

Shuafat Refugee Camp

Introduction

When traveling from the center for Jerusalem northwards along Highway 60,¹ one can spot a stark, dense cluster of high-rises to the east, part of the Ras Khamis neighborhood. Beyond these buildings is one of two Palestinian refugee camps in Jerusalem:² Shuafat refugee camp.



¹ Highway 60 links Bir al-Sabi in the south to Nazareth in the north.

² The second is Qalandia refugee camp, set up over Qalandia land but extant under the jurisdiction of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem.

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Location and Area

Shuafat refugee camp is located four kilometers northeast of the Old City of occupied Jerusalem³ and falls within the jurisdiction of the Occupation Municipality.

The camp is bordered by several Jerusalem towns and villages: Anata to the east, Beit Hanina to the north and al-Issawiyah to the south. It is about 200 dunums in area⁴ and sits on parts of Shuafat village, which lies on its western side.

Origin and History

Population

The residents of Shuafat refugee camp contend with significant overpopulation; 11,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA as residents of the camp,⁵ but local estimates place the figure at over 25,000 Palestinians. This high figure is in part due to the camp's location within the Occupation Municipality's borders, which makes it an affordable place of residence for many Jerusalemite families seeking to preserve their Israeli occupation-issued "residency" cards.

The refugees of the camp originate from over 50 Palestinian cities and villages,⁶ mostly from those that were depopulated in 1948 in the Jerusalem, Lydd, and al-Ramlah areas.

Historical Context

The camp is associated with the village of Shuafat, owing to its location on its eastern edge in an area previously known as the Knour plot.

The camp was established in 1962 — over a decade after the establishment of the West Bank refugee camps — on 100 dunums⁷ of land leased by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) from the Jordanian Government.⁸ The camp was set up to shelter Palestinians

³ "The Shuafat Refugee Camp Guide," Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), Jerusalem, published in 2012. [شعافط مخيم دليل](#)

⁴ Hiba Aslan, "Ghetto Mukhayam Shuafat: 'Azl Israeli wa Ghiyab Rasmi Filastiny" ("The Shuafat Refugee Camp Ghetto: Israeli Isolation and Palestinian Official Absence," Institute for Palestine Studies 107 (2016).

⁵ "Shuafat Camp," United Nations Work and Relief Agency UNRWA, <https://bit.ly/2OVhR9r>

⁶ See Note 4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Note 6.

who had sought refuge in al-Sharaf and al-Magharbah quarters in the Old City of Jerusalem during the 1948 war. Establishment of the camp commenced directly after the land was acquired, and the refugees only moved in after preparations had been completed in 1965.

According to an official Jordanian document dated July 20,1966, “the establishment of Shuafat refugee camp is among those projects undertaken by the Jordanian government in cooperation with the mayor of Jerusalem Rouhi al-Khatib, the governor of Jerusalem and the Ministry of Development and Urban Planning.”⁹

Shuafat refugee camp was occupied in 1967 and annexed to the Occupation Municipality borders following the Knesset’s adoption of amendments to that effect.

The quarters and alleys of the camp were named after the villages and areas from which the refugees who inhabited them had been expelled during the Nakba. For example, the al-Thoulah quarter was named in reference to the uprooted village of Beit Thul in the Jerusalem area. Similarly, the al-Ladadwa quarter is derived from al-Lydd.

Landmarks

Popular Committee Headquarters: founded by the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1960’s, the Popular Committee is regarded as the earliest organization in the camp. It was established to manage the camp’s affairs and to communicate its needs and concerns to UNRWA in relation to required services and infrastructure .

The Palestine Child Center: an independent social work center founded in 2002 to care for children aged 6 to16. It organizes cultural and sports activities and offers social and mental health services so as to improve social engagement while providing a communal space for the children of the camp.¹⁰

⁹ See Note 4.

¹⁰ For more information on the Palestinian Child Center, visit their website:
<https://palchc.org/%d9%85%d9%86-%d9%86%d8%ad%d9%86-2/>



The Youth Center (The Camp Club): founded in the 1960's,¹¹ the center includes a sports field, in addition to the Women's Center, which was founded in 1999 and organizes activities for the women in the camp.

There are **eight schools** in Shuafat refugee camp today. Two are administered by UNRWA (one for girls and one for boys); one is administered by the Palestinian Ministry of Education; two are administered by the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem; and two are private schools.

History of Resistance

Shuafat refugee camp is a place of active resistance against the occupation in Jerusalem. Beginning in the first Intifada, on through the second Intifada and the 2014 popular uprising,

¹¹ "Al Ahya al-Arabiya fi Sharq al-Quds wa Buna Tahtiyya, Mukhayam Shuafat lil Laji'in" ("The Arab Neighborhoods in the East of Jerusalem, Assessment and Infrastructure: Shuafat Refugee Camp," The Jerusalem Center for Israeli Studies, document 529.

the camp's Palestinian youths have engaged in fierce confrontations with Occupation forces. Many have been martyred, injured and detained over years of Palestinian resistance.

Newspapers issued during the first Intifada (1987) abound with news on Shuafat refugee camp, most of it reporting on incidents of Israeli incursions, detentions, destruction and mass deployment of tear gas in the camp. The October 20, 1987 issue of *al-Ittihad* newspaper notes that "the boys' and girls' schools in Shuafat refugee camp were showered with tear gas, after which the Occupation forces ordered a schoolteacher and some students to remove a makeshift barrier made of rocks and burnt tires from the entrance of the camp."¹² This is in addition to news about the wounding and martyrdom of many of the camp residents.

In 1990, some reports emerged about statements made by the Occupation authorities promoting the transfer of Shuafat refugee camp "as a preliminary step towards the Judaization of unified Jerusalem" and ridding the city and its municipality of any refugee camps. This transfer has not materialized.¹³

During the second Intifada (al-Aqsa Intifada), the camp's participation in the uprising was facilitated by its proximity to the Old City of occupied Jerusalem, with no wall separating them at the time. The camp's youths took part in the clashes that occurred during the Intifada, and many fell as martyrs. Among them was Ammar al-Mashni who was killed near Lion's Gate during the first days of the uprising.¹⁴

Several people from Shuafat refugee camp fell as martyrs in the 2014 uprising. Among them was Ibrahim al-Akkari, killed in November 2014 after he carried out a car ramming near the light rail station in al-Sheikh Jarrah, in which two colonists were killed and others were injured.¹⁵ Following the incident, the Occupation authorities ordered the demolition of the martyr's home. His family, however, stalled the demolition through their confrontations with the Occupation forces. The demolition was ultimately carried out over one year later. The residents of the camp

¹² Al-Ittihad Newspaper, accessed from the archive of Arabic newspapers in Ottoman and Mandate Palestine: <https://bit.ly/2XhFMpr>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Rabitat Shabab Mukhayam Shuafat" ("The Shuafat Camp Youth Association"), Facebook, published August 10, 2014: <https://www.facebook.com/shabab.shufat.camp/posts/687134094688332/>

¹⁵ According to a report titled "Ibrahim al-'Akkari...Muhib al-Aqsa al Lathi Istishhad Difa'an 'Anh" ("Ibrahim al-Akari: The Devotee of al-Aqsa Who Sacrificed His Life in Its Defence"), al-Markiz al-Filastini lil l'am, November 7, 2014: <https://bit.ly/2NikYwc>

organized a fundraising campaign and purchased a new home for the family in Ras Khamis neighborhood.¹⁶

In 2015, two young men, Wisam Farraj and Ahmad Salah, were killed by Israeli occupation forces in clashes that erupted in the camp.¹⁷ The camp continues to endure raids, home searches and detention campaigns, and the residents of the camp regularly engage in confrontations with the Occupation forces.

As there is no cemetery in Shuafat refugee camp, its residents bury their martyrs and their dead at al-Mujahidin Cemetery in Bab al-Sahira (Herod's Gate) and at Bab al-Asbat (Lion's Gate) Cemetery.

Colonization

Palestinians living in Shuafat refugee camp endure the many facets of continued Zionist colonization and occupation.

Colonies

The camp is suffocated by colonies on all sides: Pisgat Ze'ev to the north, Givat Shapira to the south, Anatut to the east and Rekhes Shufat to the west.¹⁸

The Annexation and Expansion Wall

In 2004, the Annexation and Expansion Wall surrounded the camp, save for its eastern side. The camp is connected to the town of Anata, which itself is partially situated within the jurisdiction of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem. The Wall has placed Shuafat refugee camp outside of Jerusalem proper, though it remains within the boundaries of the Occupation Municipality.¹⁹

As the camp is located within the borders of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem, many Palestinians have sought residence there so as to avail of the "advantages" of living within the

¹⁶ See Note 4.

¹⁷ From a report titled "18 Shahid wa 481 Mu'taqalan min al-Quds Khilal October" ("18 Martyrs and 481 Detainees from Jerusalem in October"), Quds Press International, published on November 2, 2015: <https://www.qudspress.com/index.php?page=show&id=11956>

¹⁸ See Note 4.

¹⁹ See Note 3.

Municipality borders, including the preservation of the Israeli-issued “residency” cards that they carry.²⁰ Moreover, the monthly rent in the camp is considerably lower relative to other villages and neighborhoods that lie within the jurisdiction of the Municipality. These factors, in addition to the significant social and economic hurdles that have compelled many to live in the camp, have led to the current overcrowding there, which itself has led to a change in the camp’s social fabric. Whereas most of its residents had been acquainted with one another in the past, social bonds have since waned.

The Military Checkpoint

The military checkpoint in Shuafat refugee camp began taking shape as of the second Intifada in 2000. It began as a military jeep parked on the western side of the camp, which Palestinian youths often pelted with stones.²¹ The Occupation army then placed concrete blocks in place of the jeep, and those were eventually replaced by a permanent checkpoint equipped with surveillance and control systems in 2011. The checkpoint occupies an estimated 30 dunums.²²

The military checkpoint separates Shuafat refugee camp from Jerusalem and Shuafat and is the only point of access to either. This means the complete isolation of thousands of Jerusalemites carrying the Israeli-issued “residency” cards from their places of work and study, in addition to their being compelled to traverse the checkpoint on a daily basis.

Occupation Police Compound

In 2017, the Occupation authorities, represented by then Minister of Internal Security, Gilad Erdan, inaugurated a police compound at the entrance of the camp near the military checkpoint. The compound includes Israeli police headquarters as well municipal and “National Insurance” service centers. The inauguration of the compound came as part of Erdan’s plan for complete control of the camp and the subjugation of its residents. The scheme is supplemented by security procedures, including the use of advanced surveillance systems that further stifle Palestinians’ freedom of movement.²³

²⁰ For more information about residency in Jerusalem, consult “Al-Maqidisyyun wa al-Jinsiyya al-Isra’iyya. Kal Mostajir min al-Ramada’ bil Nar” (“Jerusalemites and the Israeli Citizenship: Adding Fuel to the Fire”), Mitras, <https://bit.ly/3nVucfc>

²¹ According to Yasin Sbeih, a Shuafat camp resident, during a phone call conducted on January 27, 2021.

²² See Note 3.

²³ From a report titled “Shurtat al-Ihtilal Taftatih Markizan lil Shurta fih Mukhayam Shuafat Shamal Madinat al-Quds al-Muhtala” (“The Occupation Police Inaugurates a Police Compound in the Shuafat Refugee Camp North of Occupied Jerusalem”), Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), May 6, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3uukgNC>

Epilogue: The Camp Today

The Shuafat camp is not unlike Palestinian refugee camps inside and outside the borders of historic Palestine, especially in terms of the absence of essential services and infrastructure. Despite the presence of UNRWA schools and health centers, services are not adequately provided. This is due to the continued curtailment of the UNRWA budget over the past years, especially given the United States' adamant to shut down the agency, in an attempt to redefine the Palestinian refugees as being strictly those who were uprooted in 1948, thus denying refugee status to their children and grandchildren and eliminating the Palestinian Right of Return.

Following the United States Administration's decision to sever their funding of the 2018 UNRWA budget, the former mayor of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem, Nir Barakat, staged an incursion into the Shuafat refugee camp in October of the same year to proclaim the cessation of UNRWA's work in the camp, and in Jerusalem more broadly, and its transfer to the jurisdiction of the Occupation Municipality.²⁴ Prior to his incursion, Barakat had set up a committee to prepare "plans to stop the work of UNRWA and to shut down the agency in Jerusalem," including transferring the responsibility of managing water services, sanitation systems maintenance and waste collection in Shuafat refugee camp from UNRWA to the Occupation Municipality.

The Donald Trump administration's decision to withdraw American funding of UNRWA did not result in the complete suspension of the agency's work in the Shuafat refugee camp, though the effect of that policy on the role and significance of UNRWA in the camp is evident. UNRWA's office in the camp has been relegated to a near-symbolic presence, and the agency has lost a part of its institutional role and responsibility towards improving the lives of registered refugees. In parallel to that relegation, the role of the Occupation Municipality continues to expand, with the aim of controlling the camp and its residents while marginalizing UNRWA's role in the provision of essential and daily services. This creates a new reality in which the Occupation Municipality maintains the upper hand in place of an international body like the UNRWA, which may not necessarily further the Occupation's schemes, and whose aid to the Palestinians may even indirectly bolster their ability to resist such schemes. Despite the Biden administration's tendency towards the resumption of American funding for UNRWA — as part of

²⁴ From a report titled "Li Inha' al-UNRWA bil Quds...Baladiyat al-Ihtilal Taqtahim Mukhayam Shuafat" ("To End UNRWA: The Occupation Municipality Invades Shuafat Camp"), Ultra Sawt Falastine, published on October 23, 2018: <https://bit.ly/3skG6RS>

its reversal of many of the former administration's policies —²⁵ the role of UNRWA in Shuafat refugee camp has not recovered. It appears that the agency's role in the camp has shifted to one that is more symbolic and less beneficial to the residents.

Economically, the camp has witnessed an increase in the number of commercial establishments over the last 10 years, largely due to the influx of residents and rise in population numbers. The Shuafat refugee camp has become a commercial hub that many Jerusalemite families frequent to shop for groceries, owing to lower prices in relation to the rest of occupied Jerusalem.

²⁵ From a report titled "Idarat Joe Biden Ta'tazim Isti'naf Taqdim Musa'adaat lil Filastinyin wa l'adat al-Bi'that al-Diplomasiya" ("The Joe Biden Administration intends to Resume Assistance to Palestinians and to Return Diplomatic Missions"), BBC Arabic, January 27, 2021: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-55830852>