

Silwan

Introduction

Silwan's story brings together several layers of Jerusalem's history and its political and social reality. Historically, Silwan is deeply rooted in the birth of the city of Jerusalem, as it is believed that the core of Canaanite Jerusalem originated there. Geographically, Silwan is the closest village to the Old City. It is also home to Ein Silwan (Silwan Spring), previously considered the only water source in Jerusalem. Politically, Silwan is the most heavily targeted by settler-colonial and Judaization projects and is prey to intense activity by settler organizations. It is also one of the most prominent hot spots of confrontation with the Occupation forces in Jerusalem and registers high numbers of Palestinian youth and children detainees in Occupation prisons.



Location and Area

Silwan is located south of the Old City of occupied Jerusalem. Three hundred meters separate one of its neighborhoods, Wadi Hilweh, and al-Aqsa Mosque's southern wall (which itself is the

Old City wall). People call Silwan the "southern safeguard of al-Aqsa Mosque," as it is the closest to it. The people of Silwan walk there weekly to attend the Friday prayer.

Silwan is bordered from the west by the neighborhoods of Nabi Daoud and al-Thawri; from the south by the western lands of al-Sawahrah al-Gharbiya, Jabal al-Mukaber and Sur Baher; from the east by Abu Dis, al-Ezariyah and al-Tur, and from the north, as mentioned above, by the Old City, with a-Aqsa Mosque at its center.

Silwan's total land area is 5,421 donums.¹ It extends to the eastern edge of occupied Jerusalem in Khan al-Ahmar, called "the Salawnah lands" or "Khan al-Salawnah," estimated at 65,000 donums and mostly used for agriculture prior to being confiscated following the 1967 war. Ma'ale Adumim colony was established on large swaths of this area.²

Origin and History

The name "Silwan" refers to calm, serenity and isolation, in essence meaning "village of calm and serenity." The name's origin may be derived from "Siloam," a natural pool and spring in the village.

The history of Silwan dates to the Canaanite era. It is believed to have been the cradle of Jerusalem, built in 4000 BC by the Jebusites, who availed of Ein Silwan, the city's primary water source.³ They built rock-cut water channels, traces of which remain today.

Population

Between 50,000 and 55,000 Palestinians live in Silwan today,⁴ a mixture of native Silwan villagers and Palestinian families from other villages and cities. They live in the neighborhoods that make up the village of Silwan, including Ras al-Amud, al-Bustan, Wadi Hilweh, Wadi al-Rababa, al-Shammaa, al-Sowweih, Wadi Qaddum, Ein al-Lozah, Batn al-Hawa, al-Hara al-Wusta, al-Thawri (not entirely built on the original lands of Silwan), al-Salaa, Ghazeil, and others.

As for the families of Silwan, they descend from 11 clans: al-Najada, al-Mahrisheyah, al-Mahariq, al-Qalbin, al-Abbasiya, al-Alewat, al-Rawidiyah, al-Diabiyah, Qarain, Siam, and Somreen. They

¹ Murad al-Dabbagh, Mustafa. "Our Country, Palestine." <https://bit.ly/2mGhJBq>

² Silwan Charitable Society. Memory, Silwan and the Association, 2004.

³ Al Aqsa Foundation. Silwan Remains. 2012. [فيلم وثيقي، سلوان](#) .

⁴ Rep. Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, n.d. <https://jerusalemresearch.org.il/projects/שכונת מזרח ירושלים/> .

are united by the Association of Silwan Clans, which works to strengthen social bonds and resolve disputes between families. Also active in the village is the Silwan Charitable Association, which runs kindergartens and organizes cultural and social activities.

Social and Economic context

Historically, economic activity in Silwan was based on agriculture. Farming was practiced at two locations, between Ein Silwan and the Ein al-Lozah area, at a site known today as al-Bustan (orchard) neighborhood. It was named so because it was an orchard tended to by Silwan's villagers and irrigated from Ein Silwan. The most notable crops cultivated in the orchard were: olives, dafouri figs, parsley, mint, lettuce, spinach, and especially chard. The popular proverb, "you're selling chard to the people of Silwan," references the village's significant chard cultivation in its orchards.

As of the latter half of the 1980s, agricultural activity in al-Bustan diminished, and the area gradually transformed into a residential neighborhood, with houses built on what was once agricultural land. Today, al-Bustan faces threats of home demolition and eviction of its Palestinian residents in favor of an Israeli colonial project, as we will detail later.

The second agricultural site extends over 65,000 donums of communal land owned by Silwanis and known as Khan al-Salawnah. The area, 70% of which is agricultural land, is located along the Jerusalem-Jericho Road. This land is characterized by fertile plains used to grow grains and legumes, including wheat, barley, and Palestine vetch. In 1967 the land was entirely confiscated, and the Ma'ale Adumim colony was built on large areas of it.⁵

Thus, Silwan lost all its agricultural lands, a result of confiscation, direct colonial settlement, population growth, and the urban strangulation policy practiced by the Occupation, whereby it restricts construction zoning and expansion, compelling the population to build on agricultural land in order to meet their need for living space.

Landmarks

Ein Silwan: The famous Ein Silwan spring is located in Wadi Hilweh neighborhood north of Silwan. It is "the only significant natural spring in the occupied city of Jerusalem and its environs,"⁶ not including the many springs located in the remote villages of the countryside. People from al-Tur, al-Ezariyah, Abu Dis, and other areas resorted to Ein Silwan to meet their own water needs.

⁵ Silwan Charitable Society. *Memory, Silwan and the Association*, 2004.

⁶ Barakat, Bashir Abdul-Ghani. *The History of Jerusalem's Water Resources and Their Uses*. Dar Al-Muqtabas, 2016.

The spring has many names; Christians sometimes call it the Virgin's Spring because it is believed that the Virgin Mary washed Christ's clothing in its waters. In another narrative, it is said that she fetched water from it. The spring is also known as Ein Umm al-Daraj (stairway spring), likely because it is accessible via a rock-cut staircase; and al-Ein al-Fawqa (upper spring) to distinguish it from its southern tributaries that lie lower down the slope of Wadi Hilweh.⁷

After the Umayyad conquest of Jerusalem in the seventh century AD, Muslims took an interest in this spring. The Muslim Caliph Othman bin Affan designated it as an endowment to the poor of the city. Following Salah al-Din's liberation of Jerusalem in the 12th century, the spring and the village were endowed to the Salihya school near Bab al-Asbat (Lions' Gate) in the Old City and continued as such until the Ottoman era.⁸

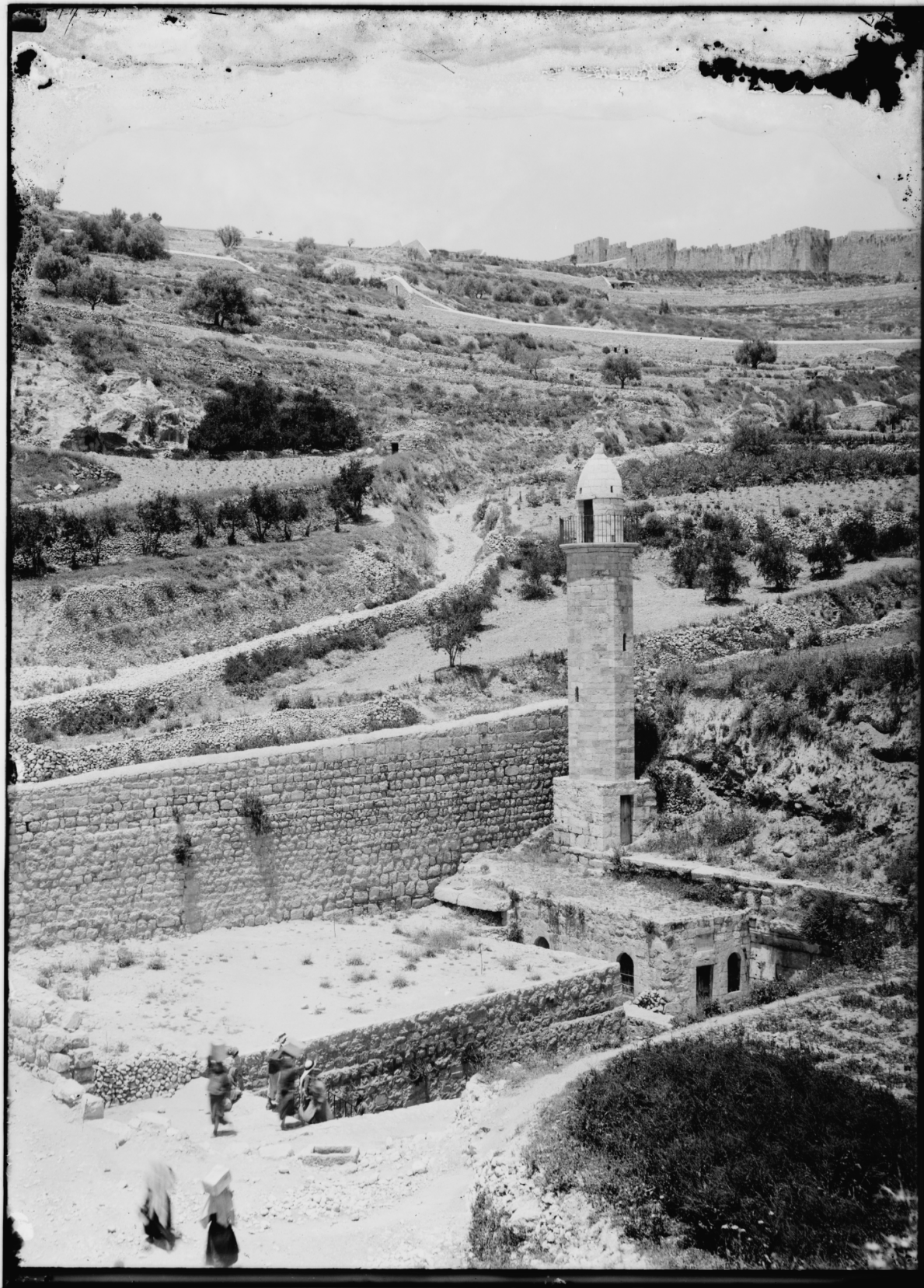
The water of Ein Silwan flows from the north of Wadi Hilweh southward for approximately 533 meters through a narrow rock tunnel until it reaches Silwan Pool on the eastern side of Wadi Hilweh Road,⁹ where al-Ein Mosque stands above it. There are some ancient columns at the pool, remnants of a church built between 527 and 565 AD. Some Christians believe that this is the site of Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind. The pool sometimes overflowed and irrigated the village orchards, continuing its flow down to Silwan's al-Tahta pool (lower pool), also called the Red Pool.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Aslan, Hiba. "Ein Silwan... El-Ad Hostility Everywhere." Metras, July 15, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2EdH12h>

¹⁰ Al Aqsa Foundation. Silwan Remains. 2012. [فيلم وثقفي سلوان](#).



Bir Ayub: In addition to Ein Silwan, Bir Ayoub is a famous well in the village that is no longer used. 38 meters deep, and located 400 meters south of Silwan Pool,¹¹ it was architecturally renovated by Salah al-Din al-Ayubi after he liberated Jerusalem in the 12th century AD.

Some say that water flowed from Ein Silwan and filtered into Bir Ayub, while others have said that water sprung from beneath the well itself, overflowing like a river due to the abundance of rain in winter. Today, the well has dried up "after the depletion of the groundwater in its vicinity following the Israeli occupation,"¹² and their control of the water pumps at Ein Silwan.

Also in Silwan is Ein al-Lozah,¹³ to where the excess water from Bir Ayub likely flowed. The spring dried up right after Bir Ayoub, and there is no trace of it today.¹⁴

History of Resistance

Some villages in the eastern and southern parts of occupied Jerusalem (Silwan, al-Ezariyah, Abu Dis and Sur Baher) took part in the attack on the British Palestine Potash Company convoys as they passed through those villages on their way from the Dead Sea towards the port of Haifa. This form of resistance was emblematic of the features of the struggle, especially in the period between 1927 and 1947. The participation of the people of Silwan was notable; on December 15, 1947, a group of Silwanis attacked a convoy comprised of several vehicles transporting potash and accompanied by Zionist-driven armored vehicles, killing seven of its members.¹⁵

Consequently, Zionists attacked Silwan on December 17, 1947, and detonated several houses. They made Silwan a permanent target for their bullets and bombs, launching their attack from the Jewish Quarter in the Old City and from their locations in Nabi Daoud / Dajani neighborhood and Jabal al-Mukaber. Silwanis could not be at their homes during the day due to heavy shelling, so they returned to their homes after sunset and left before sunrise.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² According to estimates by Haj Ibrahim Khalil Sarhan, "Abu Ghazi", president of the Silwan Charitable Association, in an interview conducted on October 4, 2018.

¹³ The presence of Ein Al-Lozah in a time past does not contradict the statement that Ein Silwan is the only spring in the vicinity of Jerusalem, as Ein Al-Lozah is not a permanently flowing spring. The testimonies of the people of Silwan indicate that its waters were collected from Ein Silwan or Bir Ayoub, meaning that it was not a natural spring originally.

¹⁴ Qarain, Sarah. "Beir Ayyoub ... a Palestinian History Crossed Out by the Occupation." Quds News Network, October 14, 2018. [بئر أيوب. تاريخ فلسطيني شطبه الاحتلال](#).

¹⁵ Al-Aref, Aref. Al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt Al-Maqdis Wal-Firdaws Al-Mafqud (The Catastrophe: The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise). Institute for Palestine Studies, 2012. P. 68.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Historian Aref al-Aref notes that the number of Silwani martyrs who fell from the onset of the fighting in 1947 until the cease-fire reached 285.¹⁷

تفتيش قرية سلوان ومقتل عربي

بلاغ الحكومة عن الحادث واصابة عربي آخر اصابة خطيرة

<p>سلوان حيث رأى شاهديان القتلة هربون نحوها . وقد طوق الجنود والبوليس القرية وفتش البوليس ثلاثة منازل دلت عليها كلاب البوليس . وقد نثر في المنزل الاول على اربعة عيارات نارية من التي تستعمل في المصدسات ، واحد هذه العيارات يشبه عياراً نارياً فارغاً وجد في مكان الجريمة . وفي البيت الثاني عثر على عيار بندقية واحد وفي المنزل الثالث عثر على كيس بارود وبعض الكبسول . وقد هرب صاحب البيت الثاني وسقط من منحدر شاهق وأصيب من جراء ذلك باذى ابلغ فنقل الى المستشفى وقبض على صاحبي المنزلين الآخرين .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">قتل عربي واصابة</p> <p>وعندما وصل الجنود اطلقت عليهم « البقية على الصفحة الرابعة »</p>	<p>النار فقتل احمد حميده وقد احتفلت الحكومة والجيش بتشجيع جنتي الجنديين من المعسكر البريطاني الى مقبرة الجيش بالرملة حيث سار افراد من الجيش مع الجنازة يرافقهم ضباط وبعض الموظفين البريطانيين »</p> <p>اما الحلة فان اهلي سلوان مشتتون دون مأوى ودون طعام غير مستطهين الدنو من القرية .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">اعلانه</p> <p style="text-align: center;">وفاة الجنديين</p> <p>وفيما يلي نص البلاغ الرسمي : يعلن القائم بادارة الحكومة بمزيد الاسف نأ وفاة الجنديين هاتشسون وملتون من اورطة بلاك واتش (فرقة هايلاند) فقد اطلق النار عليهما ليلة امس معتدون مجبولون بالقرب من بركة السلطان بجوار شور المدينة القديمة وقد اتخذت في الليلة الماضية بعض الاجراءات لعزل مكان الحادث وتعقب اثر القتل</p> <p style="text-align: center;">تفتيش في القرية</p> <p>وفي الساعة الرابعة من صباح اليوم اقتفت كلاب البوليس الاثر حتى قرية</p>	<p>الاحياء العربية . والحقيقة انه بين احيين يهوديين احدهما المنفيوري والآخر « جورة العناب » ولا يوجد فيهما من لعرب إلا بضع عائلات على مسافة بعيدة عن مكان الحادث بالنسبة للسكان اليهودية والعائلات الساكنة فيها . وقد اعتقلت السلطة السيد احمد حسين النول ووضعته في قشلاق البوليس ، وذهب الى سلوان بعض الضباط الانكليز وعادوا الى المدينة . وقد اغلقت المدرسة الاميرية في القرية لوجود الجنود فيها .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">بلاغ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">دائرة الامن</p> <p>واذاعت ادارة الامن العام البلاغ التالي : في الساعة السادسة والدقيقة العشرين اطلقت النار على الجنديين ميلتون وهتسسون من الفرقة الثانية « بلاك ووتش » الاسكندرية فقتلوا قرب مستشفى الحيوانات ، جهة بركة السلطان . وتمطي الحكومة فلسطين الف جنيه لمن يرشد البوليس الى عمالكة المعتدين .</p> <p>وفي هذا الصباح بينما كانت دورية من الجنود والبوليس تفتش قرية سلوان رماها الاهلون بالحجارة وبالنسجة اطلقت</p>	<p>القدس في ٦ تشرين ثاني - المراسل الدفاع الخاص - ذهبت قوة من الجنود البريطاني بمرعد افراده بالمئة ودهمت قرية سلوان حوالي الساعة الاربعة من صباح هذا اليوم . واخذت في تفتيش القرية بمد جمعها السكان في مكان واحد ، واتخذت اجراءات شديدة</p> <p>وقد قتل عربي يدعى احمد حميده واصيب ثمانية اشخاص من اهالي القرية وعم : حسين علي عوده ومحمد خضر عوده وطاهر موسى عوده وداود موسى عوده و احمد عبد الرزاق وعطا احمد النيص وابراهيم سلواني ، واصابتهم ليست خطيرة . واصيب راضي حسن ابو سندفي رأسه باصابة خطيرة وجميعهم نقلوا الى مستشفى الحكومة وبعضهم خرج والبعض الآخر لا يزال تحت المعالجة . واحترق متاع واثاث وادوات منزلية في دارين لأحمد ومحمد يعقوب شرف وعيسى جبر ولا تزال قوة من الجنود البوليس مرابطة في قرية سلوان</p> <p style="text-align: center;">في</p> <p style="text-align: center;">تصحيح خبر</p> <p>وبالمناسبة نود ان نصحح عبارة وردت في جريدة تصدر في الخارج عن مكان الحادث الذي وقع فيه الاعتداء على الجنديين إذ ورد في الخبر انه من</p>
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باخرة فرنسية هوجمت قر

In terms of military organization, Silwan's garrison consisted of 14 fighters affiliated with al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Army of the Holy War)¹⁸ and a company of 22 fighters led by Musa

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Hussein al-Ghoul, who did not join the ranks of the Army.¹⁹ Silwan's resistance fighters participated in the various battles for Jerusalem in 1947 and 1948, contributing to the protection of the eastern part of Jerusalem from Zionist occupation. Thus, this area, including Silwan, escaped occupation in 1948 and came under Jordanian rule until its occupation in 1967.

Silwan Post-occupation

Silwan was occupied in the 1967 war and, as was the fate of many neighborhoods and villages, it was annexed to the Israeli occupation Municipality in Jerusalem. Since then, Silwan has remained a leading site of confrontation in occupied Jerusalem between Palestinians and Occupation forces. When confrontations break out in Jerusalem, Silwan and al-Issawiyah take the lead. Even during periods of relative calm, Silwan witnesses, from time to time, clashes between Palestinian youths and Occupation forces or Zionist colonists and their guards.

The perpetual state of confrontation is reflected in the number of Silwani prisoners held in Occupation prisons. Across different periods, Silwan has remained at the forefront in terms of the number of Jerusalemite prisoners. According to the latest statistics, about one quarter of Jerusalemite prisoners sentenced to more than ten years are from Silwan, that is, nearly 30 prisoners from Silwan out of 113 Jerusalemite prisoners. Among Jerusalemite prisoners, Wael Qassem from Silwan faces the longest term of 35 life-sentences plus 50 years.²⁰ From the first intifada (1987) until today (2021), Silwan has lost close to 32 martyrs.²¹

Colonization

After the Old City, Silwan is the main venue for Israeli settler-colonial activity in Jerusalem. Colonization plans target it based on the fabricated biblical narrative that King David established his Jewish kingdom on the land of Wadi Hilweh, specifically near Tal al-Thohour, where Canaanite Jerusalem originated. Therefore, the term "City of David" is commonly used in Israeli media to refer to the northern part of Silwan (Wadi Hilweh area). This settler-colonial activity seeks to "restore" so-called "Jewish presence" in that area and to highlight what is claimed to be a Jewish history spanning more than 3,000 years, beginning in that area. A political position is then spun from a supposedly historical and archaeological discourse aimed at "proving" Jewish claims over Palestine.

For this reason, Israeli settler organizations in Silwan work on two levels: firstly, to wrest control of Palestinian property and convert it into outposts by housing colonists there, in an attempt to

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ These figures are accurate up until the end of 2018, based on information from Amjad Abu Asab, head of the Committee of the Families of Jerusalemite Prisoners, provided in a phone call on October 11, 2018.

²¹ According to information by Wadi Hilweh Information Center, during a phone call made on January 5, 2021

achieve a Jewish majority and expel Palestinians from their homes and land; and secondly, to manage archaeological sites in Silwan and oversee their excavation while running Zionist propaganda via these sites. This scheme also includes initiatives to build new colonial tourist sites to bolster that propaganda and provide it with the necessary capabilities and tools.

These two approaches complement one another to build a human settler-colonial presence and bolster a historical narrative that enhances the "relationship" of that Jewish presence to the place. Two settler organizations are active in this regard, namely the Ateret Cohanim Organization and the Ir David Foundation (El-Ad). Ateret Cohanim's activity is concentrated in the Silwan neighborhood of Batn al-Hawa, while El-Ad Foundation is concentrated in the Wadi Hilweh area (dubbed the City of David or Ir David by Zionists), north of Silwan.

The two organizations work through various methods to gain control of Palestinian property and to transfer ownership to themselves and house colonists there. After the transfer of ownership of these properties to settler organizations, they are called "settlement outposts." A civilian guard unit accompanies each outpost, and in some cases, a guard unit of the Occupation Police (Border Guards).

The methods for seizing control of these properties vary, and they include the use of racist Israeli laws for the expulsion of Palestinians. Chief among these is the Absentee Property Law, whereby the original owners of a property who reside outside of Palestine are investigated to prove their absence. Subsequently, the law is invoked in relation to the property in question, and its ownership is transferred to the Custodian of Absentee Property, an Israeli government entity. The latter, in turn, transfers this property to settler organizations. This dynamic highlights the complementary roles played by the Occupation government's official and unofficial branches, the latter being comprised of settler organizations. In other words, these organizations, despite being non-governmental, operate with a green light from the Occupation government agencies and with their extensive support and direct cooperation.

Another method is the use of Palestinian brokers and collaborators who purchase property from Palestinian owners on behalf of settler organizations. In other instances, the organizations themselves have purchased property from Palestinian collaborators directly, or portions of property from disputing owners.

Among the more infamous colonial outposts in Silwan is the Beit Yonatan building, located in Batn Al-Hawa neighborhood. It can be easily spotted from the center of Silwan, as it is draped with a massive Israeli flag. The story of this building dates to the early 2000s, when the Ateret Cohanim organization used the services of a Palestinian collaborator and broker, Mohammad

Mraghah, and paid him to construct a seven-story building on land he owned in Batn al-Hawa. It appeared as though Mraghah had been building a house for himself, but in reality, he was providing his services to colonists, having sold them his land.²² On March 31, 2004, colonists accompanied by Occupation police stormed the building, evicted the Palestinians living there, and housed colonists in their place. On the ground floor of the building, in the heart of this Palestinian neighborhood, is a permanent Occupation police station, inviting many confrontations with Palestinian youths.



Since 2015, Ateret Cohanim has also controlled the five-story Sarhan building since a member of the family that had owned the building sold it despite the refusal of other family members who questioned the dubious nature of the sale.²³ The number of colonial settlement outposts in Silwan's Batn al-Hawa and al-Wusta neighborhoods controlled by Ateret Cohanim is approximately seven outposts.²⁴

²² Hasson, Nir. "The Fake Contract Broker of Ateret Cohenim Is Still Paying the Price." Haaretz (Hebrew Edition), March 13, 2014. [איש הקש של "עטרת כהנים" ממשיך לשלם את המחיר](#).

²³ "Details and Pictures - Evacuation of a family in Silwan after their apartment was bought from the property's original owner," Silwanic, October 24, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OBHmM7>

²⁴ According to information by "Wadi Hilweh Information Center", during a phone call on November 12, 2018. It should be noted that numbers are approximate, and the center is working on detailed and accurate statistics.

Since 2013, Ateret Cohanim has been filing eviction lawsuits against dozens of Palestinian families, claiming that they live on land belonging to a “Jewish endowment,” and that Yemeni Jews had inhabited this land in the 19th century. Therefore, according to their claim, Palestinians who build their homes there are “residing on land that does not belong to them.” On the other hand, Palestinians contest the ownership of the land by the Yemeni Jews, saying that their association with it disappeared as soon as they left it in 1948. Furthermore, its endowment was relevant exclusively to the houses that were built there, and thus nullified by their demolition. Because the land is categorized as Miri land (Ottoman-era commons), its endowment is only applicable to the use of the plot for construction, and in no way implies ownership of the land itself.²⁵

These eviction lawsuits continue to threaten hundreds of Palestinians. As of January 2021, more than 87 families have received court orders demanding they relinquish the land on which their homes are built, and seven of those families have received eviction orders. The rest of the families' cases are being deliberated in the Occupation's Supreme Court amid clear cooperation between Ateret Cohanim and the official Occupation authorities.

As for the El-Ad settler organization, its activities have focused on Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in Silwan since the late-1980s.²⁶ In October 1991, the organization's activists, accompanied by Israeli police, stormed eleven Palestinian homes in the neighborhood at once, laying claim to them under various pretexts, most notably, the Absentee Property Law.²⁷ Today, the El-ad organization controls approximately 35% of Wadi Hilweh's real-estate, including 40 Palestinian properties (homes and land).²⁸ These homes have turned into outposts, with the number of housing units reaching approximately 80.²⁹

In addition to controlling real-estate, El-Ad administers the City of David National Park, or *Ir David* in Hebrew,³⁰ designated as such by the Occupation authorities on a 24- donum archaeological and natural site in Silwan that extends from Tal al-Thohour (Tel Ufel) south of the Jerusalem wall towards Ein Silwan and its lower pool. It contains many archaeological

²⁵ Mahajna, Alaa. “Batn Al-Hawa Neighborhood: An Ongoing Nakba.” Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, June 5, 2016. <https://bit.ly/2AY5i8M>

²⁶ “El-Ad Association’ ... the Spearhead of Settlement and Judaization Around Jerusalem.” Al-Jazeera Net, August 18, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2EcqFao>

²⁷ “A Dark Deal in Silwan.” Ir Amim Foundation. May 2009.

²⁸ According to information by “Wadi Hilweh Information Center”, during a phone call on November 12, 2018. It should be noted that numbers are approximate, and the center is working on detailed and accurate statistics.

²⁹ According to estimates by the Israeli Ir Amim association, which monitors settlement issues in occupied Jerusalem. These figures remain estimates that require more scrutiny.

³⁰ Some of the real-estate and land that El-Ad seized under the Absentee Property Law was transferred to the so-called “City of David.”

artifacts unearthed in the excavations that have been carried out there since the mid-19th century.³¹

This site is officially associated with the Occupation's Nature and Parks Authority and its municipality in occupied Jerusalem. As an exception among other locations designated as Israeli "national parks," however, El-Ad has been granted the prerogative to manage and control it since 1997. It continues to do so to this day, to the point that a distinction between Ir David and El-Ad is now difficult to draw. The Israeli Ir Amim organization notes: "The City of David is the only case in which the powers of running a national park have been transferred to the hands of a private political organization."³²

From this site, El-Ad spins a Zionist colonial narrative that claims the location of the ancient city of Yabous (Jebus) to be where the "Kingdom of David" was established. By doing so, it attempts to link visitors, Israelis and tourists alike, to the land of Palestine by claiming that it has been the "land of "Israel" for 3,000 years, using the slogan "where the whole story began,"³³ and making every effort to conceal any Palestinian-Arab and Islamic history.³⁴

Having once been freely available to Palestinians and a waqf to the poor, today, entrance to the Ein Silwan rock tunnel, and enjoyment of its pool area is only possible with a ticket paid to the El-Ad settler organization. Visitors are greeted with signage and Zionist colonial propaganda aimed at cementing the fabricated Zionist narrative and erasing the authentic Arab and Islamic one.

Facing the Ir David site from the west is an ancient archaeological site controlled by EL-AD and dubbed by Israelis "Givati Parking Lot." It was originally used by local residents as a parking space. Since 2007, El-Ad has been conducting deep and extensive archaeological excavations there, in an attempt to unearth any Jewish archaeological evidence to support its narrative. The organization plans to build a massive settlement complex on the site. Named Kedem Center, it will be a colonial tourist center that will disseminate propaganda about occupied Jerusalem, and in particular, Silwan, declaring Jews as the "exclusive and legitimate heirs" of Jerusalem and its history.

Kedem Center is in its final stages of planning by the Occupation Municipality. Upon its construction, and along with the City of David and other Israeli centers within the walls of

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. p. 22

³³ Evri, Yuval. "Israel's City of David: A Tourist Attraction Concealing a Violent Enterprise." Haaretz, March 25, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2PSiEfd>

³⁴ This propaganda can be viewed and analyzed on the Ir David website, [City Of David | Ancient Jerusalem](#).

occupied Jerusalem, it will constitute a massive settler-colonial enclave that will attract tens of thousands of tourists and visitors.³⁵ The Occupation authorities plan to set up a cable car that would cross from al-Thawri neighborhood to the Mount of Olives, with a stop above Kedem Center. It is worth noting that most tourists arrive in Wadi Hilweh through Bab al-Maghariba (Moroccan Gate) upon visiting al-Buraq Wall and perhaps the so-called Davidson Park south of al-Aqsa Mosque (the Umayyad palaces area), which is also run by the El-Ad organization. Ultimately, these visits will form a triad (the Buraq Wall and Davidson Park, Kedem Center, and the City of David), where tourists are repeatedly exposed to a Judaized and Israelized vision, whose most prominent and focused aim is to connect the city's history to Jewish history by any means possible at the expense of Palestinian existence.

Home Demolition Policy

The threat of colonization in Silwan does not stop at Wadi Hilweh or Batn Al-Hawa neighborhoods but extends to the nearby al-Bustan neighborhood. After walking down Wadi Hilweh Street, which on Occupation municipality signage today is named Maalot David, we reach a crossroads that leads us south to the fringes of al-Bustan.

In the recent past, al-Bustan (literally “the orchard”) was an actual orchard for the people of Silwan. It was home to agricultural land that was particularly famous for its chard. With the expansion of urban activity in occupied Jerusalem, the lack of space to build, and the Occupation’s urban planning policies that reject the zoning of new and adequate areas for construction, the place's agricultural character gradually disappeared. Al-Bustan transformed from an orchard into an urban neighborhood due to a lack of other areas in which to build.

Since 2005, about 90 Palestinian residents of the neighborhood have received home demolition notices, under the pretext of building without a permit, and for the benefit of an Israeli plan to convert al-Bustan land into a "national park" and link it to the existing one in the so-called City of David.³⁶

The Occupation authorities often declare a particular area of land as a “national park” if it contains significant archaeological discoveries or natural features that deserve attention. The al-Bustan area, however, does not meet these criteria. The Occupation seeks to control and turn it into a “national park” for purely colonial purposes, with the goal of bolstering Jewish presence and expelling the Palestinian population. The name given to this park is the King's Garden, based on the notion that al-Bustan belonged to King David, a garden near the site of his kingdom, Ir David. Therefore, religion and the Zionist-fabricated narrative about Jerusalem's

³⁵ According to the statistics provided by the El-Ad Organization, more than 400,000 Israeli soldiers or students and foreign tourists visit the "City of David" annually, see Source 21.

³⁶ “Al-Bustan Neighborhood... The King's Garden.” B'Tselem. September 16, 2014. [حَيِّ البستان - حديقة الملك | بتسيلم](#)

history are employed to destroy Palestinian lives, demolish their homes, and bolster Jewish presence.

In February 2009, after receiving repeated home demolition notices from the Occupation Municipality, the people of Silwan set up a sit-in tent, known as the al-Bustan Neighborhood Tent. Since its establishment, the tent has hosted press conferences, cultural seminars, and photo galleries about the attacks carried out by the Occupation authorities on Silwan and occupied Jerusalem's neighborhoods. The tent has also attracted local and international delegations and has had a significant impact on rousing national awareness and resistance to Occupation policies in Silwan and in Jerusalem more broadly.

In addition, Friday prayers are still held in the tent from time to time. On various national occasions, it has also been a venue for confrontations with Occupation forces, who surround the tent and fire tear gas and rubber-coated bullets, causing dozens of cases of fainting, in addition to arresting demonstrators. As for the plan to demolish al-Bustan neighborhood, its threat still looms; though it has not begun to be implemented on a large scale, the plan has not been wholly canceled either. In other words, Silwan's homes still receive demolition orders and notices from time to time, most of which are deferred, though this does not mean that the scheme has been dropped from the Occupation's plans.

The rest of Silwan has not been spared. In Ras al-Amud neighborhood, Ma'ale Hazeitim colony was built on land purchased by the American Jewish millionaire Irving Moskowitz in the 1990s. Today, dozens of families of colonists live there, and their armed guards pose a constant threat to the lives of Palestinians in the area. The latest example is the murder of 17-year-old Mohammad Sharaf, shot by a colonist's guard on July 21, 2017.

Epilogue

The harsh political reality in Silwan has a direct impact on the daily socioeconomic life of Palestinians. The surveillance cameras installed throughout Silwan violate, among other rights, the privacy of Palestinians, even at the entrances to their own homes. The constant presence of the Occupation police patrols leads to continuous attacks on children and youth. Shops are slapped with fines under various pretexts. Multitudes of guards protecting colonists roam the alleys as Palestinian children play football or ride their bikes, robbing them of the safe environment they need.

Above all, Silwan suffers from a systemic policy of neglect by the Occupation Municipality in terms of infrastructure development and the approval of building plans, rendering the public living space in Silwan as one of the harshest environments in occupied Jerusalem.

This is the bitter reality that is evoked whenever Silwan is mentioned. Still, it does not obscure another reality, in which Palestinians remain steadfast on their land and in their neighborhoods, where they continue to resist and to reinvent the meaning of life and survival.