

The Centrality of East Jerusalem

The Palestinian National Struggle 1967-1987



By Walid Salem

The Israeli settler colonial project started in East Jerusalem in early 1967, directly after the beginning of occupation. During the same period, the Palestinian resistance began as both an armed struggle – as in Gaza mainly from 1967 to 1972 – and a public movement of nonviolent resistance – as in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied West Bank. In addition to settler colonialism, the Israeli project in East Jerusalem has included a combination of belligerent occupation and apartheid policies.

One of several early settler-colonial projects was the demolition of Al-Sharaf neighborhood inside the Old City, in order to begin the expansion of the Jewish Quarter over its ruins. At the same time, however, the Palestinian Jerusalem Municipality (Amanat al-Quds) rejected its dissolution by the Israeli occupying authorities. Sheikh Abdel Hamid Al Sa'eh, among other personalities, took the initiative to create the first National Guidance Committee, which has led the Palestinian struggle against the occupation since early 1967.*

Later on during the same year, the Israeli Occupation Authorities deported Sheikh Sa'eh to Jordan, but the resistance continued. In Jerusalem, this resistance preserved the Palestinian Islamic and Christian Waqf Institutions' independence under the leadership of the High Islamic Commission that was established immediately after the 1967 war. The commission worked in tandem with the Christian religious representatives in order to protect the holy places and the religious



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courts' independence, and to contribute to the leadership and guidance of the resistance against the occupation.

Using all kinds of creative measures, the Palestinian national institutions in East Jerusalem strove to protect themselves from being taken over by occupation. These included the chamber of commerce, the electricity company, the labor and professional trade unions, Makassed and Augusta Victoria hospitals (among others), and several charitable societies as well as the education sector. In this case the teachers undertook a long, successful strike in order to prevent the imposition of the Israeli curricula as the curricula for education in East Jerusalem schools.

These successes in the early years of

occupation were sustained by others in subsequent years. In 1973 the National Front was established in Jerusalem and consisted of national and left-wing factions and parties in addition to national personalities. The National Front led the Palestinian resistance until 1976. Several demonstrations were organized during that period of time, especially by students. A national strike followed the martyrdom of Muntaha Al-Hourani, a schoolgirl from Nablus who was assassinated by Israeli Occupation Forces in 1974. The Palestinian artist Suleiman Mansour drew an impressive portrait of her bleeding from the back while lying on the ground in her school uniform.¹

For the Israeli Occupation Authorities, the combination of the struggle made

Palestine would like to acknowledge:

Angela Davis

An academic and civil rights activist and an outspoken supporter for the Palestinian struggle against Israeli apartheid, Davis is also a supporter of BDS.



Palestine would like to acknowledge:

Adolfo Perez Esquivel

Argentina-born human rights activist and 1980 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Perez Esquivel supported the Women's Boat to Gaza as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian cause. "Whilst there are those who build walls of intolerance, hunger blockades and weapons for death, we, the peoples, must build bridges of dialogue and life."





Photo from Palestine Image Bank.

by the Jerusalem-based National Front – in addition to the students and trade unions, cooperatives, and other organizations under the national front leadership – combined with the Arab Rabat Summit recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, meant that there was a need to make concessions. One of the major concessions was the cancellation of the 1975 plan to establish a civil administration,ⁱⁱ and the decision to allow the PLO-affiliated personalities to run for the municipal elections in 1976, which resulted in a big victory for a number of important personalities, including Karim Khalaf, Bassam al Shaka'a, and Ibrahim Al-Tawil, who became the mayors of Ramallah, Nablus, and Al Bireh, respectively.

The elected mayors played the role of political guide for the Palestinians and did not limit themselves to the provision of services. In 1978 when the Camp David agreement was signed

between Israel and Egypt, the mayors gathered with other personalities and the university student councils, the trade union representatives, and others in the premises of the trade unions in Beit Hanina, Jerusalem, where they declared their rejection of the Camp David Accords and announced the establishment of the second National Guidance Committee.

In the early 1980s, the Israeli Likud-led government decided to dissolve the National Guidance Committee and initiated a war against the elected mayors. In the course of this campaign of persecution, Bassam Shaka'a's car was bombed in June 1980, which left him in a wheelchair after he had lost parts of his legs and one hand.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, the Israeli occupation authorities created the so-called village leagues that were connected to the Likud-created Civil Administration. It was led by Hebrew University professor Menahem Milson (between November

1981 and September 1982). He ended up resigning after the utter failure of his experiment to “organize village leaders.” The whole plan failed in all its aspects: To weaken the urban-based PLO supportive leadership on one hand, and to create a leadership that was loyal to Israel on the other hand. In addition, the village leagues were boycotted, even in their own villages, which led to their full collapse a few years later.

As the Israeli government increased settlement expansion, with the number of settlers reaching 111,600 in 1993,^{iv} it also hired Israeli professors such as Ezra Sadan to develop ideas for economic peace as an alternative to ending the occupation. These additional Likud policies strengthened Palestinian national aspirations and Palestinian support of the PLO, contrary to the aim of the Likud: that “the improvement of living conditions for Palestinians” as it was called then, would lead Palestinians to forget their national aspirations and the confiscation of their land.

These developments ripened conditions for the eruption of the first Intifada that started in 1987. Jerusalem once again was the center of the Intifada leadership, continuing until the death of the leader Faisal al-Husseini in 2001, and the Israeli closure of the Orient House.

This short overview has shown the centrality of East Jerusalem not only in planning and guiding the Palestinian popular struggle against the occupation from 1967 to 1987, but also in the protection of national institutions, the rejection of any compromise in the

After 1967 the Palestinians refused to surrender their national institutions to the Israeli occupiers, continuing the Palestinian struggle for freedom. East Jerusalem was central to such efforts that ended up thwarting Israeli attempts to normalize the occupation and to create an alternative to the PLO. This strengthened the PLO's status as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

struggle for self-determination, and the strengthening and support of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

* A chronology of the Palestinian resistance to occupation can be found in the annual volumes of the *Palestinian Diaries*^v and in the Palestinian documents (in Arabic) that were published by the PLO Research Center.^{vi}

Valid Salem is a lecturer on democracy, human rights, and conflict resolution at Al-Quds University, and a PhD candidate in international relations at the Near East University of Northern Cyprus. He is also a member in the PLO Palestinian National Council, and the director of the Center for Democracy and Community Development in East Jerusalem.

i. For stages of resistance, see Anne Latendresse, *Jerusalem: Palestinian dynamics, resistance and urban change 1967-1994*, PASSIA, Jerusalem, 1995.

ii. Khaled Kashtini, “The Palestinian Civic Resistance,” in *The Palestinian Encyclopedia*, Vol. 56, pp. 283–355, 1990.

iii. Kashtini, *ibid.*, p. 243.

iv. See Nabil Al-Saleh, *Settlers' Violence and Its Impact on the Palestinians*, Madar, the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies: Ramallah, 2014, p.10.

v. Published until 1982, currently available in print at local libraries; soon to be available online.

vi. Available in Arabic at <http://www.shuun.ps/page-438-en.html>.