Introduction: Tracing Ruination

There is no single moment from which a history of ruination in the Arab-Palestinian village of Salama can commence. Rather, it begins with a trickle, shortly after the United Nations General Assembly approved the partition of Mandatory Palestine on 29 November 1947. Violent incidents were recorded during the first days of December in Haifa, Jerusalem and in the neighbourhoods dividing Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Salama,[1] the largest non-urban Arab settlement in Palestine, became a frontier almost overnight: only a few hundred metres divide the western houses of the village from the eastern perimeter of Shekhunat Hatikva, a Jewish neighbourhood situated between Salama and the city of Tel Aviv. Arab irregulars used Salama, as well as other villages, to initiate assaults on Jewish neighbourhoods or vehicles, mostly in the form of sniper attacks.[2] At the same time, Jewish forces formed a line of military outposts in the outskirts of Jewish neighbourhoods throughout the country. These lines of partition, which were to separate the Arab and Jewish communities, would become the zones of violent friction that left a persistent mark of destruction long after the last gun-shots were fired.

However, the eruption of violence did not occur in spite of the international community's formula for territorial division, but rather because of it. The Partition Plan, which was officially outlined in UN General Assembly Resolution 181, divided Palestine into what was described in the resolution as "Independent Arab and Jewish States". A brief look at the map of the plan reveals, however, quite a different spatial reality: the partition was not between two contiguous territories, but between concentrations of Arab and Jewish populations. This logic meant that Mandatory Palestine was to be dissected and segmented into seven subregions – three were to form the Jewish state, three designated for the

[1] In Arabic: سلمة, and pronounced Salameh. There are several transcriptions of the name in English, and the transcription used here follows the one used by the Beir Zeit University's Village Archive.
[2] Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 194.

Arab state and Jerusalem was to remain an international zone. However, if the division of the entire territory formed a fragmented collection of ethnically differentiated sub-regions, in itself an ambitious endeavour with highly uncertain prospects, the assignment of Jaffa as an Arab enclave at the heart of the Jewish territory required the plan's designers to chart the borders of this area according to the smallest of scales:

> The area of the Arab enclave of Jaffa consists of that part of the town-planning area of Jaffa which lies to the west of the Jewish quarters lying south of Tel Aviv, to the west of the continuation of Herzl street up to its junction with the Jaffa-Jerusalem road, to the south-west of the section of the Jaffa-Jerusalem road lying south-east of that junction, to the west of Miqve Yisrael lands, to the northwest of Holon local council area, to the north of the line linking up the north-west corner of Holon with the northeast corner of Bat Yam local council area and to the north of Bat Yam local council area.[3]

With street corners and city junctions becoming border zones almost overnight, the deterioration that followed was hardly surprising. From the first days of December 1947, Salama became part of the south-east frontier of the Tel Aviv and Jaffa region: on 4 December, a Haganah force was sent to take over an abandoned house on the outskirts of Salama, from which they could establish an observation point over a new road that bypassed the village. The force came under gunfire from Salama, which drew in response heavy fire from the 53rd Haganah Battalion and a local Jewish police force that were positioned in Shekhunat Hatikva.[4] The following day events continued to escalate, with heavy fire exchanged across the narrow strip of orchards that separated the warring parties. On 7 December, the Haganah ordered a "retaliation act" and several houses were blown up.[5] This act provided the incentive for what historian Benny Morris describes as "the first, armed attack on a Jewish urban neighbourhood" in the 1948 War:

> The following day [8 December] hundreds of Arab irregulars, led by Hassan Salama, launched a frontal assault in an attempt to conquer [Shekhunat] Hatikva. A few of the quarter's peripheral houses fell as British troops looked on without interfering. The Arabs began looting and torching houses. Haganah reinforcements arrived … The attackers were pushed back to Salame. About 60 Arabs and 2 Jews were killed, and after the battle, a British officer returned a baby the Arabs had found and abducted.[6]

It is hard to read through this violent chronology and see beyond mutual bloodletting. But what these events signify is a unique focus, banal as it

[3] United Nations, *Resolution 181*, 145–6.
[4] Milshtain, *The War of Independence*, vol. 2: 56; Elon, *The Givati Brigade*, 79–80.
[5] Milshtain, *The War of Independence*, vol. 2: 59; Elon, *The Givati Brigade*, 81–2.
[6] Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 194.

may seem: both Arab and Jewish forces aim their military efforts not only at the other's body but at the other's house. While this proved to be a significant element, at least in the first stages of the war, it did not result in the wholesale destruction of neighbourhoods and villages. Instead, these acts constituted "spatial statements" that would address an unspoken warning. The destruction of Arab houses and buildings was formulated by the Haganah General Staff in a detailed fashion in "Plan Gimel" of May 1946, which specified that retaliatory action will be taken

> against villages, neighbourhoods and farms, serving as bases for Arab armed forces … by arson or explosion. If the aim was general punishment – the torching of everything possible and the demolition of the houses of inciters or accomplices [was to be carried out].[7]

The houses that were blown up or torched in December 1947 were not the last. Far more explicitly "didactic" orders were issued ahead of "Operation Joshua", a retaliation operation planned to take place in Salama on New Year's Eve of 1948:

> The villagers do not express opposition to the actions of the gangs and many of the youth even provide [the irregulars with] active cooperation … the aim is to attack the northern part of the village … to cause deaths, to blow up houses and to burn everything possible.[8]

These statements of destruction were clearly heard. Only two days after the violence between Salama and Shekhunat Hatikva began, on 6 December 1947, women and children from the Arab village were evacuated to the towns of Lydda and Ramlah, at the same time as residents from the Jewish neighbourhood sought refuge in Tel Aviv. Indeed, most of the residents of the friction zones in the Jaffa and Tel Aviv area fled their homes in the first two months of the fighting: on the Arab side, residents from El Manshiya, Jabaliya, Abu Kabir and Tel a-Rish fled to Jaffa[9]; Jewish residents from Kerem Hateymanim and Neve Tsedek left their homes and moved away from the frontlines, mostly remaining in Tel Aviv. During the first two months of the war, it is estimated that 15,000–20,000 Arab-Palestinians fled the city and approximately 7,000 Jewish residents left their homes by mid-January 1948.[10] Beyond the growing human cost, the fighting began to make an apparent mark on the face of the city. Although in most cases fighting in the first period

[7] Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 343.
[8] Quoted ibid.
[9] The situation in the Arab-Palestinian villages in north-west Tel Aviv (Jammasin, Summeil and Sheik Muanis) was somewhat different, as they were relatively small enclaves in the midst of a large Jewish population. Summeil and Jammasin began evacuating in early December after attacks initiated by Jewish paramilitary organisations. Golan, *Wartime Spatial Changes*, 76; 79; 80–3.
[10] Ibid., 78.

of the war (December 1947–June 1948) did not result in widespread damage to the urban environment, a "destruction strip" that outlined the boundary between Jewish and Arab neighbourhoods was gradually created. Buildings on both sides functioned as an urban trench-line and bore the clearest signs of damage; beyond this strip, however, most houses and buildings remained unharmed.[11] Destruction strips of this sort marked the boundaries between Jebalya and Bat Yam, Tel a-Rish and Holon, Manshiya and the south-western neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv, as well as between Salama and Shekhunat Hatikva.

The static warfare characteristic of the first months of the war reached its decisive moments in April 1948, as the final days of the British mandate were drawing near. The city of Jaffa, at this point already besieged by Jewish forces and in a state of almost total disarray, was not to be included in "Plan Dalet", a broad operation drafted by the Haganah on 10 March to secure solid military control over territory designated to be part of the future Jewish state.[12] Salama, however, along with the rest of the Arab periphery of Tel Aviv, gained primary strategic importance in ensuring the complete isolation of Jaffa, and consequently, its downfall. The operation was carried out by the Alexandroni Brigade as part of the *Hametz*[13] military operation on 28–30 April.[14] According to the offensive plan, Salama was the last target of the operation and was therefore entered by the 32nd Battalion on 29 April; by that time, the village was completely deserted as the last of its Arab inhabitants – approximately 4,000 out of more than 7,000 before the fighting commenced[15] – fled[16] on 25 April. When

[11] David Tal's analysis of the fighting in the urban regions during what he describes as the Communal War that lasted from December 1947 to June 1948, clarifies that this was characteristic of all urban regions in Palestine. Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948*, 64.

[12] Dinur, Slutsky and Avigur, *History of the Haganah*, vol. 3: 1955.

[13] The name of the operation, *Hametz*, is borrowed from the traditional Jewish term designating the foods containing flour that are prohibited during the Passover period. These foods are traditionally gathered, removed from the house and, at times, a ceremonial burning of the *Hametz* takes place, symbolising the purification of the house. The Alexandroni Brigade's website states that the name for the operation was chosen to exemplify its directives: symbolically "burning the *Hametz* before Passover 1948" ("Operation 'Hametz'").

[14] Gelber, *Palestine, 1948*, 94; Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 217.

[15] Golan, *Wartime Spatial Changes*, 87.

[16] It is unclear what led to the desertion of the village. As Morris explains, the divisions between flight that occurred as a result of the influence of a nearby town's fall, fear of being caught up in fighting, or a direct military assault on a settlement, "are somewhat blurred" (2004, xvi). On 25 April the IZL began its assault on Jaffa's northern Manshiya quarter (Gelber, *Palestine, 1948*, 94; Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 212–14). This operation must have had an effect on the remaining residents of Salama, as did the harsh conditions in Jaffa itself, on which Salama was dependent politically, economically and socially (Ibid., 591).

David Ben-Gurion visited Salama on the eve of 30 April, he encountered "only one old blind woman".[17]

Despite Salama's complete depopulation, it was hard to ignore all that remained: apart from the damage caused to some of the houses, most stood unharmed; the mosque that formed the heart of the village – Masjid Salama – remained intact, as did the village's two cemeteries; the schools, cafés and shops that were located along the main roads were there, just as they were left.

The houses of Salama stood empty for 18 days, but emptiness did not equal indifference or disappearance from sight. Only one day after the completion of the military activity in the village, on 1 May, a Jewish group from Shekhunat Hatikva looted houses in Salama and then set them on fire. Without their inhabitants, these houses were an accessible target, penetrable and easily damaged. However, torching the Arab houses after looting them meant that in the eyes of the perpetrators, these were not merely neutral objects, but sites that still retained the potential of an Arab return. Emptiness was not enough to alleviate fear or defuse animosity; ruination was needed for this emptiness to become permanent. Furthermore, this violence relied on the identification of these houses as conspicuously Arab signs, which were not erased or made insignificant by the absence of their owners; as Kathleen Stewart has noted in another context, signs of local life are "written tentatively yet persistently onto the landscape".[18] This lingering of meaning in space will motivate recurring efforts of ruination in Salama, though the justification for their execution will change to suit the political and ideological conventions of the times.

However, vengeance and hostility were almost simultaneously accompanied by curiosity, drawing dozens of residents from Shekhunat Hatikva to walk the short distance to the neighbouring village. A photograph taken shortly after the conquest of Salama (Figure 0.1) captures people strolling between the Jewish neighbourhood – seen on the horizon – and the depopulated Arab village. What was described in the Jewish papers of the time as a "murderers' village" was suddenly an intriguing place, safe enough so that on the lower-right corner a woman is seen pushing a white baby pram accompanied by a man carrying a young child in his arms, while another family walks closely behind. At the centre of the photograph, two men are leisurely walking their bicycles. At the same time, first signs of the administration and management of space also begin to appear: houses that have been examined by

[17] Ben-Gurion, *The War Diary*.
[18] Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, 17.

Figure 0.1 Salama, shortly after the Israeli occupation, probably early May 1948.
Photographer: Zoltan Kruger, Israel National Archive.

bomb-defusion squads are marked as safe; the words "Jewish home" appear on houses that will be allocated by the authorities to Jewish war refugees and immigrants shortly thereafter. Literally and symbolically, the writing on the wall anticipated the filling of the physical voids left by the Arab population, but it would take more than graffiti to transform Salama into Kfar Shalem, the Jewish neighbourhood established in the village after the war.

In the years that followed, vast and diverse efforts were invested in completing this transformation from Arab to Jewish space. The settling of Jews in the empty Arab houses was followed by new construction, new histories and new routines that piled up on top of the Arab village, ostensibly leaving the events of 1948 behind.

Yet more than 50 years later, on the night of 9 October 2000, in the first days of the second Palestinian Intifada (uprising) – which sparked violent incidents throughout Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – the Arab history of Salama reappeared. Armed with metal bars and hammers, a group of residents from Kfar Shalem and adjacent neighbourhoods began tearing down one of the walls of the empty building of Salama Mosque. Despite the fact the mosque had not been used for

Muslim religious purposes since the village's seizure, and although it had served as a community youth club until the early 1980s, the building continued to bear the troubling past of its Arab existence. For those who set out to bring down the mosque, the Arab village of Salama was neither erased nor forgotten.

The unsettled presence of an empty building that attracts such fierce and violent emotions illustrates the fractious and fractured flow of spatial history, in Salama/Kfar Shalem and throughout Israel-Palestine. In the time that passed from the torching of empty houses in May 1948 to the battering of the walls of the Salama Mosque in October 2000, a web of intricate relations between people and space was formed and transformed: alienation made way for intimacy, ruins were rebuilt and demolished again, one antagonism was replaced by others. Yet all took place, as it were, through spatial forms and imaginations, which added their marks to create an unsettled heterogeneity of relations and existences, one that always walks the thin line between the mundane and the explosive.

Emptiness and ruination play a central role in shaping Salama's transformation into the Jewish neighbourhood of Kfar Shalem from the very first days of the 1948 War to the present. This ongoing reshaping of the physical landscape and the re-inscription of its cultural and historical meaning indicates that spatial transformation never takes place uninterruptedly, but constantly encounters forces that seek to conserve and uphold. This tension – at times implicit and at times bluntly evident – resulted in the exceptional perseverance of Salama as a unique space in the midst Tel Aviv's sprawling suburbs. Closely following its evolution redirects our attention from piles of debris and ruined landscapes to all that is still there, to its challenging meaning, and to the significance it has for the people who call it their home.

1 Toward a Spatial History in Israel

"Erasure" and "spatial annihilation" are common tropes used to describe the radical transformation of the Arab landscapes seized by Israel in the 1948 War. The Israeli space is indeed strewn with ruins, ancient and more recent, outcomes of ethnic and national antagonism, mutual exclusion and trenchant sectarianism. Despite the prevalence of rubble and debris, this book breaks from conventional focus on explicit sites of violence and devastation. Instead, it begins with a question: why is so much still there? This question resonates throughout this research, which forms an exploration of spatial transformation and resilience in Israel. It centres on the spatial history of Salama, an Arab village in the eastern outskirts of Jaffa, which was depopulated and transformed into a Jewish neighbourhood yet continues to retain many of its former Arab features. From this humble, working class suburb the book sets out to interrogate the ambivalent negotiation that characterises the intricate and often intimate engagements between Jews and the myriad of Arab spaces they inhabit, move through, and encounter throughout Israel, shedding light on the subtle process through which people, as it were, "take place".

When the question of spatial resilience was first posited to me over a decade ago, I struggled to come up with a convincing answer. Paradoxically, it was easier to chart a history of destruction and erasure than make sense of the presence of the past. The difficulty of the problem lies in its simplicity, in the fact that its referents were blatantly obvious: when referring to my neighbourhood in Jerusalem, I used its common Arab name, "Baq'a", not the Hebrew "Geulim"; some of my friends (those who could afford it, that is) lived in "Arab houses" with high ceilings, arched windows and painted floor tiles; at the entrance to my childhood village in the north of Israel stood a large structure that served as an Arab roadside inn in the pre-state era and was later used as a poultry factory. The examples go on and on. My bewilderment came about not because all this was suddenly revealed, but because it is intimately familiar, implanted in contemporary Hebrew vocabulary and in

one's orientation around town, in the memories of school trips and in books that are included in compulsory school curricula. The traces of the Arab past have become an inseparable part of the Israeli present, so much so that their mundane and commonplace presence is discarded as insignificant, a matter of fact.

But this is far from obvious. From the mid-1980s, a growing number of scholars began interrogating the political and ideological forces that shape processes of spatial transformation in Israel. The opening of official Israeli archives in the late 1970s enabled a critical scholarly scrutiny of the dominant narratives about the 1948 War and the events that surrounded the establishment of the State of Israel.[1] It exposed the heavy price paid by the Arab-Palestinian population, many of whom were forced to flee their homes and denied the right to return once the hostilities were over; it examined the mechanisms that were put in place by the state to ensure its control over Arab lands seized during the war; and it illustrated how a concentrated effort was made to marginalise the Arab cultural history of the land in favour of a homogenous national space that adhered to clear ideological and political imperatives. Critical attention also turned to internal tensions within the Israeli society, the treatment of ethnic Jewish minorities and the formation of Israeli culture. Inspired by post-structuralist philosophical trends – notably postmodern and postcolonial critiques of culture, society and the modern nation-state – this debate used a broad theoretical prism to view and analyse spatial processes and phenomena.[2] As an object of scholarly inquiry, "space" was no longer confined to the empirical description of physical formations, but viewed as an essential component in the interrogation of socioeconomic, ideological and cultural forces through which human and political environments were produced.[3]

The formation of the "Israeli space" was critically interrogated by historians, sociologists, art and literary critics, though relatively few

[1] Since first emerging in academic debates and gradually entering the public realm, this critical corpus expanded beyond the historiographical debates around the 1948 War, as is indeed reflected in later stages of the book. For a review of post-Zionsit critique, see, for example: Shapira and Penslar, *Israeli Historical Revisionism*; Nimni, *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*; Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates*.

[2] During the 1980s, this "post-Zionist" discourse moved from a critique of the Zionist historical attitude toward the Palestinian population in and outside Israel, to a theoretical-political critique of social and cultural relations in Israel as a whole. See: Nimni, *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*, chapter 6.

[3] The Marxist spatial critique presented by scholars such as Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey were highly influential in shaping the terms of the debate, mostly from the mid-1990s onward.

geographers, mostly because of the latters' close historical relation to the Zionist establishment.[4] This critical corpus illustrated the contribution of various fields of knowledge to the evolution and preservation of a spatial logic in Israel, which was governed by a strict political and ideological agenda. Architecture and demographic patterns, literature and visual art, even leisure activity like picnics and hiking, were all understood as practices through which Israelis' consensus about space was devised and upheld. This was not an innocent "common sense",[5] but one that served specific interests and a particular relation of power. During the first decades of the state, these were predominantly the formation of a cohesive national territory in which a homogenous national community can be forged. From the late 1970s, Israel's spatial logic underwent a gradual change in correlation with the growing influence of laissez-faire capitalism on the country's political and cultural spheres. Despite its divergence from social-democratic policies that ruled the county's social and economic agenda until then, this capitalist logic was harnessed to operate hand in hand with the existing national Zionist hegemony.[6] Accelerating processes of neoliberalisation from the mid-1980s eagerly adopted the prevailing discourse of development and modernisation that characterised Zionist attitudes to spatial transformation since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such are the ironies of space: the slogan "making the wasteland bloom" could appeal to socialist Zionist ideologues in the 1930s and continues to be trumpeted by present-day real-estate moguls.

As part of this critical assessment of the Israeli space, specific attention was given to the way Zionism cultivated a diametrical opposition between Jews and Arabs as two conflicting identities that cannot – and indeed, must not – meet. Through both physical and symbolic means, space was utilised to reflect this ideological premise and uphold it. Physically, depopulated Arab villages and towns were seized, appropriated and often demolished, to make way for Jewish settlements. In some cases where demolition was not carried out, Jewish immigrants were settled in Arab houses, while in other cases, emptied villages became part of natural reserves, parks and tourist attractions.

[4] Yoram Bar-Gal discusses the ideological and practical bonds between Israeli geographers and the Zionist authorities from the establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925 to this day. In addition, Bar-Gal points to traditions and conventions within the discipline – from its origins in German traditions to current training methods of geography students – which enforced its conservative and conformist character. Bar-Gal, "On the Tribe-Elders, the Successors and the New Ones".

[5] On the cultural "common sense" and its relation to the concept of Hegemony, see: Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony".

[6] Ram, *The Globalization of Israel*; Kemp, Ram and Newman, *Israelis in Conflict*.