

Al- Sawahrah

Introduction

The word "al-Sawahrah" refers to three areas of the Arab al-Sawahrah tribe located southeast of Jerusalem, namely al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah,¹ Jabal al-Mukaber (al-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah) and al-Sheikh Saad.²

As is the case in many Palestinian villages, the Zionist colonial policies of isolation, fragmentation and the hardships they inflict are starkly manifest in al-Sawahrah's geopolitical reality. These policies aim at fragmenting a single community into several enclaves by splitting it apart with walls and military checkpoints, tearing its social fabric and instilling a sense of alienation, with devastating impact on social, political and economic harmony.

¹ According to scholars of the history of Arab al-Sawahrah Jamil al-Salhut and Muhammad Shihadeh, the designations "al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah" ("East al-Sawahrah") and "al-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah" ("West...") emerged only in the 1940s.

² According to the administrative divisions of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem, al-Sawahrah encompasses Jabal al-Mukaber and Umm Layson. Even though Jabal al-Mukaber is primarily part of al-Sawahrah, Umm Layson is originally a land area that belongs to the village of Sur Baher and was sold to families from al-Obeidiyah, north of Bethlehem. However, a new neighborhood emerged in Umm Layson, accommodating mainly the people of al-Obeidiyah, and, despite originally being part of Sur Baher, it came to be part of the Occupation Municipality's structural plans for the al-Sawahrah area. This information was verified by Rasim Obeidat, a well-known figure in al-Sawahrah, as well as through the "Umm Laysoon Information Card," published by the Bimkom Association: Planners for Planning Rights. [3.3 Umm Laysoon - Jerusalem](#)



Location and Area

The lands of the Arab al-Sawahrah tribe cover over 76,000 donums.³ This large area extends from Nabi Musa, Silwan and Abu Dis in the north, Arab ibn Ubayd and Sur Baher to the south, the Dead Sea to the east, and the Jerusalem-Hebron Road and the outskirts of the uprooted village of al-Maliha to the west.⁴

Jabal al-Mukaber, sometimes referred to as al-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah, is among the vast land areas inhabited by the Arab al-Sawahrah tribe. Peaking at 600 meters above sea level, the hill is located five kilometers south of the Old City of Jerusalem. The valley of Silwan Separates Jabal al-Mukaber from al-Tur (Mount of Olives), and Al-Rababa valley lies between it and Mount Zion.

Jabal al-Mukaber is the only area among those of al-Sawahrah that falls within the boundaries of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem. After the complete occupation of Jerusalem in 1967,

³ Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad, Our Homeland, Palestine, 501. Accessed on Palestine Remembered website:

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/Biladuna-Filisteen/Story26251.html>

⁴Ibid, and confirmed by Mohammad Musa Halasa, Acting Mayor of al- Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah Municipality, on May 10, 2018.

most of Jabal al-Mukaber, 4,600 donums,⁵ was placed at the disposal of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem and thus came to be governed by Israeli law. Consequently, the Palestinians inhabiting this area were forced to carry Israeli “residency” cards (blue ID) as had the neighborhoods annexed previously in the eastern part of Jerusalem.

Moreover, al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah, covering 69,000 donums,⁶ and al-Sheikh Saad, about 1,650 donums,⁷ remained within what is designated as West Bank territory. Following the Oslo Agreement, al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah was divided into areas A, B, and C, and its residents today hold Palestinian identification. Al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah and al-Sheikh Saad are managed by local councils under the authority of the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government.

Origin and History

The Arab al-Sawahrah tribe acquired its name in light of their long-standing presence near the village of Beit Sahour, part of the Bethlehem Governorate today.⁸ Moreover, the etymology of Jabal al-Mukaber bears geographical, historical, and religious significance, as the word “al-Mukaber” is associated with a famous story about the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab’s arrival in Jerusalem from Medina: upon entering Jerusalem in the 7th century, he stood on the peak of the hill, overlooking Jerusalem, and praised God, declaring, “*Allahu akbar*” (“God is great”).⁹

The hill is also referred to as Jabal al-Muamara (“the hill of conspiracy” or “...of corrupt counsel”). This name is associated with a New Testament narrative, according to which the hill is believed to have been the home of the High Priest (Palace of Caiaphas), where Judas Iscariot conspired with the priests and Roman officers against Jesus.¹⁰

As for al-Sheikh Saad, it is believed to have been named after Sheikh Saad al-Din al-Andalusi, who arrived with Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi on the mission to defeat the Crusaders and liberate Jerusalem in the 12th century.¹¹

The population of Arab al-Sawahrah is thus spread across different areas with differing administrative classifications and identity documentation regimes. Despite these present distinctions, people had once been able to move easily between their areas with no significant

⁵ “Planning Survey and Directions for Planning and Development in Jabal al-Mukaber Arab AsSawahrah,” published by Bimkom:

Planners for Planning Rights, 2008, [جبل المكبر عرب - السواحر](#).

⁶ “As Sawahira ash Sharqiya Town Profile”, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem / ARIJ, 2012. [As Sawahira ash Sharqiya Town Profile](#)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See note 3.

⁹ Al-Aref, Aref, Al-Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-Quds (A Comprehensive History of Jerusalem) (Jerusalem: Arab Institute for Research & Publishing), 1961, 164.

¹⁰ Ibid, 441.

¹¹ See note 6.

restrictions, but the construction of the Annexation and Expansion Wall in 2007 did create harsh new realities in this regard.

Population

The Arab al-Sawahrah tribe originates from the "Banu Uqba" tribe, an offshoot of the famous Arabian Peninsula "Lakhm" tribes, and is divided into two subtribes:

1- The Jaafrah, from which the following clans descend: al-Awaisat, al-Masharah, al-Jaabees, al-Sarawakha, Bashir, and al-Khalayleh.

2- Al-Halsa, from which the following clans descend: al-Shuqeirat, al-Hallasah, al-Obeidat, Zaatarah, and al-Zahayka.¹²

It is believed that both subtribes descend from a man by the name of Ahmad, who lived in Khirbat Beit Sahour and was referred to as "Ahmed al-Sahouri." His grave lies near the Jabal al-Mukaber cemetery on the northern side of town.¹³

The population of al-Sawahrah, including those residing within and outside the Occupation Municipality boundaries, is estimated at about 50,000 Palestinians,¹⁴ most of them (about 25,000) living in Jabal al-Mukaber. Al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah is home to about 7,000 Palestinians, and about 3,000 Palestinians live in al-Sheikh Saad.¹⁵

Social and Economic Context

The Arab al-Sawahrah had lived in traditional Bedouin woolen tents until the late 1920s, when they began constructing stone houses in their areas. The first stone house in Jabal al-Mukaber was built in 1928 by Ahmad al-Husseini Zahaika, and this mode of habitation soon caught on among the al-Sawahrah clans.¹⁶

Economically, the Arab al-Sawahrah tribe relied on agriculture. Those with the means to do so bred livestock and cultivated fruits and vegetables on both sides of Wadi Al-Nar valley. Additionally, they planted their vast lands with grain crops, whose harvest was not guaranteed due to irregular yearly rainfall. In order to secure their yearly consumption needs, they stored any surplus wheat during abundant harvests for less fortunate seasons of draught.¹⁷

¹² According to Mohammad Musa Halasa, Acting Mayor of al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah, on May 10, 2018.

¹³ Al-Salhut, Jamil and Shehadeh, Mohammad, *Sowar men al-adab al-shaabi al-Filastini* (Scenes from Palestinian Folkloric Literature). (Jerusalem: Al-Rowad, 1982).

¹⁴ According to the estimates of the Municipality of al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah, Source (5).

¹⁵ According to Rasim Obeidat, a prominent al-Sawahrah figure, September 16, 2020.

¹⁶ Al-Salhut, Jamil, *Ashwak al-barari* (Thorns of the Wilderness – My Childhood). (Haifa: Kul Shee, 2018), 13.

¹⁷ Ibid, 62.

Prior to the 1967 Naksa, the different areas of al-Sawahrah had maintained socioeconomic bonds as one unified town. Following the 1967 war, however, Jabal al-Mukaber was annexed to the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem, while al-Sheikh Saad remained outside those municipal boundaries and was therefore regarded as part of the occupied West Bank.

Al-Sheikh Saad had maintained a special bond with Jabal al-Mukaber, to where according to the people of al-Sheikh Saad, their village was the summer garden that the people of Jabal al-Mukaber would frequent.¹⁸ But this bond has been severely impacted by the Annexation and Expansion Wall.

Education

Kuttab were the main mode of mass education in the al-Sawahrah region at the dawn of the 20th century. A sheikh by the name of Ahmad Ali Mansour had opened a kuttab in the al-Zawiya al-Alawiah Mosque near his home in Baten al-Harf in Jabal al-Mukaber, and it continued to operate until the mid-1950s.¹⁹

In the late 1920s, the people of al-Sawahrah, especially those who lived in the eastern part of the town, began to send their male children to schools outside the village, such as the al-Nahda School and Mount Zion College in Jerusalem. In 1944, the first school for boys was established on the western side of town on Jabal al-Mukaber. Another school for boys was founded in 1946 on the eastern side of town, accessible to those who still lived in the peripheries at that time. To differentiate between the two schools, the first school was called al-Sawahrah *al-Gharbiyah* School for Boys, and the other was called Al-Sawahrah *al-Sharqiyah* School for Boys. It was there that this designation of “West” and “East” al-Sawahrah emerged.

Members of the Arab al-Sawahrah tribe did not commonly send their daughters to school in those days, though there were some exceptions. For example, Fatima Salem Shehadeh is known to have been the first woman to obtain a high school diploma (Tawjihi) in al-Sawahrah in 1967, and she went on to teach at one of the local schools.²⁰

¹⁸ According to stories told by an al-Sheikh Saad family, during a tour coordinated by the Palestinian Museum on October 11, 2019, as part of a series of visual arts workshops titled “The Story of the Village of Sheikh Saad.”

¹⁹ See note 17, 24.

²⁰ Ibid, 55.

Landmarks

Palace of the British High Commissioner: Located on the western outskirts of Jabal al-Mukaber, the High Commissioner's Palace is one of the most prominent relics of British colonial rule in Palestine. The palace was built in 1933 and used as the residence compound of the High Commissioner until 1948 and the end of the British colonial period. In May of that year, as the British army began to leave its bases, High Commissioner Alan Cunningham departed from Qalandia Airport aboard a private plane for the port of Haifa, from which he sailed to Britain. The British flag was lowered at his former palace in Jabal al-Mukaber and replaced by the flag of the International Red Cross.²¹ Today the building serves as the office of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and as the office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO).

Adjacent to the palace is a garden and large square overlooking the south of Jerusalem. The garden and the square overlook the Old City, Silwan, Ras al-Amud, al-Tur, parts of Abu Dis, Jabal al-Mukaber and some of the western part of Jerusalem.

The Tomb of Abu Thawr: located in an elevated area of Jabal al-Mukaber, the tomb bears the name of a Muslim figure who took part in Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi's liberation of Jerusalem. He died and was buried in Jabal al-Mukaber,²² but his tomb is no longer standing today.

The Arab College in Jerusalem: The British colonial authorities established the Arab College in 1918 near Bab al-Sahira (Herod's Gate) in the Old City. It catered to high school graduates, providing instruction in the arts and natural and education sciences. The College was relocated to Jabal al-Mukaber in 1934, with a large facility on 47 donums of land,²³ and it graduated a number of Jerusalemite notables, including Aref al-Aref and Fakhri Al-Nashashibi. Prior to his departure on May 14, 1948, High Commissioner Alan Cunningham placed the college at the disposal of the Red Cross, though presently, the campus is in the control of the Israeli occupation. Referred to as Kiryat Moriah, the campus includes a faculty of humanities, research center and cafeteria.

In a study conducted under the supervision of Professor Walid Ahmed Sameh Al-Khalidi in 1969, Walid Ragheb Al-Khalidi made an observation regarding the legal status of the area (Jabal al-Mukaber) and the college itself since its placement in the hands of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1948 as part an agreement between the ICRC and the departing British colonial authorities: "...all of Jabal [al-Mukaber] is theoretically a no man's land

²¹ Al-Aref, Aref "The Nakba: The Nakba of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise, 1947-1949." (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2012), 326.

²² Ibid, 225.

²³ Khalidi, Walid Ragheb, "The Arab College of Jerusalem: A Historical Background and a Future Outlook," In Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniya, issue 44, Fall 2000. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000), 7.

and still under the jurisdiction of the United Nations in New York through the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which legally speaking, should entail a tripartite discussion of the fate of that area. In other words, the final negotiations regarding this issue should be conducted with the participation of a United Nations representative, given that the area is considered to be part of the Eastern Jerusalem question and must not be at Israel's disposal in contravention of that."²⁴

Among the accounts noted in Nakba literature about the college is the story of a Jerusalemite by the name of Ahmad Hussein Hermas. During the Battle of Jabal al-Mukaber in May 1948, Hermas endeavored to protect the library of the Arab College from Zionist attempts to seize its contents. In fact, the Zionists did manage to seize a number of valuable manuscripts and books, but Hermas's efforts ultimately succeeded in saving the library, and he was able to transfer 13,007 books to the Arab-held part of Jerusalem. The books were placed in the Rashidiya School building, then known as Rashidiya College, near Bab al-Sahira.²⁵ He also managed to transfer an estimated 100,000 Palestine pounds worth of equipment and tools that had been intended for the construction of additional annexes for the college.

Maqam al-Sheikh Saad: located in al-Sheikh Saad, the maqam (shrine, sanctuary or tomb) includes a mosque, shrine and remnants of an old church. It is believed that there are children's cemeteries in the area, which, according to the villagers, were built near the shrine for no distinct reason.²⁶

Wadi Moqallek: this valley and seasonal stream is located at the northernmost edge of the al-Sawahrah region, bordering the Dead Sea. The valley extends for 30 km, encompassing spectacular geographic features shaped by the natural elements. In addition to the remains of the Byzantine-era Moqallek (Theoctistus) Monastery, the valley contains remnants of mosaic flooring and rock-cut cisterns from that period. Although the valley is located within the West Bank,²⁷ the area is controlled by the Israeli Parks and Nature Authority, which plays its part in the seizure and colonization of land as one instrument working in tandem with a host of Israeli colonial authorities and agencies.

²⁴ See note 23, 8.

²⁵ See note 21, 226.

²⁶ A photograph of the cemetery, the Palestinian Museum Website: <https://bit.ly/2B8EvP0>

²⁷ See note 3.

History of Resistance

Al-Sawahrah and the Great Palestinian Revolt

Due to commander Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini's special relationship with the place and its people, al-Sawahrah was a rebel stronghold during the 1936 Revolt. Many rebels had resorted to the village to evade British forces. Jamil al-Salhut recounts, as told by his parents, that his mother delivered her first baby on the day "al-Beik" was martyred, referring to Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, adding that "this nickname ['al-Beik,' a title of esteem] was given to him by the people of the village at the time, known to be the backbone of al-Jihad al-Muqaddas [Army of the Holy War], led by al-Husseini. They trusted and followed him, and whenever he was hosted in the village, he was a guest in the house of Sheikh Hussein Ibrahim Shuqair, the mukhtar of the Shuqairat clan, and in the house of Hamdan Hassan Sorour, also known as al-Balhidi, an al-Mashahirah clan notable."²⁸ Prior to Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini's martyrdom in battle, he had sent Jamil al-Salhut's father to Damascus to procure weaponry; al-Salhut returned with a half-filled sack of ammunition.²⁹

Al-Sawahrah and the Nakba

The battle of Jabal al-Mukaber

The Palestinian and Arab resistance fighters thwarted multiple Zionist offenses aimed at gaining control of al-Sawahrah, which was coveted for its strategic location overlooking the neighborhoods of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem-Bethlehem-Hebron route.

When the British forces withdrew from Palestine in mid-May 1948, the Zionists informed the international monitoring body that Jabal al-Mukaber had come under their control, warning that Palestinians should not approach the area, claiming that a group of Palestinian fighters had in fact approached it. Indeed, al-Jihad al-Muqaddas fighters had maintained an official presence in Jabal al-Mukaber. Thus, the area was divided among two parties, the Arab fighters positioned in the east and the Zionists in the west.³⁰ Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross maintained control over the areas of the hill containing the Palace of the High Commissioner and the Arab College.

On August 17, 1948, the Zionists launched another offensive to occupy the remainder of the hill, then controlled by Egyptian soldiers of the Arab Salvation Army, who fired from their positions in Talpiot colony and Khirbat Sabha. Following this attempt, the resistance leadership in Sur

²⁸ See note 16, 15.

²⁹ Ibid, 17.

³⁰ See note 21, 255.

Baher, led by Mahmoud Abdo and Jadallah al-Khatib, decided to send a group of 11 al-Jihad al-Muqaddas fighters and six Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated fighters, under the command of first lieutenant Mohammad Jadallah.

The group was stationed in Hawakir Khreisheh, near the Arab College, a strategic location overlooking Jabal al-Mukaber, the Palace of the High Commissioner, al-Sawahrah and al-Obeidiyah to the north and east, Sur Baher to the south, and the colony of Talpiot to the west. The Zionist forces subsequently withdrew to their previous positions.³¹

Following the battle, the Red Cross's jurisdiction was expanded onto Jabal Mukaber, and the area was declared a no man's land, a demilitarized or international zone. Nonetheless, with evident bias from the Truce Supervisory Committee in their favor, the Zionists soon acted as though the area were theirs to control.³²

Jabal al-Mukaber was the first battleground in Jerusalem during the 1967 war. A contingent of the Jordanian army managed to take the "no man's land" on Jabal al-Mukaber, but an Israeli army brigade pushed the Jordanians back and occupied the area.

In more recent years, Jabal al-Mukaber's resistance has persisted. After the relative calm that followed the second Intifada in the West Bank, Jabal al-Mukaber stood out, when in March 2008, Alaa Abu Dhaim fired at a religious school located in Kiryat Moshe colony in occupied Jerusalem, killing eight colonists. The operation came in response to an Israeli military assault on Gaza in late February of the same year that killed 112 Palestinians.³³

In November 2014, Jabal al-Mukaber again made headlines when the martyrs Uday and Ghassan Abu Jamal carried out a shooting and stabbing attack at a synagogue in Har Nof colony in Jerusalem, killing five colonists. The Abu Jamal martyrs were buried in Jabal al-Mukaber, and their funeral procession was attended by hundreds.³⁴

On May 8 during the 2017 al-Quds uprising, the resistance fighter Fadi al-Qanbar from Jabal al-Mukaber, carried out a car ramming in the colony of East Talpiot, killing four Zionist soldiers and wounding dozens of them. Al-Qanbar was martyred, and the Zionist occupation authorities are still detaining his body to this day, in addition to the bodies of 50 martyrs (as of September 2019), as a form of punishment. Also in the way of collective punishment, his two-story home in the Qanbar neighborhood was demolished by the Occupation forces.³⁵

³¹ Jadallah, Mohammad Mahmoud, Me'at Am Men Hayati (100 Years of My Life), edited by Aziz Mahmoud al-Asa. (Jerusalem, 2019), 57.

³² See note 21.

³³ Qawasmī, Hanadi "Jabal al-Mukaber: the town that shook the security of Israel," published on Al-Araby Al-Jadeed website on January 10, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2XmfcvM>

³⁴ "Hundreds Attend the Funeral of the Abu Jamal Martyrs in Jerusalem," published on Al-Araby Al-Jadeed website on December 25, 2012. <https://bit.ly/31d8Yzw>

³⁵ See note 33.

Colonization

Colonies

A number of colonies have been erected on lands belonging to Arab al-Sawahrah. They include Kalia colony, first built in 1929, then destroyed during the 1948 war and rebuilt in 1968 on 955 donums seized from al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah.³⁶ In 1973, 684 donums were confiscated from Jabal al-Mukaber for the construction of East Talpiot colony, also known as Armon HaNetziv. In 1984, another 45 donums were confiscated from al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah and annexed to Kedar colony.³⁷ In 2019, Zionist colonists seized an area of land and erected a colonial outpost in the south of Kedar near the Jabal al-Muntar area in al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah.³⁸

Additionally, Nof Zion was built on 1,886 donums confiscated from Jabal al-Mukaber in 2004.³⁹ In 2019, the Occupation authorities began bulldozing and digging the land, in preparation for the expansion of this colony to include 176 additional housing units.⁴⁰ Upon the conclusion of this project, Nof Zion will become the largest colonial outpost among the neighborhoods of the eastern part of occupied Jerusalem. In the meantime, Ma'ale HaZeitim, located in the heart of the Ras al-Amud neighborhood, is still the largest colonial outpost, housing 106 Zionist settler families.⁴¹

The Annexation and Expansion Wall

The Annexation and Expansion Wall, which cuts through over four kilometers of the area, tore al-Sawahrah in two, an eastern side and a western one.⁴² In addition to the Wall, the resultant military checkpoints have physically fragmented the town, making its people's daily life a harsh ordeal. Illustrative of this is the hindrance of al-Sheikh Saad students, carriers of Palestinian IDs, from reaching their schools in Jabal al-Mukaber as a result of the checkpoint that stands between their homes and schools.

Moreover, the Wall has prevented people living in al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah from burying their loved ones in the Jabal al-Mukaber cemetery beyond the Wall. Access to this cemetery has been restricted to a few bereft families that hold either Jerusalem IDs or work permits. Mayor Yunus

³⁶ "As Sawahira ash Sharqiya Town Profile", Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem / ARIJ, 2012. [As Sawahira ash Sharqiya Town Profile](#)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "A new settlement outpost on Jabal Al-Muntar in Al-Sawahrah Al-Sharqiya," Published on Quds Network on September 15, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2P3fqDF>

³⁹ "Jabal al-Mukaber," on Haqocom website. <http://haqocom.ps/ar/content/%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A8%D8%B1>

⁴⁰ "Nof Zion Settlement Expanded to Become the largest in Eastern Jerusalem." Published on Ultra Palestine, November 28, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2DjJhVO>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See note 36.

Jaafar explains that there is in fact a cemetery in al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah, but that it is a private one and belongs to some families of the area. However, he states that since it is used for burial in exceptional circumstances, such as the burial of martyrs, the people refer to it as the Martyrs Cemetery.

By swallowing arable land and pastures, the Wall has also devastated al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah's main source of income.⁴³

With the completion of the Wall, al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah was isolated from the Old City of occupied Jerusalem and was attached to Bethlehem instead, which, along with Abu Dis and al-Ezariyah, has since become its commercial and medical services hub. Furthermore, the commute to al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah from the Old City, whether by car or bus, has become possible only via a detour through Al-Ezariyah or Abu Dis, and eventually across al-Zayem military checkpoint.

⁴³ Abu Ghaith, Nahil, "In Al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah... the living are outside the wall and the dead are within it," published on Ultrasawt, January 6, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2mM2hE1>



Al-Sheikh Saad Military Checkpoint

In September 2002, the Occupation authorities placed concrete blocks at the entrance to al-Sheikh Saad to separate it from Jabal al-Mukaber. In time, these concrete blocks became a permanent military checkpoint, flanked by towering walls and barbed wire. Cars are strictly denied entry though the checkpoint, and pedestrian access is conditional.

While access from Jabal al-Mukaber to al-Sheikh Saad is often uncomplicated, the opposite route, from al-Sheikh Saad to Jabal al-Mukaber, is accessible only to those who hold Israeli-issued IDs that note their registration as residents of Jabal al-Mukaber, or to those who hold a special Israeli permit that allows them passage, as in the case of a student from al-Sheikh Saad studying at a school in Jabal al-Mukaber, for example. In other words, the people

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of al-Sheikh Saad who hold Palestinian IDs cannot reach the geographically contiguous Jabal al-Mukaber.⁴⁴

Some high school students from al-Sheikh Saad still attend school in Jabal al-Mukaber, since the schools on their side of the Wall do not offer classes for the scientific branch of the Tawjihi (General Secondary Education Certificate Examination system).⁴⁵ Under these circumstances, they endure hardships to traverse the checkpoint on their daily route to school in Jabal al-Mukaber.



Urban Planning Policies

Similar to other towns and villages under the control of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem, Jabal al-Mukaber suffers from poor or altogether nonexistent urban planning strategies to organize expansion in response to natural population growth. Due to the deliberate

⁴⁴ See note 36.

⁴⁵ According to a Sheikh Saad family, during a tour coordinated by the Palestinian Museum on October 11, 2019, as part of a series of visual arts workshops titled “The Tale of al-Sheikh Saad Village.”

restriction on construction licensing, some people are compelled to build without seeking the Occupation authorities' approval. The violation of the pervasive Israeli colonial policies that systematically seek to expel the native Palestinian population, results in these “unlicensed” buildings being demolished by the Occupation forces.⁴⁶ More strikingly, the Occupation authorities classify more than half of the land as “green spaces” and “public parks,” where construction is forbidden. Meanwhile, the area contends with overcrowding and building congestion.

Moreover, the area has become even more densely populated due to the relocation of a considerable part of the al-Sheikh Saad population to Jabal al-Mukaber. This massive influx was directly spurred by the need to preserve “legal” residential status in Jerusalem. Consequently, al-Sheikh Saad has become very sparsely populated, resulting in weak economic and commercial activity. Conversely, Jabal al-Mukaber has become one of the most overcrowded areas. Some Palestinians living in this area have become dependent on the nearby colonies for work, and others rely on commerce, which has seen increased demand due to the large population numbers in relation to availability in Jabal al-Al Mukaber or Jerusalem in general. Al-Sheikh Saad and al-Sawahrah al-Sharqiyah have thus become two geographically disparate areas in terms of their integral links with Jerusalem, and the route between Jerusalem and these areas is stifled by a military checkpoint and entry permits regime.

⁴⁶ See note 36.