



PODCAST

# Resisting Palestinian Erasure in Jerusalem with Jalal Abukhater

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*The transcript below has been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.*

## **Jalal Abukhater 0:00**

They want us to feel like we are diminishing in existence in Jerusalem, our flag is almost banned at every occasion in Jerusalem, saying you are Palestinian is akin to becoming a criminal. Sometimes if you express Palestinian identity, they suppress you by force and violently. They just want to turn this city into a Jewish settlement where Palestinians are a minority under 30%. That is the proclaimed goal of the Jerusalem municipality.

## **Yara Hawari 0:30**

This is Rethinking Palestine, a podcast from Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network. We are a virtual think tank that aims to foster public debate on Palestinian human rights and self-determination. We draw upon the vast knowledge and experience of the Palestinian people, whether in Palestine or in exile, to put forward strong and diverse Palestinian policy voices. In this podcast, we will be bringing these voices to you so that you can listen to Palestinians sharing their analysis wherever you are in the world.

The Israeli regime has actively sought to destroy Palestinian Jerusalem since its creation in 1948. Over the decades, we have seen continuous and intensified



attacks on the Palestinian presence in the city. Although this is in keeping with Israeli policy vis-a-vis Palestinians, wherever they may be, Jerusalem certainly holds a special place in the Israeli settler colonial project, one that has led to a deteriorating trajectory for Palestinians in the city.

Now, this year we once again saw intensified attacks against Palestinians during Ramadan from Israeli regime forces. But perhaps one of the images that will stay with many of us forever is of the funeral of slain Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh which was brutally repressed by Israeli police. Coffin bearers were brutally beaten and some were even arrested.

But despite this horrific repression, Palestinians in their tens of thousands still attended the funeral and flooded the old city, with Palestinian flags demonstrating that despite this persistent erasure, Palestinians remain steadfast in Jerusalem.

Joining me to discuss this is Jalal Abukhater a Palestinian Writer and activist from Jerusalem.

Jalal, thank you for joining me on this episode of Rethinking Palestine.

### **Jala Abukhater 2:22**

Thank you, Yara for having me on. I'm honored.

### **Yara Hawari 2:25**

Jalal, this is such a big topic and we can cover so much, but I really want to focus on more recent things going on. Perhaps you can start off by telling us what has happened in Jerusalem since the Unity Intifada of last year. What, if anything, has changed?

### **Jala Abukhater 2:42**

Last year we saw a major shift in Jerusalem. The Palestinian Street was visible not only in Jerusalem but also in 48 Palestine, the West Bank, elsewhere in the world,



and in Gaza. There was a lot of representation for Palestine from all over Palestine and internationally there was what you just described as the Unity Intifada because that is what we felt.

And in a way, Jerusalem was at the very center, at the very core of this Intifada, in my opinion, at least as a Jerusalemite, I saw how Jerusalem influenced people, how Jerusalem motivated and inspired others to protest for Palestine to raise the Palestinian flag. We saw it happen in Gaza. We cannot ever forget what happened in Gaza.

Gaza stood up for Jerusalem to make sure that Jerusalem does not feel alone. And we saw the onslaught that Israel led against Gaza killing innocent people and bombing buildings and homes and terrorizing the nation for weeks. Just because Gaza said we are standing with Jerusalem, we all know that was the case last year.

Of course, it's normal when time passes, people tend to relax their energies, or perhaps people tend to forget what we had just gone through. I was in Sheikh Jarrah mid-last summer, I was interviewing people, speaking to them about what they expect of this new "government of change" the Israeli government of change.

There was a new government coming in place, Netanyahu was gone, and what are the people of Sheikh Jarrah expecting from this new government of change since they were at the epicenter of the troubles in the past? Everyone shared the same response. Everyone shared the same concern and fear of this new government of change.

This coalition government that Israelis established from the so-called Israeli Zionist left and right-wing parties, which together established this government, there was fear that it'll be more dangerous, it'll be more brutal, it'll be more barbaric, in its dealing with the Palestinians. Only to survive as a government in the face of Netanyahu.



They wanted to convince the extreme right in Israel that we are here to represent you. This new government of change is way worse for Palestinians all over than anything we've seen before. Because they want to prove to the extremes of Israeli society that they are there for the settlers. They are there for the settler movement in Jerusalem as well.

They want to return the deterrence against Palestinians. They don't want to see what they saw in Umm al-Fahm again, they don't want what happened in Lyd, in Yaffa, in Haifa, in Jerusalem. They want to crush the Palestinian identity and its symbolism of Palestine from our collective memory, especially over the past few months, we've seen how brutal they've been.

When other commentators claim that this is a moment of calm in the Palestinian territories, they don't realize, or they don't wish to realize, or they don't wish to see that we are being killed every day, we are losing our homes every day and there is a demolition almost every day in a certain part of Palestine, especially in areas of the West Bank and Jerusalem, occupied Jerusalem.

Just this year in Jerusalem itself, since January 2022, 75 demolitions have been recorded in Jerusalem. 39 of those are residential homes and we're still faced with warnings that Israel is giving out to people a Silwan, in At-tur, in Sur Baher and elsewhere where they want to throw out dozens and dozens of Palestinian families from their homes, make them homeless because of what they claim to be lack of permit, but in fact, they want to zone the homes of people such as a house in Silwan Wadi Qaddoum, a house of 12 apartments. It is housing almost a hundred Palestinians, 32 adults and 42 children. Can you imagine, they want to throw those people out in the street because they claim the area is zoned to be a green area, and they want to turn it into a sports field in the middle of Silwan Wadi Qaddoum.

They want to make Palestinians homeless without an alternative of course. This is the brutality of the Israeli state. They want to throw people out on the street and



claim: Oh we're just fixing it up to make it a park or a football field. Of course, this is happening all over Jerusalem.

Especially in Silwan, there are many cases of people facing imminent forceful evictions from their homes because Israelis want to build biblical parks, Biblical theme parks in Wadi Hilweh actually in Al-Bustan Neighborhood, in Wadi Qaddoum they want to demolish dozens of homes. There are, I think, approximately a hundred homes in Wadi Qaddoum and Al-Bustan area which are threatened with close imminent demolition in order to build a park, King David city, for Jewish biblical settlers. This is to the benefit of the Israeli settler organization Elad. We are always being faced with this, in other areas in Sheikh Jarrah and Batn al-Hawa of Silwan, settlers are taking over our homes using the courts and the legal system of Israel, which allows only Jewish settlers to claim the property in East Jerusalem because of the laws that they've established to steal our homes.

But at the same time, I must say that no Palestinian can reclaim their stolen home from Jerusalem. I myself am one of the thousands of Jerusalemites who do have papers for our homes and our properties and our lands, which are now in what they call West Jerusalem.

So they still continue to use the state, the legal system to take over our homes in East Jerusalem, while we are not able to even claim back our homes that they now live in, in Al Katamon, in Al-Baqaa neighborhood, in Al-Talbiya and other neighborhoods of West Jerusalem today.

So we are faced with a war, a war on Palestinian existence in Jerusalem, and since last year, it has only intensified in Silwan, in Sheikh Jarrah, in Jabel Mukaber, in Sur Baher, in Ras al-Amud, all those neighborhoods are facing threats from the municipality of Jerusalem, from the courts, from the settler movements collectively. And the enforcers are of course the Israeli occupation forces in the



city. They have the guns, they have the arms, they have the legal instruments, they have the bulldozers, and we Jerusalemites feel that we are also so left alone, and that's what they want. They want us to be isolated, to feel alone while they take over the city and continue to build massive projects.

There's also something to add, over the past few months we've learned about the Israelis, especially this new government, speeding up progress in different projects that are meant to accommodate Jewish settlers only. They wish to expand the settlements of Givat HaMatos, Givat HaShaked I believe those are around Beit Safafa, which is a neighborhood in, technically West Jerusalem, and Palestinian existence there is being suffocated and no one is allowed to expand and build and accommodate the growing population.

But at the same time, they have two settlements in mind, thousands of settler units to be built around Beit Safafa to be choking that area and limit Palestinian existence in that town in Jerusalem. Similarly, in Atarot where they are speeding up the plans to build a settlement for ultra-orthodox Jewish settlers. Atarot is situated between Beit Hanina, between Qalandiya, between Kufr Aqab. They want to insert settlements right in the heart of Palestinian Jerusalem. And all of this has been happening since last year. They're just speeding up those processes. They want us to feel like we are diminishing in existence in Jerusalem our flag is almost banned on every occasion in Jerusalem.

Saying you are Palestinian is like, is akin to becoming a criminal. Sometimes if you express Palestinian identity, they suppress you by force and violently. They just want to turn the city into a Jewish settlement where Palestinians are a minority under 30%, that is the proclaimed goal of the Jerusalem municipality.

## **Yara Hawari 10:09**

Jalal, thank you for outlining all that. What you've described as really this consistent process of erasure with the destruction of Palestinian homes, the



dispossession of Palestinians from their land, and it's really quite shocking that commentators and media people are able to describe this as a period of quiet or a period of calm when the realities for Palestinians is to the contrary.

But there are periods of intensified violence from the Israeli regime. And if we fast forward to a little bit earlier this year, we saw once again the Israeli regime repressing Palestinians in an intensified way in Jerusalem and also Palestinians visiting Jerusalem, especially over the month of Ramadan.

What is it in particular about Palestinian presence during this holy month that gets the Israeli regime so riled up?

## **Jala Abukhater 11:05**

The holy month of Ramadan, as we all know, every Muslim and everyone who ever had a Muslim friend in their life would know, is a month that people seek spiritual purity, seek to be closer to God, seek to pray more, to quit bad habits.

Perhaps they see this as an opportunity to repent for sins. They see the holy month of Ramadan as the most sacred month of the year, and especially Laylat al-Qadr as the most sacred night of the year. This is how Muslims see Ramadan. It was insane to witness Zionist media in full throttle, proclaiming that the month of Ramadan is a harbinger of evil, of violence.

The channels of the Israeli state, Channel 12, 11, 13, the commentators, and the mainstream journalists, they all kept speaking of Ramadan meaning violence. Ramadan means terrorism. Ramadan, the Palestinians are gonna be seeking blood. There was a huge campaign of incitement by the Israeli society against Palestinians, especially them assuming that Ramadan clashed with two other holidays. I think it was the Pesach for Jews and the Easter for Christians that Israeli media kept spinning this piece of information that this is a month of violence and we Jerusalemites, we are, as any other Muslim in the world, celebrate



Ramadan as a month of faith and purity.

And we are denied even this basic, basic right to observe Ramadan in a very respectful and comfortable manner. There were closures in Jerusalem during Ramadan. There was tightening of checkpoints. Israelis always try to facilitate, in front of the world, the prayers on Friday, but at the same time, they allowed extremists, the most extreme of Israeli society, to come into Al-Aqsa on various occasions during Ramadan.

The ones who are calling for the destruction of Al-Aqsa, the ones who are calling for spilling blood to perform tributes in Al-Aqsa, they allowed hundreds of those activists, the temple activists, that's what they call themselves, to ascend Al-Aqsa Mosque and desecrate the site during the holy month of Ramadan. They facilitated provocative moves against Palestinians.

They drove up the anger in Palestinian society. Palestinians have been living under constant violence from the Israeli state, and we have always been experiencing this extreme violence. But in Ramadan especially, the provocations never stopped the provocations by this state, which wants to be satisfying the settler population, satisfy the right-wing extremists. They kept allowing and allowing further provocations and tightening up on Palestinian existence in Jerusalem. We've seen what happened on Sabt el-Nour, Saturday of Light, in Jerusalem during Easter for Christians were also denied the right to perform their pilgrimage in Jerusalem for the Easter holidays.

We've seen how they allowed foreign Christians who were coming here as tourists, they allowed huge numbers of them to attend the pilgrimage, but at the same time said, if you're a Christian Arab Palestinian in Jerusalem, you don't get to access your holy sites or do the pilgrimage in comfort. And it led to clashes also with Jerusalem's Christian Palestinian Population.

So we are seeing this trend of Israelis predicting that Ramadan is gonna be a





violent month, but at the same time, they are the ones who are responsible for every single move leading to violence, leading to further desecration of holy sights, and leading to further tightening of our freedom of worship, for example, in Jerusalem.

They wish to proclaim themselves sovereign in Jerusalem. The Israelis are really annoyed and really, really angered. I can see this in their media and how their journalists speak on TV during the prime time shows they really hate the sight of the Palestinian flag at Al-Aqsa. They hate the sight of the Palestinian flag being raised in the heart of Jerusalem.

They feel like that touches the issue of sovereignty so hard and they lobby and pressure the government and there are thousands who do this and they even do polls on channel 12 and 13 of Israeli society, and everyone is supportive of the measures to suppress Palestinian flags and Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, and they become, like an angry bull, which is just seeking to take down any Palestinian flag in Jerusalem and this, this behavior of them wanting to exert forcefully, subjugate Palestinians in Jerusalem and claim sovereignty.

This behavior is leading to all the trouble we keep witnessing because that's what they want. They want a pure Israeli Jerusalem. They don't want any kind of resemblance of a Palestinian identity in Jerusalem. This is a war over sovereignty. Their people are angry over Palestinian flags in Jerusalem, so the Israeli forces in occupied Jerusalem, want to forcefully proclaim sovereignty.

They wanna forcefully send those thugs and hooligans, thousands of them into our streets to become violent and raise the Israeli flag. They want to defend them, protect them. They want to put the flag in our faces, even if that means violence against us, against our homes, against our women and children.

They really, really, really just want to raise the Israeli flag at Al-Aqsa and not just Al-Aqsa, it's a symbolic thing, but they want the Israeli flag to be the identity



representing Jerusalem and anything else does not pass with them. That's why they become like just angry bulls, especially whenever Palestinians proclaim their identity in the city of Jerusalem.

## **Yara Hawari 16:16**

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Jalal, you mentioned flags and how the Israeli regime gets riled up at the site of Palestinian flags in Jerusalem because it challenges their claim to absolute sovereignty and control.

At the end of May, we all watched as thousands of Israeli settlers descended upon Jerusalem for what they call flag day. And you were there on the streets watching everything unfold, and usually, this is a day in which settlers are given complete free reign to be violent towards Palestinians and cause damage to Palestinian property.

Can you tell us, maybe even though you have touched upon this a little bit, further tell us about, what this tells us about Israeli society?

## **Jala Abukhater 17:16**

It's not just thousands, it's over 50,000 and some say the number is 70,000 of those Israeli settlers who descended upon our streets on a really violent and dark day for Jerusalem.

I'll start off by saying that Israel, the whole of Israel chose to make this happen. You had the Prime Minister of Israel, Bennett, you had the Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, he is soon to become Prime Minister. You had the entire government of Israel, including those in labor and other parties supporting this march.



The fact that it should happen on the route that those organizers chose. The organizers, of course, are extreme, they're no longer actually extreme fringes of society. They are mainstream in Israel and they are a very vocal and active group who are in a way influencing the direction of the Israeli state in every way.

Those are not extreme fringes. Those are people who are Israeli, they are representative of a very, dangerous trend in Israeli society. It is a trend of hate and violence towards anything Palestinian. So I just need to be clear with this. They chose to make this happen, this march happen. Before I describe how ugly this March was, I wanna say that they chose to make it happen.

They are responsible. They made statements, they were given warnings by, international parties, even the Americans were trying to influence Israelis to change the route of this march. The Americans tried to intervene, lots of countries in the world. They all know what this March means, and we've seen it before.

It's not like a rare event. We've seen it before. If they allow this hate march to happen, they are responsible for it. And the way I see it, the violence we saw, this is state-sponsored violence, state-sponsored terrorism against the Palestinians, and as if it was an open season on Palestinians in Jerusalem, as if the Israeli state, which is in control of the entirety of Jerusalem today, by force, of course, it's an occupied city, as if they declared open season on Palestinians. Violence was permitted against Palestinians and not vice versa, of course, because I've seen with my own two eyes how Jewish settlers would be throwing stones at me and others and the homes of people in Jerusalem, and the Israelis would be defending them, protecting them, and also arresting us for trying to defend ourselves.

I've seen this with my own two eyes in Jerusalem, and I think one commentator on Twitter, described the scenes of Jerusalem as if something out of the purge because for one day, violence was allowed, permitted by the state of Israel against Palestinians. I saw it in the old city of Jerusalem against journalists, against



Palestinian residents.

We saw it in Silwan at night, thousands of settlers attacking homes with rocks and damaging cars and hurting people. People were hospitalized because of this violence, which was facilitated by the forces of the Israeli state. In Sheikh Jarrah it was even worse. It was an organized pogrom. It was very clearly an organized pogrom, which the Israeli police did not intervene to stop.

And it led to the damage of people, homes, and property, and people who were injured, and taken to hospital as well. Jewish settlers were attacking people in the thousands, and it happened from, I think the evening when we first heard the news, I was in Jerusalem around 6:00 PM until 12 there were reported attacks against Palestinians against Palestinian homes in Sheikh Jarrah, and Israeli police forces did not stop it.

In fact, when we first heard that there was an organized attack against Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah during this flag March they were held in Jerusalem, I was in Salah ad-Din Street and I remember people just heard immediately about the news. I heard people on phones and speakers from cars. They were reporting that there is organized violence against Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, and settlers are attacking in huge numbers. So people naturally mobilized to go protect the people of Sheikh Jarrah. We went down just maybe a couple of hundred meters. We were met with extreme violence by the Israeli forces in the area.

There was a water cannon sent against us. There were rubber bullets being fired. Police deployment was heavy. I was there in Sheikh Jarrah, and I saw from a distance how settlers were still continuing to throw stones and attack Palestinians in their homes. Israeli police forces were not stopping any settlers and were not making any arrests.

Zero arrests were made that day. There was organized violence against Palestinians, and zero arrests were made. Only two reported arrests of Israeli



settlers in Jerusalem, where of two settlers, they were masked. They attacked a journalist called Iyad Harb. He works with the Israeli public broadcaster Can, and he is the police correspondent.

He is a Druze journalist from the North, and it's as if he's one of them. It's an Israeli journalist technically. There was outrage among Israeli journalists about how this one journalist got attacked and there was videos of him. He was describing himself as he was beaten with sticks on his head, and metal rods on his head. His phone was stolen. His clothes were ripped and he was violently beaten. He himself Iyad Harb, said that two officers of the Israeli border police were nearby 10 meters away. And they did not intervene to stop the attack against him until after the two masked settlers ran away and he was screaming in pain. And that's when they came to attend to see what happened with this journalist who got attacked in front of their eyes.

This happened repeatedly in East Jerusalem, especially in Sheikh Jarrah. People from their homes, cars were smashed. It looked and felt everything screamed of an organized pogrom. People were preoccupied with the march and Damascus gate and the old city that we didn't expect thousands to descend upon Sheikh Jarrah in this organized manner and to go smash homes and smash people's homes and cars without them being stopped by the presence of the Israeli forces in the area.

It felt like a state-sponsored attack, and that's what happened on that march. They chose to let this happen. Israelis knew that there would be a genocidal chance there would be called for death for Arabs. I heard death for Arabs being screamed at on multiple occasions, and I got called a liar by one officer who was trying to kick me out of the area.

He said, "Inta shakran", "shakran" means liar in Hebrew. I had to learn that day. I told him like, you're just pushing us away and throwing us out while you allow those settlers to call death for Arabs and call us benzona and all the worst names



in the world and protect them. There is a collusion that we saw on that day.

There is collusion between the state of Israel, its armed forces, and those extremists, which if it's like 70,000 people on the streets raising the Israeli flag and yelling death to Arabs, those are not extremists. Those are not the fringes. It's 70,000 settlers. They're presenting the Israeli state and the Israeli state is represented by those who allowed this to happen, who deployed 3000 Israeli occupation forces in Jerusalem to protect those people, to allow their violence to continue.

And with all the evidence we have, all the videos we have, no arrests were made. Any Palestinian who dared to resist, who dared to raise a Palestinian flag in their face, got attacked, got shot dozens, even more than 70 or 80, got arrested. Many were hospitalized. The damage, property damage is in millions. I believe it just looked like a day from the movie *The Purge*. If you're a Jewish settler, you're allowed to go be violent against Palestinians, and Palestinian subjects, and you get Scott free. Just on this day, that's what it felt like.

## **Yara Hawari 24:21**

Jalal, thank you for sharing your sort of eyewitness testimony of what happened on that day and what has been happening on other days in Jerusalem. And you are right to point out that this is not a fringe group of Israelis. This is a large, if not majority portion of the Israeli population.

Commentators were saying, Oh this is only a minority, this doesn't represent the state of Israel. And yet the Israeli Prime Minister Bennett is a champion of settlers in the 67 territories, and yet the Israeli regime was founded on the dispossession and the theft of Palestinian land. It is in the very foundation and the DNA of the Israeli regime to dispossess Palestinians and to be violent towards Palestinians that remain steadfast.



I want to shift gears a little bit just for the end of this episode and talk about other ways in which Israel tries to eliminate Palestinian presence in the city. And one successful and really cruel mechanism that they use is ID revocation. Thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites have had their residency in Jerusalem revoked since 1967, and often many of these cases are a form of punishment for political activity. Now one very recent example of such a case is that of Salah Hammouri, a Palestinian French Jerusalemite lawyer and human rights defender, who is currently being held under administrative detention following having his residency revoked. Can you tell us a little bit more about this case?

## **Jala Abukhater 26:00**

Just as I'll speak about Salah, I wanna mention that only a few days ago I saw a video of a Palestinian Jerusalemite from Silwan. His name is Murad Abbassi. He was having a farewell breakfast with his family because he had received, in my opinion, the most brutal and violent of legal orders. The Israeli state wanted to expel him from Jerusalem, so he is forcibly removed from Jerusalem and he has to reside in the West Bank, away from his home, away from his family, and away from his kids. Murad Abbassi is one of many Palestinians who are punished and persecuted for their political activity. This is called political persecution. He's one of many who have been forced to leave Jerusalem just because they are deemed to be, a threat to the Israeli state without any evidence, without any justification, without any material evidence.

But their existence as politically active Palestinians is threatening to the Israeli state and that's why they make orders to expel them from Jerusalem. Of course, we have Salah Hammouri as well, a human rights defender and a lawyer. I think it's called Breach of Allegiance. So they accuse Salah Hammouri of preaching allegiance to the state of Israel, which is ridiculous.

We are an occupied people living under occupation and they assume that they



can use, in the court's claim, breach of allegiance to revoke our right to live in Jerusalem, the right to reside in the city, and they get the right to forcefully evict us from the city as well. Salah has been arrested, not even just had his ID revoked by a court.

He's been arrested and is under administrative detention. Which means he is detained without charge or trial basically. He was there for three months in March, arrested for three months and only a few days ago, his detention was extended for a further three months. Administrative detention could be extended for God knows how long.

That's why people go on hunger strikes to protest this inhumane measure where people are detained without charge, without proper trial, and they are unaware of when their detention would end. It keeps extending either three months, six months, three months, six months, and they have to just keep waiting until the Israelis decide to let them go.

Sometimes it takes years before they are let go. Salah Hammouri is punished because of his commitment to Palestinians, his commitment to human rights, and his commitment to his work as a lawyer with Addameer. Many other Palestinians, especially those who are active politically, especially those who run for parliament, for example, in the past we've seen people who have run for Tash'eeri, the Palestinian Parliament, and they were as well forcefully removed from Jerusalem through the Israeli legal instruments.

Of course, we're not unaware that Israel is an enemy of democracy. Israel does not allow an election to happen in Jerusalem. They don't want anyone Palestinian to participate in elections in Jerusalem. They've denied us the right to elect parliamentarians over the past few years in Jerusalem, which is the excuse the PA uses not to hold any elections, but there hasn't been any election held in Jerusalem.





We are not represented by anyone in Jerusalem. We are stateless people living under the mercy of this brutal occupation force. Even if you hold democracy in the West Bank, like just yesterday I saw a banner in Al-Bireh municipality. So, a banner in support of Islam Al-Taweel the mayor of Al-Bireh. He got elected as the mayor of Al-Bireh, but before he got elected, when all the signs were indicating that he will win, his group will win for the Bireh municipal elections. He got arrested the night before and he remains in prison. Administrative detention as well without charge or trial, and he remains in prison as elected mayor of Al-Bireh. So Israelis do not respect any wish for Palestinians to practice democracy. We're not allowed this basic right to choose or people choose who leads municipalities, our town halls, our city councils. We do not have the right for that anywhere, not just in Jerusalem as we've seen elsewhere in the West Bank. So democracy, it's just a cover-up for Israel to proclaim that they are a state that deserves the respect of other nations.

But at the same time we've seen how brutal apartheid is. How brutal the subjugation of Palestinians and this hole, this really black hole, it will keep sucking and sucking and sucking until it'll explode eventually. I do not believe Israel can maintain this really oppressive and subjugating regime. I don't believe they can maintain this oppressiveness because at the same time I wanna be optimistic.

I am optimistic. I believe that Palestinians are proclaiming and are addressing and speaking up for Palestine. We are raising the Palestinian flag. Every attempt to take away our flag is met with more attempts to raise the Palestinian flag. We've seen at Shireen Abu Akleh's funeral in Jerusalem, how the Palestinian flag in the thousands was filling up the streets of Jerusalem.

I never imagined that scene to be. And just for context, during the funeral of Shireen Abu-Akleh in Jerusalem, the flags you saw raised in that funeral, was not an easy task. Whenever you saw a flag, you had to know this took a huge toll from the person who carried that flag and got it to that point. I myself am witness to



how oppressive they were in taking away the flags.

I had kept a flag in my pocket. I walked through all the old city three hours before the planned time of the funeral. I got to the church just in time. I didn't want to get stopped at any checkpoint because there were so many checkpoints. Trust me. They tried to block people from reaching the old city. They tried to block people from participating in this funeral.

At the same time, the flags were there. I know outside of the church, while I was inside, I know there were undercover police who at one moment they would put on caps that say police, and they would start grabbing all the Palestinian flags from the crowd. They would take away all the flags and just violently assault anyone who resists, take away all the flags and then get out of the crowd.

That kept happening throughout the day and we still saw flags. We still saw large flags being raised. I myself raised a flag at the very entrance of Jaffa gate, Bab Al-Khalil. I don't think I've ever been prouder of myself for 40 seconds. I had managed to hold a flag with my two hands over my head and speak and chant with people at the funeral.

We were chanting "Hiyeh hiyeh hiyeh, Al-Quds Arrabiyeh" and it felt amazing. It felt like a magical moment. It was a Palestinian Jerusalem. We all saw it for what it is. 30, 40 seconds before the flag was snatched away by Israeli forces in the crowd, I saw people getting assaulted. Kids had their flags snatched. I saw an old lady get assaulted and they tried to assault her and arrest her just because she had the flag with her.

They were within the crowd taking away all the flags. But the picture came out with so many flags, thousands of flags in Jerusalem. I kept seeing flags as far as I walk. I kept walking out and then I'm like regressing, using my flag after 40 seconds. But the same time I saw like 10 or 20 in front of me, I was like, wow.



Like, I was just astonished at how resilient those people were. People jumped, checkpoints, people jumped walls, jumped fences to get to that point in the funeral, and they had massive flags with them. How did they get there? It just shows you the resilience of the Palestinians in Jerusalem. The Flag is alive. The people are alive. And I don't believe that Israel will succeed in erasing Palestinian existence in Jerusalem. On the contrary, we're just gonna become stronger and we are gonna exert ourselves in a very confident manner soon, I believe. And inshallah soon free Jerusalem free Palestine.

### **Yara Hawari 32:55**

Jalal, there's really nothing that I can add to end, so thank you so much for joining me.

Thank you for your testimony and thank you for your analysis and we hope to have you again on Rethinking Palestine very soon.

### **Jala Abukhater 33:09**

Thank you, Yara.

### **Yara Hawari 33:14**

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