

Raising Awareness

Tourist locations occupied post 1967 by Israel

Alternative Tourism Group -Study Centre

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Introduction

Tourism is an important factor in Palestinian society, as it comprises 13% of the GDP of the country; one can claim that the wellbeing of hundreds of families is earned from tourism. The Palestinian Authority, represented by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, relies greatly on tourism to promote the Palestinian situation. This reliance on tourism, whether touristic, religious, or even political, and the number of visitors coming to Palestine, is a difficult issue to control, due to the severely limited control the PA has over its borders. Moreover, due to the political situation, and the constant land grab by Israel, Palestine is losing a great deal of its natural resources, such as water, but it is also losing tourist sites, that would benefit the Palestinian economy, should the Palestinians have control over them. Needless to say, any given government works hard, and provides a great deal of financial assistance and subsidies to tourist sites, in order to see a financial return from that assistance to the country, but again, due to the financial difficulties imposed on the PA by the Occupation, Palestine can hardly afford to pay salaries, let alone maintain tourist sites or improve them.

This is an eye opening paper as to some of the locations occupied by Israel, based on criteria that will be further developed within this research. It will look into sites in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. Jerusalem is an occupied city, separated into East and West. West Jerusalem has been predominantly settled by Israelis and East Jerusalem is the Arab side of town. Despite the fact that East Jerusalem is the most visited area in Palestine tourist-wise, due to the presence of religious sites such as the Via Dolorosa, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, permission is required for Palestinians living in the West Bank to access the area, and much difficulty is imposed on Palestinians living in the area of East Jerusalem.

According to the Oslo Accords, the West Bank has been divided into different Areas: A, B and C. Area A is under the full civil and security control of the PA. Area B is under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control. Area C is under full Israeli civil and security control. It is not controversial to say that the Israeli government does not even respect the terms of the Oslo Accords, and has nevertheless managed to make use of some of the tourist locations on Palestinian land to its advantage, either by imposing entrance fees, proclaiming those sites as Israeli National Parks, or building a settlement around those sites. This is also the case in the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

Main Body

The potential contribution that tourism could make to the Palestinian economy is staggering. Unfortunately, the tourism market in the Occupied West Bank (along with many other industries) is undeveloped, largely due to Israel's occupation of the territory. There is an abundance of locations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem that could generate revenue for the Palestinian economy, but they are instead controlled by the State of Israel, which has engaged in several activities in the West Bank that are illegal according to International Law, such as confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction of settlements and the Illegal Apartheid wall, as ruled by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). "Through the occupation, Israel creates exclusionary mechanisms and profits at the cost of the Palestinians, and, thus, virtually appropriates what is not its entitlement" explains Rami Kassis, director of the ATG.

More importantly for our purposes, however, Israel has claimed many sites of historical significance and natural beauty within the West Bank for itself, even going so far as to label some of them 'Israeli National Parks.' "Israel employs a whole gamut of unfair trade practices to deprive the Palestinians of their rightful share of revenues. For, after all, a large number of the historical and religious sites for the pilgrim, ordinary tourists, study groups, and solidarity activists, are in Palestinian areas." ¹

It is arguable that the designation as national parks of some areas in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the northern part of the country, is indicative of the Israeli government's intention to eventually confiscate all of the West Bank (how brazen it is - for any country - to create a national park located outside its national borders!). This being the case (with all its potential implications) and the fact that Israel should not be monetarily benefiting from tourist sites in the West Bank, it is logical to raise awareness as to those locations so tourists know that the money they are paying for entrance fees, is lost revenue for the Palestinians, and gained profit to the occupying country.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is the "caretaker of the land of Israel on behalf of its owners- the Jewish people everywhere". In other words, one may argue that the Israeli government, and especially the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the governmental body that manages the national parks in Israel, is working for the JNF. The JNF is said to be a non-governmental body, although initiated and started by Theodor Herzl. Its role, other than financially funding projects that serve the State of Israel, is to evict Palestinians from their homes. According to Yosef Weitz, former director of JNF: "the complete

¹ Alternative Tourism Journal "Lost Revenue from Tourism to the Palestinian Economy" ATG-Study Center

eviction of the country from its other inhabitants and handing it over to the Jewish people is the answer”²

As stated on the JNF website “Over the past 109 years, JNF has evolved into a global environmental leader by planting 250 million trees, building over 210 reservoirs and dams, developing over 250,000 acres of land, creating more than 1,000 parks, providing the infrastructure for over 1,000 communities, bringing life to the Negev Desert and educating students around the world about Israel and the environment”.³ To the casual reader, this information sounds very promising and environmentally friendly, but on the ground this translates as Palestinian homes and lands demolished and stolen, and people evicted in order for the JNF to proceed with its work, under the protective eye of the government.

Powerful as it is, the JNF is an active arm of the Israel government, and has been the leading force pushing for acceptance of the Praver Plan⁴, which aims at kicking Bedouins out of the land in the Negev. It is with this mentality that Israel takes land from Palestinians and uses it for its own benefit.

“The Knesset’s decision to move forward with the Praver Plan supports the plans of the JNF, which owns 13 percent of the land and explicitly only allocates it to Jews. The JNF is also currently engaged in a \$4 billion "Blueprint Negev" project to ensure that the area has a majority Jewish population. The plan includes economic development projects that seek to attract young Jewish Israelis and Jewish westerners to move to the Negev. Despite the centuries that Bedouin people have been living there, ethnic/religious identity alone is being used as a criterion for who has access to the land”.⁵ Racist as it is, the Praver plan has not yet passed fully into law, fortunately for the Bedouins, but it shows how powerful the JNF is to let the Knesset work for it. Its progress in the Knesset has been delayed, and Minister of Agriculture Yair Shamir has replaced Benny Begin at its head, thereby boding ill for the Bedouins, since he has a far worse reputation and attitude than Begin.

The intentions of this research should be made clear. Simply put, it is an attempt to raise the awareness of visitors to what the Israeli government is doing towards the Palestinians. It is also a means to pressure Israel into recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people and to discontinue its illegal activities in the Occupied Territories, specifically its possession of tourist sites located outside its own internationally recognized borders. By raising awareness towards those sites, one would hope that the international community

² <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2009/land-day-2009-and-bds-global-week-of-action-against-the-crisis-and-war-351>

³ <http://www.jnf.org/about-jnf/>

⁴ <http://adalah.org/eng/Articles/1589/Demolition-and-Eviction-of-Bedouin-Citizens-of-in-->

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-alissa-wise/praver-plan_b_3438201.html

can pressure Israel not to force its occupation on those sites, and hopefully minimize the financial benefits that Israel gains from those sites.

It is important to emphasize that this research does not extend to sites found within Israel's pre-1967 borders; it is merely an effort to raise awareness on this issue and perhaps that the international community will pressure Israel to stop overstepping its bounds and accept its own legal limitations. To summarise: the Palestinian economy should be benefiting from these sites, but instead, Israel's does. Relinquishing its control of tourist sites in the Occupied Territories would go a long way towards assisting the development of the Palestinian tourism market and the economy as a whole, so it is of critical importance to give Israel an incentive to do so. A large-scale campaign such as this has been effective in past cases, such as ending the apartheid era in South Africa. History has shown that an international campaign can, in fact, assist greatly in the fight for equal rights, so it should also be viewed as a viable option for the contemporary Palestinian issue.

This paper will concentrate on locations eligible for the conditions mentioned below, and based on initial research; we have cited over 32 main locations, 10 in Jerusalem, 15 in the West Bank, and seven in the Golan Heights. However, taking into consideration the limitations faced during the research, there may be more locations to which this research will not refer.

Most important of these locations are the “City of David” archaeological park in Jerusalem, Qumran National Park and Herodion in the West Bank, and Nimrod Fortress in the Golan Heights.

The first requirement for inclusion in the study has been that the site must be located outside Israel's pre-1967 borders. Such areas include the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Second: it must be Israeli-controlled. Third: a visitor must pay a fee to gain entrance to the site. Next to those criteria, one must refer to the sites located inside colonies in the West Bank. Palestinians, unless a permit has been obtained in advance from the Israeli government, are not allowed to enter colonies, sites located inside a colony or on the outskirts of one, due to the presence of security checkpoints which deny Palestinians entry. Thus, paying a fee is not necessarily a criterion for those sites inside colonies, as a Palestinian ID card might be the “fee” or “fine” for non-entry.

Since 1967, specifically after the Six Day War, Israel re-occupied the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Having done so, everything was under their occupation until the signing of the Oslo Accords and arrival of the Palestinian Authority. Before that, Palestine was under civil administration by the Israeli government. When the PA was set up, as a result of the Oslo Accords, Palestine and more specifically the West

Bank was divided into 3 main zones, Areas A, B and C. Jerusalem and the Golan Heights remained under full Israeli control.

There are diverse reasons why most sites that this research has looked into are still under Israeli control or have been transformed into Israeli National Parks. They are not only financial reasons.

Israel has a known history for changing events and facts and re-shaping or re-framing history. By claiming a site in the West Bank, not only has Israel confiscated and stolen more Palestinian land, but it has also re-written the story about those locations.

Jerusalem, the capital city of Palestine, is arguably the holiest place in the world. For Christians, Jerusalem houses, amongst many other Christian sites, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus was resurrected after his burial. To Muslims, Jerusalem houses the third holiest place in Islam, Al-Aqsa Mosque/Dome of the Rock. As for Judaism, the Western Wall is arguably the most sacred of places within Jerusalem or world Jewry.

Jerusalem is an occupied city, like many other cities in Palestine. Palestinians living in the West Bank must obtain permission from the Israeli government to enter, work, pray or live in it. Obtaining those permits is a highly sophisticated procedure, as one may be denied permission, for no specific reason, and at many times, a reason is not given. For Palestinians, Muslim and Christian alike, Jerusalem is not only a city where one can go and enjoy the nice atmosphere, but it is also a religious city, where many Palestinians wish to practice their religious rituals and beliefs. Needless to say, there is no presence whatsoever of any Palestinian governmental bodies in the city, except for some charitable or humanitarian organizations or initiatives which care for the city, or people and their well-being.

It also goes without saying that due to the absence of a Palestinian governmental body, Israel controls both the west and east side of Jerusalem. As one may imagine, due to the reasons mentioned above, Jerusalem has a high number of tourist attractions and receives a high number of tourists per year. Those tourists, whether local or international, wish to visit the religious sites of the city. Needless to say, those sites are all controlled by Israel, physically and financially, and they control the story, and are the only beneficiaries of the financial aspect, and the political aspect, as they get to tell their own story.

All sites presented here are more or less claiming Jewish presence, history and identity in order to keep the Jewish prerogative over the land. Jerusalem, as the proclaimed capital of Israel, has not proved one single fact of Jewish identity. There are no remains or proof of the temple of Solomon nor is there any legitimate proof of Jewish religious practice or anything that can be related to it. Nevertheless, Israelis are forcing or forging the authenticity present underground and under “buildings” by referring to the vaults and tunnels of the City of David.

As an example, this research will go in depth into explaining the case of the “City of David”. It will explain the historical background to it, and its consequences and effects on Jerusalemite society.

The City of David's Archaeological Park

Entrances fees: 29 Adults, 23 Students, 15 Youth and senior Israeli citizens,
Free for soldiers.

60 NIS guided tours

Visitors: around 450,000 a year.

The city of David is the Israeli name for an ancient core of settlement in Jerusalem dating back to the Bronze Age, which is now a major archaeological site, considered by many as one of the most important archaeological sites in all Jerusalem. It annually draws hundreds of thousands of Israelis and foreigners over the Green Line into the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan.

Located just outside the walls in the centre of Jerusalem, right next to the Dome of the Rock, and the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan.



“The village of Silwan, in East Jerusalem, contains the remains of the most ancient part of Jerusalem, often termed “The City of David”. In recent years the excavation and presentation of the archaeology of Silwan has been placed in the hands of a Jewish settler NGO, whose incorporation of the site into the Jewish Israeli narrative is multi-faceted — mixing religious nationalism with theme-park tourism. As a result, conflict with local Palestinians occurs at the very basic level of existence, where the past is used to disenfranchise and displace people (there have even been killings) in the present. The volatile mix of history, religion and politics in the City of David/Silwan threatens any future reconciliation in Jerusalem, which must be based on the empowerment of local

people and adoption of a pro-active, inclusive archaeological stance in which the many voices of the past are heard.⁶

The City of David has been classified as a National Park since the early 1970s. Yet since 1997, the settler organization El'ad - meaning "toward the city of David" in Hebrew, is supervising the park, while the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority's daily involvement with the site is minimal. El'ad, as mentioned above, is a Jewish settler NGO, privately driven by a right-wing ideology whose aim is to settle Jews in East Jerusalem, specifically Silwan neighbourhood. It is the operating hand that controls the park, provides the materials, signs and attractions and the fees collected at the entrance, and from guided tours and the gift shop, go to them. El'ad funds the majority of the archaeological excavation in and around the city, thanks to the charitable donations it receives. Although it refuses to publish the names of its sponsors and donors, it has a wall of fame for donors at the Hezekiah's Tunnel found under the city, and inside the City of David Visitors' Centre. This is done to encourage other people to sponsor these excavations, and a few empty spots have been left for people who wish to donate.

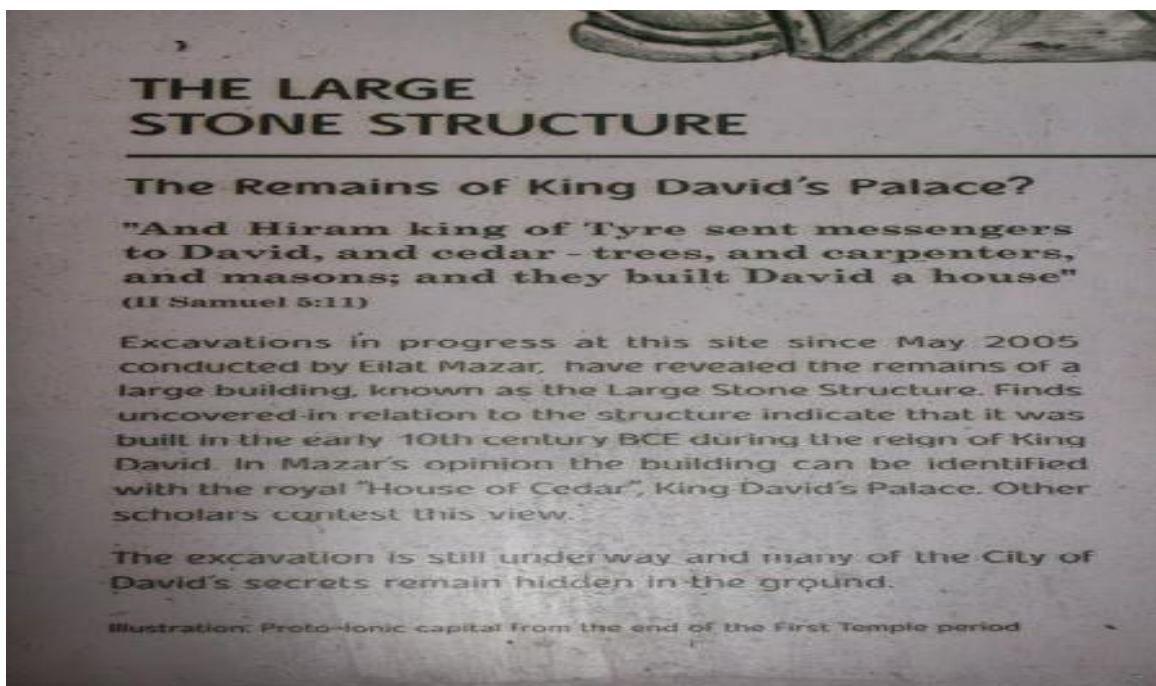


⁶ Towards an Inclusive Archaeology in Jerusalem: The Case of Silwan/The City of David by Raphael Greenberg, Tel Aviv University

As part of the fun attraction at the tunnel, school trips and summer camp groups are constant at the location. The idea of going with a flash light into a tunnel with water up to 70 cm in depth is fun. However, because they are this close to “Palestinians” in Silwan, those trips are accompanied by armed gunmen.



There is not enough evidence to assure whether or not the site actually was that of David’s Palace. However, as the sign below shows: “Other Scholars contest this View”. There is of course dubious information written on signs about the findings. As one may find in these long explanations about the excavations as found below, there is no real interpretation about the “other scholars’ views who contest the written view”.



The tours offered at the park (guided by Jewish Israeli guides) are either conducted in English, Hebrew, French or Russian, as are most of the signs present on site. There is not enough information to assure whether the site actually was that of David's city, but El'ad has created an image of strong connection to Jewish History alone. Although David was also a prophet, in the view of Isla, Arab and Islamic interest is completely ignored during the tour, with minimal mention of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the excavations taking place under it.



The tour passes through the neighbourhood of Silwan, and when walking through the village, two Palestinian children walked by, as there is a children's activity centre right next to the visitor's centre: one tourist asked about the safety of the area, and the guide answered that it is safe enough due to the armed men and the security fence around the visitor's centre.



To the people of Silwan the park affects their daily life, as they are constantly threatened by house demolitions. El'ad's plan is to extend the park until it reaches the Kidron Valley. In order to do so, an increasing number of demolition orders have been issued for Silwan's houses that have been constructed without a permit from the Israeli authorities as hardly any are ever given to Palestinians in East Jerusalem as a mechanism to force them out of the city and prevent expansion. Silwan is always harassed by settlers accompanied by soldiers, and today more than 70 settler families have settled in Silwan, and are forcing Palestinian families out. Soldiers, Border Police, General State Security officials ("Shabbak") and private security guards are always present in the area, as well as the various fences and the ubiquitous security cameras.

In Jerusalem alone, there are many sites that Israel controls and from which it profits financially. Not only that, but the Israeli government, in order to limit Palestinian profits in Jerusalem, banned development of Palestinian infrastructure and enterprises. For example, Palestinian owned hotels are not allowed to expand and increase the numbers of rooms in their hotels. By doing so, Israel is forcing agencies and tourist operators to use Israeli hotels in high season when all Palestinian hotels are fully booked, meaning an increase in the income of the Israeli hotels. "The development of tourist sites, particularly in Area C, is actively prevented by Israeli authorities" ⁷

⁷ Lost Revenue from Tourism to the Palestinian Economy, ATG, Pg. 16.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the sites about which we are raising awareness have all been taken by force from the Palestinians, have been occupied and are now used for the benefit of Israel. Many of those sites either carry a political dimension, or a religious one. For Palestinians, those sites represent more than just financial income: for them, they are places of worship. The financial return that the Israeli government achieves from those sites is immense, reaching millions of dollars. Moreover, the quieter we continue to be about such locations and such ways of dealing with religious sites, the more the Israeli government will continue to steal land, re-shape history and profit financially.