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Israel, Don't Raise the Roof Beams High As You "Resettle" Lifta; Its Owners Will Return

By Rima Najjar
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The latest crisis in Palestine cannot be set aside as another passing episode in Israel's forever war against the Palestinian people.

We are now witnessing shocks within Israel behind the Green Line, something that Israel had hitherto been able to contain. In the process, it pretended, along with much of the western world, that it is the "longest-lived democracy in the Middle East" and that only its continued occupation of the West Bank and its harsh blockade of Gaza undermine its "constitutional ideals"- ideals now exposed for what they've always been: Jewish supremacist in nature.

We know, as CJ Werleman wrote in Inside Arabia on May 14, 2021,

> "Israel is a country built on racism, dispossession, and genocide. The recent rise in attacks by Israeli settlers, vigilante groups, and lynch mobs targeting Palestinians are a continuation of that history and must be addressed."

There is an unbreakable thread between the Palestinian man lynched by Israeli Jews on the pavement after being pulled from his car in Jaffa and then beaten unconscious recently and the killings and massacres at the hands of Zionist militia in Jaffa and elsewhere in 1948 that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians, as recounted by Israeli historian Benny Morris.

The myth, amplified by Wikipedia, is that historians [presumably Israeli] disagree "concerning the effect these killings and massacres had on the Palestinian refugee flight and whether or not these killings and massacres were carried out with the intent of hastening it."

Palestinian historians have absolutely no doubt about what happened then and why, just as we Palestinians have no doubt about what is happening now in occupied Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, in Gaza and in several towns and cities behind the Green Line where Israel has imposed states of emergency—and why.

Take, for example, my own father's village of Lifta on the northwestern edge of Jerusalem. It is the last remaining Palestinian village that was ethnically cleansed of its population in the 1948 Nakba. Now, Israel is set to destroy what remains of it.

The Jerusalem Post (JP), an Israeli English newspaper where facts are shaped by a narrative driven by Zionist values instead of knowledge, reported on this deeply disturbing piece of news this month by denying, like those Israeli historians who are still disputing historical facts, that any ethnic cleansing took place in Lifta—apparently, my grandfather just up and put his eight children and wife in a truck and abandoned his home so that, 73 years later, his village would be "resettled" by Israeli Jews and a luxury hotel built there.

The Israeli newspaper published the following shameful headline:

> "Arab village of Lifta, abandoned in '48, to house new Israeli neighborhood: The western neighborhood in Jerusalem which was abandoned in '48 will be resettled with 259 housing units, including a luxury hotel."

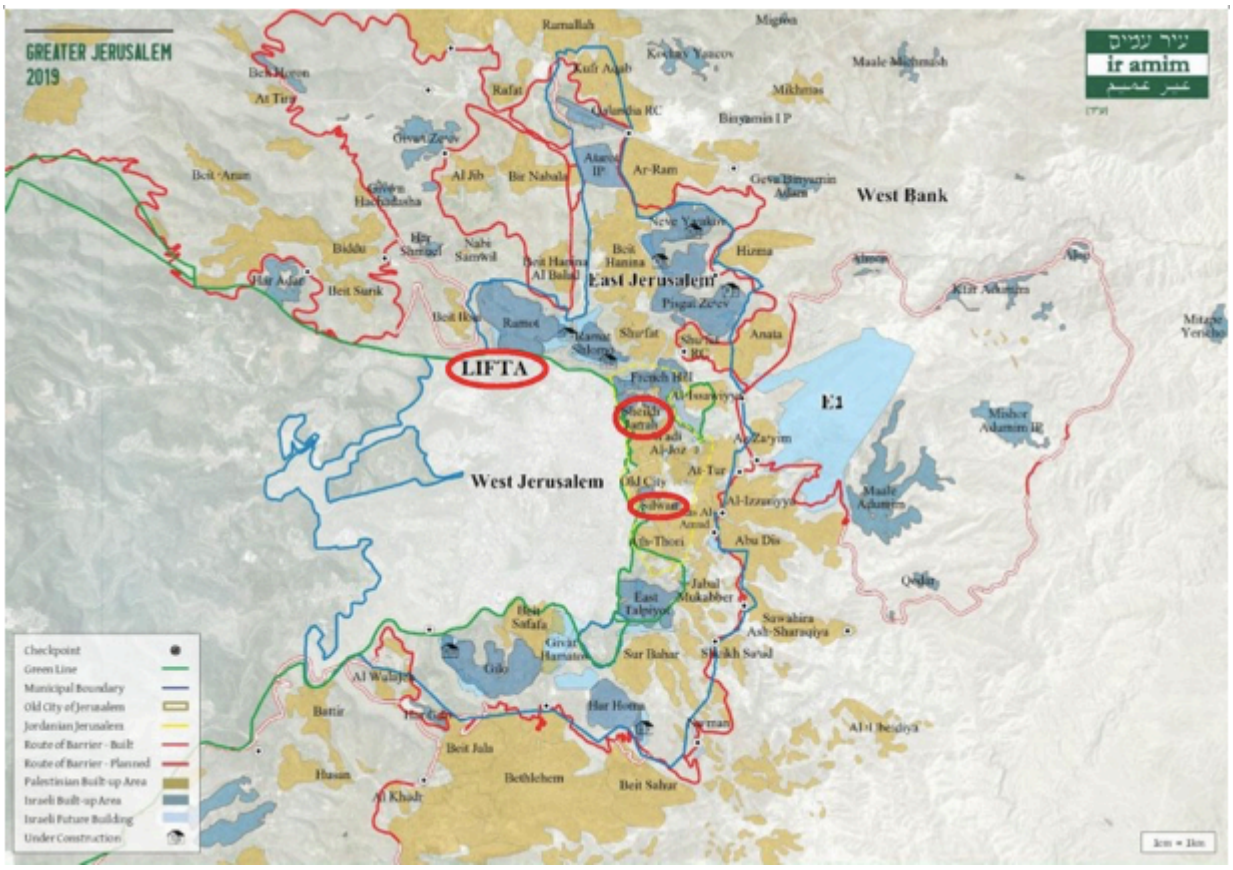
A report by Hidden Palestine: a News & Media Website, which, unlike JP, is a site driven by a narrative that values freedom from oppression, provides us with the following facts:

> The Israeli land authority announced this month that it is taking bids from construction companies to take charge of the real estate development of Lifta, with the contract set to last 98 years.
>
> The agreement includes the construction of 259 buildings, as well as commercial and business units, in addition to a hotel. If it moves forward, the deal would also see the majority of the Palestinian village's remaining buildings razed to the ground.
>
> Thanks to petitions by its past Palestinian residents, Lifta was declared as one of 25 endangered sites on the 2018 World Monuments Watch list. It also appears on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites, which has led to threats from Netanyahu that Israel would withdraw from UNESCO.
>
> Lifta has few parallels anywhere in the world. The Palestinian village, lying on a slope at the entrance to Jerusalem, is the last ethnically cleansed Palestinian village to be frozen in time. Here, hundreds of beautiful Palestinian stone houses have continued to stand the test of time, empty and neglected for the past 73 years.
>
> With a history dating back at least 700 years as a Palestinian Arab village, Lifta was among the wealthiest communities in the Jerusalem area, and the women were known for their fine embroiders. Thob Ghabani bridal dresses were sewn in Lifta, which were made of ghabani, a natural cotton covered with gold color silk floral embroidery produced in Aleppo. The village's clothing stores attracted Palestinians and Arabs from across the Levant.
>
> The entire population was forced out following brutal attacks by the invading Hagannah militias in early 1948. It is an incredible but depressing place to visit, and its destruction would contribute to the continued erasure of Palestinian culture and heritage.

The Jerusalem Post's story made it sound as though the "resettling" of Lifta was a preservation and development project. What it is, in fact, is a rewriting of history.

Destroying Lifta destroys opportunities for Palestinians to uncover the past of both Palestinians and Israelis: “Lifta has a lasting value in its own right, as it can link restitution to the right of return. Moreover, its preservation will be an opportunity to assert the restoration of dignity in the Palestinian as well as the Jewish community. Finally, by halting the new development in Lifta, UNESCO will affirm its global credibility in response to cultural cleansing.” [See LIFTA AFTER ZIONIST PLANNING and PLANNING AS A CRIMINAL ACT]

Israel’s expulsions of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, Jerusalem neighborhoods just outside the Green Line, are motivated by the same Zionist objective that resulted in the expulsion, also known as ethnic cleansing, of Palestinians like my family from Lifta, which is just inside the Green line. (See Israeli 2019 map of so-called “Greater Israel” below with Lifta, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan circled). That objective is Israel’s desire to Zionize/Judaize all of Jerusalem and all of Palestine.



Israeli 2019 map of so-called “Greater Israel” below with (left to right) Lifta, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan circled

I hope the ongoing worldwide protests on social media against Israel’s crimes will now add the rallying cry of #SaveLifta, in addition to #SaveSheikhJarrah and #SaveSilwan.

If you are still in doubt about Israel’s intention, listen to two Palestinian citizens of Israel reacting to the message they have heard loud and clear all their lives from successive Israeli governments:

Eva Najjar, Haifa-based lead designer and developer at Just Vision, writes:

> “I knew I was bringing my children into an ethnic-supremacist state when they were born. But after these past weeks, I don’t know how I can continue to raise them here.” (In The Washington Post: Palestinian citizens of Israel like me are facing terrifying new

attacks)

Diana Buttu wonders:

> "How do I explain to my 7-year-old son what being a Palestinian citizen of Israel means? What future can he look toward, when the leaders of the government incite hatred against him? What audacious hope can he have when he is bound to face racism and discrimination in education, employment and housing? For now, I try to shield him from the images on television and on our phones, but there will soon come a time when I cannot shield him from the reality that he is surrounded by people who consider him a second-class citizen." (In The New York Times: The Myth of Coexistence in Israel)

I am heartened by the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) Special Session held on May 27, which for the first time has included a geographic scope encompassing Israeli violations targeting the Palestinian people on both sides of the Green Line.

Israel's institutionalized regime of racial domination and oppression targets the Palestinian people as a whole, including those no longer in Lifta through no fault of their own, who have more right by far to reconstruct their homes in Lifta than Israeli Jews have in constructing housing and luxury hotels to "resettle" the village. We will return, so don't raise the roof beams high, Israel.

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Featured image: Taken from slides in "Reconstruction of Memory—Lifta—2007" by Malkit Shoshan

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