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Subject: Demolitions in Wadi Yasul Symbolize Politically Motivated Discrimination in Planning
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Demolitions in Wadi Yasul Symbolize Politically Motivated Discrimination in Planning

April 17, 2019

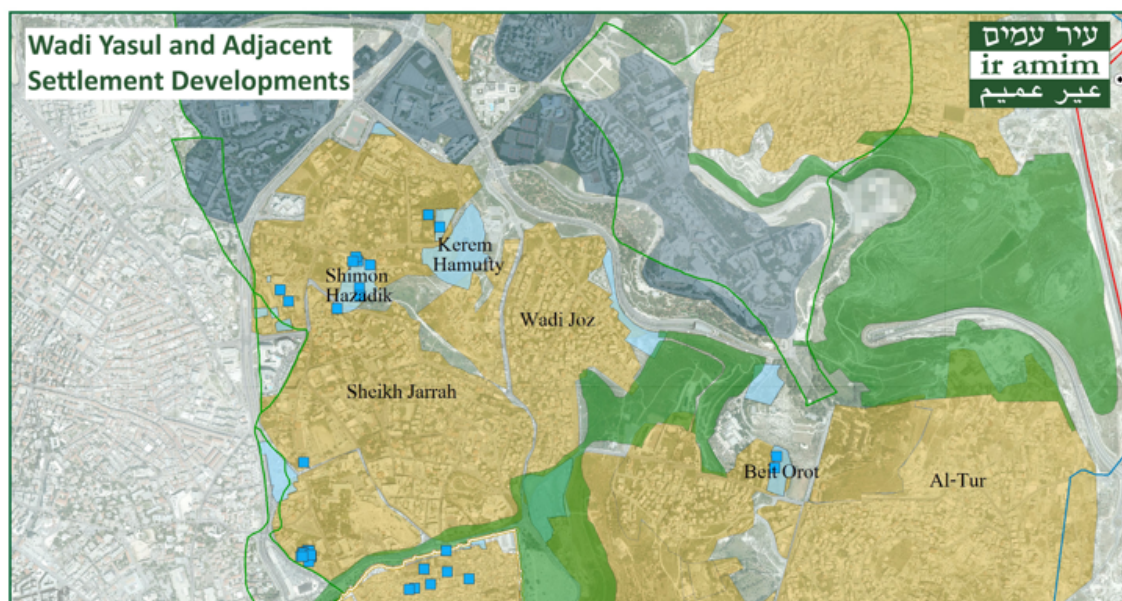
Early this morning Israeli authorities entered the Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Yasul in East Jerusalem, demolishing a horse stable and a warehouse. The demolitions come just days after the latest in a series of court decisions that put the neighborhood – located between Abu Tor and the settlement of Nof Tzion in Jabel Mukaber – at risk of wide scale demolitions. Some 500 residents stand to be affected.

On March 31, the Jerusalem District Court dismissed three demolition appeals submitted by neighborhood residents. Last Saturday, April 13, the Supreme Court denied a lawyer's request to appeal the decision, resulting in the issuance of three demolition orders that went into effect the following day. An additional 63 cases in the Jerusalem Magistrate Court have been suspended pending the District Court's decision. The Court's dismissal of the appeals and the subsequent issuance of demolition orders signal the likelihood that a swath of homes in the neighborhood will soon become vulnerable to demolition.

Wadi Yasul is situated on one end of an arc of Palestinian spaces that are the focus of intensifying state sponsored and private settlement activities (denoted by square blue dots on map below):

The community of Wadi Yasul (see southern edge of map) is located inside the Jerusalem **Peace Forest** (Ya'ar Shalom). Because the neighborhood was built on land designated as forestland, any construction within it is deemed illegal. This constraint does not apply to projects being advanced by the Elad settler organization inside the Peace Forest (see map), where it is now working to get an illegally permitted touristic settlement project retroactively legalized.

At the end of March, Ir Amim reported that Elad had resumed efforts to develop a major new tourist attraction: a zip line park that would run between Armon Hanatsiv (East Talpiot) and the Peace Forest. Several years ago, Elad erected an unpermitted lodging site in the forest. On March 25, the District Planning and Building Committee convened to override the master plan for forests with a master plan for the Old City Basin from the 1970s that designates the area as open public space, with the intention of enabling the legal issuance of building permits for Elad's illegitimately permitted zip line. The request was submitted by the Jerusalem Municipality, creating the appearance that the project is being promoted as a municipal initiative. Elad has leased several dunams of land from the Israel Land Authority without tender and over the years has continued to build illegally in the forest without challenge.





North of the Peace Forest, Elad recently opened a restaurant and visitor's center in **At-Thuri**, where the Municipality and Jerusalem Development Authority intend to construct a pedestrian bridge connecting the two Palestinian areas of **Wadi Rebabe and Wadi Hilweh** (see map). The bridge represents another link in the chain of settlement compounds and touristic settlement sites creating a band of Israeli contiguity around the Old City Basin. Work began on the bridge in early 2018 despite the Local Planning and Building Committee having approved the building permit for the bridge without a detailed plan and without publication in May 2017. Although an appeal against the permit filed by Peace Now was rejected, construction has thus far been suspended.

Wadi Hilweh, Silwan has been the locus of Elad activity for the past three decades, during which it has taken over roughly 75 Palestinian homes. The settler group substantially consolidated its hold in the 1990s, when the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) privatized daily management of the City of David National Park to Elad. The archeological site sits just across the street from the Old City Walls and draws a purported half a million visitors every year, providing a platform for Elad to impose an exclusive, right wing Jewish narrative onto archeological digs embedded inside a Palestinian neighborhood.

Recent developments reveal the wide spectrum of state support Elad enjoys and its multi-level strategy to secure control of Silwan on the ground, above it, and below it:

- In November 2018 the Knesset passed **Amendment 17 to the National Parks, Nature Reserves and Memorial Sites Law**, specifically designed to enable Elad to expand its settlement in Wadi Hilweh by reversing a long-standing prohibition against residential construction inside national parks. The Jerusalem Development Authority has now hired planners to design a new master plan for parts of Silwan, including Wadi Hilweh, that will potentially open the floodgates to new settlement construction there.
- This week the National Infrastructures Committee (NIC) heard objections on National Infrastructure Plan No. 86 for a **cable car** that would run from the refurbished Ottoman-era train station complex ("The First Station") in West Jerusalem to the roof of the planned Kedem Compound in Silwan, a massive state-of-the art visitor center and future Elad headquarters. In May 2018 the government approved 200 million shekels to build the cable car; the plan has since been fast tracked through the NIC, circumventing the traditional planning process in an attempt to stifle public objections. Represented by authorities as a public transportation project to facilitate access to the Western Wall and Old City, the cable car will channel thousands of people a day over an invisible Green Line to the epicenter of Elad's touristic settlement operations.
- Work is ongoing to complete the **Pilgrims' Way Tunnel**, a vast excavation project under Wadi Hilweh that will link the Shiloach Pool (Pool of Siloam) to the Kedem Compound. The tunnel passes at a depth of three to four meters under the homes of Palestinian residents. Many of the buildings along its route have been compromised and several of them evacuated due to structural damage caused by construction of the tunnel. Despite these concerns and strong criticism from high-ranking officials in the Israeli Antiquities Authority regarding safety standards and scientific

procedure, Israeli authorities have refused to halt the Elad run dig.

Just one month into the second quarter of 2019, there have already been 53 demolitions in East Jerusalem, including the destruction of 35 homes. Twenty of those demolitions (as compared to a 2018 year-end total of 23) are categorized as “self demolitions,” a designation for cases in which Palestinians demolish their own property in order to avoid steep fines from the Municipality. In Wadi Yasul, demolitions are being executed based on the grounds of illegal construction. The scope of settlement projects in the vicinity of Wadi Yasul – and the breadth and depth of state support awarded to Elad, including authorities’ overt efforts to retroactively legalize unpermitted building – illuminate the stark discrimination in planning that empowers the expansion of radical settlement inside Palestinian neighborhoods while putting their native residents at risk of displacement.

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