

# Beit Safafa

## Introduction

Chanting traditional *ahazij* (songs) that mourn the loss of land is common among the women of Beit Safafa. One such song says:

*Hand us a newspaper to read  
To learn who governs our country  
Forbidden unto me is ornate silk  
Now that our country is split in two  
Forbidden unto me is silk so furrowed  
Over you Beit Safafa and your fate<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> "Beit Safafa 1948: Muqawama Ahdaraha Itifaq al-Hudna" (Beit Safafa 1948: A Resistance Squandered by the Armistice Agreement). Quds Net: <https://www.qudsn.ps/article/41918>.



## Location and Area

Beit Safafa is located six kilometers south of the Old City of Jerusalem, with an average elevation of 750 meters above sea level.<sup>2</sup> It is bordered from the north by al-Malha village and al-Qatamon neighborhood, from the south by Bethlehem and Beit Jala, from the north by Sur Baher and Umm Tuba, and from the west by al-Malha and Sharafat.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of area, Beit Safafa is among the smaller villages of the Jerusalem Governorate, with a total area of 3,314 donums prior to its occupation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Palestine Remembered. "[Bayt Safafa Village File](#)," accessed November 11, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. *Biladuna Filastin (Our Homeland, Palestine)*, p. 173. Accessed on Palestine Remembered, November 11, 2017.

According to the administrative divisions of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem, Beit Safafa today encompasses an area of 2,000 donums,<sup>5</sup> including areas designated for public use and roads, and others that were seized for the purposes of colonization, such as the Givat HaMatos colony, built in the Tabliyah area, east of the village. It is important to note that the location of the village today, as defined by the Occupation Municipality, muddles the original ownership of the lands. For example, al-Tantur and al-Jamiyyah neighborhoods were originally situated on land belonging to Beit Jala, but are today designated as Beit Safafa neighborhoods.

## Origin and History

There are several speculations regarding the etymology of the village name. According to Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh in his book *Biladuna Filastin (Our Homeland, Palestine)*, the word Beit Safafa could be a derivation of the Syriac word “*Sefifa*,” which means “the thirsty one.” Thus, Beit Safafa would come to mean “home of the thirsty one;”<sup>6</sup> notably, that there are no natural springs in Beit Safafa. In his book *Al-Mufasal fi Tarikh al-Quds (A Detailed History of Jerusalem)*, Aref al-Aref relates a story about the Jews — a minority in Jerusalem in 333 BC — who welcomed Alexander the Great in Beit Safafa and wore white to communicate their surrender and to avoid execution. Upon sparing them, and as *serenity* (“*safaa*” in Arabic) prevailed, the village was named Beit Safafa.<sup>7</sup> In *al-Qarya al-Arabiyya al-Filastiniya (The Palestinian Arab Village)*, Shukri Araaf posits that the name of the village means “beautiful orchard,” and that it was previously “Beit Shafafa.”<sup>8</sup>

Scholar and Beit Safafa native Mustafa Othman notes in his book about the village that the villagers relay a story about a Roman emperor’s only daughter named Safa. The story goes that when she fell ill, the emperor was advised to move to southern Jerusalem, and he opted for the location of Beit Safafa, which was dubbed Beit al-Safa and later became known as Beit Safafa.<sup>9</sup> In his linguistic study on the names of Jerusalem villages, scholar Nasser al-Din Abu Khdeir explains that the word “beit” is common among the Semitic languages as it appears in the

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Israeli organization Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights, the area of Beit Safafa as a neighborhood today is 2,091 donums. The report published by the organization about Beit Safafa is available here:

<https://www.slideshare.net/bimkomplanners/ss-34124674?ref=http://bimkom.org/2014/06/brollopsklanningar-pa/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Aref, Aref. *Al-Mufasal fi Tarikh al- Quds (A Detailed History of Jerusalem)*. Beirut: Maktabat al-Andalus, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> Arraf, Shukri. *Al-Qarya al-Arabiyya al-Filastiniya (The Palestinian Arab Village)*. Dar al-Jundi, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Othman, Mustafa. *Beit Safafa: Tayib al Manbat wa Safaa al Qulub (Nub Design: 2006)*, 19.

Akkadian, Aramaic and Hebrew languages to denote a place of residence. According to Abu Khdeir, “it is possible that [the name] derives from the *safsaf* [willow] tree.”<sup>10</sup>

## Population

According to local community reports, Beit Safafa was home to about 13,000 Palestinians in 2019. The Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research estimated the combined populations of Beit Safafa and Sharafat residents at about 11,200 in 2011.

Beit Safafa is home to its native residents, referred to as Saffafin, as well as incomers from other Jerusalem areas or from lands occupied in 1948. The original families of Beit Safafa descend from three clans: Alyan, Salman and Hussein.

While Alyan is the largest clan, the Hussein clan comprises a large number of families that are not related by blood, but have joined the clan for purposes of unifying within one community and under one name. The Hussein clan is regarded as the most recent arrival, with a 300-year history in the village, while the others date farther back.

The Hussein clan families include Abu Dalu, Musleh, Subhi, Othman, Lafi and al-Omari.<sup>11</sup>

The Alyan clan families include Awad, Jadallah, Ismail, al-Hajj and Ahmad Ali.

The Salman clan families include Salman and Abed Rabbo.

According to Ibrahim Othman, in 1947, prior to the Nakba, about 214 “outsiders,” that is, non-natives of Beit Safafa, resided in the village, including Syrians, Arab and Greek Jerusalemites, Hebronites, Gazans, Czechs, as well as a group of railway workers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Abu-Khdeir, Nasser al-Din, “The Names of Palestinian Villages of Jerusalem: A Linguistic and Semantic Study,” *Association of Arab Universities Journal for Arts*. For source access and Abu Khdeir’s lecture on the subject, click [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> The Omari family in Beit Safafa originates from Egypt, from the Abu Shabana family, as reported by the villagers. The family gained prominence in the village, as its elders ran the village kuttab and educated the children in religion and the Arabic language. One notable figure among them was Imam Jaber Ibrahim al-Omari, who taught many of the boys and girls of Beit Safafa and passed away in 1946. Abdullah al-Omari, who participated in the Great Revolt in the 1930s and in resistance against the Zionist militias in the 1948 War, is also a notable figure among them.

<sup>12</sup> For more details, refer to Hasan Ibrahim Uthman, *The Mountain and the Snow*, p.12.

## Social and Economic Context

Historically, economic life in Beit Safafa centered on agriculture and olive, grape, wheat and barley cultivation. The village maintained its relatively tranquil rural features until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Beit Safafa ceased to have a low population density beginning in the 1980s as it witnessed a rise in the number of residents, when large numbers of Palestinians from the lands occupied in 1948 arrived in Jerusalem for work or study at the Hebrew University. Beit Safafa was initially favored for its proximity to the Israeli job market and its relative tranquility and low population density. Following the start of the second Intifada and the construction of the Annexation and Expansion Wall around Jerusalem, Beit Safafa witnessed another rise in population, as many sought residence away from the Jerusalem neighborhoods that became isolated by the Wall.

Despite the many social, economic, and political transformations endured by Beit Safafa, most of its quarters,<sup>13</sup> neighborhoods and streets have kept their original names. Among these neighborhoods are al-Safeh, al-Thuhra, al-Tantur, al-Jabal, al-Qaa, Tabliyah, and Bir Abu Khashabeh. The areas also include what is known as al-Zone, which refers to the lands that fell under Israeli occupation in accordance with the Rhodes Agreement, signed with the Jordanian government in April 1949. More details on that will follow.

## Sports in Beit Safafa

Beit Safafa was famous for being among the first Palestinian villages to establish a sports club, called al-Nadi al-Qarawi (the village club) between 1943 and 1944. The club was founded by Beit Safafa native Musa Othman al-Aas or Abu al-Majd. In his memoirs, titled *al-Jabal wa al-Thalj* (*The Mountain and the Snow*), Hasan Ibrahim Othman notes that al-Aas had been a student at al-Nahda College, where he was exposed to Jerusalemite and non-Jerusalemite students from outside of Beit Safafa. This opened new horizons for him in terms of social connections and knowledge. After persistent effort, he became a sport instructor in the same college and later founded, along with the local community and football enthusiasts, al-Nadi al-Qarawi.

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<sup>13</sup> All the Beit Safafa Village quarters today fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem and are therefore governed by Israeli occupation authority laws.



The club was composed of amateur players and would organize friendly football matches with teams from neighboring Ein Karem and al-Malha, though it gradually grew to include professional players from Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Lifta, Ramallah and others. Hasan Othman notes that the club was quite active and distinguished, qualifying for the Premier League in early 1946 and for the Palestine Cup final in the same year. It lost the championship match to Jaffa's Islamic Club. The club ceased its activity during the 1948 War.<sup>14</sup>

## Landmarks

**The Tower and the Old Village:**<sup>15</sup> Known as **al-Burj (the tower)**, the area is located in the center of Beit Safafa, where the abandoned remains of a Roman tower stand, an indication of the village's beginnings in the Roman era.



<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim Uthman, Hasan. The Mountain and the Snow, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. Our Homeland, Palestine. On Palestine Remembered: [كفر عقب قضاء القدس - Kafr 'Aqab \(فلسطين\) - دور عكبة](#) في الذاكرة

**Khirbat Tabliyah:**<sup>16</sup> This area is located in eastern Beit Safafa and is under threat of colonization. The Occupation authorities erected a monument in Tabliyah, dedicated to an Israeli soldier killed during the 1967 war by Jordanian fighters who targeted his warplane.

**Military Fortifications:** Near the English Hospital in northern Beit Safafa, there are remains of fortifications that were built by the Egyptian military, Sudanese volunteers, as well as the village resistance fighters.

**The Railway:** North of the Eastern Mosque, one can walk along the railway route that once connected Jerusalem and Jaffa. In the 1990s, the Occupation authorities closed off the section of the railway that passed through Beit Safafa and turned it into a park. Pedestrians walking along the railway/park path will arrive at the Jerusalem station, located opposite al-Thawri neighborhood, and which the occupation calls the First Station.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> For more reading on the history of this railway and its service to the Zionist movement and the British Mandate, consult: Khalid Awadalla, Yafa- al-Quds: Tarikh Muwjaz li sikkat al-Isti'mar (Jaffa-Jerusalem: a Brief History of the Colonial Railway) published on Bab el-Wad on October 17, 2018: <https://bit.ly/35eLT2R>





**The Ice Factory:** This abandoned building is located at the foot of one of the village's northern hills, which can be reached from the side of the Eastern Mosque. It had been an ice factory owned by the Battash family until 1948.

**The English Hospital (Beit Safafa Hospital for Communicable Diseases):** Located on the eastern side of the village, the hospital treated wounded Palestinians during the 1948 battles.

**Hamza Mosque:** Following the 1948 War and the division of the village, the main village mosque, the Eastern Mosque, which fell on the "Israeli side" of Beit Safafa, was destroyed. Al-Batma Mosque, on the "Jordanian side" of the village, was rather small, and so, the residents of Beit Safafa constructed a new mosque with the help of their expatriate relatives working in the Gulf. Hamza Mosque still stands in the center of Beit Safafa.



## History of Resistance

The people of Beit Safafa were active in resisting the British and Zionist colonizers. They joined the ranks of the Great Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939) and took part in the resistance against the Zionist attacks on their village and neighboring ones during the 1948 war. Their fight to the death and the blood they shed triumphed during the 1948 war and led to the Zionist militias' failure to occupy Beit Safafa that year, except for the part of the village through which the railway ran, which was relinquished as part of the 1949 Rhodes Agreement. The rest of Beit Safafa would be occupied in 1967.

Among the resistance fighters of Beit Safafa was Abd al-Salam Ibrahim Mohammad Subhi (1894–1958), who headed the al-Najada faction in Beit Safafa and its neighboring villages during the Great Revolt. He took part in training resistance fighters, owing to his experience serving in the Ottoman army. Subhi spent his life as a resistance fighter and a target of the British and Zionist colonizers until his passing in 1958, his body riddled with battle scars, including shrapnel in his eye,<sup>18</sup> an injury he sustained while defending Beit Safafa in 1948.<sup>19</sup>

Commander Abdullah al-Omari participated in the battles of the 1948 war, his two sons were martyred, and his home, along with those of other resistance fighters, was shelled by Zionist militias. Aref al-Aref writes that he was: “a Beit Safafa native, born in 1907... As of 1936, he participated in Palestine’s emergent national movements. He was frequently arrested and pursued by the English, and so, he spent three years (1937–1949) in Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Amman. Upon returning to his homeland, Palestine, he was treated as though he were a criminal and was ordered to check in [with the authorities] three times per day. He worked in commerce, and with outbreak of the most recent incidents in Palestine, he assumed leadership of the resistance movement in his hometown.”<sup>20</sup>

Egyptian and Sudanese resistance fighters also joined in defending Beit Safafa. Some arrived in Palestine with the Egyptian army, while others were enlisted in al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Army of the Holy War). Among them were also Sudanese Palestinians, who had settled in the Old City’s African Quarters long before. The most famous among the Sudanese resistance fighters was the

<sup>18</sup> Al- Subji, Majida, “Min al-Jandarma ela al-Najada: Fusul min Hayat al-Munadel Abd al-Salam Subhi,” Bab al-Wad, accessed on November 11, 2017: <https://www.babelwad.com/ar/abed-el-salam-subhi>.

<sup>19</sup> Uthman, Hasan Ibrahim. The Mountain and the Snow, 104.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Aref Aref. The Palestinian Nakba and The Lost Paradise, 67. Source can be accessed [here](#)

Yüzbaşı [Ottoman military rank of captain] Mohammad Ali Mustafa, of Sudanese origin and leader of the Beit Safafa garrison.

The people of Beit Safafa tell many stories of the Sudanese fighters in particular. They were known for their great strength, resilience, bravery and high spirits. They also contributed to building fortifications around the village. Ibrahim Abd al-Fattah Alyan (born 1927),<sup>21</sup> who fought in the 1948 battles remarked in an interview: “The Sudanese arrived as a godsend to us, with their unbelievable conviction and absolute fearlessness. They would position themselves on the frontlines and would try to encourage us, saying: ‘how do you expect to be considered a martyr if you are fearful or hesitant? You must enter battle without worry, so as to earn your martyrdom with merit and sincerity.’”<sup>22</sup>

In his book *Karithat Filasteen (Palestine’s Calamity)*, Abdullah al-Tal discusses Beit Safafa’s resistance: “The endurance of that village is foremost credited to its people, who stood up to the Jews and have not abandoned their beloved village to this day.” Presiding as the head of the village was the resistance fighter Abdullah al-Omari, who molded the youths of the village into a unified block that stood strong against the frequent Jewish attacks despite the many losses and casualties that the village incurred. Upon their arrival, the Egyptian armed forces cooperated with the village fighters and assisted them with their defensive lines, strengthening fortifications, building towers and digging trenches skillfully. With that, Beit Safafa was safeguarded against attack by Jewish colonists.”<sup>23</sup>

## The Nakba and Fragmentation of the Village

Beit Safafa’s location was of great strategic and military significance during the battles fought in Jerusalem, especially in 1948. In *al-Nakba al-Filastiniya wa al-Firdos al-Mafqud (The Palestinian Catastrophe and the Lost Paradise)*, Aref al-Aref describes the strategic importance of Beit Safafa, stating: “An Arab village south of Jerusalem that can practically be regarded as one of its neighborhoods, [Beit Safafa] is home to 1,500 people, all of whom are Arab and Muslim. The village is located on a hill that overlooks the railway connecting Jerusalem with Jaffa and Tel-Aviv, and the road connecting Jerusalem with Bethlehem and Hebron. For these reasons, the

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<sup>21</sup> See note 1.

<sup>22</sup> Qawasmī, Hanadi. “Beit Safafa: Hikayat Sumud min Thakirat al-Nakba” ( “Beit Safafa: A Story of Resistance in the Memory of the Nakba”), Al-Arabi al- Jadid, accessed on November 13, 2017 from [here](#)

<sup>23</sup> Al-Tal, Abdullah. *Karithat Filasteen (The Catastrophe of Palestine: Memoirs of Abdullah al-Tal)*, (Cairo: Dar al-Qalum, 1959), 172-173. [The book can be accessed [here](#)]

Jewish colonists had their sights set on the location from the very early stages of battle. They devised schemes by which to capture it, so as to sever the connection between Jerusalem and the south of Palestine while securing the link between Ramat Rachel and Mekor Chaim colonies, situated on the eastern and western sides of the road, respectively, with Beit Safafa standing between them.”<sup>24</sup>

Abdullah al-Tal, a Jordanian army officer, underscores the importance of Beit Safafa’s geographic location during the battles of 1948, stating that “the village of Beit Safafa in southern Jerusalem was a vital location in the defensive line of the south [of Palestine]. The skirmishes between the Jewish colonists and Beit Safafa had preceded the entrance of the Arab armies into Palestine by several months, owing to this Arab village’s proximity to the colony of Mekor Chaim. Beit Safafa continued to constitute a prominent protrusion in the Jewish area, until that protrusion was eliminated with the South Jerusalem Agreement between Amman and the Jews.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1948, the defenders of Beit Safafa put up stiff resistance and succeeded in preserving the village’s freedom, as did neighboring Bethlehem and Beit Jala to the south, and Sur Baher to the east. Much of the neighboring areas, however, did fall under Israeli occupation, including the villages of al-Malha and Ein Karem, in addition to some areas of al-Walajah and nearby Arab neighborhoods like al-Baqaa, al-Talbiya and al-Qatamon.

The joy experienced by the people of Beit Safafa in light of their legendary resistance would, however, be short-lived. The Rhodes Agreement of 1949 (the so-called Armistice Agreement) stipulated a land exchange between the Jordanian government and the nascent Zionist occupation government. Beit Safafa suffered its share of that agreement, as the Occupation had sights set on the railway connecting the western part of Jerusalem with Jaffa, and which ran through the center of Beit Safafa. Accordingly, in April 1949, the Jordanian forces conceded northern Beit Safafa to the Israeli occupation, including the area through which the Jerusalem–Jaffa railway ran.

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<sup>24</sup> Aref al-Aref, *Al-Nakba al-Filastiniya wa al-Firdus al-Mafqud* (The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise), (Dar al Huda, 1951), 75, as published on [Filastin fi al-Thakira](http://Filastin fi al-Thakira) (Palestine Remembered) website.

<sup>25</sup> See note 23.



Resistance fighter Yüzbaşı Mohammad Ali Mustafa, leader of the Beit Safafa Garrison, along with the mukhtars of Beit Safafa refused to sign the document stipulating the division of the village and brought before them by the UN observers. The Occupation forces attacked the village and fired into the air for about 15 minutes, with the aim of terrorizing the people, deterring their resistance and forcing them to flee. The next day, barbed wire was erected to divide the two sides of the village, forming a border between Jordan and the Occupation state in the Beit Safafa area. This border became known among the villagers as al-Sharit (the cordon).<sup>26</sup>

Those villagers who found themselves on the side of the village that fell under the jurisdiction of the Israeli occupation would eventually hold Israeli passports, as would other Palestinians living in the lands occupied in 1948. The people of Beit Safafa would refer to this area as al-Zone (the English word). Most of Beit Safafa did in fact remain under Jordanian rule until 1967. Remnants of this split are visible to this day, as the Israeli and Palestinian curricula are both taught in Beit Safafa, whereby the former is a continuation of its enforcement since 1949, and the latter a continuation of the Jordanian curriculum that was taught in the West Bank and Jerusalem during the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's rule after the 1948 war. It is worth noting that this split and the battles that took place in and prior to 1948 led many to migrate to Beit Jala, Bethlehem and other areas.

In his diaries recounting the day on which part of the village was conceded along with the railway, Hassan Ibrahim Othman describes an intense emotion characterized by deep sadness. He writes: "We could see signs of gloom, anger and pain on the faces of the soldiers who had sacrificed everything, some of whom cried and mourned parting with Beit Safafa, this town where the Arab spirit and unified conscience had been embodied; where Egyptian, Syrian, Sudanese, Iraqi and Palestinian blood merged with the earth of Beit Safafa and quenched its soil so that it would remain a beacon of hope."<sup>27</sup>

For about 18 years, 1949 to 1967, the period during which Beit Safafa was divided between Jordan and the Occupation, the people of the village endured many experiences on both sides of the barbed wire that split their village and separated loved ones. The Jordanian and Israeli forces would allow the people to gather on either side of the barbed wire fence on occasions like Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, funerals and weddings. The families of brides and grooms were

<sup>26</sup> Pictures of this isolation cordon can be seen [here](#), and in a 1957 film available [here](#).

<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim Uthman, Hasan. The Mountain and the Snow, 164.

often split on either side, and so the barbed wire fence became their only place to meet and arrange for a unified *zaffa* (customary wedding procession) while separated by this boundary.<sup>28</sup>

It is painfully ironic that the Naksa of 1967 was the occasion that brought together the people of the divided village, as all the lands of the village came under Israeli occupation, or as is commonly said, became “unified.” Walking near the famous Abed Rabbo Bakery and Hamza Mosque in the center of Beit Safafa, one may notice a sign bearing the name al-Tawhid Street (unification street). The street runs precisely where the barbed wire boundary had been, separating “Jordanian” Beit Safafa and occupied Beit Safafa.

## Colonization

Beit Safafa is a prominent embodiment of Israeli policies that fragment Palestinian residential communities and prevent the possibility of any geographic contiguity among Palestinian villages. This is manifest upon the examination of Beit Safafa’s present borders and the village’s existence as a narrow and limited Arab presence amid a concentration of Israeli colonies and the bypass roads that serve them.

## The Colonies

Several colonies have been built on the lands of Beit Safafa, including the southern industrial outskirt of Talpiot colony, in addition to Gilo Colony, built on land belonging to Beit Safafa, Sharafat and Beit Jala. According to the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ), the Occupation authorities have seized a total of 1,980 donums from Beit Safafa and Sharafat,<sup>29</sup> on which they built parts of Gilo and Har Homa colonies. Givat HaMatos colony was built in 1991 near al-Khalil Street in eastern Beit Safafa, swallowing about 285 donums of village land.<sup>30</sup>

The Occupation authorities are also plotting to expand the Givat HaMatos (“Airplane Hill” in Hebrew)<sup>31</sup> colony in Beit Safafa’s Tabliyah area, with the construction of 2,600 residential units.

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<sup>28</sup> To listen to testimonies on this division and its impact on the lives of the Beit Safafa community, a report by journalist Sara Dajjani for Qudscom can be viewed [here](#). Accessed on November 13, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Beit Safafa and Sharafat are often referred to in unison due to adjacency and overlapping plots of land.

<sup>30</sup> Applied Research Institute Jerusalem - (ARIJ). “Beit Safafa and Sharafat Town Profile,” published in 2012 and accessed [here](#).

<sup>31</sup> The Arabic name for the area located on the eastern side of Beit Safafa near to Al-Khalil Street and facing the entrance to Sur Bahir is “Tabaliyya”. The Occupation authorities refer to it as “Airplane Hill” in reference to the Israeli warplane that was shot down by the resistance, killing its Israeli pilot Dan Givon on June 6, 1967.

The plan is for a contiguous colonial presence that begins at Har Homa on Jabal Abu Ghneim in the east, on through Givat HaMatos and Gilo colonies. This expansion would result in the severance of all Palestinian links to Beit Safafa, isolating it entirely from any Palestinian neighborhood or village.<sup>32</sup>

## Colonial Bypass Roads

Beit Safafa also suffers from the colonial bypass roads built to connect and ease mobility between the colonies of Jerusalem and Hebron. Among these roads is Dov Yosef Street, inaugurated in the 1990s to connect Gilo colony with the center of Jerusalem. The opening of this street on Beit Safafa and Sharafat land resulted in the fragmentation of Beit Safafa and severance of its natural contiguity with al-Thahra neighborhood and Sharafat village. Residents must now traverse a tunnel under Dov Yosef Street to cross between either side of the village. The street will also provide a route for the Israeli Light Rail from Gilo colony on Beit Safafa land to the Hebrew University campus, at the expense of the Palestinian commercial establishments present along the way.

Beit Safafa waged a struggle in 2013<sup>33</sup> against Israeli schemes that would further fragment the village with another colonial road, Road 4, or Highway 50, or the southern section of the massive Begin Highway, which connects northern and southern Jerusalem by cutting through Beit Safafa and dividing its neighborhoods. Begin Highway is being promoted as the road through which “you can commute from the north of Jerusalem to its south without stopping at a single traffic light.”<sup>34</sup> It connects the northern colonies of Jerusalem with the southern ones and with the south of the West Bank, including Gush Etzion colony.

This road cuts through the heart of Beit Safafa and runs for two kilometers,<sup>35</sup> fragmenting and isolating its neighborhoods from one another while preventing its natural urban contiguity and blocking off many of the internal streets connecting its neighborhoods.<sup>36</sup> Despite the protests

<sup>32</sup> “Al- Musadaqa ala Mashru Mustawtanat Jufat Hamtus Janub al-Quds” (Approving the Colony Project “Jufat Hamtus” in Southern Jerusalem), [Filastinyu 48](#), accessed on November 17, 2017. Refer also to Razi al Nablisi’s [Al-Sihyuniyya wa al-Istitan: Istratijiyaat al-Saytara ala al-Ard wa Intiaaj al-Ma’azel](#) (Zionism and Colonization: Land Control Strategies and the Production of Isolation), (Markiz al-Masarat: 2017), 31.

<sup>33</sup> Videos of the many demonstrations organized by the residents of Beit Safafa in protest of the Road 4 plan can be watched [here](#) for January 16, 2013 and [here](#) for February 10, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> More than one Israeli newspaper reported on the completion of Road 4 under this headline: “To Cross Jerusalem with no Traffic Lights,” including [Yedioth Ahronoth](#) and the [Globes Appendix](#).

<sup>35</sup> “Road 4 south of Beit Safafa is a part of the municipal roads that serve to cut off the village,” [Bimkom Organization](#), accessed on November 17, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> For more information on Road 4 and its harmful impact on the residents, refer to this [Ma’an Center report](#).



and demonstrations carried out by the village residents throughout 2013, and their appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court,<sup>37</sup> the project was completed, and the road was inaugurated in early September 2017.

In addition to the colonies and their roads, there are several colonial outposts in Beit Safafa (Palestinian homes that are seized by settler-colonial organizations or colonist families). In most cases, the Occupation authorities availed of their Absentee Property Law of 1950, whereby they usurp the homes of the original Palestinian owners who are outside the country, for the benefit of Zionist colonists. Beit Safafa was also affected in 2005 by the erection of Military Checkpoint 300 in the south of the village to separate the city of Bethlehem from Jerusalem and its villages, further undermining the waning geographic links among them.

## Epilogue

Beit Safafa still retains some rural characteristics today, like the stone fences built by our forefathers to demarcate and manage their properties. It is therefore regarded by many as a tranquil and livable place, away from any congestion, though these features have begun to fade due to a growing Palestinian population and the resulting rise in construction activity in the area. Moreover, land seizure by the Occupation authorities and the Zionist colonial enterprise has left little land in the hands of the Palestinians, who have been compelled to prioritize habitation and construction on the limited space available to them.

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<sup>37</sup> Refer [here](#) to the transcript of the Israeli Supreme Court hearing that allowed Road to slice through the village, dismissing the residents' plea.