



We're building a world where Palestine is liberated and all are free

Jerusalem, known as Al-Quds in its original Arabic, is an internationally renowned city, rich with over a millennium of documented history. Of course, Jerusalem has become known for its religious significance to all major monotheistic religions. The city boasts a diverse history as it has been home to people of many different religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Beyond its divine history and importance, Jerusalem is a beautiful city filled with both ancient and contemporary architecture, mountains and valleys that create a stunning landscape. One of the most recognizable pieces of Jerusalem is the city's ancient walls which surround the Old City. The Old City of Jerusalem is approximately 900 dunams (220 acres), which is less than 1% of the total city area. The Walls of the Old City are mentioned in maps as old 1500 years. They have been rebuilt many times due to deterioration caused by a variety of reasons, including human-caused destruction and natural disasters. The walls were most recently rebuilt in the 16th century under Ottoman rule, as ordered by Sultan Suleiman. Inside these walls, Palestinians primarily make up the residents of this city, though illegal, Jewish-only settlements have continued to steadily grow, forcibly displacing Palestinian families who've lived in Jerusalem for generations. Despite this, the resilient Palestinian spirit is still on display as shopkeepers sell souvenirs, fresh produce, and trinkets along the Old City's historical stone pathways which eventually lead to the Dome of the Rock and other religious sites. Most recently, however, many of these shops have remained closed as tourism has come to a standstill.

Prior to the Israeli occupation, which began in 1967 in Jerusalem, the city had a history of welcoming pilgrims and refugees, which accounts for its diversity. Post-1967, the gates of the Old City, which remained open as a symbol of welcome, closed. Re-opening the gate became conditional under forcibly established Israeli

authorities, who ignored the fact that Jerusalem was supposed to be an international city until justice could be mediated. Palestinian citizens who fled for their safety in 1967 were prohibited from returning by Occupation Forces. Even for Palestinians who stayed, however, residential status is made deliberately vulnerable. Palestinians who are born in Jerusalem today are not granted any kind of citizenship, unlike Jewish Israelis. Instead, Palestinians are given residency cards with harsh conditions which are applied only to Palestinians. To learn more about this, check out the interview below with Sheikh Mousa Qous, Executive Director of the African Community Society, based in Jerusalem.

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## A CONVERSATION WITH SHEIKH MOUSA QOUS FROM JERUSALEM, PALESTINE



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By Moureen Kaki

*As Executive Director of the African Community Society, Sheikh Mousa Qous's knowledge on the history of Afro-Palestinians is expansive and distorts many myths told about the history of Palestinian Jerusalemites with African descent. Like many Black Palestinians, Sheikh Mousa was born in Jerusalem as a descendant of pilgrims who settled in Jerusalem. Conservative estimates put the Afro-Palestinian population numbers between 350-400 in Jerusalem. Most of them, Sheikh Mousa says, can trace their ancestors to four African countries: Chad, Nigeria, Sudan, and Senegal. According to Sheikh Mousa, most Afro-Palestinians either ended up in Palestine for religious or humanitarian reasons.*

*"Most [migrated to Palestine] for religious reasons. After performing pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, many of them also come to perform pilgrimage in Jerusalem. If they go back to their countries of origin, this pilgrimage gives them higher status in society, because they visited and prayed at the holiest sites of Islam. Some decided to stay in Jerusalem." He goes on, "some [Africans] came to Palestine for humanitarian reasons.*

*They came to help Palestinians by joining Arab forces to fight for the liberation of Palestinian lands that were taken by Zionists.”*

*Today, Jerusalemite Afro-Palestinians live predominately in a part of the Old City that has become known as the African Quarter. Naturally, this part of the Old City is also filled with a rich history. What is known as the African Quarter today was originally built by the Mamluk Empire, which ruled Palestine in the 13th century. The quarter was intended to house the impoverished and pilgrims who needed shelter while carrying out religious duties in Jerusalem, according to Sheikh Mousa. He goes on to explain that towards the end of Ottoman Empire's reign in Palestine, the Ottomans decided to convert the compound into a prison, which was later shut down under British colonial rule. Sheikh Mousa says that because of where Black Palestinians are situated in Jerusalem, they are often at the forefront of attacks by illegal Jewish settlers. Despite being targeted by settlers and Occupation Forces, Afro-Palestinians continue to resist and live their lives as proud Palestinians. Yet, often when people ask the Occupation Forces that loom in the Old City about where the Afro-Palestinian quarter is, they are told that such a quarter does not exist. Sheikh Mousa chalks this up to a denialist attitude about Palestinians in general. “Of course we exist, and we are Palestinian,” he says.*

*Settler attacks sanctioned by Occupation Forces are just one of the many concerns plaguing Afro-Palestinians. Sheikh Mousa explained that 76% of Palestinians in Jerusalem live below the poverty line. Many rely on tourism-based business, which fluctuates dramatically depending on the situation in Palestine. Currently, there is limited economic opportunity as tourism has come to a sudden and lasting standstill. Additionally, residency status of Palestinians born in Jerusalem is precarious. Leaving Jerusalem to find supplemental work is not an option. Despite the fact that Israel illegally proclaims Jerusalem as its capitol and grants citizenship to Jewish inhabitants of the city, including illegal settlers, Palestinians born in Jerusalem are instead given a blue residency card with many unfair conditions.*

*Sheikh Mousa explains, “if Palestinians move to another part of the West Bank [or anywhere outside of Jerusalem] for more than seven years, they might lose their residency right in Jerusalem. His identity card would be confiscated and he would be unable to return to Jerusalem, which is another way to limit or to decrease the Arab population of Jerusalem.” This isn’t the only condition disproportionately applied to Palestinians, however. Palestinian Jerusalemites are also at risk of having their residency card revoked if they cannot prove that their “center of life” is in Jerusalem, meaning Jerusalem is where they work, pay bills, their children attend school, and other conditions. This is an increasingly difficult burden on Palestinians as they are priced out of Jerusalem by colonial gentrification.*

*Nonetheless, Sheikh Mousa has hope. In his role as Executive Director of the African Community Society in Jerusalem (ACS), he facilitates work that uplifts and supports Palestinians, no matter their race or religion. ACS was established in 1983 and continues its work in Jerusalem today by supporting and strengthening the most vulnerable in the community, including women and children. They offer projects that focus helping women improve their lives by gaining access to economic opportunities. Some of their other projects include supporting youth through positive outlets, including athletic clubs and summer camps. You can [learn more about their work here on their website.](#)*



To hear more from Sheikh Mousa and others in Jerusalem, check out Eyewitness Palestine's upcoming Live from Jerusalem webinar happening later this month, on Saturday, January 24th at 11AM ET. Sheikh Mousa will be joined by Eyewitness Palestine Board Member, Khaled Farrag, who will take us on a virtual tour of Jerusalem that you don't want to miss! Register at the link below.



**WEBINAR**

11 am ET  
Saturday Feb 24th

# LIVE FROM JERUSALEM

**JOIN US FOR A DISCUSSION ON LIFE IN JERUSALEM AS WELL AS A VIRTUAL TOUR OF THE HOLY CITY**

Featuring



Khaled Farrag  
Eyewitness Palestine



Sheikh Mousa Qous  
Executive Director  
Afro Palestinian Society

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Participation is free. Link in Bio.



Scan QR to Register



REGISTER FOR THE LIVE FROM JERUSALEM EVENT HERE

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Please continue to support Eyewitness Palestine's efforts by donating, as we navigate through these dark times in order to educate, facilitate and collaborate!

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## VISIT JERUSALEM

When you're ready to visit Jerusalem, Palestine, make sure to check out these attractions, recommended by Eyewitness Palestine Staff!



### Al-Aqsa Compound

Al-Aqsa Compound is a globally-recognizable holy site in Jerusalem. Contrary to popular belief, the Dome of the Rock is not the Al-Aqsa mosque, but a feature of the entire compound. Al-Aqsa refers to everything within the walls of the compound. It is located in the Old City at the terminal point of the Prophet Muhammad's Isra journey. According to the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammed was miraculously transported one night from Mecca to this site in Jerusalem. On that spot, he led Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other messengers in ritual prayer. That same night, he was taken up to heaven from the Dome of the Rock for an encounter with God.



### Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives—or “Jabal a-Zaytoun” in Arabic—is a multi-summit limestone ridge east of the Old City of Jerusalem. It is frequently mentioned in religious literature and is considered holy in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. From at least the 4th century CE, Christian monuments have been built at the Mount of Olives. A joint mosque and Christian chapel exist over the spot where many Christians and Muslims believe Jesus ascended to heaven. After the colonization of Palestine began in the early 20th century and following the Nakba (or “Catastrophe,” referring to the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians from their land), Zionists forced control of a portion of the Mount of Olives. The entirety of the summit came under Israeli control following Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank which began in 1967.



### Abu Shukri Restaurant

With only five tables, Abu Shukri's restaurant can get a little tight, but you won't notice the small size once you take a bite of Abu Shukri's falafel. The restaurant has been a staple for residents and enjoyed by tourists for decades. Abu Shukri's father opened the small shop 83 years ago. Abu Shukri took over the restaurant from his father over 30 years ago. The menu is small and focused, serving traditional Palestinian breakfast staples, including falafel, fuul (fava bean dip), and hummus. All of this goes well with ka'ak, a popular sourdough bread native to Al-Quds that is considered to be the oldest continually made "bagel" in the world. Grab some ka'ak at the Gates of Damascus to enjoy with your falafel like a traditional Jerusalemite Palestinian.

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## LEARN MORE ABOUT JERUSALEM

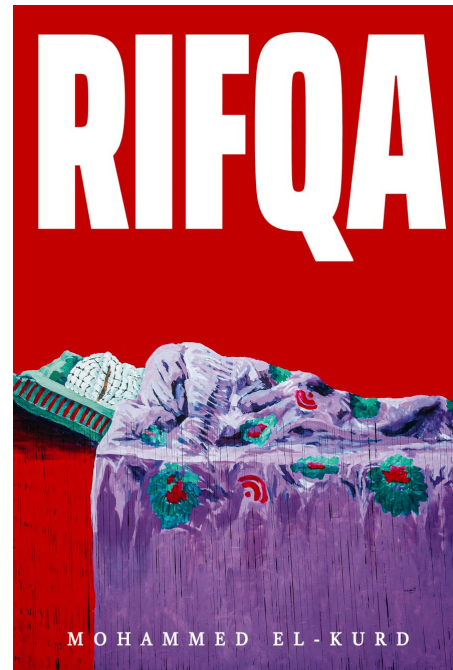


### Recommended Watch: *One Night in Al-Aqsa*

**About the film:** Discover the awe-inspiring story of the Al Aqsa Compound in Jerusalem, set against the backdrop of the holiest night in the Islamic calendar. Al Aqsa is one of the worlds most revered Islamic holy sites but remains shrouded in mystery. This is a place where miracles, that helped define the religion of Islam, took place. Now, for the first time, experience the power of Al Aqsa, as told through the eyes of the people who live and work there.

From the award-winning director of *One Day in The Haram* and the Oscar nominated executive producer of *The Look of Silence* Comes a new vision, offering a unique look at both the spiritual history, and the modern-day workings, of this most significant Islamic institution.

The film is [available for viewing by signing up for a free trial here](#).



### Recommended Read: *Rifqa* by Mohammed El-Kurd

**About the book:** *Rifqa* is Mohammed El-Kurd's debut collection of poetry, written in the tradition of Ghassan Kanfani's Palestinian Resistance Literature. The book narrates the author's own experience of dispossession in Sheikh Jarrah—an infamous neighborhood in Jerusalem, Palestine, whose population of refugees continues to live on the brink of homelessness at the hands of the Israeli government and US-based settler organizations.

Each day after school, Mohammed El-Kurd's grandmother welcomed him at the door of his home with a bouquet of jasmine. Her name was Rifqa—she was older than Israel itself and an icon of Palestinian resilience. With razor-sharp wit and glistening moral clarity, El-Kurd lays bare the brutality of Israeli settler colonialism. His poems trace Rifqa's exile from Haifa to his family's current dispossession in Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem, exposing the cyclical and relentless horror of the Nakba. El-Kurd's debut collection

definitively shows that the Palestinian struggle is a revolution, until victory.

The book is [available for purchase here](#).

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Eyewitness Palestine

PO BOX 73798

Washington, DC 20056

United States

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