contributed to the shaping of educational policies, but also as a member of the Central Elections Commission, where she brought together education, governance, and institution-building. Throughout her engagement in public service, Lamis worked under constant political pressure, managing education and electoral portfolios amid occupation, internal division, limited resources, and shifting political realities.

Lamis Alami is the mother of five children and has four grandchildren. She believes that education, especially women's education, is a weapon for progress, independence, and dignity. Her life stands as a model of the Jerusalemite woman who unites deep roots with global openness and a steadfast belief that knowledge has the power to change destiny, for both the individual and the nation.

Erasing Jerusalem

The Elimination of a People

By Maha Abdallah



Damascus Gate stands empty amid Gaza genocide, monitored by Israeli occupying forces controlling the movement of Palestinians. All article photos are taken by the author in 2025.



A vacant Christian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem.



Al-Wad Street where Israeli settlers have taken over.

Jerusalem is not merely the occupied capital of Palestine and its people; it forms a cornerstone of Palestinian consciousness, identity, and collective presence.[1] It is also a primary site where Israel imposes a multilayered system of persecution and subjugation, targeting education, dismantling social and cultural life, and reengineering the spatial and urban landscape to advance its settlercolonial project.

For over seven decades, Israel has pursued a deliberate project of de jure and de facto annexation of both West and East Jerusalem, in direct violation of international law.[2] To this end, it has deployed a wide range of laws, measures, and policies designed to displace Palestinians and alter the city's demographic, legal, spatial, and sociocultural character in order to entrench an IsraeliJewish majority and create irreversible facts on the ground.[3] These efforts mirror broader patterns of Zionist Israeli supremacy that seek to subjugate Palestinians across the rest of occupied Palestine – from the Naqab to Jenin, Gaza, and the Galilee – and in exile, through similar tactics of fragmentation, dispossession, and domination.

Meanwhile, the international community, particularly third states, has largely failed to meet its legal obligations, namely of nonrecognition, nonassistance, and cooperation to bring to an end serious breaches such as Israel's apartheid, prolonged illegal occupation, and associated atrocity crimes. Instead of upholding international norms, powerful actors such as the United States have undermined Jerusalem's internationally protected status by recognizing it as Israel's capital and continuing to provide weapons, political cover, and economic support as Israel commits grave crimes, including acts of genocide.

Israel has instituted an apartheid regime against the Palestinian people in their entirety, including Palestinian refugees in exile, which has served as a pillar to advancing Israel's settler-colonial project in Palestine. The legal and administrative regime governing Palestinian life in Jerusalem constitutes not only apartheid but a project of erasure that attacks a people's ability to survive physically, socially, and as a collective identity. Israel's project in the city relies on military power alongside laws, military orders, courts, municipal structures, planning policies, population registries, and discriminatory legislation, all calibrated to steadily eliminate Palestinian presence while facilitating foreign settler takeover and IsraeliJewish dominance.

To advance these objectives, Israel has implemented a coherent system designed to maintain a demographic Israeli-Jewish majority while minimizing Palestinian presence; practices that amount to forcible transfer and expulsion, a grave breach under international humanitarian law and a war crime under the Rome Statute. (When the forcible displacement and transfer of a population is done without lawful justification and as part of a systematic or widespread attack, it constitutes a crime against humanity.) These



Israeli soldiers on watch at one of the entrances of Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound, Lions Gate.

include revocation of residency rights, discriminatory family unification rules, restrictive "center of life" requirements, systematic home demolitions, and zoning and planning regimes that severely restrict Palestinian construction while expediting settlement expansion and largescale land appropriation through the Absentees' Property Law and "state land."

These measures are reinforced by policies that geographically and politically isolate Palestinians in Jerusalem, restricting their movement both within the city and in relation to the rest of the West Bank and Gaza. This isolation is enforced through checkpoints and the Wall, which the International Court of Justice declared illegal in its 2004 Advisory Opinion.

The outcome of Israel's prolonged colonization is that there are now two populations in occupied Jerusalem living under two separate legal systems. IsraeliJewish settlers are governed by Israeli civil law and enjoy full civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights, while Palestinians live under a web of military orders, residency regulations, and administrative controls that render their presence precarious and revocable at any time. This dual system is central to Israel's demographic engineering of the city and exemplifies apartheid as the systematic domination of one racial group over another through inhumane acts such as forcible transfer, denial of basic rights, and persecution.

In recent years, Israel has intensified its colonization of Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine through military, political, and legal means. Settlement expansion has accelerated, control over education has deepened, new fines and taxes have been imposed, and home demolitions have surged, placing entire neighborhoods under threat of mass displacement. At the same time, Palestinian political and cultural life is being suffocated through attacks on institutions, restrictions on assembly and mourning, and pervasive surveillance and policing.

Around 350,000 to 400,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem, making up around 40 percent of the city's population, are classified not as citizens but as "permanent residents," a status that can be revoked at Israel's discretion.[4] Since 1967, Israel has stripped tens of thousands of Palestinians of this residency, denying them the right to live in their own city, while discriminatory family unification policies have forced couples into separation, insecure status, or exile. Urban planning has been weaponized: less than a small fraction of eastern Jerusalem is zoned for Palestinian construction despite Palestinians comprising a large share of the population, making permits rare and prohibitively expensive and pushing many to build without authorization, only to face fines and demolitions.



Despite heavy militarization and surveillance, signs of resistance, including through graffiti, continue to be drawn.

Punitive tools further entrench this regime. In 2018, the Knesset adopted an amendment to the Entry into Israel Law empowering the Interior Minister to revoke the permanent residency of Palestinians on grounds of alleged "breach of allegiance," even though international humanitarian law prohibits an occupying power from demanding allegiance from the occupied population. Simultaneously, settler presence has expanded in and around Palestinian neighborhoods, with entire settler areas approved, funded, and integrated into infrastructure networks that cut through and fragment Palestinian space; a form of spatial apartheid planned and enforced.

Settler organizations and state authorities use a deeply unequal legal system to evict Palestinian families in areas such as Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan on the basis of alleged historic or ideological ownership claims, while Palestinians are barred from reclaiming properties lost in Jerusalem, particularly the western side, or elsewhere inside the areas Israel took over in 1948. In Silwan, for example, families face demolition to make way for archaeological parks and tourism projects, erasing living communities in favor of a falsely curated narrative. Such practices amount to statebacked systematic transfers of land and people that constitute grave breaches of international law and may qualify as war crimes, crimes against humanity, or even genocide.

The assault is not only physical and spatial but also cultural and symbolic. Palestinian institutions, cultural centers, charities, and even international organizations in Jerusalem are frequently raided, closed, or otherwise constrained. Arabic language and Palestinian heritage

are marginalized in public space, school curricula are monitored and dictated, and even funerals and public mourning are policed and criminalized, as seen starkly in the violent repression of the funeral of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May 2022. These practices aim to destroy not just the built environment but also the society's identity, continuity, and memory.

What is happening in Jerusalem is one expression of a system applied across all of Palestine and targeting the Palestinian people as a whole. In the West Bank, Palestinians are confined to fragmented enclaves under permanent military rule while settlements and settler violence expand with neartotal impunity. In Gaza, the logic of elimination has produced catastrophic levels of destruction, killing, starvation, and displacement; a live-streamed genocide. In the Naqab, Bedouin communities face repeated demolitions to clear land for IsraeliJewish development.

Apartheid and genocide are distinct but connected crimes in international law. Apartheid normalizes systematic domination and dehumanization, creating conditions in which genocidal policies become not only thinkable but also executable, especially in an environment of impunity and unconditional support. Genocide includes not only mass killing but also acts intended to destroy a group through the imposition of life conditions calculated to bring about its physical or social destruction, including displacement, starvation, and the destruction of essential infrastructure and social fabric. Across Gaza, and through accelerating displacement in Jerusalem and the West Bank, this legal threshold is no longer a warning but an unfolding reality, rooted in the long, calculated process of deconstruction and destruction of the Palestinian people, known as the *Nakba*.





Israeli cameras that hang across the city monitor every step, movement, and sound of Palestinian life.

Under international law, Israel's annexation of Jerusalem is illegal; settlements and forcible transfer are illegal; apartheid is a crime against humanity; and genocide is the gravest international crime. In July 2024, the ICJ reaffirmed that Israel's occupation is unlawful in its entirety and confirmed that all states have binding duties not to recognize the illegal situation, not to assist in maintaining it, and to cooperate to bring it to an end, a finding later echoed by a UN General Assembly resolution calling for the occupation's end within a year. The same court has issued legally binding provisional measures in the South Africa v. Israel case under the Genocide Convention, yet Israel has continued its policies, while major powers keep arming and shielding it, while attacking international courts and Palestinian human rights organizations engaging with them.

This raises urgent questions: Is this a failure of law, or a refusal to enforce it for geopolitical reasons? What can be done in the face of such an order? International law is deeply marked by its colonial and imperial origins, yet even imperfect legal tools have sometimes halted arms transfers, constrained corporate complicity, or opened pathways to embargoes and sanctions when combined with political mobilization. Law alone will not end the *Nakba* or liberate our land, body, and mind, but in a moment where evidence is overwhelming and consequence is absent, real accountability must mean cutting military, financial, and political support, imposing targeted sanctions, enacting a comprehensive arms embargo, backing ICJ and ICC processes, protecting Palestinian civil society and human rights organizations, and ending corporate profiteering from occupation and war. Documentation, strategic litigation, boycott, divestment, and sanctions remain tools of survival rather than symbolism. Jerusalem must be at the center of these efforts, even as the window to act to preserve the city narrows.

SCAN
TO SHARE



Maha Abdallah is a graduate teaching and research assistant at the Faculty of Law, University of Antwerp. Her research investigates Zionism and the genocide of the Palestinian people, situating the Nakba as an ongoing structural process of destruction and elimination.

[1] Malek Zablah, "The Theory of Social Resilience in Jerusalem: Between the Hegemony of Occupation and the Tools of Resistance," Institute of Palestine Studies, August 22, 2025.

[2] "Annexing a City: Israel's Illegal Measures to Annex Jerusalem Since 1948," Al-Haq, May 11, 2020.

[3] Ibid.

[4] "COVID-19 and the Systematic Neglect of East Jerusalem," Al-Haq, July 14, 2020.

Canaan Ghoul

A Jerusalem Voice Carving Its Path



Born in the Silwan neighborhood in 1992, Canaan Ghoul grew up in Jerusalem in an environment burdened with a heavy history and complex circumstances; yet these very conditions have shaped his character and artistic path. He realized early on that music could be a space of resistance and identity, and that the oud could turn everyday details into a clear message.

Shaped by Jerusalem's streets and quarters, Canaan has moved between Palestinian cities and villages, the calm of the countryside and the bustle of the city. In Silwan, Battir, and near Damascus Gate, his style began to form. On the sidewalk of Al-Zahra Street, he played the oud for the first time in public, and from there he embarked on a journey that exposed him to a wide audience. He is appreciated and esteemed as an authentic artist who stands firm despite all challenges.

Having graduated from Al-Salla'a School in Jabal Al-Mukabber, Canaan continued his studies at Birzeit University and Hebrew University. But he considers his true education to have come from the living Palestinian heritage and from direct engagement with people and the city. Blending academic knowledge with field experience, he has developed a musical style that expresses present-day Jerusalem through contemporary sounds that are deeply rooted in history. His project "Oud 'Addiarak" (Return to Your Homeland) has presented performances in alleyways and public squares, while his project "Andalusiya" aims to instill a love of music and heritage in children through structured yet simple teaching.

Canaan has faced difficult economic conditions; he worked in construction and distributed newspapers, yet he never abandoned his dream of choosing music as his profession and personal path. Over time, he has built a respected reputation within the Jerusalem art scene. His message to young people is clear: Start with what you have, carve your own path, and remember that perseverance is stronger and more important than circumstances.

Claudette Habesch

A Life of Service



Claudette Habesch, née Ayoub, was born in the beautiful Jerusalem neighborhood of Talbiyeh to a Palestinian Christian family. At a young age, she alongside her family found themselves refugees after the *Nakba* of 1948. Having lost everything, from the warmth of her home, to her sense of safety and security, she observed how her parents toiled and sacrificed to rebuild their lives. Her parents' strength and faith were the first lessons learnt as she forged her life. She learnt perseverance, hard work, empathy and hope, pledging her life to achieving justice and prosperity for her Palestinian people.

After graduating from Beirut College for Women with a BA in Social Work and a minor in Child Psychology, Claudette trained at the American University of Beirut Hospital as a medical social worker. Upon her return home, she married Issa Habesch and settled in Jerusalem starting a long life of service. Her dedication to voluntary work, guided by faith and a deep sense of purpose, she headed Caritas Jerusalem as its Secretary General for 27 years, becoming President of Caritas MONA (Middle East and North Africa). She was elected twice as Vice President of Caritas Internationalis, the first woman to hold that position. She approached every responsibility with humility, compassion, and an unwavering respect to human dignity.

Believing that education is the foundation of development that empowers individuals, Claudette served on the Board of Trustees of Bethlehem University, as a member, then as Vice-President and later as President.

Claudette stands as a living example of service, generosity, and devotion, leaving a lasting impact on her church and the Palestinian community. She served as Board member and Chairperson of the Central Committee of the Department of Service of Palestinian Refugees, in addition to various organizations such as the Board of Faisal Husseini Foundation, the Presidential Commission for the Restoration of the Church of Nativity, YWCA and the Pontifical Council Cor Unum. She was a member of the Holy See delegation to the UN Conference on Women, Beijing 1995. In recognition of her work, she received various decorations and accolades.

Claudette never forgot her instrumental role as wife, homebuilder and mother, raising three children in Jerusalem, grandmother to ten and great-grandmother to two and counting.

The Digital Cage of Jerusalem's Unbroken Spirit

By Omar Da'na



Controlled entry. An all-seeing occupation: Israeli surveillance cameras crown Jerusalem's ancient walls, transforming historic space into a laboratory of digital control.

In the Old City's narrow streets, the cameras are as constant as the ancient stones. A glint of glass atop a lamppost; a dark orb tucked under an arch – each an unblinking eye watching every move. Under this gaze, a Palestinian on the way to dawn prayers at Al-Aqsa knows he is never alone. The Israeli police's surveillance system – Mabat 2000 – blankets the Old City with thousands of CCTV cameras, covering virtually every corner of its winding alleys. Since 2017, authorities have aggressively upgraded these networks with artificial intelligence, enhancing facial recognition capabilities to give themselves unprecedented powers of monitoring and control. Where once soldiers stood on ramparts, now algorithms and operators in distant rooms track the movement of residents and worshippers in real time. In effect, a "smart" occupation has emerged: high-tech, all-seeing, and deeply intrusive. Palestinians in Jerusalem often say that "Big Brother" is always watching – whether at the Damascus Gate plaza, in Silwan's hillside streets, or around the sacred precincts of the Haram al-Sharif. And they are not wrong: a recent mapping found an average of one to two cameras every five meters in parts of the city. This is Jerusalem under digital siege, its people living under a perpetual lens.[1]

Israeli officials claim that this vast surveillance apparatus is about "security" and preventing violence. But for Palestinian Jerusalemites, the lived reality is one of omnipresent intimidation and control. The constant watch is a daily message that every gathering, every protest, even every prayer could be under scrutiny – and that any form of dissent will be caught on camera. Facial recognition checkpoints now augment the physical walls and barricades: Amnesty International's 2023 Automated Apartheid report revealed how an experimental system known as "Red Wolf" was deployed to scan Palestinians' faces and feed a massive database, automating decisions on who can pass through checkpoints.[2]

> **Israel's high-tech surveillance web in East Jerusalem enforces an "automated apartheid" – and Palestinians are fighting back with resilience and hope.**



Regulating life. Order imposed from above.

In Hebron, this technology literally dictates movement; and in East Jerusalem, too, its reach is expanding. Amnesty found that after protests – like those against evictions in Sheikh Jarrah – Israeli authorities flooded Palestinian neighborhoods with yet more cameras and AI tools, aiming to keep Palestinians under near-constant observation. Under this regime, even the simple act of walking to one's home can become a high-tech identification checkpoint. As Amnesty's Secretary-General Agnès Callamard put it, Israel is using sophisticated surveillance to "supercharge segregation and automate apartheid."[3] Now a Palestinian may be barred from entering her own neighborhood by an algorithm's decree – her biometric profile flagging her as unwelcome on land her family has inhabited for generations.

The surveillance extends into the digital sphere as well, turning social media into a minefield for Palestinians. Israeli intelligence agencies monitor Facebook, WhatsApp, and other platforms tirelessly. Dozens of East Jerusalem residents in recent years have been arrested for nothing more than posts on social media – often on nebulous charges of "incitement" that hinge on a word of protest or a poem of grief. In one especially chilling case, a 16-year-old girl was arrested after she posted "Forgive me, mother" on Facebook – a phrase Israeli police bizarrely interpreted as intent to commit an attack (it was in fact a song lyric). This is predictive policing turned dystopian: Advanced algorithms and special police units trawl through online expressions of Palestinian identity, looking to pre-empt any hint of resistance.

In the tense days following October 7, 2023, this digital dragnet went into overdrive – scores of Palestinians were detained or interrogated simply for posts or private



Every step recorded. In Jerusalem's Old City, daily life unfolds beneath an unblinking digital gaze. Daily life under a constant watch.

messages deemed sympathetic to Gaza, under a draconian "zero tolerance" crackdown. The result is a pervasive chilling effect: People self-censor heavily online, knowing that a lament for a slain relative or a patriotic song could land them in a cell. Freedom of expression – a basic civil liberty – has been gutted in the digital realm of Jerusalem, as every word is subject to surveillance and misinterpretation.[4]

Nor does Israel's technological dominance stop at passive surveillance. Increasingly, it has weaponized spyware and cyber tools to infiltrate Palestinian life. The notorious NSO Group's Pegasus spyware – a tool that can turn a smartphone into a pocket spy – has been deployed against Palestinian activists and civil society leaders. In 2021, the phones of several Palestinian civic figures, including some in Jerusalem, were found to be infected with Pegasus, essentially bugging their most private communications.[5] Such digital intrusions blur any line between security and political repression: What justification can there be for secretly listening in on human rights defenders if not to undercut their advocacy? For Palestinians, it often feels that every device is potentially compromised, every email or call observed. In East Jerusalem, community organizers now assume their phones are tapped and their chats surveilled – a reasonable suspicion when an occupying power openly uses cyber warfare techniques against a subject population.

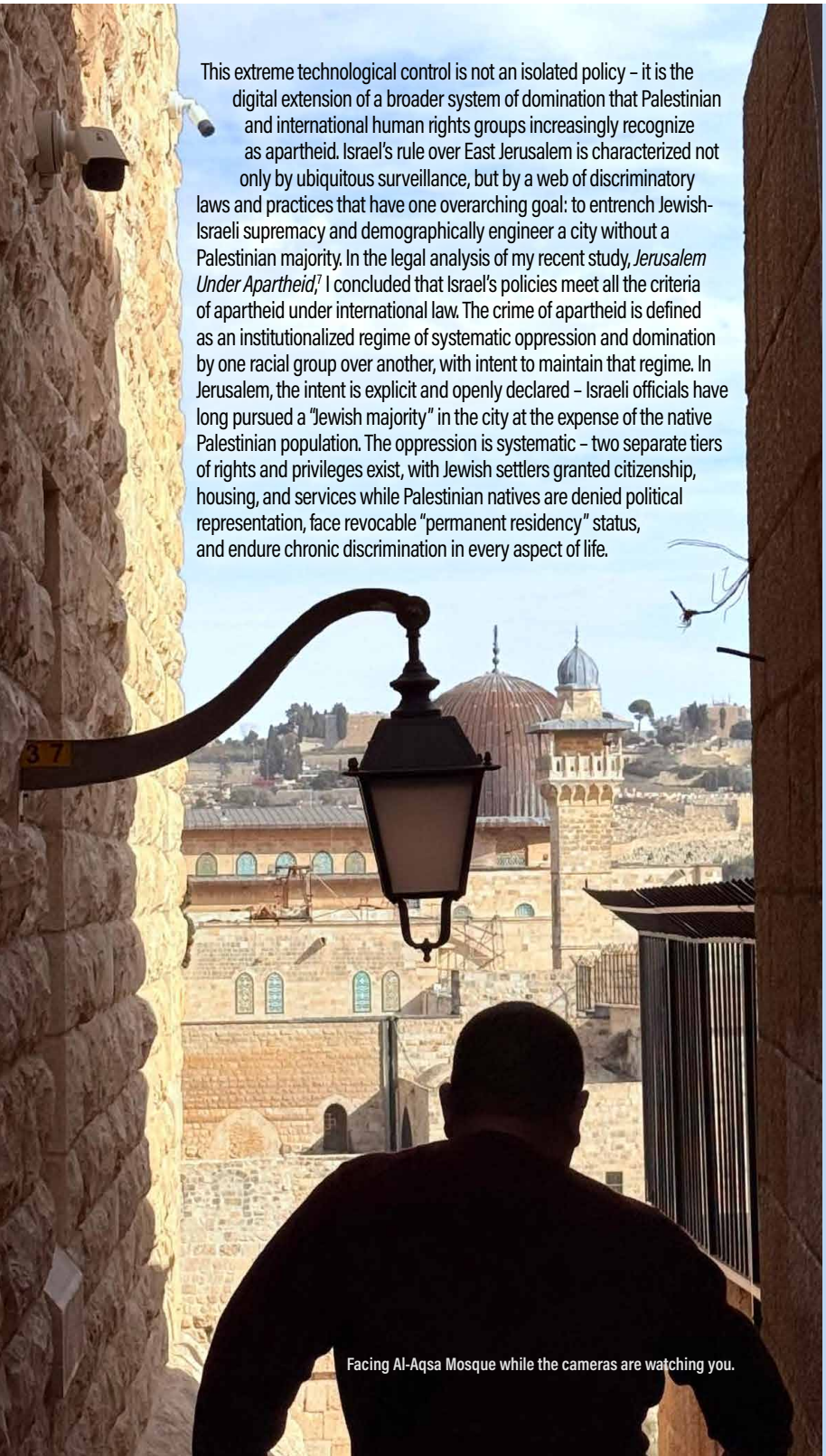
On the streets, Israel's high-tech grip manifests in more visceral ways. Surveillance towers and cameras are often flanked by militarized police units equipped with cutting-edge crowd-control gear. When Palestinian youth gather at Damascus Gate or Issawiya to protest, they are met with tools straight out of a science fiction nightmare. One such weapon is "skunk water" – a noxious chemical liquid fired from water cannons that leaves its targets drenched in a putrid stench that can linger for days. Skunk water has been sprayed liberally in Palestinian neighborhoods since the mid-2010s, effectively punishing entire communities with a smell so foul it makes areas temporarily uninhabitable. Israeli forces also deploy mobile IMSI catchers – fake cell towers that can intercept phone communications or send mass texts warning residents not to "disturb order." Over the Old City, drones buzz in the sky during times of tension, providing live video feeds to command centers; at times these drones even drop tear gas from above, blanketing historic plazas in chemical haze. It is a twenty-first-century police state in action: Mass surveillance combines with automated force, enclosing Palestinian Jerusalemites in an environment where every movement is monitored and can be met with immediate, high-tech retribution. As one Palestinian journalist observed, even if protesters aren't arrested on the spot, their faces will be captured and they "can be arrested later." The message is clear – "we are watching, and we will get you eventually."



Jerusalem under surveillance. A city observed, managed, and measured.

The human impact of this digital domination is profound and multi-layered. Psychologically, it has woven a climate of constant fear and uncertainty into daily life. "I'm being watched the whole time ... every time I see a camera, I feel anxious, like you are always being treated as if you are a target," admits Neda, a resident of the Old City. Palestinians describe how the omnipresence of surveillance invades their privacy, represses activism, and erodes social life, leaving them feeling constantly exposed.[6] The simplest interactions – chatting in a café, attending a community event – are shadowed by the awareness that the state's digital eyes and ears are always listening. Many have retreated from public squares and limited their social media presence, weary of the risk that an algorithm will mislabel them a "threat." This mass surveillance is not just an academic concern about privacy – it is trampling fundamental rights and freedoms.

Amnesty International has warned that Israel's AI-powered surveillance in Jerusalem blatantly violates the right to privacy and exacerbates a climate of repression, deterring people from exercising their freedoms of expression and assembly. Indeed, knowing that one's face is catalogued in some secret database or that one's neighborhood is blanketed in cameras inevitably deters open protest. Community gatherings that once thrived in Jerusalem's plazas now often feel like scenes in a panopticon – watched by police, recorded by machine, and liable to be broken up at will. In addition to the threat of physical force, Palestinians now must contend with the risk of being tracked by an algorithm or barred from their own streets by a digital profile, an intolerable new layer of control. As one East Jerusalem activist put it, "It's like our entire existence is tagged and under surveillance – they want to make us afraid to even leave our homes." The sum effect is a systematic throttling of Palestinian life: a high-tech chokehold on an indigenous community's ability to communicate, congregate, and even move freely in their city.



Facing Al-Aqsa Mosque while the cameras are watching you.

This extreme technological control is not an isolated policy – it is the digital extension of a broader system of domination that Palestinian and international human rights groups increasingly recognize as apartheid. Israel's rule over East Jerusalem is characterized not only by ubiquitous surveillance, but by a web of discriminatory laws and practices that have one overarching goal: to entrench Jewish-Israeli supremacy and demographically engineer a city without a Palestinian majority. In the legal analysis of my recent study, *Jerusalem Under Apartheid*,[7] I concluded that Israel's policies meet all the criteria of apartheid under international law. The crime of apartheid is defined as an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over another, with intent to maintain that regime. In Jerusalem, the intent is explicit and openly declared – Israeli officials have long pursued a "Jewish majority" in the city at the expense of the native Palestinian population. The oppression is systematic – two separate tiers of rights and privileges exist, with Jewish settlers granted citizenship, housing, and services while Palestinian natives are denied political representation, face revocable "permanent residency" status, and endure chronic discrimination in every aspect of life.

The inhumane acts to enforce this regime are plentiful and well-documented: forced evictions of families in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan; home demolitions and residency revocations that amount to quiet deportation; police brutality and extrajudicial killings under loose "rules of engagement";[8] mass imprisonment and detention without trial; and the persecution of those who dare to oppose the system – whether they be human rights organizations shut down or youth arrested for their posts on Facebook. The technological surveillance we see in Jerusalem today is another such "inhumane act" of systematic oppression. By design, this surveillance regime serves to maintain the apartheid system: it suppresses protest against unjust policies, it deters Palestinians from claiming their rights to the city, and it helps enforce segregated spaces (for instance, monitoring and restricting Palestinian movement near settlements). In the words of Amnesty International, the expanding digital surveillance "cements Israel's domain of control"[9] over East Jerusalem and helps advance the unlawful objectives of the settlers' enterprise. In short, every CCTV camera, every facial scan, every tapped phone line is a tool to preserve a regime of inequality.

The international community is starting, belatedly, to call this reality by its name. In July 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered a historic advisory opinion affirming that Israel's policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – including East Jerusalem – violate international law and breach the prohibition on racial segregation and apartheid.[10] It marked the first time the World Court explicitly recognized that Israel's systematic discrimination may amount to apartheid, placing the onus on all states to work to end this unlawful situation. Likewise, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has an ongoing investigation into the situation in Palestine, which pointedly includes crimes committed in Jerusalem – from the transfer of Israeli settlers into occupied East Jerusalem (a war crime under the Rome Statute) to widespread persecution and oppression of Palestinians that could constitute crimes against humanity.[11]

Apartheid is defined as a crime against humanity in the ICC's Rome Statute, and Palestinian civil society has been urging the ICC Prosecutor to add formal apartheid charges to the docket. The legal framing of Israel's rule as apartheid is not mere rhetoric; it is a powerful classification that carries weight and urgency. It says that what is happening in Jerusalem is not just a series of isolated abuses or "security measures," but rather part of an intentional, systematic regime of racial domination. This framing cracks through the fog of contested narratives with clarity: Annexing occupied land, embedding two tiers of law, and deploying advanced AI surveillance to subjugate an entire population are not just policies, but elements of an international crime. And with this recognition comes the demand for accountability – a demand now echoing from the halls of The Hague to the grassroots protests in Palestine.

Yet, even as Israel marshals twenty-first-century technology to tighten its grip on Jerusalem, the city's Palestinian residents continue to demonstrate an unyielding will to live free. In many ways, the surveillance regime has unintentionally fostered a new tech-savvy generation of resisters. The very tools of digital control are being met with digital-age defiance. Across East Jerusalem, youth activists attend digital security workshops to learn how to encrypt their communications and evade spyware. Encrypted messaging apps and VPN networks are being used to create community alert systems that warn of impending arrests or raids, turning the occupying power's reliance on data against it. Local groups share tips on covering or obscuring faces to frustrate facial recognition cameras at protests. Others have taken to citizen counter-surveillance – filming and

documenting the actions of Israeli police and soldiers on their own phones to hold them accountable, even if it means risking those phones being confiscated or monitored. Palestinian journalists and volunteers work quietly to map the surveillance cameras in their neighborhoods, raising awareness about blind spots and the heaviest watched zones, effectively learning the contours of the digital prison in order to navigate within it.

On the cultural front, Jerusalemites are refusing to let the surveillance state rob them of their community life and identity. When Israeli authorities shutter a Palestinian cultural center or ban a public gathering citing "security," Palestinians find a way to respond. Artists hold pop-up exhibits in private homes, away from the soldiers' cameras, displaying paintings that depict the life and history of Jerusalem's people. Heritage tour guides organize informal tours that lead visitors through





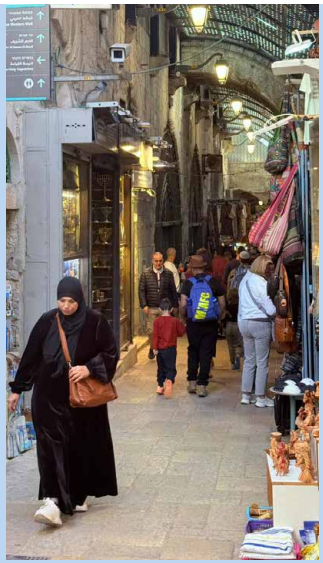


Surveillance cameras in the Old City of Jerusalem.

every angle, but their very presence in that space was a statement of "we are here, we will not be intimidated."

Each such act pushes back against the attempt to render Palestinians invisible. As a local organizer put it, "Every time they install a new camera, we put up a Palestinian flag right under it." In other words, each attempt to erase or subdue Palestinian presence is answered by a collective refusal to be silenced. This

The story of Jerusalem's Palestinians is, at its core, one of perseverance against the odds. The same city where an AI-powered camera can track a child walking to school is also a city where that child's parents teach them to be proud of who they are, and where neighbors come together to support each other when the state cracks down. It is a city where international law and human conscience are increasingly aligned in recognizing the injustice that has been unfolding – and where local grassroots







Surveillance cameras in the Old City of Jerusalem.

And crucially, social media – despite the risks – remains a battleground of narrative: Activists use online platforms to make their voices heard beyond the checkpoints and walls, ensuring that images of evictions in Silwan or police violence at Al-Aqsa reach the world in real time. Each post carries a degree of personal risk, but also the potential to galvanize global solidarity. In this way, Palestinians are reclaiming technology as a means of resistance, not just repression.

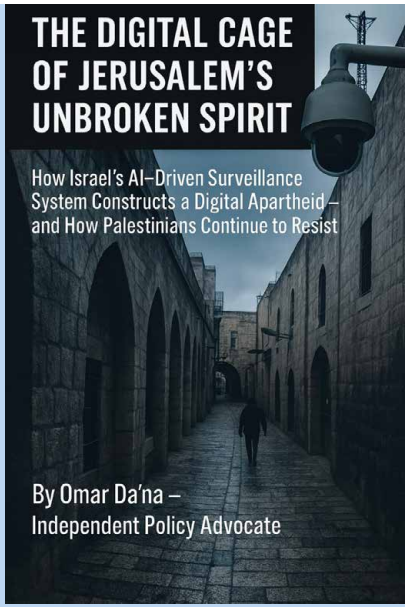
the Old City's Palestinian landmarks and stories – a subtle retort to an occupation that tries to erase the Arab heritage of the city. Youth theater troupes stage plays in East Jerusalem basements, beyond the prying eyes of the authorities. Even the act of praying or celebrating a holiday becomes a form of civil disobedience when done en masse under the watchful cameras. A recent example saw Palestinian Muslims and Christians jointly holding a prayer vigil near Damascus Gate after a spate of arrests; they knew they were being filmed from

resilient spirit – the heartbeat of Palestine in Jerusalem – continues to pulse, defying an occupation that invests billions in technology to break it.

Jerusalem in 2026 stands at a fateful intersection of oppression and resistance. Israel's technological domination has indeed made life more difficult and dangerous for the city's Palestinian inhabitants – it is a sophisticated machine designed to enforce subjugation in every facet of daily existence. But that machine has not broken the people's spirit.

actors are crafting new forms of courage and creativity to confront a digital-age apartheid.

As a human rights advocate born in Jerusalem, I am awed by my people's capacity to uphold hope amid such totalizing repression. East Jerusalem today is under a microscope of surveillance, yes – but it is also under the microscope of global scrutiny and solidarity. The world is beginning to see the stark reality that Palestinians here have long known: that Jerusalem, the heart of Palestine, beats



on with unbroken spirit despite the wires and walls encircling it. And so long as that spirit endures – in the courts, in the streets, and online – the drive for freedom and justice in this city will continue, undimmed and unstoppable.

Article photo courtesy of Mounir Kleibo.

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Omar Da'na is a Jerusalem-born independent policy advocacy and human rights expert. He is the author of the policy study "Jerusalem Under Apartheid."

[1] Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: Israeli Authorities Are Using Facial Recognition Technology to Entrench Apartheid," May 2, 2023.

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[6] Heba F. Zedan, ""'We Have No Safety at All': Insecurity and Continuous Traumatic Stress Among Palestinian Adolescents in Jerusalem," Frontiers in Psychology, September 26, 2025.

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[8] Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: Israeli Authorities Are Using Facial Recognition Technology to Entrench Apartheid."

[9] Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: Israeli Authorities Are Using Facial Recognition Technology to Entrench Apartheid."

[10] Human Rights Watch, "World Court Finds Israel Responsible for Apartheid," July 19, 2024.

[11] Human Rights Watch, "World Court Finds Israel Responsible for Apartheid," July 19, 2024.

Ambassador
COLLECTION

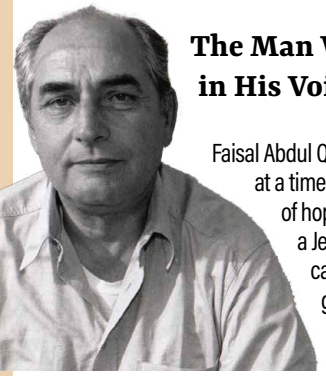


Merry Christmas
Happy New Year
A season of peace, from Jerusalem

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Faisal Al-Husseini

(1940–2001)



The Man Who Carried Jerusalem in His Voice and His Steps

Faisal Abdul Qader Al-Husseini was born in 1940, at a time when Palestine lived on the edge of hope and collapse. He was raised in a Jerusalemite family whose lineage carried the banner of struggle for generations; his father was the martyred commander Abdel Qader Al-Husseini, and his grandfather one of Jerusalem's prominent leaders. From childhood, he understood that a Jerusalemite is not afforded the luxury of an ordinary life – his fate was to be both witness and guardian at once.

His education took him through Cairo, Baghdad and Aleppo, where he became active early on in the student movement and helped found the General Union of Palestinian Students. As his experience matured, he returned to Jerusalem to establish the Arab Studies Society and the Orient House, which became the political mind and living memory of the city amid persistent attempts at erasure.

Faisal was not a traditional politician; he was a reader of history, a fighter through words, and a negotiator who knew that rights must be seized just as they are dreamed. He mastered Hebrew, confronted Israeli media with courage, and articulated the Palestinian narrative with a cool mind and a heart burning with homeland. During the First Intifada, he became one of its pillars – a voice that set the rhythm and reassured people that Jerusalem was not alone.

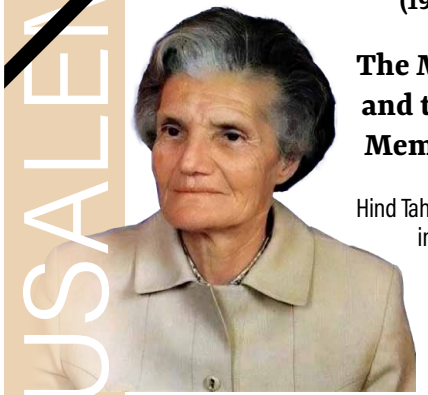
Faisal was later appointed in charge of the Jerusalem portfolio, but he remained larger than titles, closer to the image of a unifying "symbol" than a bureaucrat. He walked the city's alleys as if stitching back what had been torn, placing his hand on a stone as though listening to its pulse, speaking of Jerusalem as if she were both mother and destiny.

When he passed away in May 2001 in Kuwait, Jerusalem paused for a moment, then called for him again. His memory remains etched in its stones ... as though the city is still waiting for him to return from a meeting that has lasted longer than it should.

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Hind Taher Al-Husseini

(1916–1994)



The Mother of Orphans and the Educational Memory of Jerusalem

Hind Taher Al-Husseini was born in Jerusalem in 1916 and grew up in a conservative Jerusalemite family that valued education, refinement, and social responsibility in everyday life. She began her schooling at the Islamic Girls' School, adjacent to Al-Aqsa Mosque, completing elementary school in 1922, and then enrolled in the English High School for Girls, graduating in 1937. She worked as a teacher at the Islamic School until 1945, when her strong sense of social responsibility led her to establish the Women's Social Solidarity Society, which quickly expanded to 22 branches across Palestine.

The 1948 *Nakba* marked the pivotal turning point in her life. After the Deir Yassin massacre, she gathered fifty-five surviving children – boys and girls – and rented two rooms for them in the Basket Market, possessing merely 138 Palestinian pounds. At this time, she made her famous pledge: "I will live with them, or die with them." From this seed grew the Arab Children's Home Association. She started in her grandfather's house in Sheikh Jarrah, where she converted the garage and stables into makeshift classrooms before gradually expanding it into a leading educational and cultural institution.

Over the years, Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi Association came to include the Institute of Education and Social Service, the College of Arts for Girls, and a research center at the Esaf Nashashibi House. Hind also founded the Palestinian Folk Museum, which has collected 3,200 embroidered pieces that preserved the country's material memory. Her efforts and wide participation in Arab conferences on women and development have received both local and international recognition through prestigious awards.

Hind Al-Husseini offered a unique model that combined educational and social work, affirming that building the human being, protecting heritage, and strengthening identity are the foundations upon which the future of Jerusalem and Palestine can be built.

Grassroots Activism in Jerusalem

By Daoud Kuttab



A panoramic view of Jerusalem from the East.

> **Jerusalem has long been a cultural, educational, media, and societal hub. It is simultaneously Palestine's political and ideological capital, a magnet for education, and a historic media hub. It features a thriving cultural scene, hosts professional unions, and boasts a vivid civic life.**

For centuries, Jerusalem has been a magnet for people from around the world. Its geographic centrality at the crossroads between three continents and its profound spiritual significance have given it a name recognition few cities can claim. As the cradle of the three Abrahamic religions, Jerusalem has drawn Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers for centuries. Its Old City – particularly Mount Moriah, believed to be the biblical site where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son in obedience to God – is revered by all three faiths. It is where Jesus Christ was crucified, and it is home to Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site. Yet while this religious significance cannot be dismissed, many residents experience it as a heavy burden that overshadows the city's cultural and social contributions. For them, the holy sites have increasingly felt like a curse rather than a blessing, as its religious centrality has often obscured its many grassroots achievements.

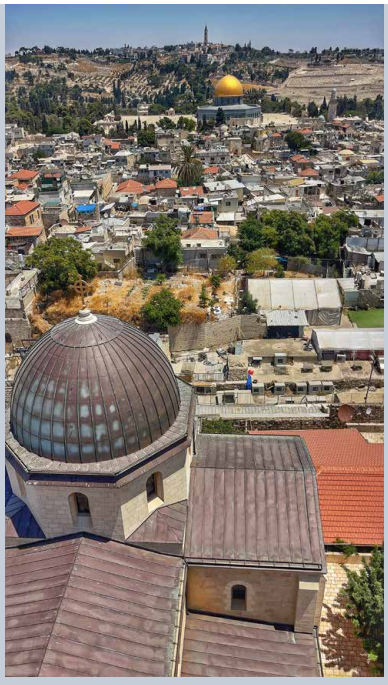
Whether due to its holy sites or for other reasons, Jerusalem has become a political magnet. No politician can survive without paying homage to the city and insisting that it be the capital of whatever entity they represent. This political fixation extends far beyond Palestinians and Israelis. American Christian Zionists have woven Jerusalem deeply into their religious-political ideology, with many relocating to the city in the belief – based on their biblical interpretations – that it will be the site of Jesus' second coming. Some fall into what psychologists call the "Jerusalem Syndrome," a rare psychiatric condition in which visitors experience intense religious delusions, sometimes believing themselves to be biblical figures or divine messengers.

Jerusalem's importance has long extended into education, media, culture, and professional life. While religious motivations may have played a role in establishing many of its educational institutions, the result, especially in recent centuries, has been that generations of regional leaders received their foundational education in the city.

Among Jerusalem's oldest educational institutions are the Manjakiyya School (1361), the Umariyya School, the Kamiliyya School (1413), and the Aminiyya School from the Mamluk era. Modern institutions such as the Frères School (1876), the German Schmidt School (1886), St. George's School (1899), and Ibrahimiyya College (1931) demonstrate the depth and longevity of Jerusalem's educational heritage.

As a historic media hub, Jerusalem was a vibrant center of publishing in the early twentieth century, home to newspapers, magazines, and book presses. After the Ottoman Empire eased press censorship in 1908, Arabic, Hebrew, and Ottoman Turkish papers flourished. Although World War I halted most activity, the British Mandate (beginning in 1920) ushered in a diverse and prolific media environment. By the mid-1930s, more than 250 Arabic and 65 non-Arabic newspapers and magazines circulated in Mandatory Palestine, with Jerusalem as a major hub for the Arabic press.

Radio added even greater influence. In 1936, the British established the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) with studios in Jerusalem, broadcasting in Arabic, English, and Hebrew. After 1948, Jordan continued operating the station, now based in Ramallah, whose Arabic music programs even attracted Israeli listeners. "Huna al-Quds," Jerusalem's pioneering station, became the second radio station in the Arab world after Cairo Radio.



The Old City of Jerusalem.

After the shock of the 1967 occupation, the PLO gained influence. But soon, grassroots and nonprofit organizations reemerged, leading to a cultural renewal in the visual arts, music, and theater. Jerusalem's civil society associations enjoyed slightly more freedom than their counterparts in the rest of the occupied territories, as they were governed by civilian rather than military law.

Jerusalem's cultural life was equally vibrant. Cinemas and theaters flourished, and leading Egyptian and Lebanese artists competed for the opportunity to perform before packed Jerusalem audiences. After the *Nakba*, East Jerusalem's cultural scene thrived even further and was immortalized in Fairuz's famous song "Zahrat al-Mada'in," one of the most beloved songs in the entire Arab world.

Jerusalem was also a center for professional life. Major unions, including doctors' and engineers' associations, based their headquarters in the city, drawing professionals from across Palestine and Transjordan.

The 1967 war and Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem caused an immediate suspension of many educational institutions, especially after Israel imposed its curriculum during the 1967–68 school year. A mass boycott by Palestinian students forced Israel to reverse course and allow private and waqf schools to maintain the Jordanian *tawjihi* curriculum, with coordination for matriculation exams continuing through Palestinian education committees.

By the mid-1970s, as the PLO gained influence, grassroots cultural and nonprofit institutions re-emerged. Some represented the continuation of older traditions; many others were entirely new. Artists such as Suleiman Mansour and Nabil Anani reshaped Palestinian visual culture – Mansour's iconic image of a porter carrying Jerusalem on his back became a symbol of the era.

Nationalist music flourished through pioneers such as Mustafa al-Kurd and George Qurmuz, whose songs, often set to the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, became anthems of the struggle. The Sabreen music group, founded in 1980 by Said Murad and featuring vocalist Kamilya Jubran, blended Western and Arab musical forms into a distinctive sound of resistance.

Theater became a vital outlet for Palestinian national expression. Beginning with the Balalin troupe and later the El-Hakawati Theatre, founded by François Abu Salem, the son of a French doctor who treated Palestinians during the occupation, the movement embraced collective, improvised creation. Productions such as *In the Name of the Father and the Mother, Mahjoub Mahjoub, and One Thousand Nights of a Stone Thrower* toured widely. The troupe eventually purchased the neglected Nuzha Theatre, transforming it into the Palestinian National Theatre, still commonly known as El-Hakawati.

Jerusalem became fertile ground for civil society organizations, aided by the fact that Israeli civilian law, rather than military law, applied in the city. Activists enjoyed slightly more space to operate than their counterparts in Ramallah, Nablus, Bethlehem, or Gaza. Cultural initiatives from Jerusalem spread outward, inspiring art galleries, music festivals, such as the famous Ramallah Summer Festival, and theater troupes.

The PLO's influence from abroad helped energize unions, women's groups, student bodies, human rights centers (such as Al-Haq), and nationalist municipalities. Newspapers such as *Al-Fajr and Al-Quds*, both based in Jerusalem, elevated these grassroots activities across the West Bank and Gaza.

While the first Intifada amplified Jerusalem's leadership, the Oslo Accords brought setbacks rather than fulfilling their initial promise. Jerusalem has faced three decades of restrictions, and religious symbolism has replaced the realm of national and cultural identity.

Damascus Gate, Jerusalem.



The First Intifada further amplified Jerusalem's cultural and political role. Figures such as Faisal Husseini, Sari Nusseibeh, and Hanan Ashrawi – all Jerusalemites – became leading voices of Palestinian nationalism. Israel's refusal to allow Jerusalemites to join the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid Peace Conference forced the creation of a separate steering committee, largely composed of Jerusalem leaders. Hanan Ashrawi ultimately served as spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation.

Although the Oslo Accords initially appeared promising, they quickly resulted in the isolation of East Jerusalem. The eight-meter-high concrete separation wall and the strict permit regime severely undermined Jerusalem's cultural and civil society life. Activities shifted to Ramallah, while Jerusalem audiences dwindled. Most Palestinians were barred from entering the city, and vehicles with West Bank plates were prohibited. Israeli authorities increasingly cracked down on activities perceived as linked to the Palestinian Authority, even banning children's puppet festivals at El-Hakawati by military order.

Since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the rise of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli policies in East Jerusalem have become even more restrictive. Despite this, some institutions – including the Palestinian National Theatre, Yabous Cultural Centre, and Old City galleries – have persisted, though under constant pressure. Police frequently raid events minutes before they begin, declaring them illegal.

Where the first three post-occupation decades saw flourishing cultural and grassroots life, the past two decades have seen a shift toward religious struggle. The Palestinian national spirit – once expressed through music, art, and theater – has been forced into battles over Islamic and Christian holy sites and the right to worship freely.

The struggle for national and religious identity in Jerusalem has become deadlier. Israel has killed and injured hundreds, demolished homes, restricted movement, and issued bans preventing Jerusalemites from entering Al-Aqsa or, conversely, from entering West Bank cities.

The grassroots national movement that thrived in the twentieth century is now largely absent, surviving mainly through struggles over religious freedoms. Much of the cultural movement has migrated to Ramallah, Bethlehem, and the diaspora, while its remnants in Jerusalem fight for survival in the hope that a political breakthrough might restore something of the golden age.



Damascus Gate, Jerusalem.



Selling ka'ek.



The Old City of Jerusalem.

Article photo courtesy of Mounir Kleibo.

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TO SHARE



Daoud Kuttab is an award-winning Palestinian journalist from Jerusalem.

Huda Farid Al-Imam

Jerusalem's Cultural Guardian



A Jerusalemite woman from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, Huda was raised in the heart of Jerusalem, where she absorbed early on its language and spirit. She pursued studies in France in European languages and civilization, and later completed her graduate education in the United Kingdom, earning a master's degree in human resource development from the University of Manchester and a second master's degree in management from the London School of Economics. She is fluent in English, French, Italian, and German. She is also the mother of the young artist Hani, in whom she sees the continuation of a legacy of creativity and belonging.

Huda began her professional career with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Jerusalem, and later served as director of human resources at Orient House (1992–1994), where she organized university scholarship missions for Palestinian students and helped mobilize Palestinian expertise from the diaspora to support the building of emerging national institutions during a pivotal historical moment.

Subsequently, Huda founded and directed the Jerusalem Studies Center of Al-Quds University in the Old City, focusing on empowering the local community, restoring heritage sites such as Hammam al-'Ain, and revitalizing the city's cultural life. She faced pressures and arrests due to her continuous advocacy for Sheikh Jarrah and her efforts to highlight the displacement of families and the depopulation of Palestinians from West Jerusalem, in addition to her ongoing visits to her father's home in the Baq'a neighborhood.

Rooted in Jerusalem, Huda's cultural activism promotes the beauty and legacy of Palestinian identity in the city. Occasional actress, she promotes events, films and art, challenging cultural erasure threats. In 2022 founded 'Time Out Palestine' to highlight the importance of preserving Palestinian heritage & living cultures.

Huda works as the Diplomatic Outreach Advisor for Taawon, the Welfare Association.

Zahira Kamal

A Politician and an Activist



Zahira Kamal is a woman who turned awareness into an institution and experience into a movement. Born in Jerusalem in 1944 into a conservative middle-class family, the daughter of educator Ahmad Badawi Kamal, she was raised on the values of religious openness, respect for knowledge, self-accountability, and human dignity. Her national consciousness was formed even before her political affiliation, when as a child she witnessed Raja' Amasha burning the British flag in 1955 – a scene that ignited within her a spark that would never fade.

For her engagement, Zahira chose the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1962, then joined the Democratic Front at the time of its founding, eventually becoming one of its leaders. Her push for renewal and democracy culminated in the founding of FIDA Party, whose secretary-general she became in 2011. Zahira paid a heavy price for her path: administrative detention in 1979, five preventive arrests, and seven-and-a-half years of house arrest, during which she was banned from movement and from entering the West Bank and Gaza. Yet she transformed the experience into a school of its own: reading, engaging in dialogue, developing language, and cultivating awareness inside prison.

Zahira has not merely been a political activist; she was the engine of the Palestinian women's movement. She founded the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, from which emerged institutions that became milestones: the Women's Studies Center, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, Asala Association, the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, and the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center. She viewed institutions as a form of resistance, a space to empower women and a framework to protect society from marginalization.

In public life, Zahira moved between teaching at UNRWA, working with the UNDP, and serving at the Ministry of Planning, eventually becoming the first Minister of Women's Affairs in 2003. She then became the director of the UNESCO Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center, where she led a project that documented the roles of Palestinian women in three volumes, a work that has become a national reference.

Zahira has traveled the world from America to China, yet Jerusalem has remained her root and compass. A woman shaped by books, refined by experience, and molded by truth, her message to the next generation is to remain a steadfast voice that defends justice, equality, and the freedom of the Palestinian people.

Most recently, Zahira has mastered professional painting, embracing creativity, renewal, and enjoyment during her retirement in the heart of Jerusalem.

From JRS to JLM

How Three Letters Encapsulate the Annexation of Jerusalem

By Rajai M. Nuseibeh



The Jerusalem Airport was under Jordanian administration between 1948 until 1967.

> **JRS and JLM are three letters that tell a city's story: The ghost runway of Al-Quds.**



Airport codes are meant to be administrative shorthand – neutral, functional, forgettable. But in Jerusalem, even three letters can become a battleground of identity. For much of the twentieth century, the city was marked by JRS, the code of its historic airport and a symbol of its Arab and regional connectivity. Today, a state-led branding shift toward JLM – drawn from the Hebrew Yerushalayim – is being deployed across official campaigns, signage, and global marketing. This seemingly minor change is part of a far larger story: the steady restructuring of Jerusalem's geography, demography, and memory. This shift functions not as mere rebranding but as a symbolic extension of policies that have reshaped Jerusalem's physical and demographic landscape since 1967, embedding even language and symbols into the machinery of annexation.

JRS once stood for Jerusalem Airport – a modest airfield first laid down by the British in the 1920s and opened to regular civil flights in 1936.[1] From that year onward, Palestine Airways and Imperial Airways carried Palestinians and international passengers from Jerusalem to Cairo, Beirut, Baghdad, and beyond.

Under Jordanian administration (1948–1967), it was officially known as Jerusalem Airport (Matar al-Quds), and the code JRS was printed on tickets and timetables.[2] Airlines such as MEA and Alia/Royal Jordanian made it a true gateway tying Al-Quds to the Arab world.

All of that ended in 1967, when Israel occupied East Jerusalem and seized the airport.[3] The terminal was renamed, flights dwindled, and by 2000, at the start of the Second Intifada, all civilian traffic stopped. Today, the runway lies abandoned – apart from Israeli plans to transform it into a new Jewish-only settlement of more than 9,000 housing units.[4] If built, it would further strangle the surrounding Palestinian villages and cut East Jerusalem off from its natural connection to Ramallah and the rest of the West Bank.

What happened to Jerusalem in 1967 was not new. Two decades earlier, it happened in al-Lydd. When the British built Palestine's main international airport in 1936,[5] they named it Lydda Airport, after the thriving Palestinian town of Al-Lydd on whose lands the runways were laid. For a decade, it was the hub of Palestine's skies.

In July 1948, during *Operation Dani*, Palmach forces led by Yigal Allon and his deputy Yizhak Rabin, at the time a young officer in the Yiftah brigade, stormed the town. Within days, more than 50,000 to 70,000 Palestinians – Muslims and Christians alike – were expelled from Al-Lydd and nearby Ramle. Hundreds were killed in Al-Lydd in some of the bloodiest massacres of the war: the *dahmash* mosque massacre and the "Lydda Death March,"[6] where families were forced to walk for miles in the summer heat without food or water. Only a fraction of the original Palestinian Arab inhabitants remained, living under military rule.

The town itself was renamed Lod. The airport became Lod Airport, and in 1973 it was rebranded once more as Ben-Gurion Airport. Today Lod is home to some 80,000 residents, but only 20 to 25 percent of them are Palestinian Arabs.[7] The rest are Jews who resettled there after the expulsions of the Indigenous population: Mizrahi families

Lydda: Another city, the same story.



from Arab countries moved here in the 1950s, later waves came from the Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

The logic was clear: Uproot the population, repopulate the town, rename the airport, erase the history. What was done in al-Lydd in 1948 would later be applied to Jerusalem after 1967 – only this time to the political and spiritual center of Palestine.

In June 1967, after the Six-Day War, Israel occupied East Jerusalem and within weeks redrew the city's map. The municipal boundary was unilaterally expanded by 70 km^2, annexing the Old City and surrounding Palestinian neighborhoods, along with land from 28 nearby villages. The line was drawn not to serve residents, but to secure ratios: maximum land with minimum Palestinians. Those absorbed into the new borders were denied citizenship and instead labeled "permanent residents" – a fragile status that could be revoked at any time.

On these confiscated lands, Israel began constructing new Jewish "neighborhoods." Ramat Eshkol was built on the lands of Lifta and Shu'fat. French Hill rose on lands from Issawiya and Shu'fat. Pisgat Ze'ev sprawled across the fields of Beit Hanina and Hizma. Neve Yaakov, abandoned in 1948, was reestablished in 1970 on more land from Beit Hanina. Gilo was planted on the orchards of Beit Jala, while Har Homa claimed Jabal Abu Ghneim, once owned by families of Beit Sahour and Sur Baher.

By 2025, more than 57,000 housing units had been built in these new neighborhoods, housing over 150,000 Jewish Israelis on confiscated Palestinian lands – all with direct government and municipal support. In the same period, fewer than 600 units were approved for Palestinians. Confined to just 13 percent of East Jerusalem's land, most of it already built up, Palestinians face a near-total blockade on permits. Thousands of homes have instead been demolished, criminalizing Palestinian presence while expanding space for Israelis.

The project only widened. The so-called "Greater Jerusalem" plan seeks to extend the city's footprint even further, linking it to the massive settlement of Ma'ale Adumim (40,000+ residents) through the planned E1 corridor. If completed, it would cement Israeli control over the Jerusalem periphery while cutting the West Bank into two – severing the north from the south, and East Jerusalem from its natural Palestinian hinterland.

Demolition and residency policies have reinforced the same goal. Since 1967, more than 2,600 Palestinian homes have been torn down in East Jerusalem; in 2024 alone, 181 homes were demolished – the highest figure ever recorded.[8] Residency itself became a weapon: Israel has revoked the legal status of nearly 15,000 Palestinians, severing their ties to their own city and pushing them outward.

The demographic balance shifted as planned. At the end of the First World War, Jerusalem's population was around 75 percent Palestinian Arabs (Muslims and Christians) and 25 percent Jews. By the final British census in 1946, Palestinians still made up nearly 60 percent of the city. After 1948, entire Arab neighborhoods in West Jerusalem – Talbiyeh, Qatamon, Baq'a – were emptied and their residents barred from return under the Absentees' Property Law.



While Al-Quds was annexed through urban planning, the illegal Separation Wall has drawn another line on the map, slicing not only through the West Bank but also through Jerusalem's neighborhoods.

After 1967, East Jerusalem was annexed, and its 66,000 Palestinians downgraded to residents rather than citizens.

Today, Jerusalem has a population of roughly 1 million people: about 61 percent Jews and 39 percent Palestinians. The numbers are not natural; they are engineered – the product of decades of land confiscation, settlement construction, residency revocations, and house demolitions.[9]

If 1967 redrew the city once, the 2000s cut it again. Israel's Separation Wall, declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004, did more than divide the West Bank – it sliced through Jerusalem itself.[10] Entire Palestinian-majority neighborhoods – Shu'fat Refugee Camp, Kafr 'Aqab, Samiramis, Al-Ram, Bir Nabala – were pushed to the "outside." Families in these areas still carry Jerusalem IDs and pay Jerusalem taxes, yet they must pass through military checkpoints to reach their own schools, workplaces, and hospitals. At the same time, these neighborhoods receive almost no municipal services: garbage piles up uncollected, streets go unpaved, schools remain underfunded.

In the south and east, the same story unfolded. Abu Dis and Al-'Eizariya (Bethany), suburbs historically tied to Jerusalem, were excluded from the city's municipal boundary and then walled off in the 2000s, cutting them off from Al-Quds and leaving residents dependent on permits for access. The village of Al-Walaja lost most of its lands to annexation and now sits encircled by the Wall, accessible only through a single checkpoint. Parts of Sur Baher, Jabal Mukabber, and Um Tuba were also fragmented, some sections inside the annexed Jerusalem, others trapped outside.

The Wall was not built for security alone; it was another act of cartography in the service of demography. By running its course where it did, Israel effectively scratched off nearly 150,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites from the functional life of the city. On paper, they remain residents. In practice, they have been excluded from the urban core, their presence diluted in statistics, their neighborhoods left to decay.

For Palestinians, the Wall did not just cut land; it cut memory and belonging. It turned the simple act of reaching Jerusalem's Old City – Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher – into a journey of checkpoints and permits.



A once thriving airport tower now sits in ruins.

"If I don't steal it, someone else will."

Another line on the map had re-engineered the city, not by removing people directly, but by walling them out of their own capital.

The story of Jerusalem, is put forward in simple words by Jacob Fauci, a settler from New York. Brought by extremist settler organizations all the way from the United States to Israel, he moved into part of the Al-Kurd family's house in Sheikh Jarrah – property that Palestinian refugees have lived in since 1948. Settler groups have targeted Palestinian homes built by the Jordanian government for families displaced in 1948, such as the Al-Kurd home, based on pre-1948 claims revived only for Jewish litigants.

Across town, the story is reversed but the outcome identical. In the once-elegant Arab neighborhoods of Talbiyeh, Baq'a, and Qatamon, Palestinian Arabs were forced out in 1948, their homes seized under the Absentees' Property Law (1950) – a 1950 Israeli law that classifies Palestinians displaced or prevented from returning as 'absentees,' even if they were only a few kilometers away, and transfers their property to the state without compensation, forming the legal basis for the confiscation of over 4 to 5 million dunams of Palestinian land and tens of thousands of Palestinian homes since 1950[11] – and the neighborhoods absorbed into Israeli West Jerusalem.[12] Families such as the Khourys, Nashashibis, Husseinis, and Dajanis still hold the title deeds to their villas but are barred from ever reclaiming them.

The contradiction is deliberate. Palestinians expelled from their homes in West Jerusalem or historical Palestine (Yafa, Akka, Haifa, Al-Lydd) cannot return, while Jewish settlers arriving from abroad are legally empowered to take homes in East Jerusalem. Different mechanisms, opposite directions – but the same outcome: displacement of Palestinians and demographic engineering of the city.

The battle over Jerusalem is fought with borders, bulldozers, and laws – and increasingly with symbols as small as three letters. JRS once stood for a city that looked outward, connected to its surrounding Arab world through an airport, a code, a culture and a history rooted in its Muslim and Christian inhabitants.

Since 1967, that city has been systematically reshaped: municipal boundaries expanded, land confiscated, settlements built, homes demolished, residencies revoked, and families uprooted by discriminatory laws or by force. Palestinians were walled out of their own capital, and whole neighborhoods were recast in Hebrew names.

Now, even the abbreviation is being rewritten. Israeli municipal branding pushes JLM – lifted from *Yerushalayim* – across tourism posters, city logos, and sports campaigns. It is presented as neutral shorthand, but it is anything but. It is another layer in the long project of erasure: to overwrite JRS, to deny the Palestinian Arab history of Jerusalem, and to impose a new identity that serves the occupier.

Three letters tell the story. JRS: an airport code that anchored the city in its Arab surroundings, both physically and culturally. JLM: a branding device of annexation and demographic engineering. Between the two lies the history of a city under occupation – its land divided, its people displaced, its memory rewritten. From JRS to JLM: three letters that encapsulate the annexation of a city.

SCAN
TO SHARE



Rajai M. Nuseibeh is a technology and economic development strategist with over 18 years of experience in building inclusive innovation ecosystems across East Jerusalem, Palestine, the larger MENA region, and Eastern Europe. He has led programs that expand employment and entrepreneurship, empower women and youth, and strengthen grassroots leadership in underserved communities. His work includes partnerships with institutional and government donors such as USAID, the World Bank, and the EU, alongside leading private-sector actors, advancing models that link digital innovation with social and economic impact. Nuseibeh is also active in community leadership, philanthropy, and civic initiatives in Jerusalem.

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[3] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 252 (1968).

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[5] Salim Tamari, Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and Their Fate (1999).

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[8] Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), Statistics on House Demolitions, 1967–2024. Jerusalem: ICAHD, 2024; OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Demolition Database. Jerusalem: OCHA, 2024.

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[11] See Absentees' Property Law, 5710–1950; United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), Progress Report on Refugee Properties (1951); HaMoked, The Quiet Deportation (1997; updated 2018); Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem (1987); Walid Khalidi, All That Remains (1992).

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Suhail Khoury

The Nay that Gave Jerusalem Back Its Breath



Suhail Khoury is considered one of the pillars of Palestinian music – a man who carried on his shoulders the burden of ensuring that the city kept its voice at a time when many tried to silence it. He was born in Jerusalem in 1963, and among the stones of the city his earliest ear was formed, in the place where the call to prayer mingles with church bells, and where the alleyways intertwine with melodies heard only by those who know how the soul listens.

Suhail studied music academically, specializing in the nay, the clarinet, and composition, and carried with him – into institutes, streets, and theaters – a simple yet profound idea: Music is not a luxury... it is an act of resilience. He co-founded the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM) and then earned a master's degree in music education. He has served as the ESNCM's general director and as the head of the administrative board of the Yabous Cultural Center, whose early foundations he helped lay. Through these two institutions, he redrew Jerusalem's cultural structure and built an educational and creative space that enables new generations to carry their melodies with dignity.

On stage, in rehearsals, and in halls crowded with children discovering their own voices, Suhail led the Jerusalem Girls' Ensemble and the Palestinian Arab Orchestra, composing dozens of pieces that have become part of Palestine's emotional memory. From his early days with the Popular Art Center, El-Funoun Dance Troupe, Sabreen troupe, and the Arab Music Ensemble, he honed an exceptional ability to move between styles – between heritage and modernity, roots and aspiration.

Suhail has left his mark on musical works and albums that have become significant milestones: Marah, Matar, and Bas Shway for children; "Marj Ibn Amer" for the El-Funoun Troupe; "Ashiqah" for the Washm Ensemble; and the Jerusalem After Midnight album; in addition to composing the music for the play The Lanterns, based on Ghassan Kanafani's story, and writing the orchestral vocal work "Maryam of Gaza" and the song "Peace to Gaza."

And because art in Palestine is neither neutral nor innocent, Suhail was arrested because of his work on producing a musical album – a moment that encapsulates the relationship between melody and freedom, between rhythm and resistance.

The awards and honors granted to his projects and ensembles are not personal medals, but rather recognition that this man – calm, persistent, and loyal to his vision – laid a substantial stone in the building of the Palestinian cultural landscape, leaving an indelible mark on the memory of a city that does not forget those who play for it.

Betty Dagher Majaj

The Lebanese Who Became Palestinian



Betty Dagher Majaj was born in 1926 in the city of Sidon, Lebanon, where her early awareness was shaped by simple yet profound values: Show kindness, be modest, and serve those in need of a helping hand and a compassionate heart. She studied nursing at the American University of Beirut, where she realized that caring for human beings is not merely a profession but rather a calling and a destiny. In 1947, she married the Jerusalemite physician Amin Majaj and moved with him to Jerusalem, a city that would later become the central stage of her life's work.

With the outbreak of the 1948 *Nakba*, Betty stood in the front lines. Together with her husband, she transformed one of the monasteries in Al-Eizariya into an emergency hospital, confronting wounds, tears, and fear. Yet she firmly believed that saving even a single life was, in itself, an act of resistance. She later became director of nursing at Augusta Victoria Hospital, and in 1983 she assumed leadership of the Princess Basma Center. Over the following decades, Betty transformed it from a small institution into a comprehensive center that integrates medical treatment and rehabilitation with an inclusive education for children with disabilities. Under her leadership, the center became a home, a school, and a space for hope.

In 2021, Betty published her memoir, A War Without Chocolate, in which she offers an honest account of a woman's journey through war, borders, and the weight of responsibility.

Her message to young people remains unmistakably clear: Renewal begins with the weakest among us; compassion is not weakness but courage; and quiet, dedicated work is what leaves the most enduring impact.

To Jerusalem and its people, she says: "Elevate the value of the human being ... and the city itself will rise."

A Digital Forum with a Jerusalem Spirit

Courtesy of Burj Alluqluq



A session of the Jerusalem Digital Forum.

From the terrace of Notre Dame, overlooking the skyline of a beautiful city whose ancient stones have witnessed centuries of transformation, a new kind of light has radiated across Jerusalem, reflecting creativity, innovation, and the promise of a digital future. This backdrop framed the launch of Jerusalem Digital Forum, an initiative led by Burj Al-Luqluq Social Center Society in partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). With a vision rooted in youth empowerment and technological advancement, the gathering marked a bold step toward placing Jerusalem's young innovators at the heart of global digital progress.

The forum arrived with purpose. Its themes of digital transformation, youth-driven innovation, and the potential of artificial intelligence reflected a collective belief that Palestinian youth in Jerusalem hold the keys to shaping the city's next chapter. Burj Al-Luqluq embraced this moment with remarkable energy, positioning itself as a catalyst for a new technological era in the city.

The event brought together an impressive group of leaders, thinkers, and innovators. Among them were Dr. Imad Abu Kishek, president of Al-Quds University; Dr. Saeed Sabri, an expert in digital transformation and strategic planning; entrepreneur Hani Al-Alami, a pioneer in high-tech and advanced technologies; Andreas Adrian from GIZ; and Muntaser Dkeidek, executive director of Burj Al-Luqluq. Their presence, insights, and engagement infused the forum with a spirit of possibility and determination.

"Igniting a technological movement through contemporary dialogue to enable a better life and navigate challenges through innovation, the Jerusalem Digital Forum conference fostered the development of a productive digital ecosystem."

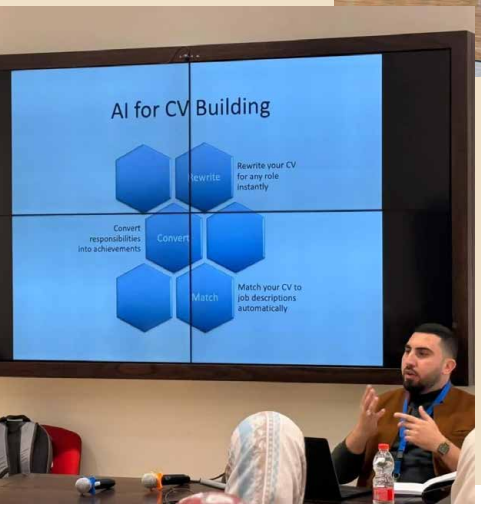


What unfolded throughout the forum was more than a series of talks, it was an evolving conversation about the digital age and the role of Palestinian youth within it. Participants explored the challenges and opportunities of emerging technologies, the global shifts toward automation, and the capacity of Jerusalem's young generation to adapt, innovate, and lead. Workshops, panel discussions, and brainstorming sessions created spaces for youth and experts alike to exchange ideas. Themes ranged from digital entrepreneurship to smart solutions for mobility, health, education, and employment. A recurring call to action emerged: to forge stronger cooperation between academia, the private sector, and civil society in order to develop digital solutions that respond to pressing community needs.

The forum emphasized that technology, when placed in the right hands, is not only a tool for economic advancement, it is a pathway to improved quality of life. Participants highlighted the responsibility and opportunity to nurture a generation of digital creators who can shape change, strengthen national identity, and build meaningful opportunities within Jerusalem.

Speakers did not shy away from discussing the profound challenges young Palestinians in Jerusalem are facing: restrictions on movement, systemic barriers, and limited economic opportunities. Yet the message was clear: Technology can serve as a powerful equalizer. It holds





More from the forum.

the potential to create jobs, empower young women working from home, and connect ideas across neighborhoods even when physical mobility is constrained. The promise of digital tools to bypass barriers and spark new forms of entrepreneurship resonated strongly, offering both hope and practical pathways forward.

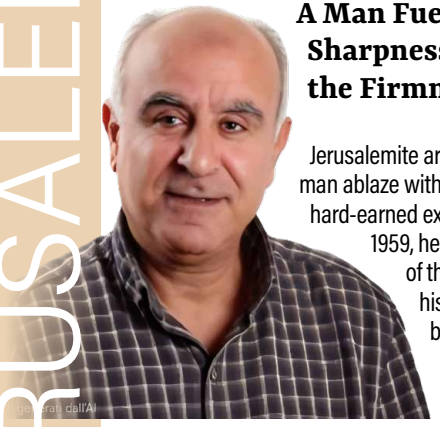
Jerusalem Digital Forum stood as more than an event; it embodied a vision of what Jerusalem can become – a city where youth harness technology to transcend limitations and design innovative, culturally rooted solutions.

In the heart of a city often defined by its constraints, the forum illuminated a new narrative: technology as a gateway to a borderless landscape of knowledge and productivity. With continued investment, collaboration, and youth engagement, this digital movement has the potential to grow into one of Jerusalem's most inspiring success stories.

SCAN TO SHARE



Shihab Al-Qawasmi



A Man Fueled by the Sharpness of Passion and the Firmness of Experience

Jerusalemite artist Shihab al-Qawasmi is a man ablaze with passion and shaped by a life of hard-earned experience. Born at Bab al-Silsila in 1959, he carries in his heart the memory of the neighborhood that witnessed his childhood – until the 1967 Naksa brought the destruction of the house and the entire quarter, and Shihab and his family found themselves in Wadi al-Joz. From amid the ruins, his first artistic steps were born: drawings of his old home and neighborhood, images that never left his soul.

Shihab studied in Jerusalem's schools, then specialized in art education and graduated from the Bezalel Academy in 1977, continuing his intellectual and artistic journey in Austria and France. He practiced design and graphics for many years, yet painting remained his inner calling – until he devoted his life to it as a mission and a duty toward his city.

Today, Shihab turns his brush into a vivid visual tool of documenting Jerusalem. Presenting exhibitions locally, across the Arab world, and internationally, he introduces the world to the city's history and identity. The title "Jerusalemite artist" has become both his signature and a medal worn on his chest.

Going beyond painting, Shihab has published the significant documentary book Kan Ya Ma Kan: Jerusalem a Hundred Years Ago, which has received high acclaim and was chosen by the Jordanian monarch as an official gift, presented to Arab leaders at the 2017 summit.

Despite this contribution, Shihab faces a major challenge: Invitations to exhibit abroad often require him to cover his own travel expenses, placing a heavy burden on him. Yet he continues, believing that Jerusalem is a treasure that has been entrusted to its people, that every kind word, every poem, and every painting is a line of defense for its authenticity.

Shihab's message is clear: Pass on to future generations the responsibility of preserving heritage and protecting it from erasure and theft. For in the end, Jerusalem is much more than ancient stones, it is an identity, a spirit, and a story told by the artist's brush and the human will.

Raed Saadeh



A Trusted Voice Safeguarding Tourism in Palestine

In Jerusalem, a city where time folds into stone and memory lives in every doorway, Raed Saadeh stands as one of its most insightful interpreters. His bond with the city is not sentimental; it is the bedrock of his identity and the guiding compass behind every professional choice he has made. From his formative years at St. George's School and the YMCA to his scientific training in mechanical engineering, each step shaped him, yet his true calling emerged elsewhere.

Despite the value of his academic specialization, Raed gravitated toward the tourism and hospitality sector, recognizing that Jerusalem's cultural heritage is not merely a legacy to be admired but an economic lifeline to be protected. For him, safeguarding heritage is synonymous with sustaining the city itself. Tourism – through its stories, sites, and cultural rituals – has long been the backbone of the Palestinian economy, and Raed has become one of its most trusted voices.

Over the years, Raed has served as a key reference for international donors, development agencies, and professionals in hospitality, restaurants, and cultural services. His insights consistently highlight the urgent need to revive the sector, invest in cultural preservation, and encourage meaningful government support for an industry that is facing unprecedented challenges.

Raed's commitment has materialized in tangible spaces. After his father's passing, Raed transformed the historic 1890 Jerusalem Hotel into a living cultural landmark, a hotel that functions as both an archive and a gathering place. Today, he extends this legacy through his newest project: an interpretation center in Khan Tankaz, inside the Old City, designed to narrate Jerusalem's heritage through immersive and interactive experiences.

For Raed Saadeh, cultural heritage is not a memory, it is a strategy for resilience. His life's work is a continuous effort to ensure that Jerusalem's story remains whole, dignified, and vividly alive.

Strong Ground

The National Conservatory of Music in the Heart of Jerusalem

By Heather Bursheh



Concert by children of Seif Silwan summer camp.

In a city where cultural identity is constantly under threat, the National Conservatory of Music (NCM) has become one of Jerusalem's most resilient institutions. For almost thirty years, it has worked quietly yet decisively against cultural erasure and urban segregation, ensuring that Jerusalem's Palestinian and Arab identity survives and thrives.

The conservatory began with a simple but ambitious vision: that every Palestinian home should enjoy a living, creative musical culture. What started modestly has become Jerusalem's most influential Palestinian music institution, a cultural anchor at a time when Palestinian presence is increasingly fragmented by political pressures, geographic barriers, and systematic restrictions.

Palestinians in Jerusalem face ongoing marginalization through policies that restrict movement, limit cultural development, and reduce access to cultural spaces. Against this backdrop, the NCM remains one of the few artistic institutions deeply rooted in the community and open to all.

Beit al-Shihabi – the conservatory's home – is preserved as a cultural and architectural landmark. Built in the late nineteenth century, it stands as a testament to Jerusalem's Arab heritage at a time when many historic Palestinian buildings have been confiscated or erased. For students and families, it is more than a school; it is a space of continuity and cultural affirmation.

Each year, around 300 students attend lessons and participate in ensembles and community programs in this historic building. For many, it is one of the few cultural institutions accessible without checkpoints, restricted zones, or surveillance. It remains a sanctuary where Palestinian identity is nurtured rather than constrained.

> **The National Conservatory of Music provides a musical lifeline, building a generation of musicians against all odds amid efforts to silence and marginalize Palestinian cultural voices.**



Banat al-Quds footage from Ireland Tour 2025 by Maurice Gunning.

One of the NCM's major achievements is the training of a generation of Palestinian musicians and educators. Today, 95 percent of its academic staff are Palestinian, and over 60 percent are conservatory graduates. This reflects a deliberate strategy to build local capacity to sustain the core programs, given restrictions on international cultural workers, the lack of free movement between Jerusalem and the West Bank, and otherwise limited work opportunities for musicians and producers of culture. By investing in local talent, the NCM has created a sustainable musical ecosystem. Its graduates now perform and teach locally and internationally, and contribute significantly to Palestinian cultural life.

There are many documented examples of Israeli authorities targeting Palestinian cultural institutions in Jerusalem. On July 22, 2020, Israeli forces raided the NCM and the Yabous Cultural Centre, as well as the home of their directors, Suhail Khoury and Rania Elias. Computers and documents were confiscated, and both were arrested and interrogated before being released on bail hours later.

In recent years, overt repression has been compounded by new policies of soft domination, framed as "inclusion." Israeli government-backed music schools and arts programs in East Jerusalem now offer subsidized or free classes funded by state taxation,



Shihabi Building during the day.

aiming to normalize the presence and permanence of Israeli state structures in Palestinian daily life. Meanwhile, Palestinian institutions such as the NCM rely on fundraising, local supporters, and international donors. This asymmetry – combined with legal and security pressures – risks sidelining Palestinian cultural organizations and elevating state-aligned narratives.

For the NCM and similar institutions, continuing to operate under these conditions is both cultural preservation and cultural resistance.

Cultural erasure occurs not only through silencing voices but by shrinking the spaces where expression is possible. Raids and temporary closures of venues such as Yabous and the Hakawati Theatre have affected

Banat al-Quds performance in Layali al-Tarab 2015.

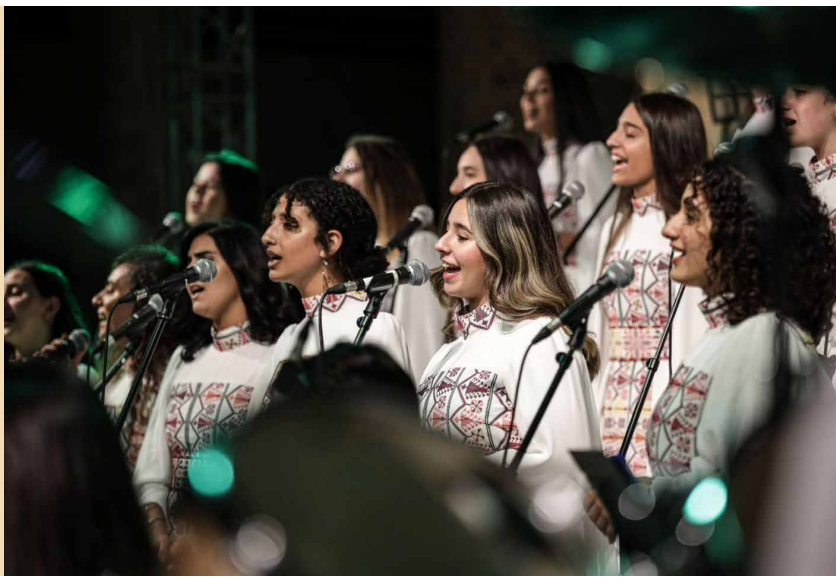


Jerusalem's cultural sphere. The NCM responds by bringing music directly into public life. Its students and ensembles have presented hundreds of performances in Jerusalem, attended by tens of thousands of Palestinians – disrupting invisibility and helping rebuild shared cultural space.

The annual Layali al-Tarab fi Quds al-Arab festival is a key expression of this mission. For more than a decade, it has placed Arabic music at the heart of Jerusalem's cultural calendar. Held outdoors in the beautiful grounds of the historic Shihabi building, the

performed internationally, including in Greece, Norway, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, UK, and Ireland, carrying Jerusalem's musical identity abroad and asserting a narrative that refuses marginalization.

The NCM's community programs have extended into areas such as the Old City and the Shu'fat refugee camp, offering group lessons at no cost. Its outreach program currently provides free wind-band lessons to Jerusalem schoolchildren to ensure equitable access to cultural participation.



Banat al-Quds performance in Layali al-Tarab 2023.

festival turns public space into a stage, reaching broad audiences, and reaffirming cultural visibility and community connection.

One of the NCM's most innovative initiatives, the Banat al-Quds (Daughters of Jerusalem) ensemble, brings together young women singers and musicians to perform Arabic music in new ways. Founded in 2013, it has

The NCM also runs creative arts camps during school holidays, offering joyful spaces in a city where young people have limited access to safe recreational areas. In a context of segregation and restricted mobility, these programs build confidence, creativity, and community cohesion.

Financial pressure also threatens cultural life in Jerusalem. A deepening



Community Education Program performance of choir in Ezarirya

crisis has been triggered by political conditions imposed by several European donors, in addition to conditions already levied by American state organizations. These restrictions effectively criminalize the Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination. The NCM rejected these conditions on principle, preserving its integrity but losing long-standing financial support. Despite this setback, it continues its mission, finding new ways to sustain its programs and its presence in Jerusalem.

In a city where cultural life is constantly tested, the National Conservatory of Music stands as one of Jerusalem's strongest expressions of Palestinian continuity. By nurturing musicians, reclaiming public space, and upholding its principles despite political and financial pressure, it shows that cultural life can endure and grow even under constraint. In a city where segregation threatens to fragment community life, the NCM stands as a powerful model of resilience, shaped by music, rooted in identity, and sustained by the collective will to remain visible, connected, and culturally alive.

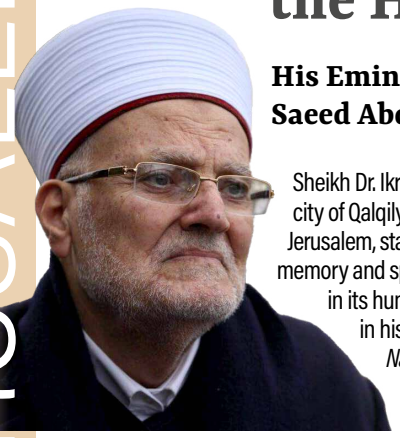
SCAN
TO SHARE



Heather Bursheh is a musician, educator, and flute instructor at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music and the bachelor of music program at Birzeit University. Her work encompasses performance, professional development for instrumental teachers, and scholarship focused on music education and musical life in Palestine.

الأرض
AL'ARD
THE LAND ENDURES.
SO DO WE.

The Grand Mufti of the Holy Land



His Eminence Sheikh Ikrima Saeed Abdullah Sabri

Sheikh Dr. Ikrima Saeed Sabri, born in the city of Qalqilya in 1938 and a resident of Jerusalem, stands as a living witness to the memory and spirit of Jerusalem. He grew up in its humble neighborhoods, carrying in his childhood the imprint of the *Nakba* and the voices of refugees flowing into the city. From an early age, he developed the conviction that Jerusalem is not merely a place but a message, a duty, and a continuous act of worship.

His upbringing instilled in him a spirit of giving and the inclination to support liberation movements. During his university years, he embraced the values of tolerance and respect for all schools of thought before choosing the profession of teaching, "the noblest of professions," as he describes it. With his transition into public religious service, he first established the preaching department within the Ministry of Awqaf, and later the Fatwa Department, after being appointed Mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories. He elevated the standards of imams and preachers, and contributed to authoring books and preparing instructional publications that still stand as testimony to a golden era of Islamic work in the city.

His influence extends beyond Palestine. He has participated in more than one hundred international conferences around the world, including in Europe, America, Africa, and the Arab and Islamic worlds. He has authored fifteen books that have been published in Jerusalem, Amman, Beirut, and Cairo, addressing Palestinian rights, the cause of Jerusalem, and various religious and intellectual issues. His works have been translated into Malay, Hindi, Albanian, Turkish, and English, evidence of the global reach of his vision. He is currently republishing his memoirs with new additions, "in service of the blessed city," as he says.

Sheikh Sabri faced persecution and was banned from entering Al-Aqsa Mosque due to his bold stances, yet he remained in his natural place: a voice rising from the stones of Jerusalem, and a guide to a generation that he admonishes to remain steadfast, engage in learning, practice unity, and safeguard the trust of the people.

Mazen Akram Sbitany



A Pioneer of the Palestinian Electronics Industry

Mazen Akram Issa Sbitany is the natural extension of a legacy founded in the heart of Jerusalem 66 years ago, when in 1961 his late father, Akram Sbitany, opened his first store on Salah al-Din Street next to the Hamra Cinema. With remarkable foresight, he anticipated the future of electronics and secured global agencies that outperformed their counterparts on the Israeli side.

After the 1967 war, the company entered the most dangerous phase of its history: an Israeli-dominated monopolistic market, burdensome taxes, restrictive operating conditions, and an economic barrier aiming to suffocate East Jerusalem and sever it from its surroundings. Despite all this, the family – through the father's discipline and the son's sharp acumen – managed to maintain its global agencies and break into the market on both sides of the city, proving that Jerusalemite commerce is not merely buying and selling, but a battle of survival and sovereignty.

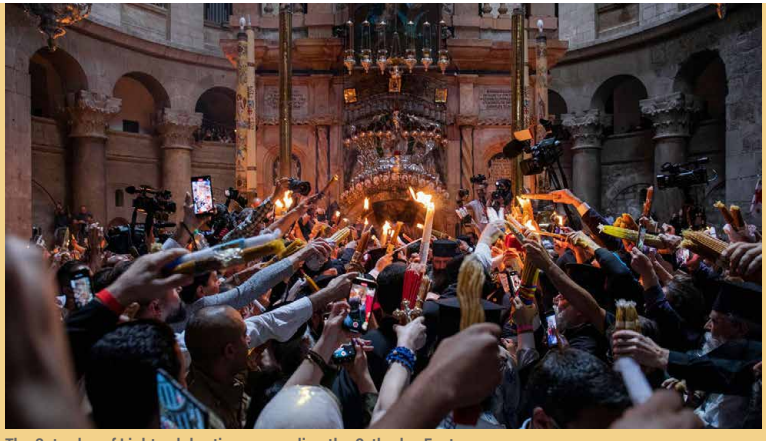
Mazen studied at the Friends Schools and participated in YMCA programs and the British Council. As a young man, he worked in his uncle's shop on Salah al-Din Street. In 1966 he moved to the United States to study engineering at the University of California, before returning in 1972 to rebuild the company anew. He ended old partnerships, restructured the company, and launched its major expansion phase. In 1997 he became CEO, and in 2023 he assumed the role of chairman of the board. Today, the company boasts more than 100 points of sale and represents leading global brands such as LG, Beko, Philips, and Midea.

Today, as Sbitany celebrates 66 years of innovation and renewal, the family legacy continues through his children, who prepare to carry the torch forward – armed with a clear vision and full readiness to propel the Sbitany enterprise into the future, guided by modern professional standards and rooted in steadfast Jerusalemite values.

The Endurance of a People

A Palestinian Christian Reflection on Survival, Faith, and the Struggle for a Future in Our Homeland

By Dimitri Diliani



The Saturday of Light celebrations preceding the Orthodox Easter.

I write during a season when the world speaks of peace, yet our lives remain burdened by daily hardships imposed upon us as Palestinians by the genocidal state of Israel. I carry with me the memory of our ancestors, whose presence as Christians in this land shaped the faith that we continue to live today. Their footsteps, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to Nazareth, remind us that faith is inseparable from the soil of our homeland, Palestine. When I speak of Palestinian Christians, I speak of an Indigenous people who have been here since the time of Christ, and our faith is embedded in the land itself. We did not arrive with the Zionist project; we are the descendants of its original inhabitants, and our presence in this land is ancient and unbroken.

Today, the numbers of Palestinian Christians reflect the toll of living under an Israeli military occupation regime that systematically strips us of our rights. By the end of 2024, Christians in the internationally recognized borders of Israel represented about 1.8 percent of the population, with a further decline in Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, where Christian communities now make up approximately 1.5 percent living under Israeli military rule. In Gaza, a once-thriving Christian community had been reduced to fewer than 1,000 members, even before Israel's ongoing, devastating genocide that has destroyed homes, churches, and entire families. These figures reflect the deepening pressures of a Western-backed genocidal colonial project. The *Nakba* of 1948 expelled Christian families alongside their Muslim brothers and sisters through massacres, forced displacement, and dispossession. This ongoing tragedy is perpetuated by Zionist militias, which became the core of the Israeli genocidal army, carrying out the same objectives through genocide, apartheid, land seizures, and colonial-settler expansion.

I have witnessed the continuous erosion of our rights and land through bigoted laws, written to privilege the occupier, and the illegal colonial settlements built on our stolen land. The apartheid wall divides the orchards of our ancestors, and military infrastructure surrounds our homes with a suffocating grip. Even the tourism that once anchored our communities in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and surrounding towns has been strangled by Israeli policies that restrict movement and economic opportunity. Every aspect of our lives, from marriage to education, from the ability to stay in our homes to the future of our children, is governed by Israeli colonial military control.

"We remain because our Palestinian identity does not yield to force.
We remain because our Christian history began here.
We remain because our faith in humanity calls us to perseverance."



This is the deliberate implementation of the Zionist ideology that elevates Jewish religious identity above all others, embedding supremacy into both law and policy. The Israeli Nation-State Law of 2018 enshrined this view into law, clearly defining the state as a bastion of Jewish supremacy. This has created an environment where Palestinian Christians are treated as unwelcome, with extreme ideologically driven Zionist terror that is justified as part of a "cultural" or "religious"



Interfaith service at Mar Elias Convent.



The walled Old City of Jerusalem.

tradition. In Jerusalem, Christian clergy are spat upon, and the desecration of churches is openly defended by Israeli officials. Settler militias, supported by the Israeli genocidal army, target Christian villages such as Al-Taybeh, where homes, churches, and farmlands are destroyed. Israeli terrorist groups, such as Hilltop Youth and Lehava, operate without consequences, emboldened by the state support, while the terror they perpetuate goes unchecked by Israeli authorities.

The genocide in Gaza has laid bare the logic of this system. Palestinian Christian institutions were bombed in the same manner as civilian homes. The Orthodox compound and the Holy Family Catholic Church were struck, while the Al-Ahli Hospital, a Christian-run institution, was destroyed, killing patients and staff. These Israeli genocidal war crimes demonstrate that no sacred space is safe, and that the Palestinian presence itself is the target.

In the West Bank, the situation for Palestinian Christians is similarly grim. Christian cities, including Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour, are hemmed in by expanding illegal colonial settlements and military checkpoints. Access to the Holy Sepulcher in occupied Jerusalem requires permission from the Israeli forces that view our very presence as an inconvenience.

Our land is the foundation of our identity and history. Yet, despite all this, we remain. Our churches continue to resist, defending properties that have been Christian for centuries. Our schools and hospitals persist under pressure, providing essential services to all Palestinians. These are acts of defiance and national responsibility.

The Palestinian Christian diaspora, particularly in Latin America, carries the legacy of this struggle. Their success reflects resilience, but their distance is a reminder of the displacement and pain that forced them to leave. Many families continue to consider departure because they fear for their safety and the future of their children under an ever-tightening occupation that is supported by the so-called "Christian West."

We remain because we are bound to this land by faith, history, and identity. We share our fate with our Muslim brothers and sisters, united by the suffering we endure and the hope that sustains us. This Christmas, I call upon the global Church to take action. The genocide in Gaza, the apartheid in the West Bank, and the Zionist ideology of supremacist terrorism that fuels the Israeli oppression of our people must be confronted. We call for moral action that will protect our land, our churches, and our future.

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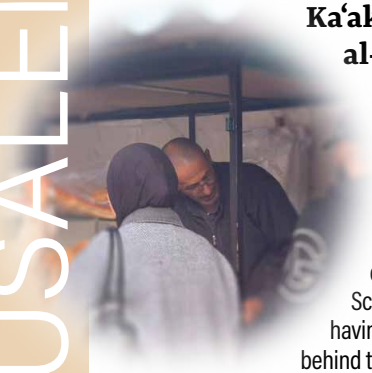


Dimitri Diliani currently serves as chairman of the board of directors at Anastasia Software Development Co. He has served on boards across industries such as ICT, finance, and security solutions and held key positions that include CEO of Wassel Group and United Consultants Media and Business Services. In 2009, Diliani became the youngest member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, chairing the social development committee. Currently, he serves as the spokesperson for Fatah's Reformist Democratic Faction and is president of the National Christian Coalition in the Holy Land. He holds a BSc in biochemistry, an MA in industrial psychology from Upsala College, and an MBA in finance from Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, USA.

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Imran Al-Shawish

Ka'ak Seller on Salah al-Din Street



At a corner on Salah al-Din Street, Imran Al-Shawish – now 57 years old – stands from the early hours of the morning in the exact spot where his father once stood. Imran never completed his schooling; he left Silwan School in fifth grade to join his father, having spent his early childhood walking behind the colorful cart, painted in Jerusalem's typical green and red, learning the ways of the craft and of people before he ever learned the ways of school.

Today, as a father of three sons and two daughters and a grandfather to seven, he still carries in his hands the aroma of bread that is as old as Jerusalem itself.

Imran is not just a ka'ak seller; he is the son of a long line of bakers who used to bring their *ka'ak* from the famed, wood-fired Al-Razzam Bakery in the Old City. Here, Jerusalem ka'ak was born, merging a traditional kneading technique with ancient stone, the dampness of the oven, and the heat of fire. The result is ka'ak that is unlike any other in the world.

People come to Imran by the dozens... Some buy ten pieces, others twenty, and some bring "travel bags" just to fill them with ka'ak and send them to loved ones abroad. For a "*ka'aka* from Salah al-Din" is not just bread – it is a piece of homeland.

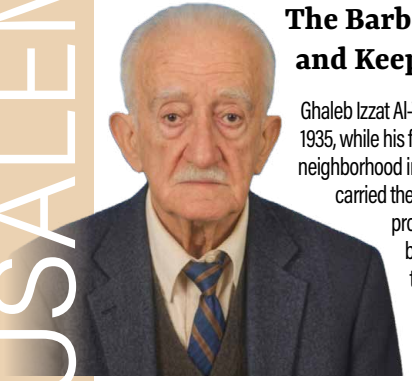
From six in the morning he stands beneath his licensed awning, with the Fulbright Research Center behind him and a beautiful Jerusalem scene before him, at the intersection of two main streets. Cars pass by specifically for him, especially on Fridays, Sundays, and holidays, because *ka'ak* with eggs, falafel, hummus, and fava beans is not just a meal ... it is a Jerusalem ritual that opens both the table and the memory.

Imran Al-Shawish is not merely a *ka'ak* seller but the keeper of Jerusalem's aroma, carrying the city's bread and spirit through three generations.

A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Ghaleb Izzat Al-Wa'ari

The Barber of Jerusalem and Keeper of Memories



Ghaleb Izzat Al-Wa'ari was born in Beit Jala in April 1935, while his family was residing in the Upper Baq'a neighborhood in West Jerusalem – a district that once carried the family's name, Hayy al-Wa'ari, owing to the properties and orchards they owned there before the *Nakba* of 1948. He grew up during the British Mandate period, moving between the Frères School near Bab al-Jadid and later the Ibrahimieh School, where he studied under the renowned Jerusalem educator Nihad Abu Gharbiyyah. With the outbreak of the war, his family was forced to leave Baq'a and relocate to the Old City, beginning a new chapter in his life, one that would shape both his Jerusalemite identity and his professional path.

Ghaleb inherited the barbershop trade from his father, one of the earliest master barbers in Jerusalem. For him, the "salon" was a second school, a place where men were shaped, just as memories were preserved. After completing high school, he formally entered the profession in 1953 and soon became Jerusalem's leading barber and a central figure in its social landscape. The most prominent men of the city sat in his barber's chair: Anwar al-Khatib, Faisal al-Husseini, Abdullah Khalil al-Silwani, Dr. Khalil Yunus al-Husseini, along with doctors, judges, educators, and countless Jerusalemite personalities. His barbershop became a space filled with political and social stories, a place that breathed with the pulse of the city.

He first worked on Al-Zahra Street, one of the most important streets in modern Jerusalem, before moving to his current salon on Salah al-Din Street, the main commercial artery of East Jerusalem. There, he remained steadfast as stone: a witness to changing times, untouched by them.

In 1958 Ghaleb married, describing that period as "the most beautiful days of life." He had seven children – Maher, Muhammad, Bilal, Mahira, Maha, Nada, and Lou'a – and the family grew to include about forty-five grandchildren who gather around him with affection and pride, carrying forward the family legacy that stretches from the Al-Wa'arineighborhood to Salah al-Din Street.

Since 1956 Ghaleb has lived in Wadi al-Joz, a neighborhood he sees as both his roots and his continuity, despite the profound transformations Jerusalem has undergone. He refused to leave the city during the 1967 war, as many others did, choosing instead to stay, saying: "This is my country... and I will not leave it." He passed the profession on to his sons Maher and Bilal, entrusting them with the salon as an inheritance, a craft, and an honor that they continue to uphold, preserving the family name and its authentic Jerusalemite presence.

His message to the youth of Jerusalem encapsulates the wisdom of seventy years of steadfastness, skill, and dignity:"Learn... hold fast... and take pride in your homeland and your craft. Jerusalem endures through those who endure in it."

The Jerusalem Story

An Interview

By Kate Rouhana



Damascus Gate, the heart of East Jerusalem.

In this interview,[1] Kate Rouhana, the founding director of Jerusalem Story,[2] sheds light on the website and its mission.

Q: What is Jerusalem Story?

K.R.: Jerusalem Story is an English-language website launched under the auspices of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies[3] that aims to tell the story of a unique city through a seldom-used lens – that of the city's large and diverse Palestinian community. This community, which makes up nearly half of the city's population, has deep historic roots in Jerusalem and holds the strongest attachment to and love for their city. Yet, they have been subjected to unrelenting efforts to erase their presence in, and potential claim to, the city – past, present, and future – to cement Israel's claim of sole sovereignty over a "united Jewish Jerusalem." These efforts, targeted through an overriding demographic imperative to maintain a Jewish majority to ensure control over the city, started decades ago and have taken myriad highly destructive forms, continuing to the present day, as is openly acknowledged by Israeli officials and decision-makers, and as our work amply documents.

Q: Why focus on Jerusalem and its people?

K.R.: Jerusalem is holy to billions of Muslims, Christians, and Jews around the world. It's a cherished world heritage site that should be open and available to all. Today, however, although Jerusalem is known as the "holy city" or the "city of peace," the reality on the ground is starkly, darkly different.

To understand what's happening in Jerusalem today, a little history: Jerusalem was conquered by force by Israel in two stages, in 1948 and in 1967. In the first stage, involving 84 percent of the city's area, almost all of the 75,000 Palestinian residents living there and in the 40 or so surrounding Arab villages were ethnically cleansed by Zionist forces pre-1948 and the Israeli army after that.[4] Although Jerusalem had been designated for international status in the UN's 1947 Partition Plan for Palestine, Israel seized this area, incorporated it into its state, and rapidly passed laws stripping the Palestinian population of citizenship and making them stateless refugees, seizing all Arab property and assets, and banning their return. The city was thus emptied of one population and divided.[5] Israel renamed this part of the city "West Jerusalem." Many refugees ended up in the remaining 11 or so percent of the city, which Jordan annexed for the next 19 years and which became Arab Jerusalem.[6]

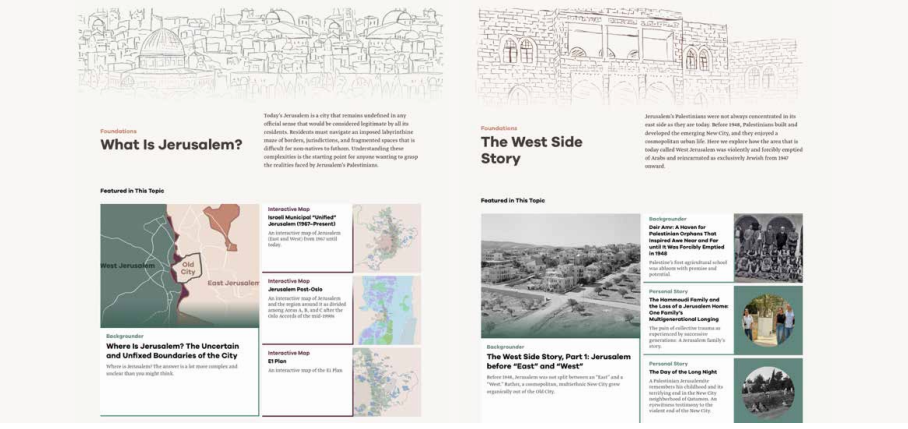
In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of the city, defeating Jordan, and illegally imposed its laws in violation of international law. It also tripled the size of the newly occupied area, which it renamed East Jerusalem, unilaterally enveloping 28 Palestinian villages.[7] A rushed census found that although tens of thousands had been displaced out of the city, the newly occupied area still had nearly 66,000 Palestinians.[8] This was enough to radically alter the city's demographic balance overnight: from 1 percent Palestinian in West Jerusalem before the 1967 War to 26 percent Palestinian in West + East Jerusalem after it.[9] For the state, this posed an increasing existential threat: the possibility of losing control of the city if its Palestinians became a majority. From this point on, planning and policy decisions in Jerusalem were driven by an officially determined demographic imperative: to keep the Palestinian population contained at 26.5 percent or less.[10]

Today, Palestinians make up at least 40 percent of Jerusalem's residents; mostly likely closer to 50 percent. Of those, 99 percent live in East Jerusalem, where they comprise at least 61 percent of the residents.[11] This data alarms Israeli city and state officials. They openly declare their intent to Judaize Jerusalem and maintain all of it under permanent Israeli control. In their eyes, the two most essential requirements for achieving this goal are maintaining a Jewish demographic majority and building settlements for Jews to seize and keep the land.

> **Jerusalem Story features a website that comprises a variety of sections, including The Big Picture, 16 Topics that fall under 6 Themes, a Jerusalem Notebook, Biographies, Quick Facts, a Lexicon with definitions, and a database of Palestinian Organizations active in the city. It also gives access to several short documentary films.**

Hence, Jerusalem is a city whose officials are openly committed to removing as many of the native Palestinians – who had lived in the city for centuries before Israel was founded and were citizens before 1948 – by any and all means possible. Those who remain should be subjugated and Israelicized, rendered docile and compliant within a state defined as exclusively for the Jews where others have no rights or political power and should not expect to get any.

its leadership, its economy, its societal fabric, its educational system, its language, its history, its culture, its cemeteries, and much more. Anything that supports a potential Palestinian national claim to the city – past, present, or future – is ferociously targeted and often criminalized. And yet despite these immense hardships, the vast majority of Palestinian Jerusalemites go to unimaginable lengths to remain in



Urban planning thus becomes a clear and explicit matter of causing one community (Jews) to thrive and flourish, while another (Palestinians) is continually controlled, surveilled, presumed to be hostile, and sent the unmistakable message that they are unwelcome interlopers – with every bureaucratic procedure, even the most mundane. Need to renew your driver's license? Prove to the Ministry of Interior that your "center of life" has been in Israel for the past seven years. Can't prove it with the copious documentation required? Sorry, your legal status is revoked and you must leave the city immediately.

In its relentless and ongoing attempts at removal and erasure of Palestinians, on the one hand, and total dominance for Jews, on the other, Israel has targeted the Palestinian community's institutions,

Jerusalem, because their rootedness in their city is so deep and fundamental.

Jerusalem Story aims to shine a light on these dystopian realities, and, in so doing, to bear witness and attempt to restore an extremely endangered community back into its own story. We also center the community's lived realities in and contributions to their beloved city as a counterpoint to Israeli efforts to invisibilize and erase them. In the wake of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, and its emptying of swaths of the West Bank in recent months, Jerusalem's Palestinians are gravely imperiled.

Q: What does Jerusalem Story offer to its audience?

K.R.: Jerusalem Story offers in-depth research, analysis, and coverage of the

story of the Palestinian community of Jerusalem, its past, present, and future. The site has a mix of research and more journalistic and personal features, so viewers can read both side by side: comprehensive, dispassionate facts alongside personal stories, interviews, case studies, and visuals that help bring those facts alive. Likewise, the site takes a multimedia approach, almost like an online museum, and offers print, stunning photos (including photo essays and photo albums), graphics, illustrations, videos, and interactive maps.

The site has a variety of sections. The first is called The Big Picture, which is the website's starting point. In an animated display of powerful images overlaid with narrative text, The Big Picture pulls all the key points of our Jerusalem Story into one introductory-highlights presentation.

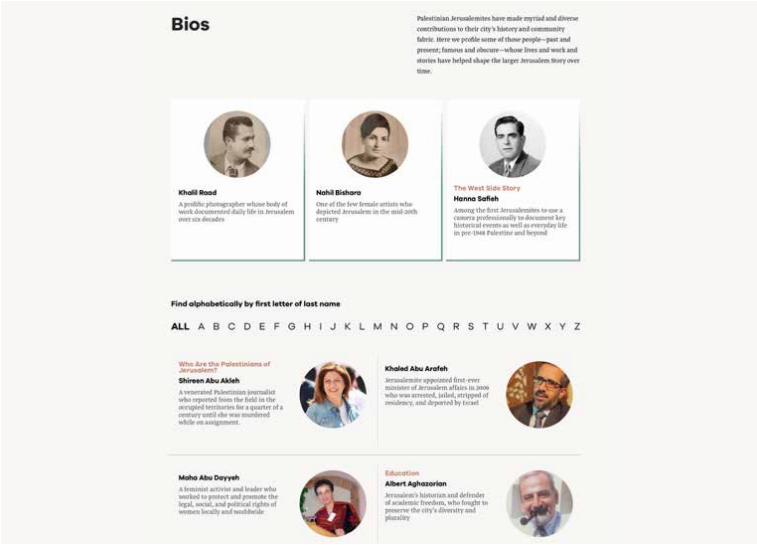
The next section comprises Themes and Topics, where content is organized around a specific key topic, such as What Is Jerusalem?, Who Are the Palestinians in Jerusalem?, The West Side Story, Precarious Status, Land, and more. Each Topic has its own landing page and menu for easy access. To date, we have launched 16 Topics, which you will find grouped under 6 Themes on the Main Menu of our website.

Within these Topics, one type of work to highlight here is personal family histories, memoirs, and profiles. We help families compile their materials into original memoirs, stories, and albums. In addition to the family histories that we develop, we also curate and republish others' published memoirs. Bringing them together side by side with our other materials and bios can create powerful cross-connections and synergies. For example, a personal memoir about the end of the Palestinian neighborhood of Qatamon, written decades ago while the experience was still fresh, read alongside a research backgrounder about the ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem in 1948, helps bring the history alive.

In addition to the work on family stories, we also search high and low for historic photos and develop unique photo-focused content out of them; for example, we feature a photo essay about the YMCA as a social and cultural hub before 1948, another photo essay about the King David Hotel and its bombing by Zionist forces in 1948, a photo album of pre-*Nakba* original works by Palestinian photographer Khalil Raad, a photo album of historic photos about the Armenians of Jerusalem, and a photo album about the life of Hind al-Husseini. As well, we try to curate collections of art by Jerusalemite artists within Photo Albums and bios (e.g., Jumana El Husseini, Samia Halaby, Kamal Boullata).

Next is Jerusalem Notebook, our blog. In it, we feature all manner of stories about the Palestinian community of Jerusalem – from character or organizational profiles to interviews to historical sketches of landmarks and traditions, book reviews, reviews of local exhibits and shows, personal perspectives, and more. Blog posts are sorted by categories for ease of access (e.g., Books, Exhibits, Profiles, Food, Film, etc.).

We also have a Biographies section. Here we profile Palestinian Jerusalemites – past and present, famous and obscure – whose lives and stories have helped shape the larger Jerusalem Story – and the story of their community within it – over time. The bios can be of people who are either alive or deceased. We aim to profile both the very famous alongside the not-so-well-known unsung heroes. We also aim for diversity in all respects, trying to profile people from all walks of life. Their common denominator is that Jerusalem was central to their life, or they made a long-lasting contribution to the community's fabric of life. Over time, we find that the bios start to connect with one another and weave a fabric, recreating or reconstituting a society and its collective life at various points in history. We are always open to suggestions from the public for new biographies.



Our Quick Facts section is a large set of FAQs about the Jerusalem Story. Where relevant, each Quick Fact is linked to a website Topic.

Our Lexicon offers clear and helpful definitions of the many terms that are unique in this arena, given its rootedness in many languages, as well as the legal, military, and technical jargon that has emerged over the decades of military occupation. Recently the authors of a review in The Heritage, Memory and Conflict Journal described this work as follows: "In their aim to re-tell and re-shape the narrative of a contested place, Jerusalem Story offers a remarkable Lexicon of the terminology, words, names of places, memories, and their meanings that are used to describe Jerusalem's places, stories, and history. This significant part of participatory practices to heritage management reveals the power of words that have 'nuanced shades of meanings' in creating and promoting narratives of complex places in conflict zones."[12]

Finally, we have compiled a database of Palestinian organizations on the ground that work on Jerusalem. This effort is important insofar as the Israeli authorities have made massive efforts over the decades to decapacitate this community by closing down its institutions, and the ones that remain face myriad challenges. Our database makes them and their work more accessible to users worldwide.

In addition, Jerusalem Story has produced a number of short films, some of which are available on the website, while others can be accessed on YouTube and Instagram.[13] For example, there is a documentary about the attempted takeover of the historic Khalidi Library in the Old City by settlers using forged documents. Another documentary presents Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi, the institution founded by Hind al-Husseini when she found orphans from the Deir Yassin massacre lost and alone by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in 1948. A documentary about Kufr 'Aqab shows the densely populated Palestinian neighborhood that is located beyond the Separation Wall but within the Israeli municipal boundaries, which the municipality has openly abandoned for over a decade and which the state wishes to excise from the city. Another documentary deals with a kindergarten in al-'Izariyya that has to operate in the shadow of the Separation Wall, which was built literally on the edge of its school playground.

Q: How is Jerusalem Story different from other mainstream media initiatives that cover Jerusalem?

K.R.: The mainstream media uncritically accepts the Israeli hegemonic narrative about Jerusalem, which views the entire city as a Jewish one that will belong solely to Israel in perpetuity. As for the native Palestinians, they are depicted as "aliens" who apparently just arrived in 1967 when Israel occupied the east side of the city. Israel does its best to erase the unpalatable history of how West Jerusalem came to be exclusively Jewish and integrated into the State of Israel. This produces analyses and reporting that whitewash and erase the vital history of one half of the city's population. Jerusalem Story aims to report on the city as it really evolved over recent history and as it truly is today, integrating the lived realities and voices of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians whose ancestors built and cherished their city and whose roots in it and rights to it should be, in any normal city, a matter of pride and honor, not a target for criminalization and erasure. It also shines a spotlight on the persistent and aggressive Judaization of a city that is holy to many religions – a world treasure.

SCAN TO SHARE



Kate Rouhana is the founding director of Jerusalem Story.

[1] Jerusalem Story.

[2] Jerusalem Story.

[3] Rouhana, "Jerusalem Should Be Open and Available to All."

[4] Jerusalem Story, "The West Side Story."

[5] "The West Side Story."

[6] "The West Side Story."

[7] Jerusalem Story, "What Is Jerusalem?"

[8] Joel Perlmann, "Introduction to Volume 6," in The 1967 Census of the West Bank and Gaza Strip: A Digitized Version (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, November 2011–February 201), xi [digitized from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, "Census of Population and Housing, 1967 Conducted in the Areas Administered by the IDF," vols. 1–5 (1967–70), and "Census of Population and Housing: East Jerusalem, Parts 1 and 2" (1968–70)].

[9] Michal Korach and Maya Chosen, Jerusalem Facts and Trends 2021: The State of the City and Changing Trends (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2021), 17.

[10] Inter-Ministerial Committee to Examine the Rate of Development for Jerusalem, Recommendation for a Coordinated and Consolidated Rate of Development, Jerusalem, August 1973, 3 (Hebrew).

[11] Omer Yaniv, Netta Haddad, and Yair Assaf-Shapira, Jerusalem Facts and Trends 2023: The State of the City and Changing Trends (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2023), 112–15.

[12] Nour Allah Munawar and Issam Nassar, "Decolonizing the Sacred: The Politics of Heritage in Jerusalem," Heritage, Memory and Conflict Journal 5(1), May 2025, 1–22.

[13] You can view these and more on the Jerusalem Story website (www.jerusalemstory.com) and YouTube channel (@Jerusalemstory), as well as hundreds of reels on Jerusalem Story's Instagram (@jerusalem_story).

"Usually Destroyed... Usually Rebuilt"

Aldous Huxley's Jerusalem Visit, 1955

By Elise Aghazarian



A stone in Jerusalem. Photo Sophie Shiber.

When in 1955, British writer Aldous Huxley walked through Jerusalem with a Palestinian refugee, the latter's repeated use of the word "usually" in the context of monuments and edifices struck the writer as a symbol of history, memory, and culture: the city's stones and monuments bear witness to cycles of power, destruction, reconstruction, and the power of culture to foster resilience.

A few years after the *Nakba*, the British writer Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) – best known for Brave New World and Ends and Means – walked through Jerusalem led by a Palestinian refugee. These reflections were later published in an essay on his Jerusalem visit, written in 1955. As scenes of destruction from Gaza and other cities across the region fill our screens, I often find myself returning to Huxley's observations. In his dystopian fiction and nonfiction reflections, Huxley consistently critiques how systems of power – political, technological, and economic – normalize destruction, social engineering, violence, and control while evading moral responsibility. This is relevant to look back on in our times. In his lesser-known essay on Jerusalem, published in Encounter in 1955, these concerns unfold through his encounter with the city and its living stones, shaped by a moment of trauma.

Huxley begins his essay on Jerusalem by presenting his Jerusalemite guide, whose name he leaves unmentioned, against the backdrop of a historical moment marked by political fracture and uncertainty: "Our guide through the labyrinthine streets of Jerusalem was a young Christian refugee from the other side of the wall which now divides the ancient city from the new, the non-viable state of Jordan from the non-viable state of Israel."

Huxley's narration is often symbolic, though at times tinged with the mockery and claimed judgment characteristic of some Western travelers to Jerusalem. The guide functions as a mediating figure within this narrative stance: both an object of observation and a conduit through which the fractured political landscape is rendered legible to the reader. In several passages, Huxley turns his attention closely to the guide himself, whose melancholy seems to echo both the city's atmosphere and the lived reality of Palestinian refugees in the period: "He was a sad, embittered young man – and well he might be. His prospects had been blighted, his family reduced from comparative wealth to the most abject penury, their house and land taken away from them, their bank account frozen and devaluated. In the circumstances, the surprising thing was not his bitterness, but the melancholy resignation with which it was tempered."

This melancholy led Huxley to refer to his guide as a "sad young man." He lingers on this sadness, using it to reflect on a somber and often obscure reality. Walking through what he described as the "brown, dry squalor" of the Old City of Jerusalem and listening to his "young friend," as he also called him, he recalls being overwhelmed by what he called an "organic realization" – not merely by the persistence of human suffering, but by an immediate, instinctive sense of it.

In contrast to traditional tourists, trapped in their fantasies, he mentions that he sees significance in angles with vital significance, as opposed to the nonviable states dividing the city, adding: "There are tourists whose greatest pleasure is a trip through historical associations and their own fancy. I am not one of them. When I travel, I like to move among intrinsically significant objects, not through an absence peopled only by literary references."

Huxley's desire to look beyond monuments and into the city's "living stones," together with the guide's melodramatic character, leads him to observe children, porters, and pilgrims. Yet he remains particularly fixed on the figure of the guide himself. He describes

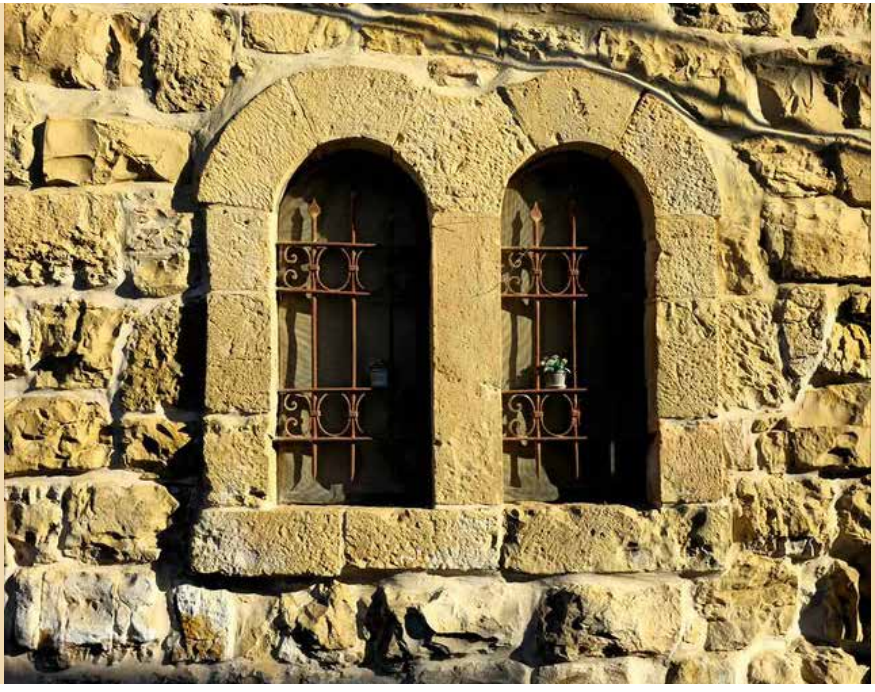
him as "far too conscientious," and of sparing no detail in his explanations.

They visit St. Anne's, St. James's, the Dome of the Rock, the Temple Mount, and the Wailing Wall – where, at the time, Jews were unable to pray because Jerusalem was divided – along with other sites associated with Anglican, Coptic, and French institutions. Throughout these encounters, Huxley appears less concerned with cataloguing monuments than with existential questions and the human presence that gives the city its meaning.

According to Huxley, the guide had a "significant contribution to colloquial English (and, at the same time, to the science and art of history)" through the insertion of the word "usually" into "almost every sentence." On every site, the guide explains how it was constructed by one power, then destroyed by another, only to be "usually" reconstructed.

This drives Huxley to reflect on the way the city seems trapped in a cycle: usually destroyed, then usually rebuilt, only to be destroyed and rebuilt again. In that single, repeated word – "usually" – he reflects on history as condensed into a "four-syllabled rhythm."

"On every site, the guide explains how it was constructed by one power, then destroyed by another power, only to be 'usually' reconstructed."



A house built in stone in Ein Karem.

As he tours the city and observes the people, Huxley recalls wars and mass killings, and reflects on the passage of time and shifting demographics. He draws analogies between past and present, only to realize that mass atrocities are now occurring on a far larger scale. "The Mongols had only horses as transport, only bows and spears and butchers' knives for weapons; if they had possessed our machinery, they could have depopulated the planet. As it was, they had to be content with small triumphs – the slaughter of only a few millions."

Huxley, a pacifist political critic, when hearing the story of the Jewish exile to Babylon at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, reflects on the present moment in the early 1950s: "Compared with the forced migrations of our time, the "Exile" was the most trivial affair. How many millions were uprooted by Hitler and the Communists? How many more millions were driven out of Pakistan into India, out of India into Pakistan? How many hundreds of thousands had to flee, with our young guide, from their homes in Israel? By the waters of Babylon, ten thousand at the most sat down and wept. In the single refugee camp at Bethlehem there are more exiles than that. And Bethlehem's is only one of dozens of such camps scattered far and wide over the Near East."

He expects catastrophes and crimes to multiply, transforming the universe into "private hells." Advanced technology, he believes, will enable fewer people to do more harm to greater numbers than ever before. He also reflects on human misery, hunger, and malnutrition. Some of these elements are sadly to say a reality in our world today, around 70 years later.

In some passages, Huxley follows the guide's example with a hint of sarcasm, though his observations are occasionally tinged with the top-down, judgmental perspective typical of Western travelers to Jerusalem. "But meanwhile here we were in Jerusalem, looking at the usually destroyed antiquities and rubbing shoulders with the usually poverty-stricken inhabitants, the usually superstitious pilgrims."

As the guide leads him to St. James Armenian Cathedral, Huxley lingers on

From Babylon to the Bethlehem refugee camp, Huxley exposes how technology and politics have magnified human suffering on an unprecedented scale.



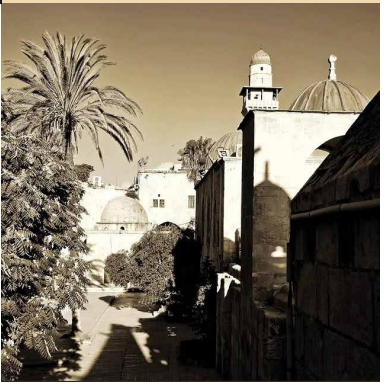
Photo by Sophie Shiber.



An alley in the Old City in Jerusalem.

The Old City of Jerusalem.





the sound of a pianist in one of the surrounding houses, playing the opening fantasia of Bach's Partita in D minor. The music lifts his spirits: "In all Jerusalem it was the only oasis of cheerfulness. And not alone of cheerfulness. As we came out into the courtyard, through which the visitor must approach the church's main entrance, we heard a strange and wonderful sound."

Huxley reflects on the moment, seeking meaning and guidance: "The ordered torrent of bright pure notes went streaming out over the city's immemorial squalor. Art and religion, philosophy and science, morals and politics – these are the instruments by means of which men have tried to discover a coherence in the flux of events, to impose an order on the chaos of experience."

He contemplates how music, memory, mass violence, and human resilience intertwine. Even amid tragedy, music offers a sense of transcendence: "Music transfigures the mortal lapse through time into the symbol, into the very fact, of a more than human life! A tunnel of joy and understanding had been driven through chaos." Huxley introduces this reflection just before mentioning his guide's reference to the "Armenian massacres." In his view, "perpetual perishing is also perpetual creation." He describes music as a device "working directly upon this experience of time," adding: "Usually destroyed but also, and just as often, usually rebuilt. Like the rain, like sunshine, like the grace of God and the devastations of Nature."

In his own way, Huxley conveys a distinctive aesthetic and worldview, expressed through his experience of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, of course, contains much more than ghosts and architectural monstrosities. Besides being one of the most profoundly depressing of the earth's cities, it is one of the strangest and, in its way, one of the most beautiful."

As a Jerusalemite, I dedicate these words to all the cities and villages of the region that have endured the past years. History reminds us that time moves in ebbs and flows: empires rise and fall, cities are destroyed and rebuilt. From the shadows of ruin, new life emerges, like a phoenix. In the meantime, culture, like music and dance, helps us transcend and connect to our essence.

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Elise Aghazarian is a sociologist, writer, and translator from the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. She specializes in topics related to cultural history, social psychology, social politics, and the Arabic language.

Book of the Month I

Khaled and Jamila

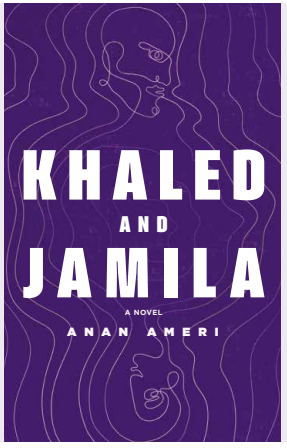
A Novel

By Anan Ameri

Paperback, full-color illustrations, 286 pages, US$18.95

Published by Interlink Books, December 2025





Khaled and Jamila is a sweeping, multigenerational novel by Palestinian American writer Anan Ameri that explores the enduring power of love and family across continents and cultures, asking what, in a divided world, truly lasts. "What in the world is beautiful forever? When disconnection rocks a family, the mistakes of one generation become the heartaches of the next."

The West Bank, Palestine, 1959. Khaled's bossy, hot-tempered father insists that his son go to college in the States so he can learn to help him run his business. Khaled, Arabic for forever, is reluctant to leave his secret, hometown crush. But he's bullied into taking off for Ann Arbor. There he falls for a blue-collar American girl. One thing leads to another, including a daughter named Jamila, Arabic for beautiful. Family mayhem erupts on all sides.

Fast forward to 1984. Jamila has come of age growing up in Ann Arbor during the turbulent sixties and seventies. There she falls for her brother's best friend, Ali, who she's known for years. But even though he's practically a member of the family, Ali is Black. Interracial marriages in the US are still few and far between. Mayhem breaks out again, tearing close ties apart.

And so, what might Sitti, the grandmother conciliator, have to say?

The names and heartaches of Khaled and Jamila ask, what in this mad world is beautiful forever? In Anan Ameri's noisy, impatient, vibrant novel, enduring beauty is the kind of love that family can teach us. And it's the larger, ever-expanding family of connections that love can show us when we learn to let it.

Dr. Anan Ameri is an activist, scholar, author, and the founding director of the Arab American National Museum, and the Palestine Aid Society of America. She has also served as the acting director of the Institute for Jerusalem Studies in Jerusalem and visiting scholar at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Ameri is the recipient of numerous local and national awards, including 2006 Michiganian of the Year and the 2020 Arab American of the Year. In 2016, she was inducted into Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. She is the author of numerous books and articles, including a two-volume memoir: *The Scent of Jasmine: Coming of Age in Jerusalem and Damascus* (Interlink, 2017, winner of the Palestine Book Award) and *The Wandering Palestinian* (2020). *Khaled and Jamila* is her first novel.

Laila Halaby, author of *The Weight of Ghosts,* offers praise: "*Khaled and Jamila* is a deeply authentic story, an important addition to the canon of Palestinian American literature, and a delightful read. We root for this family as a collective and are wowed by the bravery they each exhibit in the name of love."

Susan Muaddi Darraj, author of *Behind You Is the Sea,* states, "Written by one of Arab America's fiercest advocates and humanitarian leaders, this beautiful novel is a heart-wrenching family saga that travels across many decades and even more memories. A must read."

"After writing two memoirs, Anan Ameri has given us a gift with her first novel. *Khaled and Jamila* revolves around the lives of Palestinians. The story begins in the West Bank during the fifties, a few years after the *Nakba*. This book explores family, religion, community, love, war and race. It's a novel in which characters are defined by borders and boundaries that are personal as well as geographical. It's about each new generation finding their own way," comments E. Ethelbert Miller, a writer and literary activist, the 2023 Grammy Finalist for Spoken Word and Poetry "*Khaled and Jamila* is a moving story of intergenerational heartache from Palestine to the US. Anan Ameri weaves together dramatic events connecting the personal to the political, highlighting the hypocrisies and crushing disappointments that course through families. A moving reflection on how we repeat the same mistakes across generations," states Evelyn Alsultany, author of *Broken: The Failed Promise of Muslim Inclusion*"Anan Ameri's novel, *Khaled and Jamila*, is the heartwarming story of a Palestinian American family grappling with the challenges of cross-cultural marriage and intergenerational strife against the backdrop of Palestinian dispossession and the constant search for justice. Ameri takes us on a journey that explores the highs and lows of Khaled's search for belonging and meaning in his adopted home, as well as his relationship with his daughter whose life choices put his values and convictions to the test. A great read!" recommends Diana Abouali, director of the Arab American National Museum

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Book of the Month II

At the Turning of the Wall

A Story of Quest and Redemption

By Arthur Hagopian

Paperback, 500 pages, US$16.00

Published by Amazon, November 2025

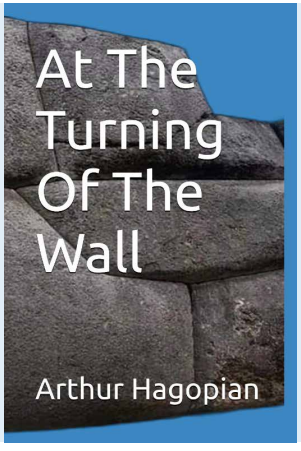


The magnificent megalithic structures at Peru's Machu Picchu form the background inspiration for this new fantasy by Australian Armenian author, Arthur Hagopian. A thousand years ago, a mysterious people set about building a megalithic city within a city, and named it Quatzatollen. Driven by the urge to unravel its secrets, Golod, a popular teacher and accomplished builder, embarks on a quest, trailed by Miraqanda, an accidental traveler, a lost, victimized youth seeking redemption.

The trek turns out to be far from a walk in the park, each milestone and signpost leading them into greater serendipity, the serendipity helping forge the bond between the two disparate characters. Golod and Miraqanda will eventually stumble upon the city but find out that its massive gate is opened only once a year, its access restricted to children. And birds. They can fly at will over the walls: Who can stop them?

Miraqanda proves a fascinating, though sometimes difficult companion, a challenge for Golod who takes it upon himself to point the way for him to recognize himself and uncover his hidden talents. And when the other three motivated people appear on stage, the road is paved for Golod and Miraqanda to attain their mission in life. Bonnaseret the Dean of the College, Akapea the shrewd artist and businessman, and Johan the master builder, all join in facilitating the attainment of the two seekers' vision.

As an architect, Golod's unbridled vision is translated into concrete reality with the creation of a skylight on the roof of the Big City museum, an unheard-of feat at the time. As a teacher, he helps his students soar to new heights of creativity, and inculcates in them the concept of sharing and human kindness, in the process winning over the rudderless class bully and entrusting him with the care and protection of his blind classmate. For himself, he desires very little, his footsteps raising not even the slightest plume of dust as he traverses his highway of life.



It is this intrinsic abiding humanity of the characters that comes most into focus and pervades the undertone of the book. As when Golod helps a developmentally disabled child to climb out of darkness into the fascinating world of reading and books, and Miraqanda saves the life of a homeless girl, and an itinerant healer prevents the death of the wolf sharing her cave. Perhaps one of the most endearing characters in the book is Golod's blind student to whom the trees speak of their joys and fears as he walks barefoot in the forest.

Arthur Hagopian has served in several countries as a teacher and journalist. He is the author of two books on Jerusalem, a reconstruction of the life and times of Jesus, a history of classical Arabic literature, a couple of fantasies, and a string of children's books. He has also acted as a consultant on the Canadian 3D IMAX production, "Jerusalem the Movie." He is married and has two children and three grandchildren. Born in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, he currently resides in Australia, where he spends his free time building cardboard models of ships, castles, and haunted houses for children.

SCAN TO SHARE

It's Too Late Now

They had the chance to remain and be accepted in the region, but they didn't play it right. They blew that chance, and it's too late now.

At the turn of the nineteenth century (around the year 1900), the Jewish population was approximately 5 to 7 percent of the total population of Palestine, which was estimated to be around 600,000 to 690,000. That's what Google says. According to ChatGPT, the total population of Palestine around the year 1800 was 250,000–300,000. The Jewish population was about 6,000 to 10,000, i.e., 2 to 4 percent. So granted, along with other ethnicities, Jews have always had some presence in Palestine. In fact, going back two to three millennia, the Jewish presence was significant. History records that the United Kingdom (Saul, David, Solomon) lasted about 100–120 years before splitting into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). But the vast majority of the Jews were forced to leave Palestine during the Babylonian Exile (c. 586 BCE) and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE).

Over the past five millennia, the region called Palestine, a strategic crossroads between Africa and Asia, has been home to a diverse mosaic of cultures, peoples, and empires. Among those who lived in Palestine are the Canaanites, the Ancient Egyptians, the Philistines, neighboring nations (Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites), Arameans, and Phoenicians who were Semitic-speaking peoples and kingdoms that interacted with and often settled in parts of the region, especially during the Iron Age and Persian periods. At some point, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians lived here, then the Ancient Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines, the Arabs (do read Dr. Ali Qleibo's amazing article in this issue), the Crusaders and Ayyubids, the Mamluks, and of course, the Ottoman Turks, the British, and – you guessed it – our last "guests," who admittedly were here in larger numbers two and half millennia ago.

I have always maintained that the Palestinians of today are the descendants of practically all of the above-mentioned cultures. They are the ones who have tilled the land and fed every occupier all along. The myth that Palestinians came to Palestine from neighboring countries is exactly that – a myth that feeds another myth of "a land without a people for a people without a land." I also maintain that most of the Jews who came to Palestine by boat during the first half of the twentieth century did not realize that they had been manipulated to be part of a conniving colonial project that aimed to rid Palestine of its Indigenous inhabitants and create a new Zionist entity. Why those naive immigrants did not react when they realized the real intentions of the perpetrators is a question for a later discussion. My point here is this: Had the "new arrivals" been kind to the local Palestinians and lived in a spirit that aimed to share the land and prosper together with the real owners of the land, these new arrivals would have had a chance to be accepted in the region. They did not do that; far from it in fact. And now it's too late for them to be accepted in the region.

Sani Meo
Publisher



This Week in Palestine

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Amin and Munir Zacharia

Robert Massoud (subscription)

David Miller

Their contribution has not only made this publication possible but also strengthened the voice of Palestine that is being deliberately suppressed.

بنك فلسطين
BANK OF PALESTINE

أعياد مجيدة

Merry christmas

Happy New Year

