

The neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in the Palestinian Territories is at the forefront of the enduring conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Since Israel's independence in 1948, the two sides have been locked in a ceaseless dispute marked by ethnic and religious tensions with no end in sight. In recent years, Israel began intensifying the demolition of homes in the Palestinian territories in its attempt to "Judaize" the region and integrate Israeli settlers. The Israeli government's attempts to evict the residents of Sheikh Jarrah in 2021 escalated toward a nearly full-scale war between the Israelis and Palestinians, leading to the deaths of over 260 Palestinians – 60 of whom were children – and the widespread displacement of numerous families in the Palestinian West Bank. The justification provided by the Israeli government

just two weeks after the protests in Sheikh Jarrah occurred. The cycle of violence en-

expense of Palestinians, of course, but this would undoubtedly be beneficial to Israeli settlers for several reasons.

First and foremost, Jews would gain easier access to their holy sites and would not have to pay any administrative fees set by the Palestinian authorities, giving Israelis both a religious and political advantage to their taking control of Palestinian lands. Secondly, by reducing the amount of land Palestinians control, Israel's sphere of influence would undoubtedly increase throughout the world. They would push back Iran, one of Israel's sworn enemies, who is doing everything in its power to precipitate Palestinian independence. Thirdly, Israel would be able to remove any people or organizations they perceive to be terrorists, which would include Palestinian residents. In order to protest, several Palestinians near Sheikh Jarrah pelt stones at Israeli offices, creating a danger for settlers. Thus, Israeli authorities would argue that their control of these Palestinian lands is purely defensive.

Central to understanding the dynamics at play in Sheikh Jarrah are three prevailing theories. In his pivotal study, Jubeh delves into the strategic manipulation of Sheikh Jarrah by Israeli policies aimed at transforming Jerusalem's demographic makeup. He posits that Sheikh Jarrah is under Israeli occupation and is used by Palestinians as a survival strategy against Israeli encroachment. The Israeli projects in Jerusalem, known as the "Holy Basin," surround holy cities and Palestinian neighborhoods and seek to change the demographics in these areas. By doing so, Israel will have a larger presence in one of the most pivotal and historical cities on the planet. Jubeh argues that the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah are part of a larger plan to turn Jerusalem and its surrounding areas into a Jewish-Israeli city.<sup>1</sup> Although Israel continues to threaten evictions and the destruction of neighborhoods, over 90 percent of the population within the "Holy Basin" project are Palestinian.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the area is of strategic importance to both Palestinians and Israelis because of the vast amount of national and international institutes that reside in the area. The neighborhood houses, among other governments, British, French, and Turkish consulates. The World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and other prominent international organizations had offices in the region as well.<sup>3</sup> Considering that Sheikh Jarrah is essentially an international port, the Palestinians heavily rely on it for resources, employment, and services. Thus, it is of strategic importance for the Israeli government to remove Palestinian control from this neighborhood, undoubtedly increasing their foothold in the region. On the other hand, the Palestinians would suffer a significant loss both economically and humanitarily.

Because of Israeli encroachment into Palestinian territories, Palestinians find themselves facing a generational displacement experience that has placed them into a zone of precarity and hypervigilance, unable to trust attempts for peace due to their

---

1 Nazmi Jubeh, "Shaykh Jarrah: A Struggle for Survival,"

harsh history.<sup>4</sup> The 1993 Oslo Accords, although initially promising, was a failed attempt to bring peace to the Palestinians as they witnessed a massive increase in illegal settlements in their areas. The common Palestinian simply saw the peace process as pushing the national security interests of both Israel and the United States, feeling disillusioned and abandoned.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the U.S. Embassy for Israel was symbolically relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, signaling increased American support for Israel's policies.<sup>6</sup> The common Palestinian, therefore, does not have much hope for any agreements to be made in their favor.

This collective history of failed peace has propelled Palestinians to put matters into their own hands by actively opposing what they see as Israeli occupation. They view neighborhoods such as Sheikh Jarrah as their only homes and a symbol of resistance against oppressive forces. Naturally, then, it is a survival strategy for the Palestinians to resist Israeli oppression because they have no other home. As Brown states in her article, many Palestinians live a precarious lifestyle, not knowing whether their home will be demolished tomorrow, or if a Molotov cocktail will be thrown at them by proponents of the Israeli government.<sup>7</sup>





transform Jerusalem into a Jewish-Israeli city. Before Israel was founded, in 1901, the 5th Zionist Congress founded the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and began purchasing lands in Palestine. Their purpose is to “promote the interests of Jews in the prescribed region” and restrict its land offerings “whether directly or indirectly, to those of Jewish race or descendency.”<sup>17</sup> Once Israel officially became a state in 1948, it was stipulated that any properties purchased can be transferred to the government, highlighting how Israeli public organizations actively work with the Israeli government to collude against the Palestinians. The Nakba – or catastrophe – in 1947-48 involved Israeli forces conducting the massacres of approximately 5,000 Palestinians and the razing of over 500 villages.<sup>18</sup> To cover the crimes, the JNF began land transfers to the Jewish people, eventually being given to the Israeli state, thus beginning a mass process of displacement under a religious and political pretext.

continuing with the apartheid-like policies it has been pursuing.

By ethnically cleansing Palestinians, they would be pushing against rivals like Iran and their attempts of pushing for Palestinian self-determination. Additionally, the theory fails to recognize the fragile, corrupt power of the Palestinian government that allows violence against the Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah to occur. The scholars mention that Palestinians lack any meaningful representation to fight the Israeli government, but fail to mention why this is the case. The Palestinian authorities have been met with internal political feuds, corruption, nepotism, mismanagement, and numerous other factors that have decreased their effectiveness. Israel takes advantage of this political weakness by committing fagrant ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians.

Furthermore, some scholars refuse to acknowledge that religion has any role in this conflict. Although they mention it in their scholarly writing, they insist that this issue in Sheikh w therfĐ us ý eÁ



struggles, it is in Israel's best interests to maintain the status quo they have created and prevent the Palestinians from gaining more power. Giving the Palestinians more power would certainly reduce Israel's legitimacy and global power status in the world, giving adversaries like Iran a moral victory. As such, Israel considers global power struggles, too, in this urban issue, highlighting the complexities of this seemingly small neighborhood.