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ملف القدس

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# Al-Atlal

## Ruins & Recollections

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* (JQ) is published by the Institute of Jerusalem Studies (IJS), an affiliate of the Institute for Palestine Studies. The journal is dedicated to providing scholarly articles on Jerusalem's history and on the dynamics and trends currently shaping the city. The Quarterly is known both for its pioneering social history and for its contemporary analyses of Jerusalem from writers on the ground, covering Palestinian lived experiences in the city, analyses of land appropriation and settlements and formal and informal negotiating strategies on, and visions for, the future of Jerusalem. Ranging from Ottoman and Mandate times to the complexities and dangers of the present, we offer incisive articles that analyze the role of culture, media, religion and politics in the struggles to claim the city.

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# Jerusalem Quarterly

INSTITUTE OF JERUSALEM STUDIES

# Jerusalem Quarterly

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Cover photo: Prince of Wales Tree near Palestine Museum, G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, 1898.

# Al-Atlal:
## Ruins & Recollections

Yazid Anani

This special issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* is another good opportunity to revisit transformations in our cities, which we think we know so well. These are major changes that sometimes shock us while walking or driving through our streets and neighborhoods, yet contradict the archival material on our historical urban experience uncovered via the present cultural renaissance of exhibits and books. The inspiration of this issue's theme materialized through a discussion with Salim Tamari about a curatorial project I had been commissioned to undertake with al-Hoash Art Court in Jerusalem. The project targeted Rockefeller Garden, a disputed park affiliated with the Rockefeller Museum, located at one end of al-Zahra Street, whose name we managed, through a series of art interventions, to change in due time to Karm al-Khalili garden.

I had many images of Jerusalem in mind as I began the project. All of them were reminiscences from my childhood, when my family used to visit Hussein Gheith's family in Shaykh Jarrah and I would spend the day playing relentlessly around the neighborhood. I remember Jerusalem through the imprinted image of the modernist Ambassador Hotel, where my father had once an exhibition and where I had my first custard creampuff and which has never departed my memory. I recall being in the workshop of al-Hakawati Theater where Mustafa al-Kurd was talking to my father, while I stared at what it looks like a mechanical Assyrian winged genie made of white styrofoam. I remember the furniture and the beautiful wall that was clustered with colorful posters of all the plays performed in the theater.

This is how my nostalgia constructed Jerusalem in my mind. These memories drove my anticipation of the city during my first visit after more than fifteen years. However, the utopia that I had imagined was shattered over the period of my daily commute from Ramallah to al-Hoash Art Court in al-Zahra Street. Jerusalem was essentially unrecognizable to me. It wasn't even close to the Jerusalem narrated in the writings of Salim Tamari, based on the diaries of Khalil al-Sakakini and memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyya. I saw a city of considerable helplessness, a society of internal communal divisions, grounded in distrust, predatory behavior, and visible aggression. A community that was systematically constructed into an enclave detached from the West Bank and Gaza, yet stripped politically and physically of its stature as a capital for the celebrated future state of Palestine.

Taking public transportation on a daily basis to al-Hoash, I had to cross the atrocious bottleneck of Qalandiya checkpoint, which now looks similar to the Tijuana border crossing at the Mexican–American border with a restless traffic jam. I never stopped being amazed by how the south and north of the West Bank collide in this microcosmic world: an area smaller than a football field, where a checkpoint, a refugee camp, a fenced derelict airport, a segregation wall, a major traffic artery, a huge stone quarry, Israeli military structures, street vendors, shops packed with colorful plastic merchandise, caged animals and birds, congested cars and trucks, litter, dust, smog, people from all walks of life, Israeli soldiers, international peace monitors, wall graffiti, and newsagents all collide in rivalry. The only reconciliation I had while walking through this twilight zone was to think of Sharif Waked's work *Chic Point* or recall the wise words of Adania Shibli, telling me to focus amidst this chaos on a couple of birds sitting on electricity wires and wonder how they managed to avoid electrocution!

As a West Bank ID holder, I must walk each time along a concrete passageway surrounded by metal fences and through a total of five turnstiles or revolving gates. This has always reminded me of the chicken slaughterhouse in Erwin Wagenhofer's film *We Feed the World* or the turnstiles of Jumana Manna's *Come to Rest*. Queuing up sometimes for hours to pass through the electric gates, you hear people's sad stories, you see quarrels emerging from the endless queues and checkpoint procedures, and you hear Israeli soldiers screaming humiliating disciplinary phrases through loudspeakers from behind reinforced glass.

Walking from the bus stop to al-Hoash through al-Zahra Street, while looking at the striking architecture of the neighborhood, I came to understand that Jerusalem to us as Palestinians has been reduced to its historic religious buildings: the Church of Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock, and al-Aqsa Mosque – so many people I know still mix up the latter two. The history of society and its cultural production is diminished and rendered unimportant against the empty architectural shells of these monumental edifices. We have reached a point of representing Jerusalem in media, posters, art, and political rhetoric as a lifeless place, a set of icons and symbols that purge life from the city and render it empty. Whenever I think about our contemporary representation of Jerusalem, I can't help but recall the work of the Scottish Orientalist painter David Roberts depicting Jerusalem lifeless within a vacant landscape. Sadly, Jerusalem has become to

us Palestinians outside its walls a city without people, for a people without appreciation of social history.

What struck me most is the compartmentalization of living conditions between Jerusalem and Ramallah and the entailing political and social implications. The proximity of these opposing conditions creates a schizophrenic experience passing from one realm to the other. While Jerusalemites live under colonial conditions and constant disciplinary measures imposed by the Israeli civil institutional system, Ramallites fifteen kilometers away live in the delusional autonomy and syndromic state-building project of a surrogate Palestinian Authority. Jerusalemites see themselves not only detached from the Ramallah manifesto but also abandoned by the Palestinian political leadership. While Jerusalemites are struggling alone, on a daily basis facing revoked residency permits, evictions and house demolitions, land expropriation, violence and harassment by Israeli settlers and soldiers, Ramallites are living a neoliberal consumerist anesthesia as a substitute for a liberation that has never happened. Resentment and anger toward Ramallah and what it represents are heard commonly not only in the streets of Jerusalem but also in other enclaves in the West Bank, Gaza, and 1948 Palestine. Unfortunately, we tend to acknowledge "orthodox Israeli colonial mechanisms" that have direct confrontational impact on society, but not those colossal invisible manipulations that drastically reshape societies on the level of economy, politics, and psychology.

## Karm al-Khalili Garden

I was escorted by Alia Rayyan, the director of al-Hoash Art Court, to what is known as Rockefeller Park, which is located at one end of al-Zahra Street and was built and walled in 1938 as part of the establishment of the Palestinian Archaeological Museum during the British Mandate. Not much has been written about the park; however, with a little research on the internet, I managed to find the story of the area where Bab al-Sahira neighborhood was established.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the Shafi'i mufti of Jerusalem, Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili, journeyed from his hometown of Hebron to Jerusalem. It was said that he carried with him a pine seedling, protected in his turban. In 1711, Khalili built his summerhouse within an olive grove and grape arbor in front of al-Sahira Gate, which was subsequently named after him Karm al-Khalili. He planted the pine seedling close to his summerhouse outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was said that he was passionate in nurturing the tree and he even performed his daily ablution underneath it before his prayers. The summerhouse was planned in two stories, with an olive press in its basement.

It was a well-known custom at that time for Jerusalem's notables to locate their summerhouses atop the hills around Jerusalem. Karm al-Khalili was an excellent location, as it has a virtuous view over al-Aqsa Mosque, the Old City of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, Wadi al-Jawz, and Shaykh Jarrah. The area was an uninhabited green and fertile hill, though it lost this virtue as Jerusalem encroached outside its ancient walls a century later.

The story of Karm al-Khalili is somehow overdramatic, and the pine tree of Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili has witnessed many of its turns. King Edward VII selected the enormous pine tree in 1862 to settle his royal tent underneath it; while in 1865 Arthur of England erected his camp right at the same site. The shaykh's summerhouse as well as his pine tree were neighbored by the Rashidiyya School in 1906, marking the establishment of the first buildings of what would later become known as Bab al-Sahira neighborhood.

In 1908, after Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II's announcement restoring the 1876 constitution and reconvening parliament, Jerusalem witnessed major urban and social transformations marked mainly by the city's expansion outside of its walls. New neighborhoods were established primarily by the middle and upper class. Urban expansion outside the walls encroached on areas such as in Bab al-Sahira, Wadi al-Jawz, and Shaykh Jarrah, and was encouraged by the provision of new road networks, streetlights, and enhanced security inside and outside the city. Although the Ottoman modernization of Jerusalem did not include planned "public parks," areas around the new neighborhoods emerged to host public festivities, entertainment, and communal activities. Karm al-Khalili was a site for football tournaments and horse races, which according to neighbors continued until the late 1960s.

In 1906, the Zionist movement through the Jewish National Fund (JNF) seized control of lands from Karm al-Khalili with the intention of building Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts overlooking their claimed Temple Mount. The urban encroachment on Karm al-Khalili continued during the British Mandate due to the demographic expansion of Jerusalem and the rise of a new social structure of professionals, merchants, and civil servants. Thirty-two dunams of land were bought from the heirs of Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili to build the Palestinian Archaeological Museum, which opened to the public in 1938. The small tract of land adjacent to the museum was walled and turned into a park based on a master plan produced by Clifford Ashby in 1922.

Israel captured the park and the archaeological museum, along with the rest of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, in 1967. The Israeli administration renamed both museum and garden after the American philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, who had donated two million dollars to build the museum. The summerhouse and the grand pine tree of Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili remained to witness the transformations and political upheaval of Jerusalem. Khalili's famous and fabulous pine persisted until 1988, when it died and was chopped down.

Karm al-Khalili garden now stands as the only open space in Bab al-Sahira neighborhood. It is administered by the municipality of Jerusalem, which marks it as one of the municipal parks of Jerusalem under the name Rockefeller Garden. The garden has green lawns, many olive trees, and is bordered by pine and cypress trees planted around the boundary formed by its 1938 British walls. A fountain and what look like a couple of empty Roman sarcophagi lie as half buried sculptures in the garden. Since the early 1970s, the community of Bab al-Sahira has identified Karm al-Khalili as a haven for drug addicts, especially at night. They avoid passing through the park due to its bad reputation, treating it as if it was not there.

To deal with this long, rich history of the garden vis-à-vis its current nature between

Museum (Rockefeller) in Jerusalem. Museum from the north, G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph
Collection, between 1934 and 1939.

Prince of Wales Tree by E.F. Beaumont. The Lilian E. Beaumont Collection of Artworks by E.F. Beaumont, Oriental Institute collections, University of Chicago. Photographer: Kramer, Austin M.

drug trafficking and proper gardening practices by the greater Jerusalem municipality, I decided to gather and work with the community's untold myths and stories of the Karm al-Khalili garden. The title of the project, *Zalet Lisan* (meaning a slip of the tongue), is a popular term used to express an error in speech or memory that is interpreted psychologically as a product of an interruption caused by an unconscious repressed and subdued desire, conflict, or thought. In Freudian terms, this error is guided by the super-ego and the rules of proper behavior, revealing sources outside the dialogue that is taking place. A group of students from al-Quds Bard College were commissioned to conduct visits, walks, talks, and conversations in the neighborhood to investigate and collect the unspoken narratives, suppressed histories, or secret stories of unspoken desires in relation to Karm al-Khalili garden. The initial research unpacked the reciprocal engagements between the neighbors and the garden, between the morphology of space and its history, between the past, the present, and the imagined future.

During the research, I found myself reading again from Ibn al-Muqaffa''s translated version of *Kalila wa Dimna*, an Indian collection of animal fables, taking place mostly in the forest, from the third century BCE. The fables unexpectedly forged an analogy between Karm al-Khalili garden and the forest in *Kalila wa Dimna*. I thought abstractly how to overlaying the forest in *Kalila wa Dimna* on Karm al-Khalili garden. I became even more excited by the thought of correlating the visuals of animal characters with certain faces and personalities from the community of al-Zahra Street. I wanted to transform Karm al-Khalili garden into a live animal fable through huge projections, the way it is portrayed in *Kalila wa Dimna* and amidst the trees and greenery existing there. I began fusing the stories of al-Zahra Street neighborhood with the animal fables, using the recorded material gathered by al-Quds Bard students and asking Fadi AbuNe'meh and Casey Asprooth-Jackson to edit them as soundtracks for several short films found on the internet depicting diverse animals in their natural habitat, combining and connecting the analogous critique found in both neighborhood and classical myths. I sought to have the community stories narrated on animal tongues, allowing the hidden to be spoken out without fear of confrontation and exposure.

On a clear evening in November 2013, as the sun descended over Jerusalem and darkness cloaked the trees and corners of Karm al-Khalili garden, fluxes of light between the olive and pine trees materialized as projections on huge white screens in several locations in the garden. Almost life-size animal figures from *Kalila wa Dimna* burst forth from the lit screens between trees, whispering past and present stories from Karm al-Khalili garden and disarming the stigmas and forbidden subjects that had shrouded the garden for years. A lion, the king of the animal world, welcomed the families and their children at the main garden entrance, inviting them to convene with the animals and exchange stories from *Kalila wa Dimna*'s forest and Karm al-Khalili garden. A giraffe stood high, peeking out above the garden walls and onto al-Zahra Street, accompanied by a sound installation narrating the story of the community and speaking wisdoms from the fables on self-empowerment and the oppressed. Families from al-Zahra Street crowded around a peacock, a rhino, zebras, and chimpanzees, engaging the taboos and myths of the garden.

# Reflections

Why has this issue of *JQ* taken as its subject derelict sites and structures? And why has it done so through the lens of architecture? Architecture has a unique advantage over other applied arts and cultural fields, as it serves as a reflection of historical relations and societal power structure. Architecture as a visual cultural doctrine shapes daily human familiarities, with regard not only to experiences of space, but also to material and utilitarian virtues. The intertwining of buildings, landscapes, and spaces is essential and can never transcend or be divorced from the mundane and the everyday. Our social history with its triumphs and tragedies occurred in or near buildings, in public and private spaces, through the intimate and the common, the metaphorical and the pragmatic, the confrontational and the compliant.

The residual spaces and derelict structures which are the subject of this issue have formal and material qualities that evoke strong and contradictory images within their present physical landscape. They embody elements that conjure collective memories and symbols. Most of these sites, whether abandoned or still in use, contradict their modern surroundings, allowing opposing readings based on specific social codes and agendas developed along specific spatial conditions. Understanding the underlying discursive interpretation of the valuing of derelict structures and spaces is key to probing the politics of the nation-building project vis-à-vis the social relations inherent to it. What is the intellectual and class allure of conservation and the integration of these dilapidated spaces and their histories within the contemporary language of nation-building? How does the "derelict" becomes a means to investigate the newly built? I would like to suggest some rough schema of approaches to reading the "derelict" within contemporary cultural discourse.

The first is a nostalgic reading that positions itself in opposition to the vile global economic apparatuses and their assimilative neoliberal cultural aesthetics. Salvaging social historical sites and building becomes part of combating global assimilation. Within this frame, *al-Atlal* becomes a protest or maybe a helpless expression of grief upon witnessing the disappearance of places indicative of local identity. Within this premise, an oppositional popular interpretation undermines the intellectual demands for safeguarding derelict sites. It formulates a popular dogma, suggesting that the uncivilized (those not part of the technological modern) live like animals in the small rooms of vernacular heritage buildings without internal kitchen or bathrooms, whereas the civilized, those demanding heritage protection, live in modern apartment buildings, enjoying technological comfort and wellbeing.

Another parallel reading, bound to a similar binary, embraces cultural heritage as opposition to Israeli colonial practices and identity. This reading is confined to a reactive discourse, whereby archaic heritage becomes the essence of national identity, and thus works toward the dissolution of inherited colonial knowledge to combat its identity politics. *Al-Atlal*, in this manner, becomes a witness to the colonial uprooting and disintegration of Palestinian identity. The assemblage of articles, written in English, becomes a global humane annunciation of the tragedy and victimhood of Palestinians. On

*Mental Map (Issa), 2nd Edition*, 277 x 127 cm, print, 2016, Detail. © Alexandra Sophia Handal.

the other hand, this reading also corresponds with the Palestinian Authority's discourse, pertaining to the conservation and preservation of the "derelict." The primordial becomes a contemporary representation of national identity, seen as essential in the struggle over whose culture came first and what traces are left to prove it. Archaeological sites and primordial and religious identities – such as Roman Sebastiya, the Umayyad Hisham Palace, Mamluk Jerusalem, and Canaanite archaeological sites – become the sole fetish in forging the reference of what is the "national." What precedes the formation of the State of Israel is worth saving and what comes after it is unnecessary and doomed to destruction, so as to make space for the modern buildings of the state-building project.

A final reading considers the global market as its landscape of operations through capitalizing on a widespread circulation of ideas about Palestinian cultural "otherness," and its competition with other cultures through food, fashion, academia, literature, arts, architecture, and so on. This reading allows a wider spectrum of representations within the category of heritage and how to promote it within this global competition. In this case, the valuing of derelict sites goes beyond primordial and archaeological representations and enters into a hybrid concept of heritage, whereby "otherness" can also be promoted through reference to modern and contemporary eras. Here, *al-Atlal* becomes an intellectual commodity within a system of global academic knowledge circulation that promotes Palestinian "otherness" while remaining disconnected from the local intellectual discourse that seeks to change the reality on the ground, where Palestinians remain trapped between the colonial and postcolonial condition.

This issue of *JQ – al-Atlal* appreciates the significance of, and therefore aims to shed light on, stories and experiences related to derelict sites that once lent our cities particular identities before becoming sites of massive redevelopment or total abandonment. We relate to derelict architecture and spaces as key signifiers in the definition of contemporary culture and identity. Dilapidated architectural sites and landscapes allow for investigation of the cultural dimension of the ongoing Palestinian state-building project. Constructing the alleged nation is not merely an economic and political struggle, but should be regarded equally as a critical moment in constructing and defining culture.

The articles and reflections in this issue intricately explore stories of derelict structures extant upon and vanished from our landscape – as well as the people who built and inhabited these structures. Alexandra Handal explores the affective dimensions of dispossession and rupture through the history of one confiscated building in Mamilla. With no physical remains of it today, the Handal uses original oral histories to reconstruct the life of this structure in words and images. In the process, a critical space for reflection opens, offering rare insight to the mindsets of Bethlehemite merchants who ventured to Latin America in the early twentieth century. During the summer of 2014, Adina Hoffman set out through the streets of Jerusalem in search of an elusive British Mandate-era architect named Spyro Houris. In an excerpt from her book *Till We Have Built Jerusalem*, Hoffman recounts aspects of her quest to discover who this "most outstanding Arab architect" of the period really was. As she looks for him, she reckons with the legacies of other Jerusalemites whose identities were (and still are) more layered than any single ethnic or national label might indicate. Jerusalem and its surrounding suburbs are also

home to four leprosaria: Mamilla Asylum, Jesus Hilfe Asyl (Talbiya), Silwan, and Surda (Star) Mountain. Suzannah Henty looks to the history of these leprosaria – both their built structures and the people who treated and sought treatment there – to trace the role of architecture in medical developments and the human experience of exile from 1867 to 1960 in Palestine.

Two articles in the issue address key institutions in the cultural and economic history of Nablus. Zahraa Zawawi and Mohammad Abu Hammad speak of the last moments of al-Assi Cinema before its inevitable destruction. For more than a decade, the cinema has been left to forgetfulness and neglect and, when it was remembered, it was thought of as an unnecessary structure that should be demolished and replaced by another structure. The article records testimonies from the times of al-Assi Cinema's glory, and documents perception and opinions about this glory. Shaden Awad and Manal Bishawi explore the journey of al-Naʿama Flourmill from its inception to its annihilation. The story of the mill reflects the history of manufacturing in Nablus and, along with it, the transformations in power relations that reshaped the city's urban identity over the last century.

Articles by Khaldun Bshara and Yasid El Rifai, Dima Yaser, and Adele Jarrar, meanwhile, explore derelict and destroyed structures throughout Palestine that were intended to impose and express political and military power. In "All that Did Not Remain," Bshara gives an account of the Ottoman saraya that has largely disappeared from Palestine's urban physical landscape while posing a methodological question about how we think about material culture that is missing from landscape and how we talk about events that are missing from historical records. Yasid El Rifai, Dima Yaser, and Adele Jarrar examine and illustrate the role played by the so-called Tegart forts since their establishment in 1936. These structures stood as powerful edifices in the Palestinian landscape. This essay examines how these forts were inhabited by successive colonial regimes, and how they provoke collective memories through their survival in different forms to this day. In a "Photo Memoir," we also feature Zeyad Dajani's photographs of King Husayn's Palace, an unrealized project built in the mid-1960s in Jerusalem and left as a lifeless skeleton after 1967.

Perhaps we are all in some ways drawn to drink from the *atlal* of our families. Dima Srouji tackles her mother's *atlal* and her recollection of how Solomon's Pools were during the Jordanian rule and before the occupation. Today, the pools sit in the shadow of the "modern" convention palace next door, both as a ghost of lost potential and as a beautiful patient skeleton ready to be reactivated by a future generation. In his letter from Jerusalem, Mahmoud Muna considers his father's peculiar advice to display his books "like soldiers," one standing straight next to the other, at his bookshop in Jerusalem. He uses this analogy between soldiers and books to talk about the massive looting and theft of Jerusalem's books and intellectual heritage when the city was occupied in 1948.

Traces on the landscape are not only those left by human hands, and in an essay on diminishing landscapes, Omar Tesdell and Iyad Issa write about the *baluʿ* or seasonal pond, a natural feature of the landscape of Palestine. By studying the wetlands of Baluʿ al-Bireh and Baluʿ Dayr Ballut, they highlight the demise of such residual natural spaces due to aggressive urban encroachment. And while the built environment can threaten

the natural environment, "nature" can also become a tool used to try to expunge the landscape of human *atlal*. In June 2017, Yalu will observe its fiftieth anniversary of extinction. The Palestinian village has a long history to tell. Ulla Mundinger shares her personal diaries in a piece that explores the history of forced transformation and oblivion, and the application thick layers of a trimmed present to the remaining shreds of the past. Since Yalu's depopulation in 1967 and the creation of Ayalon Canada Park on its ruins, a deceptive silence rests on the Palestinian village. Hopefully one day Yalu will tell its story – and let the windrows of silence lift up from its ruins.

*Yazid Anani is the director of the Public Program at the A. M. Qattan Foundation. From 2007 to 2016, he served as an assistant professor in Architecture, Urban Planning, and Landscape Architecture at Birzeit University, and, from 2010 to 2012, he headed the Academic Council of the International Academy of Art Palestine. He has curated and co-curated several projects, including four editions of the Cities Exhibition. His work and research focus on colonial and post-colonial spaces as well as themes in architecture, neoliberalism, and art education.*

## Ibrahim Dakkak Award
## For Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

**Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem** will be awarded to an outstanding essay that addresses either contemporary or historical issues relating to Jerusalem. The winning submission will receive a prize of $1000 and will be published in *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

Essays submitted for consideration should be 4 to 5 thousand words long (including footnotes), should be based on original research, and must not have been previously published elsewhere. Preference will be given to young/junior/aspiring/emerging/early career researchers and students.

Please submit essays and a short bio (including current of previous affiliation with a recognized university, research institution, or non-governmental organization that conducts research) via email to **jq@palestine-studies. org**. Any images should be submitted as separate files with resolution of 600 dpi if possible. Submitted images must have copyright clearance from owners.

The deadline for submissions is 31 October 2017. A committee selected by *Jerusalem Quarterly* will determine the winning essay.

*Jerusalem Quarterly*
Ibrahim Dakkak Annual Award
for the best essay on Jerusalem
***has been jointly won by***

# Anne Irfan

PhD Candidate in International History
London School of Economics

## Is Jerusalem International or Palestinian?
## Rethinking UNGA Resolution 181

&

# Noura Alkhalili

PhD Candidate in Human Geography
Lund University

## Protection from Below:
## On Waqf between Theft and Morality

The two winning essays will appear in a
special issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* slated for publication in
June 2017

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**Jury**
Michael Dumper, Exeter University
Rema Hammami, Birzeit University
Nazmi Jubeh, Birzeit University
Raja Khalidi, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)
Roberto Mazza, Limerick University
and
The Editors of *Jerusalem Quarterly*

A number of additional essays received honorable mention as outstanding contributions
on Jerusalem and will appear in subsequent issues of *Jerusalem Quarterly*

# A Passage from a Diary of Echoes

Alexandra Sophia Handal

We both fell into motionlessness. Only the sound of moving cars could be heard. Here we were in the immense underground car park of the upscale shopping promenade of Alrov Mamilla Avenue. While Victoria Kawas had heard about this Israeli open-air mall in West Jerusalem, it was her first time here.[1] Her voice crackled: "And now I feel as though I am going to fall" – the timbre of an English intonation still inhabiting her speech from the time of the Britishers, as she called them. Grief-stricken by the sight of what she was witnessing, Victoria explained to me: "My father spent all his years working so that he could construct a seven-story building in Jerusalem." Her physiological response to absence was summoned in the assemblage of words that followed, when she murmured, after a pause the duration of a gasp: "I feel my leg shivering." Even the balmy afternoon air did not spare her from feeling chills ripple through her bones. Victoria took a deep sigh and uttered: "Good-nessss." The "s" soared into an uphill melody, pronouncing her current state: "I feel broken." We had come to identify the unmarked grave of *a dream*, yet it was nowhere to be seen, so she began to draw the outline of a structure that once stood there with a gesture of her hand. Nothing remained, not even the remains.

The way her father had told her the story, she passed it on to me. Hanna Issa Shehadeh Kawas was no more than thirteen years of age when he left to work as a merchant in La Ceiba, Honduras.[2] "Why there?" I asked. "And who did he go with?" Victoria had no answers, nor did she desire to speculate. She only knew what her father had relayed to her about his reasons to make such an epic journey alone to the New World. This was towards the end of the Ottoman rule of Palestine. "He was a merchant," she expressed, *tout court*, with her matter-of-fact stare. While his parents and

siblings remained in Bethlehem, Hanna went in search of economic opportunities in Honduras, where he had distant relatives. In La Ceiba he married a fellow Bethlehemite named Sofia Salem. Their union would eventually form a family of seven children, with Victoria being the eldest. When she was about seven, not older than eight, her father decided to return home to Palestine with his entire family. He desired to raise his children there, "in the Arabic language," Victoria specified. Hanna had constructed the only house made of white stone in La Ceiba. Now that he had accumulated enough wealth, he was ready to leave behind *la casa blanca*, as it was referred to by the locals, to set sail with his family back to the Old World, to which he had remained closely connected, despite the distance, and the years. Cordillera was the name of the vessel, Victoria repeated, her "r" rolling impeccably into a full circle.

Before reaching the street level of the Alrov Mamilla Mall, Victoria proceeded to tell me that there was a wholesale paper factory owned by Phillip Darderian in the basement of her father's building. She did not notice my surprise when the owner's full name appeared on the surface of her moving lips. Less than a week earlier, Victoria had drawn a mental map for me with a question mark after the words: "Phillip Paper?" Now that we were in situ, she had retrieved the missing name suddenly and unexpectedly. Darderian's factory, she had informed me earlier, covered the surface of the entire underground area, with one section dedicated to papermaking and another to carton manufacturing. Resting her hands gently on top of each other, Victoria stood still. "Is this the convent you once told me to go to?" I asked. Her head swayed gently to the pace of traveling eyes, which were climbing the staircase of a splendid ecclesiastical structure that had been incorporated into the architecture of the pedestrian mall. We discovered on site that Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul had been rebuilt in its original form, yet its surrounding environment had changed so drastically that it left her with a disoriented expression in her gaze.

I was looking at Victoria from the back. Her silver hair shimmered alongside the black attire she was wearing. Departing from the Central American port city of La Ceiba, the Kawas family bid farewell to the years they had spent on the northern coast of Honduras. Their final destination was Bayt Lahm (Bethlehem), but first they needed to be at sea for weeks before reaching the Mediterranean port city of Jaffa. They were not the only Palestinian passengers on the ship. There were those from the Honduran capital city of Tegucigalpa and from neighboring El Salvador who were traveling to visit relatives. Onboard were also nine "orphaned" Palestinian children, as Victoria described them, since they had lost their mother. The widower father wanted them to be in the care of his sister in Bethlehem. Victoria's parents, Hanna and Sofia, agreed to chaperone them from Honduras to Palestine. Despite the nearly eight decades that had passed, I could hear the ecstatic voices of children running onboard the craft through Victoria's witty smile. She mentioned that herself and Mercedes, who was the oldest of the "nine children," would look after the little ones who often quarreled. On one particular occasion, Mercedes received a blow to the eye and a physician on the boat provided a recipe to heal the injury, charging a mere five piasters. He instructed Sofia to boil the contents of the little sachet he provided in order to clean Mercedes's wound. When Sofia curiously drew her nose close to the packet, she discovered to her amusement that it smelt of chamomile.

It pleased her that she had found another medicinal use for this herb. Thus it became the heirloom of natural remedies in her family, tying generations to that homecoming voyage to Palestine.

Along the Alrov shopping promenade, we discovered handwritten numbers on the stones of certain façades of buildings. The reason they were marked in this way was so they could be rebuilt with their old appearance, giving the design of this contemporary Israeli commercial space, an allure of the past. However, the *past* of unfinished balconies, incomplete archways and partially reconstructed columns emanate from the rubbles of a destroyed pre-Nakba Mamilla, the one Victoria and I had come to recollect. "It's awful," she says, continuing her thought, 'and they are still constructing. It's awful, really. And look what they are doing here!" Her voice became indiscernible as it faded into the clamor of drills, hammers and heavy weight building machinery. We moved away. "When exactly was your father's edifice constructed?" Victoria could not provide a specific date, as she never knew it to begin with. Hence, together we began measuring time differently. We ascertained that her father must have begun to give shape to his dream endeavor in Jerusalem while she was still attending the National High School of Bethlehem; for by the end of the 1930s or the early 1940s, when she had become a student in Jerusalem, it was already a commercial landmark in Mamilla.

"You had Spinneys on your left," she recalled. This grocery store occupied the largest surface of the four businesses that were situated on the street level of the Hanna Kawas building. To the right of Spinneys was the Handal Shoe Store and next to it, al-Amal, a store that boasted an array of textiles from which Victoria would ravel in choices with the help of her mother and maternal aunt (*mart khalah*), Nvart Karparian. Her mother, who was coming from Bethlehem, would take the bus to Upper Baq'a, where Nvart lived, and together the two women went to fetch her at the Schmidt's Girls School in Jerusalem, behind Cinema Orion. While the pupils who originated from nearby Bethlehem were rarely boarders, Victoria had chosen to avoid the daily bus commute by residing in the dormitories, like those who had come from Safad, Haifa, Nazareth, Acre, and Jaffa. Unable to remember the name of the fourth store, Victoria began rhyming family names that resembled it. "Not Sansour, Mansour . . . something like that," and she continued repeating similar sounding names, until she arrived at the one she was looking for: Samour.

Of the four stores on the street level, Samour's was the smallest. It sold "perfumes, things for ladies," Victoria recalled, but she stopped at that description, adding: "I don't know what else, I never went there." The rest of the building, Victoria believes, was used either as commercial storage space or offices. On the second story was her family dentist, Dr. Etayim's practice. I kept my remaining questions for our car ride back to Bethlehem. Yet there was a moment of reflection while we waited for the lift. Her contemplative presence stood in stark contrast with the glitzy, careless atmosphere. A building, I thought, is not *simply* a building. Hanna Kawas had created *a place* in Jerusalem's commercial center; but as Victoria noted, there were still unrealized desires. As we left Alrov Mamilla Mall, she pointed to the spot where *a dream* was unwillingly buried.

Over the years, destruction has taken on different facets, from ethnic cleansing to occupation to appropriation to alteration to demolition. The systematic assault on

Palestinian social and cultural memory by the Zionist state has produced another kind of ruin to be deciphered.[3] If imagination were a boundless territory, I would want to explore its capacity to touch reality. I carefully folded this idea in my pocket, making sure it would not tear. Going along an uneven road, I encountered numerous people – twenty-eight, to be precise – some by chance and others through mutual acquaintances. They had been exiled. We were all connected through loss. Each brought a new insight of what this meant. I made an agreement with every one rooted in respect. Unlike the accepted notion of a war ruin, the ruins I am examining are about an extended past that drags into the present. I pulled out the notes I held in my pocket to scribble a question: How can freedom and justice be activated in ways that are uniquely possible through art? I pass my hands on the crease that was formed at the lower edges and folded the thought gently back into my pocket.

The core of my investigation is: m-e-m-o-r-y. Through the medium of memory, I desired to recover what remains of our eradicated world. Nothing was deemed too banal to document, even what remains unknown. This too is part of the story. I heard about the barber, the shoe repairman, the seamstress, the dentist, the photographer, the watermelon vendor and the milkman. While memorials are not commonly built for ordinary folks, the everyday spaces that they have created are nevertheless the focus of my investigation. They illuminate our understanding of the social and cultural fabric of a place, even more so, when it has been torn apart. I observed that, through the act of remembering, the *spirit* of these expropriated places could be kept alive. Creativity has a vital function to play amidst destruction. As a listener from another generation, I wanted to accurately retell the stories that were being transmitted to me by those with first-hand accounts. By *accurate*, I am not simply referring to the scientific use of the term; I had already set in motion the groundwork for this understanding of it. Rather, there was a more expansive meaning of the word that I wanted to explore through art.

Over the course of nearly a decade, I compiled an encyclopaedia of vernacular places in West Jerusalem from the combined memories of exiled Palestinians. Victoria Kawas's recollection of her father's building in Mamilla is part of this index. The daily life of the town of Bethlehem was once seamlessly intertwined with the adjacent city of Jerusalem. What was most startling from my conversations with Victoria was how historians of al-Nakba, opting for a Jerusalem-centric reading, had overlooked the social, cultural, economic and demographic ramifications that the dispossession of Bethlehemites has had on Bethlehem.[4] There were other Palestinians I met, like Issa Soudah, who had become a refugee from western al-Musrara – the part of the neighborhood that was emptied of its Palestinian Arab population in 1948. He had such vivid recollections of his neighbourhood prior to 1948 that he mentioned the names of fifteen commercial and social spaces in our initial meetings. The stories that he conveyed to me orally acquired a visual dimension, eventually finding expression on paper. I wanted to animate the immaterial places that I was hearing about. What began as a component of a large-scale cartographic work called *Mental Map (Issa)*,[5] became the seed for another project. I have since assembled an inventory of forty-nine commercial and communal spaces in West Jerusalem. With this material, I initiated an ongoing series of prints, under the title *Invisible Ruins & Other*

*Short Stories of Erasure*. Through memory, I examined a dispersed people's relationship with their built environment, starting from *scratch*. I employ the visual language of advertisements in order to tell short stories of places, as they have been remembered across time. Each print is a document that retraces what has been erased or concealed. Together they are an attempt to resurrect the world beneath *invisible ruins*.

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**Endnotes**

1   Since 2007, I have been undertaking oral history fieldwork with Palestinian refugees and exiles from West Jerusalem. This essay is based on the research I conducted with Victoria Kawas. The conversations took place at her home in Bethlehem, over coffee and dessert. So deep in thought, we would not notice that our early afternoon meetings carried into the late evening. On 6 April 2008, Victoria and I went together to the Alrov Mamilla Mall, when the shopping promenade was in the last phase of construction. I am most grateful to her for sharing so generously her story with me. Victoria Kawas, conversation with the author, Bethlehem, 2 April 2008, 2 May 2008, and 24 February 2009. I wish to extend my thanks to her family for always making sure that I arrived home safely.

2   For a study specifically on the Palestinian diaspora experience in Central America, with a focus on Honduras and El Salvador, see: Manzar Foroohar, "Palestinians in Central America: From Temporary Emigrants to a Permanent Diaspora," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 3, (Spring 2011): pp. 6–22. For another important investigation on the subject, see: Cecilia Baeza, "Palestinians in Latin America: Between Assimilation and Long-Distance Nationalism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2013–2014): 59–72. The emphasis of Baeza's research is on Chile and Honduras, the two countries with the greatest population of people of Palestinian descent in Latin America.

3   Alexandra Sophia Handal, *Uncovering the hidden Palestinian city of Jerusalem: Disrupting power through art intervention* (PhD diss., University of the Arts London, 2010).

4   When I began researching the experience of Palestinians who became refugees in 1948 from West Jerusalem, I noticed the absence of lived histories concerning Bethlehemites who had become dispossessed as a result of the Nakba and exiled from the city ever since. In the course of my fieldwork, I met other Bethlehemites with similar experiences. The late Issa Giacaman told me about two residential properties that his father Saleh Giacaman built in al-Musrara for his two sons. See my interactive web documentary art, *Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)*: dreamhomespropertyconsultants. com/properties/marvelous-arab-style-house-with-a-distinct-allure-a-must-have (accessed 27 January 2017).

5   This artwork would not have been possible without the wholehearted participation of Issa Soudah in my oral history research. On 15 April 2008, Soudah kindly took me on a walk through the divided neighborhood of al-Musrara, where he lived prior to 1948. He gave me a detailed account of life there as he remembered it. On other occasions, Issa further acquainted me with pre-Nakba life by showing me his photo album and sharing memories of his family, friends, and places captured in the pictures. My conversations with Issa took place at his home in the Old City of Jerusalem. Issa Soudah, conversation with the author, Old City, Jerusalem, 21 April 2008, 22 April 2008, and 6 March 2009.
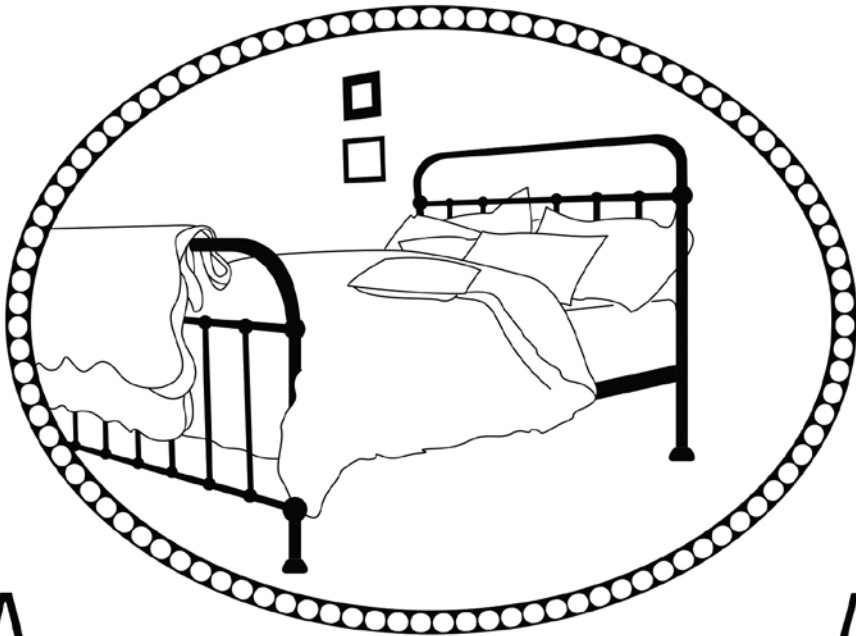
*Mental Map (Issa), 2nd Edition*, 277 x 127 cm, print, 2016, Detail. © Alexandra Sophia Handal.

# Walking on Ruins:

## The Untold Story of Yalu

Ulla Mundinger

The possession of a small red book – sometimes also called a German passport – grants me more privileges than most people in Palestine possess. Including: the privilege to decide where to go. For example: travelling to Yalu, a Palestinian village that stopped existing physically almost fifty years ago.

## A Day in Yalu

My idea of travelling to Yalu was formed in late summer 2016. I remembered my friend Ramzi from Ramallah, one of the numerous Palestinians born too late to savor their origins.. He had grown up in Jordan, but his family was originally from Yalu. I started out on a Saturday morning. Ramallah and Yalu are located close to each other, less than twenty kilometers apart. But since walls and checkpoints make direct travelling difficult, I took a detour through Jerusalem.

The Palestinian village of Yalu, located around 13 kilometers southeast of Ramla in the water-rich and fertile Latrun area, has a long history to tell. Associated with Ajalon, an ancient village mentioned in the Old Testament, Yalu lived through eras of Romans, Hasmoneans, Byzantines, and Ottomans.[1] In 1948, most of the Latrun area – together with today's West Bank – came under Jordanian administration; the rest remained no-man's land. The Jordan-Israel armistice lines of 1949 clearly allocate the Latrun area to today's occupied Palestinian territory.

Yalu was destroyed in 1967. On 6 June, voices on loudspeakers told the approximately 1,700 inhabitants to leave the village; remaining persons would be in high danger.[2] Old people chose to stay or had to be left behind;[3] the rest packed a few belongings and fled, probably without being aware that it was their last day in the village. The area became a closed military

zone. Bulldozers kept on demolishing houses. The neighboring villages of 'Imwas and Bayt Nuba shared the same fate. Now the villages, all in all home to approximately nine thousand inhabitants, are covered by the Ayalon Canada Park, a nature reserve established by the Jewish National Fund.[4] In March 1976, residents of Yalu, 'Imwas, and Bayt Nuba officially addressed a letter to Israel's former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. The request for implementation of their "legitimate humanitarian right to return . . . without applying for compensations from the State" contained within has been without answer.[5]

## Entering the Park

Asking for a taxi to Canada Park in Jerusalem was unexpectedly uncomfortable. The driver, a Palestinian, was rather less than amused to learn my planned destination. The bag of food in my hand did not help to correct the picture of me being a tourist only wanting to enjoy the beautiful nature in the park. Anyway. The ends justifies the means, I thought, and stepped into the car.

"Ayalon – Canada Park," written in Hebrew and Arabic, embellishes a huge stone at the entrance of the park, next to it the Israeli flag and a big sign of the Jewish National Fund. I walk over to an information board a few meters ahead. Again, I read the park's name in big letters, with the difference this time that there is no Arabic translation. I am sad to realize that I am not surprised. The entrance is located in the park's northwest; my destination, the remnants of Yalu, lies in the northeastern part, marked as an "historic sight" with a cartoonish pillar. I trace the shortest way within a maze of colorfully painted trails. I start walking through the park. Dusty roads, almond and olive trees everywhere. Sometimes a bunch of cactus plants and cypresses. I hear crickets chirping. People are hard to find, probably because it is the Sabbath. The heat is nearly unbearable. I breathe dust. After an hour I wish I had asked the family that was having a barbecue near the entrance for a ride. After one and a half hours, I realize that I am lost – instead of having hiked to the northwest, I find myself in the park's south. It is now late afternoon, but the heat stubbornly stays, as the biggest child on the playground that does not want to leave the swing to the others.

In 1973, Bernard Bloomfield – former president of the Jewish National Fund of Canada – launched a campaign to raise donations for the establishment of the planned recreational park. The fifteen million dollars collected were tax-deductible, due to the organization's charitable status.[6] In 1975, former Canadian prime minister John Diefenbaker himself declared the park open.[7] Approximately seven thousand dunams,[8] the Ayalon Canada Park covers the destroyed Palestinian villages of Yalu, 'Imwas, and Dayr Ayyub. Countless picnic areas, playgrounds, hiking trails, springs, and panoramic views have turned Ayalon Canada Park into a popular tourist destination. The signs inside the park refer to the area's various historical periods, but not to its Palestinian history.

## The Remains of Yalu

After what feels an eternity, I reach Yalu. It feels macabre, but the sight of the ruins nearly makes me jump with joy. I walk around randomly. From stone to stone, from ruin to ruin. The low-quality picture of the Hebrew map does not help me orientate myself. Far ahead, I see some people, but do not feel like talking to them. There is not much left of Yalu: a few stones on the ground, sometimes still connected to walls or parts of houses. Most of the stones were taken away, and nature fought back its place. Bunches of cactus plants and almond trees are mute witnesses of the life that existed before. They are in full bloom.

I spot a huge arched cave on the other side of the valley, next to it a small black square, surrounded by systematically placed stones. A house, I realize, and rush toward it. It was built directly into the hill. Its walls cut into the rock face must have rescued it from the bulldozers. I enter. For a few moments, the sudden blackness robs my eyesight. As far as I can see, the room has an approximate depth of five to seven meters. The floor consists of sand and bricks, and in the middle of the room I spot large holes in the ground. What might have been here? In whose house am I standing? A gloomy feeling of uncertainty turns the room black again. I step out. The view's colorfulness suddenly feels illusive; too much beauty for such a forlorn place. While descending, I pass the massive arched cave. The innumerable cactus plants in front seem to guard it. As I stroll around the ruins, so does my mind. Today, the place challenges one's imagination. I try to picture the life that existed here. What the houses looked like, how the people lived. Where they gathered for special occasions, whether they lived a happy life. How Ramzi would have lived if his family had not been forced to leave.

I climb up the highest hill. I am astonished by the view. Lush hills, cactus plants, and palms cover the area. Below, I even spot a lake. The setting sun lets the colors shine. I feel far away from civilization.[9] I discover a small tower of stones, one of those with big stones below and tiny pebbles on top. A "sign of civilization," as I was told. In this case, I am not sure if someone was thoughtful or simply very ignorant. I look at the settlements all around. Big houses, even a factory were placed there. I wonder what is going on in those people's minds. Suddenly a naive thought crosses my mind: how easy it would be to exit the park here and go straight to Ramallah! But then I remember the borders and checkpoints. I sigh and start walking back to the park's entry.

## Leaving Yalu

I feel confused. I witnessed how life had disappeared and houses were turned into ruins, or even less than that. What do I think about the last few hours? Why did I come here? How should I feel while walking over the ruins of my friend's hometown? I feel I have more questions than before.

On the way to exit the park, I pass a group of guys sitting on benches and smoking *argileh*. All of them come from Ramla, I find out later. I ask for the bus to Jerusalem, but shortly thereafter find myself getting a free ride to Jerusalem's Damascus Gate. We

talk, of course. "Yalu? There is no Yalu anymore," Mahdi says dryly. Silence. I remember sayings about how helpful it is to "leave the past behind." But what if force has left no past to leave behind?

## One Park, Two Stories

On its homepage, the Jewish National Fund presents itself as a "global environmental leader" that "is greening the desert with millions of trees [and] building thousands of parks." Further, it claims to promote "the preservation of historical sites throughout Israel ensuring that the stories behind each historical site are properly documented and can be retold for generations to come."[10] But this is only half the truth. When the Jewish National Fund addressed potential Canadian benefactors in 1984, it claimed that their donations would "enable the vital work of land reclamation, road-building, infrastructure preparation, and tree-planting."[11] The fact that the Ayalon Canada Park would be built on the forcefully depopulated villages – located in today's occupied Palestinian territory and therefore making the park illegal under international law – was not mentioned. When driving on Highway No. 1 from Jerusalem to the Ayalon Canada Park, no sign marks the crossing of the Green Line.[12] Until today, the Jewish National Fund neglects any Palestinian past on the park's territory.[13] A typical reference on the Jewish National Fund web site merely mentions "many fierce battles . . . during the War of Independence, between the IDF and the Jordanian Legion."[14]

## Remembering the Past. But Which One?

The Jewish National Fund seems to hide and eliminate remnants of Palestinian life within the Latrun area; thousands of planted trees seem to "greenwash" the past. Ilan Pappé, Israeli historian and author of *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, frames this engagement within the so-called process of *memoricide*.[15] In his opinion, Palestinian villages have not only been seized, ethnically cleansed, and destroyed. Rather, the Jewish National Fund tries to eliminate the area's Palestinian past and present from public awareness. Walid Khalidi, co-founder of the Institute for Palestine Studies, would be right: "It is a platitude of historiography that the victors in war get away with both the loot and the version of events."[16]

In June 2017, Yalu will observe fifty years of extinction. The Palestinian village has a long history to tell, a history of forced transformation and oblivion, of applying thick layers of a trimmed present on the remaining shreds of the past. Since its depopulation in 1967 and the creation of Ayalon Canada Park on its ruins, deceptive silence rests on the Palestinian village. Hopefully one day Yalu *will* tell its story – and clear the windrows of silence from its ruins.

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**Endnotes**

1  John Reynolds, *Where Villages Stood: Israel's Continuing Violations of International Law in Occupied Latroun, 1967–2007* (Ramallah: al-Haq, 2007), online at www.academia. edu/12909263/Where_Villages_Stood_ Occupied_Latroun_1967-2007 (accessed 23 January 2017).

2  *Memory of the Cactus: A Story of Three Palestinian Villages* [film], al-Haq, 23 June 2010, online at vimeo.com/12801869 (accessed 23 January 2017).

3  Eighteen elderly residents were unable to leave. See: "Letter from the Latroun Villagers to the Canadian Museum of Civilisation," 12 October 2010, online at www.alhaq.org/advocacy/topics/ settlements-and-settler-violence/197-letter- from-the-latroun-villagers-to-the-canadian- museum-of-civilisation.

4  Ayalon Canada Park covers Yalu, 'Imwas, and Dayr Ayyub, which was depopulated in 1948. Since 1970, Bayt Nuba has been covered by the settlement Mevo Horon, housing approximately 2,400 settlers. See the 2016 policy resolution (G16-P010) proposed by the Green Party of Canada, *Revoking the Charitable Status of the Jewish National Fund Canada (JNF)*, online at www.greenparty.ca/en/convention-2016/voting/ resolutions/g16-p010 (accessed 23 January 2017).

5  Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 181–82.

6  Reynolds, *Where Villages Stood.*

7  Corey Levine, "Israel: It Is Time to Renounce 'Canada Park'," *Canadian Charger*, 31 March 2011, online at www.thecanadiancharger.com/ page.php?id=5&a=848 (accessed 23 January 2017).

8  "The Ghost of the Latroun Area: 46 Years of Occupation," *al-Haq*, 13 June 2013, online at www.alhaq.org/documentation/weekly- focuses/713-the-ghost-of-the-latroun-area-46- years-of-occupation (accessed 23 January 2017).

9  This might also be due to the dust on my clothes, my sunburned skin, the lack of water, a bleeding knee from climbing stones, and small spikes all over from accidently walking *into* a field of cactus plants.

10  Jewish National Fund, "About JNF," n.d., online at www.jnf.org/about-jnf/ (accessed 23 January 2017).

11  Reynolds, *Where Villages Stood.*

12  Eitan Bronstein, "Restless Park: On the Latrun Villages and Zochrot," *Zochrot*, 2014, online at zochrot.org/en/article/51029 (accessed 23 January 2017).

13  Al-Haq, "What is 'Canada Park'?" 2008, online at www.alhaq.org/images/stories/PDFz/what-is- canada-park.pdf (accessed 23 January 2017).

14  "Ayalon Canada Park – Biblical & Modern Israel," *Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael – Jewish National Fund*, n.d., online at www.kkl-jnf. org/tourism-and-recreation/forests-and-parks/ ayalon-canada-park.aspx (accessed 23 January 2017).

15  Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

16  Cited in Pappe, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 234.

*Mental Map (Issa), 2ⁿᵈ Edition*, 277 x 127 cm, print, 2016, Detail. © Alexandra Sophia Handal.

# Who Was Spyro Houris?

Adina Hoffman

*In the summer of 2014, in the middle of Israel's latest war on Gaza, I set out through the streets of Jerusalem in search of a ghost. My account of that search forms the last section of a book,* Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architects of a New City, *which focuses on three very different figures who helped construct the modern town. Both the German-Jewish refugee and modernist maverick Erich Mendelsohn and the English expatriate, civil servant, and lifelong student of eastern architecture Austen St. Barbe Harrison left sizable archives, so that it was possible to reconstruct the history of their fraught time in the city. The biographical traces of the third architect, meanwhile, an elusive figure named Spyro Houris, have all but been erased.*

*The Israeli architectural historian David Kroyanker has called Houris, in passing, "among the most outstanding Arab architects" of British Mandate Jerusalem. Kroyanker also reproduces a photograph of Houris in several of his books (though the photo's source is obscure) and credits him with a range of impressive buildings, many of them inset with decorative panels made by the master Armenian ceramicist David Ohannessian and some apparently planned with a partner, "Petassis." Whatever else we do or don't know about Houris, it's clear he was a kind of equal opportunity employee, building for well-to-do people from all of Jerusalem's communities – from the aristocratic Palestinian Muslim poet, intellectual, and educator Is'af al-Nashashibi, to the Constantinople-born Sephardic Jewish judge and lawyer Yom-Tov Hamon, to the Catholic Arab businessman and diplomat Elias Thomas Gelat. He also worked in a variety of styles, which ranged from the elaborately*

*ornamented, ceramic-fronted mansions planned in Shaykh Jarrah for Nashashibi and in Talbiya for Gelat, to the peculiar, red-copper-roofed villa he built for Hamon in Romema. Among other notable designs usually ascribed to him are the group of handsome, balcony-fronted commercial and residential structures that form the very heart of the new city, on Jaffa Road near Zion Square. These are said to have been commissioned, respectively, by a wealthy Christian from the village of Bayt Jala, a Persian Jewish merchant from Mashhad, an investor named Khoury, and an Iraqi Jew from an old Hebron family; it seems Houris's own office was also located in one of these buildings. At the other end of Jaffa Road, one of the city's most ornate Mandate-era constructions stands, dilapidated and dwarfed these days by the monstrous West Jerusalem central bus station. Built for Gelat's business partner, a quarry owner from Lifta known as Hajj Mahmud, this apartment house features reddish and pink striped* ablaq *masonry, toothy crenellation, and further floral Armenian tiles, as well as calligraphed Qur'anic inscriptions that declare, for instance, "Peace be to you: you have led good lives. Enter Paradise and dwell in it forever."*

*Beyond the fact of these buildings, though, very little is known about Spyro Houris, and as I rummaged (in the midst of the war and in the blistering heat) for signs of him, my quest expanded and I found myself not just looking for Houris – whose identity began slowly to emerge as a good deal more layered than any single ethnic or national label might indicate – but also for clues. Clues to what it is the city has lost or is rapidly losing: some sense of itself as a place more multitudinous, more heterogeneous, more generous than the "eternal united capital" of a single battered and now battering people.*

*What follows is an abridged excerpt from the book.*

*– AH*

His buildings themselves offer the most solid proof of his former presence in town, and it is those buildings that have sent me scrambling to find his traces.

This is an admittedly peculiar quest. There were better-known architects who worked in Jerusalem at the same time that he did, and it would be wrong to argue that he was a world-class figure like the defiantly visionary Mendelsohn or the quietly inspired Harrison. He designed on a more modest scale and appears to have been willing to bend

his style to suit the needs and tastes of a wide range of clients. That said, it seems to me that the far less celebrated, far more protean Houris managed to infuse each of his very different buildings with qualities of wonder, complexity, and – for lack of a better word – humanity that are at once unique and wholly suited to their setting, scrambling as they do elements of East and West, grand and intimate, old and new. There's something about the freedom, warmth, and sheer variety of Houris's designs that strikes me as oddly poignant, as his work encapsulates the category blending and border blurring that are, or have historically been, part and parcel of Jerusalem itself. As I set out to find whatever I can about him, I am trying to put the puzzle pieces together and to discover: Who was the man who made this hodgepodge make sense?

Three highly distinct Jerusalem mansions offer up matching calling cards on their cornerstones, the most solid evidence we have that the architect existed and that he built here.



These inscriptions are more than signs of his authorship. They also bear, or so it seems to me, coded messages from beyond the grave.

The whole thing is, for starters, carved in Latin, not Arabic, characters. *Spyro*: the first name is Greek. *G.*: an odd flourish in local terms, where middle initials don't tend to matter. *Houris*: the family name is common in Arabic and is usually written in English as "Khoury" or "Khouri," meaning "priest," but for whatever reason this Houris didn't want to be a Khoury and so ordered the craftsmen to chip it *this* somehow alien way into the stone. In the Greek pronunciation the final *s* drops away. And if that weren't foreign enough, there's that last touch – *Architecte*. Was the choice of French a mere affectation (his clientele were wealthy, worldly people) or does it tell us something more essential about Spyro Houris and the language he dreamed in?

Just as important as the verbal substance of this stone signature is the very fact of such an inscription at all. To my knowledge, no other Jerusalem buildings of the period bear the names of their designers this way. (A handful of houses do include the Hebrew name of an engineer or builder, but the gesture is rare in these parts.) Aside from the fact that the practice seems to be, again, imported, it's striking that Spyro G. Houris, Architecte, wanted others to notice what he had created. Of course, the very *presence* of his name on those three buildings begs the question of its *absence* on the others usually ascribed to him. If he signed some buildings, why didn't he sign them all?

For now, I set this riddle aside and make my way to the National Library of Israel. This is a dignified if slightly worn-at-the-edges building from the late 1950s that may or may not be modeled on Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye and that sits on the spacious green Givat Ram (post-1948, pre-1967) campus of the Hebrew University. Soon the library will be replaced by a brand new, state-of-the-art Swiss-designed structure located not far from the brand new pseudo-tabernacle of the Israel Antiquities Authority campus, as well as the recently built Supreme Court, the Prime Minister's Office, the Bank of Israel, the Foreign Ministry, and the aptly named National Parking Lot. In his day, Houris would have known the area now occupied by the literal corridors of Israeli power as the Arab village of Shaykh Badr.

*Spyro G. Houris, Architecte*: Seated at one of the long green Formica tables in the airy general reading room, I pore over all the Mandate-era business directories that have survived the years, in search of those spectral words. *The Directory of Arab Trade, Industries, Crafts and Professions in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, 1937–1938*, for example, was published in English, Arabic, and French by the Arab Chamber of Commerce in Jerusalem and it contains, at least in verbal form, the mercantile artifacts of an entire lost world, listing as it does every sort of Arab enterprise in town – from Asphalt and Bitumen to Dentists to Newspaper Correspondents to Silk Yarn. It features ads for Lind & Halaby's Goodyear Tyres and Tubes, the Ottoman Bank, and Edward Said's father Wadie Said's Palestine Educational Co., founded 1910 ("Books & Periodicals of every description, Stationery of all Kinds, Office and School Supplies, Account Books, National Loose Leaf Books . . ."), as well as full-page exhortations to "BUY ARAB NATIONAL PRODUCTS: ENCOURAGE ARAB ENTERPRISES. If you are in doubt where to shop REFER TO THIS DIRECTORY."

The names of the officers of the Association of Arab Architects and Engineers in Jerusalem also appear here – and one Adib Khoury is described as the group's secretary. This Khoury advertises himself as a "Licensed Land Surveyor, Supervisor of Building Construction." Could it be that Spyro Houris sometimes went by this other, more explicitly "Arab" name? While it's true that in Arabic the word for "architect" and "engineer" is the same – *muhandis* – and the categories often bleed into one another in this context, I wonder if a licensed land surveyor and supervisor of building construction would dare dub himself an *architecte* and inscribe it on the side of a mansion. The discrepancies are too great here: Adib Khoury must be someone else. The entire lost world this directory contains does not seem to include Spyro Houris.

When I scour the Jerusalem section of "Engineers and Architects" in the *Palestine Directory and Handbook* of 1932, meanwhile – issued in English and Hebrew by the Tel Aviv organizers of that year's so-called Levant Fair, designed to promote Zionist industry and commerce – I recognize various familiar names, most of them Jewish and spelled a little strangely (Kaufman, Kracover). Here and there several of the city's other leading Arab architects appear (Sheiber, Baramki) as does one "Pefasis" on HaSolel Street and an engineer called "Fatasis," also on HaSolel Street. (Are they both the same enigmatic Petassis?) But Houris seems, again, to be absent, or perhaps in hiding. Why? Running my finger down the page one last time before I close the book for good and with a mounting

sense of bewilderment, another entry jumps out at me: "Koris-Sapiro, G.," which must be Houris, Spyro G. It seems the directory's Jewish editors were so flummoxed by this particular array of alien syllables (Greek? Arabic?), they simply assigned him a new – almost Eastern European and barely recognizable – handle.

And the name game goes on as, in the next directory I check, the alphabetical listings include one "Spyro, G., Arch." In Hebrew it's rendered "Shapiro." I am, at once, finding him and *not* finding him. A digitized search of old newspapers offers yet another version, which in some ways both alleviates my sense that I'm chasing a shadow and only adds to the mystery as, on 17 November 1919, the Jerusalem newspaper *Doar Hayom* features an unobtrusive ad for SPIROS HOURIS, ARCHITECTE, then, "architectural office, preparation of plans, surveying, price estimates, work tenders of all kinds" – in, of all languages, Hebrew.



Now I know this much: His telephone number was 427. His mailing address was P.O.B. 257, Jerusalem. In 1932, his office was located on "Jaffa St."

But who was Spyro Houris?

## A Picture's Worth

The photograph that Kroyanker reproduces in several of his books is a classic period piece, a formal studio portrait of a young man with cat-like eyes and a brushy mustache, a wide, unwrinkled brow, and a dark suit whose breast pocket is punctuated by the corner of a soft white handkerchief. There's a certain softness about him in general. His skin is slightly pale and his cheeks are smooth; he has broad shoulders and looks like he might be tall – an athlete? – though it's hard to say for sure, since he is sitting, his hands folded in his lap, legs crossed. Leaning a bit uncomfortably at an angle against the wooden back of an elaborately carved throne of a chair, whose one visible arm curls into the head of a lion or dragon, he looks, for lack of a better term, *European* – though perhaps this is simply the way Palestinian Arab men of his class and background dressed and posed for studio photos in this era. Or maybe it says something else, something more specific about where he came from and who he considered himself to be.

A much-enlarged version of the same photograph keeps staring, still silent, when one July afternoon I enter a simple three-room house at the edge of the Jerusalem neighborhood known as the Greek Colony and find it hanging on the wall. With its irregular geometrical panels, the wooden front door to the house has been unlocked for me by Anastas Damianos, the official head of the once substantial, now severely shrunken, Greek community of West Jerusalem. At its height in the midst of the Mandate, this consisted of some seven thousand members. Now, as the (Orthodox Christian) Damianos jokes halfheartedly, "We have enough for a minyan." A modest and unassuming man in his seventies, he can't help but wield the large, old-fashioned skeleton key with a certain inadvertent ceremony.

Though I'm speaking Hebrew with Damianos, I am, for once in this city – it happens very rarely – pleasantly confused about his ethnicity and his mother tongue. He's slight and dark skinned with wire-framed glasses, a light gait and gentle manner, and his fluent Hebrew is accented in an unfamiliar way. As he'll eventually explain when I ask, his was the only Greek family in their Galilee village – his ancestors arrived in Palestine from Monastir in Macedonia before 1850 – so as a child he spoke Greek at home and Arabic outside it. He has lived in Jerusalem for more than fifty years and, now retired, worked for decades as an official in the Arabic-language section at the largely Hebrew-speaking Israeli Ministry of Education. He collects icons; his children live in Greece and Spain. He has agreed to show me the building, which has recently been renovated by the energetic Greek-Israeli-Jewish, American-trained architect Elias Messinas and now serves as a humble museum of the history of Jerusalem's Greek community, though it is mostly locked and shuttered – unless one arranges to have coffee and a long, lively talk with Messinas, who in turn passes on the cell phone number of Damianos . . . I am, I told Damianos when I called him, eager to see the interior of a house built by Spyro Houris.

Or *seems* – yet again – to have been built by Spyro Houris. The usual air of uncertainty hovers over this attribution, as it does over the cluster of buildings that make up the heart of the orderly neighborhood, which Houris himself is thought to have planned before the First World War. A "Greek architect" was responsible. Kroyanker speculates that he was the one, as do several other Israeli historians and geographers. Damianos himself is not so sure; the dates don't make complete sense (I agree), and the style of most of these structures seems distinct from that of Houris's other buildings, the materials and

construction cruder. But it does appear that Houris was responsible for planning at least some of the buildings in the neighborhood, including this house, where his picture now hangs on the wall.

As the story is usually told, at the end of the nineteenth century a forward-looking Greek archimandrite named Efthimios took it upon himself to buy up some 1,000 dunams (or 250 acres) of farmland in the south of Jerusalem. Having formed a building association, he proceeded to arrange a lottery for these coveted plots, on which the winners would be responsible for constructing their own homes. First, a community center and four adjoining houses were erected. Then, at some point between 1902 – the date inscribed on the community center's lintel – and the moment sixteen years later when in the midst of the Great War German air force planes swooped over the city and snapped a series of remarkably sharp aerial photographs, Houris (or someone) built another sixteen houses along the same tidy grid.

While the enterprising archimandrite may genuinely have been interested in alleviating congestion within the Old City walls, where most of the community then lived in severely cramped conditions, his goals were also – as is almost always the case in Jerusalem – political. It appears he was eager to create a strong Greek presence beyond those walls, and the establishment of this upscale residential neighborhood was just part of his plan. With the bursting coffers of the patriarchate available to him – pilgrims had been bringing gifts and making donations for centuries – he began to buy land elsewhere as well. He established a row of shops in the booming Ottoman town square that filled the plaza outside the Jaffa Gate, built a grand new hotel (called, as it happens, the Grand New Hotel) right inside it, and purchased a large Crusader-era market known as the Mauristan in the Christian Quarter. Part of that suq now bears his name.

When the war began, the pilgrims stopped coming, the money ran dry, and the church was forced to sell off or lease certain properties, including large tracts in that area known as Nikephoria, where the King David Hotel and the YMCA would eventually be built. But it was in large part due to Efthimios and other entrepreneurial ecclesiastics like him that the Greek Church became what it is today: one of the most powerful landholders in the entire country, owner of more real estate in Israel than any single entity besides the state itself. The fact that the church still lays claim to such vast and sensitive tracts of land makes its history much more than the object of dusty antiquarian curiosity. The most pressing present-tense power struggles revolve around these holdings, as in 2005, for instance, when the patriarch was ousted by the local Arab community. Demoted to the rank of monk, he was, he claimed, forcibly locked inside the church compound for several years, his groceries hoisted up to him on a rope. Allegedly he'd conspired to sell Efthimios's Jaffa Gate hotel and the land around it to a group of Jewish settlers, and so to shore up his standing with the Israeli authorities by helping to "Judaize" Jerusalem.

I am, though, getting ahead of myself, and far ahead of Spyro Houris, who may not have lived to witness such sordid struggles but whose plan for the Greek Colony – if it was indeed his plan – does indicate his close ties to priests and to power. Whether or not he built the whole neighborhood, his links to the church are more than a matter of mere speculation: In the course of my digital wanderings, I've happened upon a small item

from the *Palestine Bulletin* of 16 July 1930, announcing that "the honour of Commander of the Order of the Saint of the Sepulchre has been conferred on Mr. Spiro G. Khuri by his Beatitude, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, for presenting the plans of restoring a convent near Jericho, which was destroyed during the earthquake of 1927." Whatever his religious beliefs, he clearly didn't share his contemporary Khalil Sakakini's contempt for the church's Greek-speaking hierarchy. (Sakakini for his part fiercely objected to foreign control of the church and vowed "to bring to an end Greek tyranny" as he renounced his own Orthodoxy.) If anything, Houris seems to have made his living in part from his connections to it. "They say," writes Kroyanker, "that the representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church . . . would oblige those who bought land from them to hire the professional services of the Greek Orthodox architects Houris and Petassis."

Is it so? Looking around the plain main room of the house in the Greek Colony – with its whitewashed walls, high ceilings, and simple wooden window frames, now painted a pale lemon shade – it is not ecclesiastical plotting and prodding that I am thinking about. Rather, I'm trying to imagine Spyro Houris first imagining this house. I am trying to imagine Spyro Houris imagining a house for his beloved.


## The Greek Doctor's Daughter

I'm also trying my hardest to find hard facts – to follow paper trails and architectural patterns, to unearth old photos and yellowing maps – but the saga of Houris's connection to the Efklides family, for whom this house was built and to whom it belonged until the last of its elderly occupants died there in the 1990s, is far less solid than that. It has about it the air of a legend or fable and can't be proved, exactly, though the details that emerge from various historical sources and from the memories of those like Damianos, who knew at least some of the cast of characters personally, may be pieced together like a kind of half-remembered dream, somehow spookier for its faintness. Where a ghost is concerned, there will be ghost stories. So:

Once upon a time (in 1891, to be exact) the twenty-seven-year-old Dr. Photios Efklides – a Turkish Greek, born in Brousa, now Bursa, recent graduate of the medical faculty at the university in Constantinople – arrived in Jerusalem. Recruited by the Ottoman authorities to direct the new municipal hospital there, he soon settled into several rooms near the Greek patriarchate in the Old City and started work in one of the grandest buildings on Jaffa Road, which was commonly believed to be haunted.

One account said that the wealthy man who'd built it as his home had died soon after he moved in, and that the next year his son died, and then another relative died . . . and by this point no one wanted to draw near the house, since a curse clearly hung over the imposing structure with its substantial stone gate and its two deep cisterns. According to another often-repeated and more hyperbolically Gothic version of events, the building had been planned as a home for a well-to-do young Arab Catholic couple who were engaged to be married. When the groom died before the wedding, the guests propped his corpse in a chair and led in his lovely young bride, outfitted in her brocade dress, jewels, and veil.

Necrophiliac nuptials of a sort ensued, as ululation accompanied the traditional dance performed with lighted candles by the mother of the groom, who then, it was reported by one contemporary memoirist, "tore her clothes, gave a terrible death cry, and snatched the veil from the bride's face." This "violent demonstration of grief evidently killed the mother." After her death, the building sat derelict for a decade.

Whether such ghoulish rites had really occurred, by the time Efklides arrived in Jerusalem, the authorities had decided to put an end to all the talk of corpses and curses and had assumed control of the abandoned mansion, added the sultan's intricate seal to the façade, and turned the place into a free hospital for the poor of all races. And within a few years the good doctor had established both himself and the institution as friendly fixtures in town. He became known all around as Dr. Photios, or the Greek Doctor, and the building, too, took on various nicknames – al-Mustashfa ("the hospital"), al-Baladiyya ("municipal [hospital]"), or al-Sihiyya, from the Arabic word for "health," the very salubrious sound of which implied that Efklides had finally managed to dispel the belief that evil spirits wafted through its hallways. He soon married Maria Samptopolo, a tall, beautiful pilgrim from a village in the Dardanelles, and she gave birth to three small, beautiful children: Alexander, Heleni, and Clio.

Besides running the hospital and a day clinic for peasants from the surrounding countryside, Efklides was now appointed the chief physician of Jerusalem, a role that seems to have entailed a constant shifting of registers. On the one hand, he performed the unglamorous and often exhausting work of a glorified village doctor. While theoretically the hospital was open to all, its patients were primarily poor and Muslim and the hospital's resources were meager, with two thermometers and one syringe shared on a twelve-bed ward. On the other hand, as a high-ranking Ottoman official, he took part in much of the peacocky pageantry that marked the last years of the old regime, before the Young Turks came to power in 1908. On state occasions, Dr. Photios would don an intricately embroidered uniform, complete with filigreed silver buckles that anchored his elaborate sleeves, and adorn himself with the multiple medals he'd been awarded by both the Greeks and the Turks. In 1901, the sultan himself bestowed on Dr. Photios a firman, a special recognition of his service to the empire. As befitted a man of such standing – a man with such a beautiful wife and beautiful children, such elaborate sleeves, and such imperial honors pinned to his chest and floridly calligraphed on a scroll in his own name – the doctor needed an appropriately impressive house in which to show it all off. So it was that sometime before the Great War broke out, he contracted an architect to build

him a house in the new neighborhood that had sprung up outside the Jaffa Gate, near an ancient pool and the most important Muslim graveyard in Palestine, all of it known as Mamilla or Ma'man Allah, the Shelter of God.

In his 1985 book on "Arab architecture in Jerusalem," David Kroyanker writes that in 1912 or 1913, Spyro Houris designed a house at 25 Mamilla Road for "the Efkitedes family" – which another historian, who interviewed Heleni Efklides on her ninetieth birthday, May 25, 1986, corrects as he confirms that it was the *Efklides* house. By now, one can no longer visit the building (to say nothing of Heleni), since the Mamilla Dr. Photios and his children knew – once a thriving and decidedly messy and mixed Arab, Jewish, Greek, Turkish, German, British, French, Armenian commercial, industrial, and residential district – has been bulldozed. Between 1948 and 1967, No Man's Land and a mostly Kurdish Jewish slum sprang up there, along the Jordanian border. After Israel annexed East Jerusalem in the wake of the 1967 war, the concrete wall came down and the residents were "cleared" from their homes.

Now – after more than forty years of planning, razing, digging, more planning, delays, construction, and further delays, brought about in part by the discovery of extensive First Temple period and/or Byzantine graves and the violent protests by ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups that followed – the same area is occupied by a flashy $400 million commercial development. This compound includes a lavish yet antiseptic apartment complex whose units are mostly used as holiday homes by wealthy foreign Jews, an outsized luxury hotel with a predictably bombastic biblical name, and a glitzy Miami-meets-the-Middle-East shopping mall, all of it designed with the trademark aggressively symbolic touch of Israeli-Canadian architect Moshe Safdie.

The construction of this swank compound was apparently meant to erase both the memory of the difficult period of Jerusalem's history just after 1948 and the seam between Arab East and Jewish West Jerusalem, so attempting to "unify" the still fundamentally divided city. While a certain welcome melding of populations does in fact take place there – as young women in hijabs stroll past young women in head scarves – the presence in this setting of such opulence and such high-end consumerism only underscores other divisions: "In Israel's poorest city," writes the clear-eyed, sharp-tongued architecture critic Esther Zandberg, "this colossal project is a stone-clad memorial to the sin of hubris."

And for all the talk of "unifying" the parts and people of Jerusalem, the very Israeli Mamilla complex is hardly neutral or common ground in political terms. While the developers took great pains to dismantle and then reconstruct, stone by numbered stone, the house in which Theodor Herzl once spent the night (this is now occupied by a café called Herzl, catty-corner from the Rolex store), the reconfigured façade of the Efklides residence – unmarked – is all that remains of what may be Spyro Houris's first building in Jerusalem. The inside has been razed and replaced by a darkly cavernous pop-music-blasting atrium occupied by a blur of chain stores, among them the Gap, Bug Computers, American Eagle, and a lingerie store called Whispers.

Other erasures have also taken place, as Kroyanker has since published a thick, glossy Hebrew album of a book about the history of the neighborhood and its "renewal" – commissioned by the project's Tel Aviv–based developer – in which he leaves out all

mention of the Efklides building and of Houris. Meanwhile, down the street and near what once was the mufti's Palace Hotel (now an elaborately refurbished and rather garishly decorated Waldorf Astoria that caters to well-heeled religious Jews from abroad), the Los Angeles–based Simon Wiesenthal Center is currently constructing what may be the ultimate stone-clad memorial to the sin of hubris, a $250 million Museum of so-called Tolerance, built directly over a large part of the cemetery of Ma'man Allah, which tradition holds dates to the seventh century and contains both the remains of several companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the twelfth-century graves of thousands of Saladin's soldiers. The area continued to serve as a burial place for some of Jerusalem's most distinguished Muslim families right until 1948.

No less renowned an architect than Frank Gehry (né Goldberg) was first hired to plan the museum and – thinking in the monumentally swooping, metallic terms of Los Angeles's Walt Disney Concert Hall or the Bilbao Guggenheim but not, it seems, in terms of all those dusty old skeletons buried in the Jerusalem earth – he designed one of his characteristically chaotic and commanding structures. Complete with sixteen undulating titanium "Pillars of Tolerance," which would have held the 118-foot-tall building aloft and, according to the museum's sponsors, "be seen from miles away," the building would also have featured a bulbous Grand Hall, which Gehry described as symbolizing the "living room" of Jerusalem, "because of its openness on all sides" (a peculiar conceit for a museum built in a city that the Israeli powers that be have blocked off from the West Bank and its Palestinian population by means of a snaking twenty-five-foot-high concrete wall and multiple corral-like checkpoints). For reasons that may have had more to do with budgets than politics and the international uproar that arose with the announcement of the plans to build an institution dedicated to tolerance right on top of this major Muslim graveyard, Gehry eventually dropped out – insisting all the while that he continued to consider the project "vitally important." In an official statement, he proclaimed his admiration for the idea of the museum, which "will serve as the embodiment of human respect and compassion." He was replaced with a far less famous husband-and-wife team of Tel Aviv architects, who rendered plans for a very different (more restrained) sort of building – though whatever one may or may not say about the relative merits of their design, the museum's charged location and goals didn't shift in the slightest with Gehry's departure. According to news reports, the prominent American rabbi in charge of the whole perverse production has explained that one section of this self-proclaimed "Center for Human Dignity" will "deal with the question of 'How did the Jews survive for 3,500 years?'" while the other will "confront Israel's issues as they are today, domestic and international issues, but not the Middle East peace process . . . It's not," he has explained, "about the experience of the Palestinian people . . . When they have a state, they'll have their own museum."

Shopping malls and cultural centers may, in other words, be just as haunted as houses. Built over graves of all ages and sorts, the whole neighborhood seems to me teeming with phantoms.

But while the Efklides house in Mamilla is gone, another exists – the simple structure in the Greek Colony, where, along with the picture of Spyro Houris and that elaborately

carved wooden chair, Anastas Damianos now shows me Dr. Photios's framed Greek-language Ottoman medical license and his ornate swirl of a gold-lettered firman.

The circumstances that led to the construction of this building are also vague, though at some point it seems Efklides's fortunes turned. Maybe the curse of the hospital building had attached itself to the Greek doctor, maybe he was just unlucky, but first his marriage to the beautiful Maria Samptopolo curdled and they separated. Then, in May 1916, in the midst of the war, as a typhus epidemic swept the city and sent him scrambling to try to save as many lives as he could, Dr. Photios himself succumbed to the illness. He was fifty-two years old, and his funeral was, according to one eyewitness, "truly a demonstration of sorrow," an embodiment of all the grief then washing over the town, together with the dread disease. The hospital lost not just its director during this infectious interlude, but its pharmacist, secretary, and three nurses. Dr. Photios's demise was a major event. One Hebrew newspaper reported that "The Doctor Is Dead" and described how his "geniality and fine character" had drawn a "large and impressive" crowd to his burial. Dignitaries and doctors, consuls and clerks, army officers and eminent people "of all the communities of our city" assembled to lead him to his grave in the Greek Orthodox cemetery on Mount Zion.

In a last will and testament drawn up just a month before his death – and, it would seem, in sober awareness of the very real dangers he faced as he labored on the typhus ward – Dr. Photios left his fortune to his three children, together with a small provision for his estranged wife, various shops and buildings to the Greek community of which he'd been such an upstanding member, and all his books to the Greek hospital inside the Old City. As he requested in plain terms that his children not live with their mother, it seems he may also have left an unwritten directive for Spyro Houris to plan for them that small house in the Greek Colony. While the house is often described as having been built at the start of the century, when the doctor was still alive, the photographs snapped by those German air force planes in 1918 show an empty lot where the house stands today. Subsequent maps – from 1925, 1926, and 1927 – reveal the same blank spot, though by 1929 government cartographers had taken care to ink in a little box of a house on that corner.

Whenever it was that the walls of the building were constructed, the Efklides siblings eventually found themselves living in close quarters there. Though their home was modest and the money their father left them dwindling, they somehow still carried themselves as the privileged children of the great doctor, whose nameplate they affixed like a charm to the building's entrance. Dandyish Alexander taught English at the Berlitz School but wore white gloves after hours and drove a fancy Fiat; the sisters were both widely known for their good looks and their glamour.

Their mother, meanwhile, had fallen on harder times, and where she called home in those years is not clear. After 1948, Maria Samptopolo somehow ended up a refugee in the Old City, then Jordan, while her grown children remained on the Israeli side. One longtime resident of the Christian Quarter remembers this formerly wealthy and elegant woman ("very lofty in her ways") impoverished, borrowing money from whoever would loan it – until Clio somehow arranged to cross the border and bring her mother back to the Greek Colony house, where she eventually died.

Long before that, though, and in circumstances that also remain frustratingly hazy, the often unlucky Efklides family had reason once more to celebrate, as pretty Heleni announced that she was engaged to be married – to the architect Spyro Houris.

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**Photographs**
1. The Gelat Villa, Talbiya, photographed by the author.
2. Hajj Mahmud's apartment house, Romema, photographed by the author.
3. Jaffa Road buildings planned, it seems, by Spyro Houris, near Zion Square: American Colony Photographers, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
4. Spyro G. Houris stone signature, photographed by the author.
5. Ad from *Doar haYom*, 17 November 1919.
6. Spyro G. Houris, from David Kroyanker, *Shekhunot Yerushalayim: Talbiya, Katamon vehaMoshavah haYevanit* [Neighborhoods of Jerusalem: Talbiya, Katamon, and the Greek Colony] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002).
7. Dr. Photios with Heleni and Clio, courtesy of Zalman Greenberg.
8. Heleni Efklides, Talbiya, 1930s, courtesy of Alex Corfiatis, Anastos Damianos, and the Greek community of West Jerusalem.

# Al-Assi Cinema Studio:

## Glorious Past & Pale Present

Zahraa Zawawi &

Mohammad Abu Hammad

Without memories you have no real relationship to a place.

– Mahmud Darwish

Guided by modernity and openness, the fifth decade of the last century marked a turn in the course of urban development in the Palestinian city of Nablus. The year 1952, in particular, witnessed the construction of the Dawar, a main traffic node in the city center and a public space outside the Old City borders. That same year also witnessed the birth of al-Assi Cinema, which represented, together with other cinemas in the city, socio-cultural landmarks that left a footprint on the everyday life at that time. These two monuments and others were a manifestation of a new era of urban development and architecture and significantly influenced the sociocultural practices in the city.

Al-Assi Cinema was not the first cinema in Nablus; it was preceded by others. Nonetheless, its story illuminates lifestyles and architectural forms that lasted in the

city for several decades. At that time, the cinema was considered a source of inspiration for people who had no access to the outer world except through films and magazines. People mirrored what they used to see in the new films, especially imitating the lifestyles and common social practices of other cultures displayed in the films.

From its inauguration in 1952, al-Assi Cinema Studio was open to the public until it suspended its activities at the beginning of the first intifada in 1987. It was reopened in 1994 along with al-Assi Studio, a wedding hall. Later, after being shelled in 2002 during Israeli incursions in the second intifada, its doors shut again, this time for good.[1] It has ended up in a state of neglect and is sometimes used as a storage space, while its front yard is used as a parking lot. The dilapidated state of al-Assi Cinema reflects social and cultural transformations within a continuously changing landscape where cinema as a form of entertainment is considered to a certain extent socially inappropriate and had been replaced by other media and practices.

## Rise and Fall

Behind the city hall of Nablus, amidst the surrounding narrow streets hosting diverse shops and goods, a flâneur might gaze through a passage-like bystreet to see al-Assi Cinema Studio standing pale after having once been a hub for people's meetings and entertainment. The events that flavored this place are lost today and may be lost forever as the empty cinema building is at risk of being demolished.

Al-Assi Cinema Studio as seen today is not only an architectural monument representing a form and style from an important era in Palestinian modern history, nor is it merely a derelict space in the center of one of the most vibrant cities in Palestine; rather, it testifies to the sociocultural lives of Palestinians who lived through the devastation of the Nakba and continued on as well as they could. Tracing the journey of the cinema since its construction reveals hidden testimonies and memories in the city in addition to perceptions produced and influenced by a materialistic capitalist and profit-seeking dogma.

The story of al-Assi Cinema begins on 26 August 1951, with the approval of a construction license for the building, followed by its actual construction in 1952. The brothers Sidqi, Abderrazaq, and Waleed al-Assi were the original owners of the cinema, which was built to accommodate six hundred seats, second in size to the Granada Cinema built one year earlier with one thousand seats. The architect Niazi Kan'an designed it with two floors, reflecting a functionalist modern design. The auditorium of the cinema contained a "balcony," an elevated level above the hall's rearmost seats. The balcony seats were larger and sold for a higher price. In addition, it contained seating called "penwar" in the rear part of the hall, dedicated for families only and separated from the rest of the hall by a handrail or a parapet to sustain some privacy . The rest of the auditorium was an open hall facing the stage where films were screened.

The cinema opened in 1952 with a screening of the Egyptian film *Fayruz Hanim* starring the Egyptian actor Anwar Wajdi and the child actress Fayruz. Daily shows

continued in the cinema during the time of Jordanian rule until 1967. Rabeeh al-Assi, an heir of one of the cinema's owners, recalls the cinema daily program:

> The cinema gates used to open at 3:00 pm for people to buy tickets. In the streets outside the cinema gates, bodyguards stood to organize the entry of the audience, to secure the main entrance and to prevent undisciplined boys from flirting with girls or telling uncomfortable jokes. The two ticket offices used to sell four types of tickets, which carried the cinema's name and price. Each type was linked to the seat position in the auditorium. The balcony ticket was the most expensive, costing 12 *qirsh* [piasters], and was dedicated for the elite audience, including women from rich families. The second, cheaper, ticket was for the penwar area, which included only eight seats dedicated to families and cost 7.5 *qirsh*, while the third was the public ticket mainly dedicated to men and male youths and costing 5 *qirsh*. The last type of ticket was for children and cost 2.5 *qirsh* or was free of charge depending on the view of the controller, who could accept kids' requests to watch the film by laying down on the stage and looking up at the screen, achieving their dream of watching the new film.
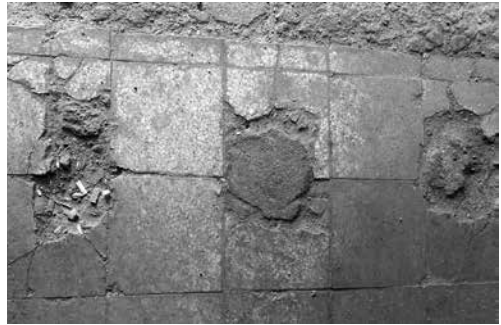




Figures 1 and 2. Floor tiles at al-Assi Cinema. Photos by the authors.

The interior space of the cinema was simple, reflecting the taste of the time period in terms of color and design. Special attention was given to the upholstery of the balcony seats, which cost 45 Jordanian dinars, while that of the penwar and the hall cost 23 Jordanian dinars; all were beige in color. However, the cost of the more expensive seats did not prevent damage being done to them by angry patrons, when quarrels broke out for silly reasons during the show or when they did not like the film. The cinema floor was tiled
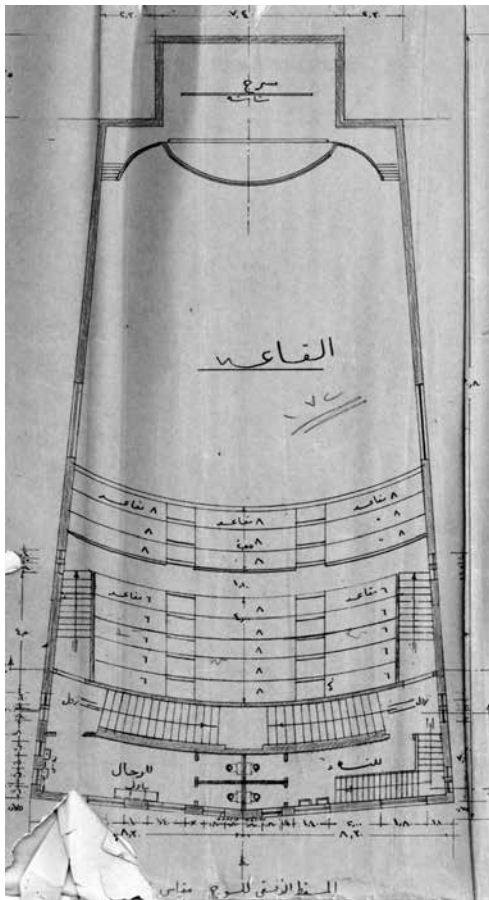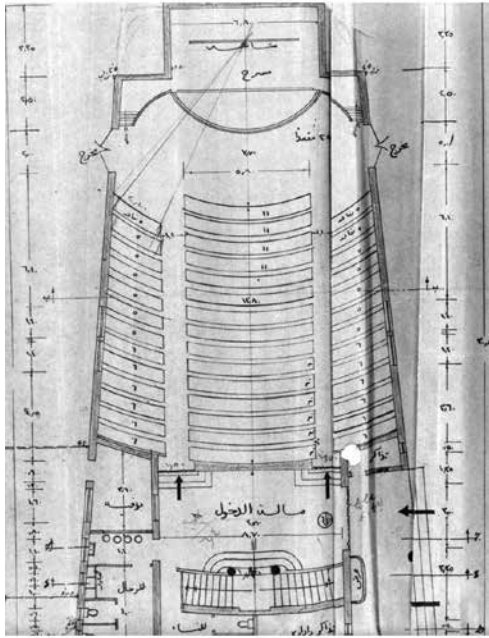
Figures 3 and 4. Al-Assi Cinema ground floor (left) and first floor (right) plans.

with a terrazzo tile (see figures 1 and 2); it was not carpeted, as people threw seed shells on the floor while watching the films and carpet would have been more difficult to clean. A different color of tile was used on the stairs that led to the balcony to indicate the area for privileged tickets. Beige acoustics panels were installed on the cinema's interior walls to provide a comfortable ambience for the audience.

The cinema's exterior, on the other hand, is exemplary of modern techniques and methods of construction at the time. The main façade, which is the aesthetically distinguishing feature of the cinema's exterior, was designed with simple lines and openings while the entrance, located on the corner of the building, was formed by a recess in the ground floor and supported by four concrete columns. The walls were stone-clad, and stone decorating elements were installed around the windows of the cylindrical staircase. The blueprints of the cinema (figures 3 and 4) reflect its functional form in addition to the use of new technologies of that period, such as the skeleton of the cinema's roof made of a simple steel structure covered with asbestos sheets.

In 1958, six years after the construction of the cinema, the owners decided to add a wedding hall (al-Assi Studio) to the cinema. The addition was attached to the cinema's eastern façade; it was made of concrete walls with rough plaster exterior coating. The architecture of the studio was not very impressive, but it functioned well as a wedding hall and many ceremonies took place there. A wedding or engagement party in al-Assi Studio was considered prestigious: mention of this location was enough to show one's elegance. The interior of the studio was renovated once,
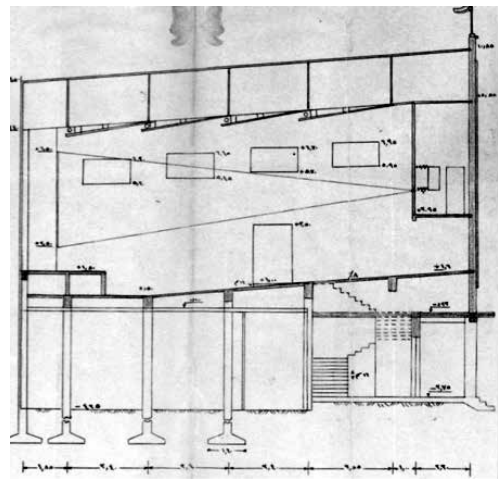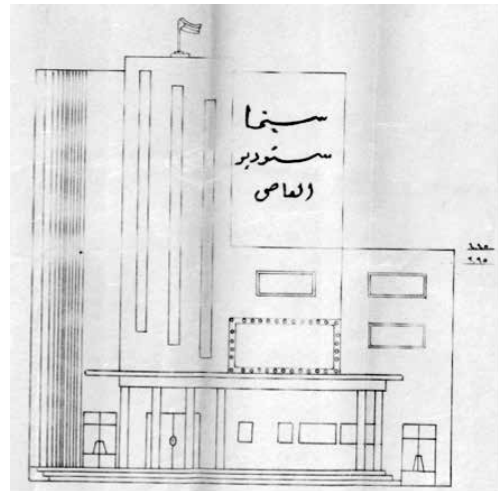
which entailed changing the furniture and replacing the original grey seats with dark brown ones. The studio was also used to screen films, but screening in the studio started half an hour later than in the cinema to allow the film reels to be passed from the projector in the cinema to that in the studio.

During the Jordanian rule, the cinema experienced its times of glory, particularly during the religious feast ('Id) holiday. Two films were screened each day: one at 4:00 pm and one at 7:00 pm. The ruling authorities controlled the type of films screened. Usually, people entered the auditorium one hour before the film would start. "It was a chaotic moment as everyone was running to get the best seat in the hall," Rabeeh al-Assi recalls – this despite the efforts of Muhammad Ana'nish, who was responsible of organizing access to the hall. He continued:

> The show used to start with the Jordanian royal anthem, followed by comic shows, commercials, and trailers for the upcoming films, and the film to be screened that day. A break of five minutes was scheduled to give the people the chance to smoke in the foyer or to use the cinema services such as the cafeteria and toilets.



Figures 5 and 6. Al-Assi Cinema main façade (left) and section (right). Source: Nablus municipality

The show started precisely at 4:00 pm and lasted for one hour and forty-five minutes if the film was Arabic or Western, and would exceed two hours if it was Indian.

During the 'Id holidays, the cinema was a preferred destination for both children and adults and it was popular for being cheaper than the other four cinemas in the city that competed to show Arabic, Indian, and Western movies. On the 'Id days, the cinema screened films from 8:00am until the late hours of the night. People gathered in long queues before the ticket offices and most of the time the tickets were sold out or re-sold at higher prices outside the cinema by groups of youth who would liaise with the controller to buy a number of tickets for this purpose.

Two prominent Egyptian stars, the actress Na'ima 'Akif and the actor Husayn Sidqi visited the cinema during the Jordanian era, the first to promote her 1957 film *Tamr Hanna* and the latter to promote his 1958 film *Khalid Ibn al-Walid*. Rabeeh al-Assi narrates how those visits were important to the cinema and to the people who had only seen those actors on television:

> The day when Husayn Sidqi visited Nablus, my father went to Amman and accompanied Sidqi to Nablus. He was invited to our home for lunch and he met the public figures of the city. Before screening the film, he appeared to the audience from the door next to the stage and introduced his film; he greeted the crowd amidst a wave of clapping.

Rabeeh also remembers Na'ima 'Akif's visit to Nablus, which took place when he was in elementary school. He recalls:

> Pupils used to go to school from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon, then have a lunch break until 1:30 pm, then back to school until 3:30pm. During the lunch break, I went home, my mother told me that Na'ima 'Akif is our guest today and she will take lunch with the family. I asked my mother to have my hair combed and to put cologne on me to go and see her. I went in and she picked me up and put a kiss on my cheek, then I went back to school and I told everyone about this.

Al-Assi Cinema Studio screened movies that attracted youth fond of adventure, thriller, and action movies. Tawfiq Hadad remembers the way the cinema advertised upcoming films on sandwich boards:

> Two boards were fixed to each other from the top, leaving a space in the middle equaling the size of a person's head, then this person carries the boards so that one face is on his front and the other on his back and both carry the film's poster. The person used to stroll around the streets along with a boy who carried a bell. Whenever they reached a crossroads, they would stop and the boy would ring the bell to bring the attention of people who would stop and listen to an explanation about the film, the actors, and a brief summary of its story.

Tawfiq remembers the screenings of the Indian film *Sangam*, produced in 1964, and the Arabic films *al-Khataya*, produced in 1962 and starring 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Nadia Lutfi, and *Ma'budat al-Jamahir*, produced in 1967 and starring 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Shadia. On Fridays, the cinema scheduled films at 10:00 am for students, who could show their student cards to receive discounted tickets, though only for the hall seats.

The cinema was a gateway to the world as well as a space for social gathering where each visitor had his own reason and incentive to attend and be part of that space. Rabeeh al-Assi states:

> People enjoyed going to the cinema, it was part of their weekend and holiday activities. Women of the city were imitating what they saw in the films in terms of fashion and haircuts or even dancing with hula-hoops. On Thursday, before going to the cinema, women of rich families would spend the afternoon getting new haircuts, doing their make-up, and putting on new dresses. Watching a new film was an opportunity to look for a bride for those who wanted to get married.

With the emergence of martial arts films at the end of the 1960s, people were racing to get tickets, especially for the films starring Bruce Lee. After the films, they imitated the actors and a large number of fights took place at the end of every film. Moreover, many martial arts clubs and gyms opened in the city and people started to follow the news of sportsmen, especially after they would return from participating in tournaments outside the country.

The golden era of the cinema started to fade after it was affected by political unrest. After the Israeli occupation in 1967, the cinema stopped for one year, then reopened. People feared going to the cinema, though distributors continued to bring new films. Families and girls stopped going to the cinema at night for security reasons and because of the uncontrolled quality of screened films. The audience by then was limited to men and male youths. This situation continued until the eruption of the first intifada in 1987, when the cinema suspended its shows after the screen was burnt by anonymous people. This was a sign of the negative attitudes that started to emerge against the cinema and its role in society, particularly set against the growing struggle with the Israeli occupation. Along with the declining interest in the cinema, the late 1980s witnessed the spread of video, which strongly competed with the cinema and exacerbated its crisis. Al-Assi Cinema reopened in 1994, but it was never able to return to its golden days. It remained open until it was shelled during Israeli incursions in 2002,and then its doors shut permanently.[2]

## The Cinema Today: A Contested Fate

Reopening the cinema did not achieve the intended returns, thus the heirs met in 1998 to discuss demolishing the cinema and building a commercial center that would include a cinema. However, they did not reach a consensus on this proposal and because of their large number (one hundred people), they decided to sell the cinema building. As Rabeeh al-Assi said: "Selling the cinema was an exit option to resolve the dispute among the heirs concerning the cinema's future." They advertised to sell the cinema locally on websites in 2010 (see figure 7), proposing alternative development options, such as demolishing the cinema to build a mall or a bank. However, ten percent of the cinema's

Figure 7. An online advertisement to sell al-Assi Cinema.

owners refused to approve its sale either because they opposed its demolition or sought more profit.

The cinema's central location in close vicinity of the Nablus municipality building eventually gave rise to the idea of the municipality reusing its site. In a meeting on 13 May 2013, the municipal council decided to buy the cinema, and in 2014 the municipality purchased the cinema from it owners, al-Assi family, going through a lengthy process of acquisition that cost 1.25 million Jordanian dinars. The decision was approved by the absolute majority of the municipal council, with all the members of the council agreeing that buying the cinema at the requested price was an opportunity that should not be missed. The amount paid to buy the cinema was not high compared to prices in adjacent locations, where similar land cost double the price paid or even more.

It took the municipality two years to finalize the cinema's purchase from the heirs because some of them were living abroad. Later, in its meeting of 26 January 2016, the municipal council took the decision to demolish the cinema. The demolition decision evoked the sentiments of city residents, who felt an attachment to the place as part of the city's modern history. Rabeeh al-Assi expressed this, "I feel very sad when I walk by the street where the cinema is, and today I don't look in the direction of the cinema because I cannot imagine that the place in which I spent all my childhood will be demolished." An owner of a shop near the cinema said, "The cinema for me was part of my daily life. Watching the daily practices of the people coming to the cinema and the crowd which gathered in front of the cinema are events that made an identity for the place."

The municipality, on the other hand, tried to justify its decision. In an interview, the city engineer 'Azzam Qasrawi said that:

> The cinema doesn't have any value in terms of architecture or architectural details; it has a ceiling from asbestos and the rear façade is ugly. This building does not represent any architectural period or typology or structural period (like the British Mandate construction typology techniques). As a municipality, we have to demolish this building. There is no decision what to do to replace it: there is a proposal to make it a parking area or part of a large project that includes demolishing the cinema, the municipality building, and a few other buildings and to install municipal services buildings.

The second proposal (see figure 8) would affect the municipality building which was designed by the famous architect Hani Arafat, and represents an example of modern architecture in Nablus.[3]

The fate of the cinema became a source of debate among residents, professionals,

and decision-makers with a focus on the value of city spaces, especially those linked to the collective memory of people and not protected by a legal framework. Interviews with people working in the cinema area or who had previously lived in its surroundings, in addition to academics and university students, revealed contradictory opinions about the value of the cinema. People who lived in the period when the cinema was flourishing (between 1952 and 1967) expressed what the cinema represented to their daily life, mainly as an entertainment and meeting place. Young people were enthusiastic to



Figure 8. Proposed area for demolition delineated by a dark boundary. Source: Nablus municipality map.

know more about the cinema, which was, in their opinion, a sign of a progressive cultural life that their parents enjoyed decades ago while they, themselves, are deprived of such opportunities in their city.

Al-Assi Cinema became a sort of a contested space because of the different opinions regarding its value. The municipality, in its unilateral decision to demolish the cinema, ignored any possible opposing reaction to its decision and thus ignored the residents' right to their city and its collectively used buildings and spaces. Al-Assi Cinema is a private building that provided a public social service and people have a special attachment to it. The residents as city holders could participate in deciding the future of an important monument as part of a contribution to the body of urban lived experience: residents can legitimately claim the right to the city, including their right to participation in any decision related to the re/production of such an important monument as al-Assi Cinema.[4]

The value of the cinema as a structure and a function was debated in academic institutions such as an-Najah National University, as well as among professionals and people in the street. Since the building is not protected by any legal framework, nor it is listed by the municipality as a cultural and architectural monument, it was easy for the municipality to take a unilateral decision. When it was announced, the decision was subject to criticism, especially by all those who believe that the building and its function have certain values and qualities. However, this belief is not shared by an important segment of society, including professionals, who see the cinema embodying no important value to the extent that it blocks the development of the central location on which it sits. Architect Reema Arafat said, "The municipality bought it for its strategic location, not for its cultural value; the cinema now is seen as economic capital not as a cultural one." Rafeeq Haddad, who experienced the times of the cinema's glory, said, "Demolishing the cinema is a necessity for today's urban transformations due to the disinclination of going to the cinema in its old structure."

Social transformation cannot be ignored while speaking about devaluing al-Assi Cinema Studio. During the golden era of the cinema, not all people considered the
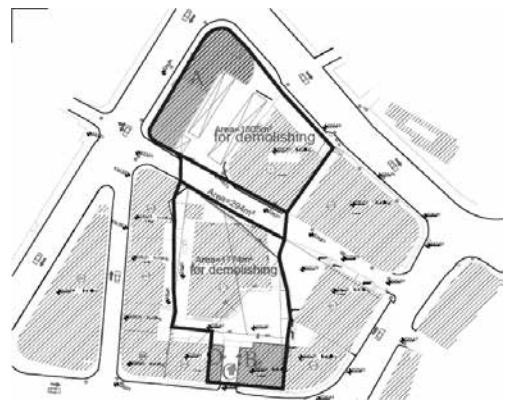
cinema a safe place where their daughters could go. Hani Alazizi recalls, "my uncle took my aunt to the cinema without their father's permission. When his father knew, he did not let them home when they returned, telling them instead to go back to the place they came from." During the period of the Israeli occupation, films were unregulated, and this was unacceptable to families and led to the cinema being stigmatized as immoral. Mohammad Atta argues that:

> People do not have any sentimental feelings toward the cinema, and one can imagine how the reaction of the locals would be if the cinema was bought by a private investor; an example given is the flourmill [*al-mathana*] that was constructed during the British Mandate and was bought by a private investor. It was demolished on 13 November 2015 with the approval [with reservation]of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and no reaction was heard from the locals. It is only because the municipality bought the cinema that the city inhabitants started to criticize its plans.

The municipality asked for the approval of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities for the demolishing of the cinema building. After communications with the ministry, the latter expressed no objections on the subject of demolition. "This happened because the cinema building is not protected by any law as it was constructed during the 1950s," said architect Ihab Daoud, deputy general director for the cultural heritage sector in the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. In his own view, the cinema building should be kept and conserved, even though it is not protected by any law; the building has a value to the local people and it represents a history of culture and modernity.

Demolishing the flourmill was a precedent that paved the way for the municipality to go ahead and approve demolition of the cinema. The municipality was accused of being less concerned about the value of local traditional and modern architectural heritage when it comes to commercial space in the city center. Several professionals in the field of architecture stated that the complacency of the city inhabitants while demolishing one of the important city landmarks, *al-mathana* (the flourmill), even if it was in bad condition, encouraged the municipality to demolish buildings without reluctance. In addition, the ignorance of citizens toward their cultural heritage, the value of architecture, and the architectural significance of the buildings made it easier not to consider their opinions.

Yet some city inhabitants fear the consequences of demolishing the cinema. They claim that it is not only about losing a building, it is about what the building represents to their memories and to the culture of the city. They also fear seeing other cases treated like the cinema, knowing that there is a concentration of high value cultural heritage sites in the city center, where land prices are highest and vacant plots are rare. Erasing unprotected valuable buildings and constructing new ones in the city center could become a trend. Dr. Hasan al-Qadi, head of department of Architecture at an-Najah National University, says of al-Assi Cinema:

this building has a high cultural value; it has a meaning for thousands of people and it is part of a cultural legacy and a witness for the beginning of cinema in Nablus. The evaluation of the building's value is not only determined through the aesthetic value or personal judgment and physical state.

## The Duality of Heritage and Modernity

Many questions were raised in interviews with local citizens: Is the cinema important for the inhabitants? Does it have a value for the city or not? As no assessment was done for this building, nor for many others, how would young people see its significance and thus its importance to them? One of the city residents said,

> I am not with or against demolishing the cinema, but I am with establishing a specialized committee to evaluate buildings that are not listed as important buildings and to then decide what to keep and what to demolish. We cannot base our decisions just on emotional reactions of the local people.

On the other hand, keeping the cinema building would not be the only challenge. The problem lies in the future of that building, a complex that now comprises the cinema, the studio, and other additions near the studio. Some residents called for renovating the cinema to serve its original function again: if the municipality is not able to do so, it has to sell it to the private sector with a condition to use it primarily as a cinema. Proponents of this plan argued that, first, the building is historic and rooted in the memories of many of the city inhabitants; and second, it was built to be a cinema, not to be a single story that serves as a cinema in a larger building. Rushdi Mabroukeh said, "If it is renovated, we would protect a historic symbol and it would be a very good profitable project, as the municipality plans. Its history and setting would attract more people and would be a good investment."

Amid the endless discussion about the value of a modern building as heritage against the needs for city development comes the fact that the cinema has been abandoned for a long time. Why during that period was there no effort to reuse it by the municipality, civil society organizations, or the people? Why did the cinema become important and valuable for the people and a representation of the city's culture only when the demolition order was issued? And what would be better from a planning or architectural perspective, to demolish the cinema and rebuild a place for the people's service or to restore the function of the cinema?

The case of al-Assi Cinema Studio shows that the duality of heritage and modernity continues to fuel discussions about urban public spaces; despite the growing attention toward cultural values and elements of identity, there are still people who do not see those values and do not mind losing them forever. In an interview with a resident who lived the golden era of al-Assi Cinema, he said, "Rivoli Cinema was not demolished and turned

to a commercial building, why is no one against its current use although this damaged its value?" Some others said "that al-Assi Cinema site has turned into a dumping place in the city center." They do not see the building bearing any architectural value.

On the other hand, there are opinions that criticize the plans to construct a commercial center instead of the cinema as contributing to exacerbating the traffic problems and congestion in the city center. Other opinions proposed to turn the place into a cultural center ("Nablus Cultural Palace") or a museum for the city because the majority of cities in the world have museums or cultural centers to serve the local community. Some people who work around the cinema think that the commercial capital overwhelms every other aspect in the city including heritage, culture, and history.

The cinema building nowadays is a deteriorating structure: part of its roof is covered with asbestos, a carcinogenic material considered dangerous for health and public safety. Despite this, its renovation and reuse would be a significant contribution to the culture of the city as a testimony to recent history that should be conveyed to future generations. With all the debates initiated and the emotions provoked after the decision to demolish the cinema and the justifications given by the municipality, it is necessary to rethink the making of cultural policy, especially with the growing devaluation of important cultural spaces. Urban coalitions should be formed to enforce the adoption of proper cultural policies that do not allow valuable cultural monuments to be treated based solely on economic value and profitable use. Amid the contradicting views, there is one question still to be answered: what if the cinema is left in neglect, abandoned to die slowly (destroyed due to time factors or vandalism)? Would the city inhabitants react and, if so, how?

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*Mohammad Abu Hammad is an architect and urbanist working at UNESCO's Ramallah office.*

**Endnotes**

1    Mary Pelletier, "Final Curtain Looms for Ghost Cinemas of Nablus," *Middle East Eye*, 5 April 2016, online at www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/remnants-citys-love-affair-film-1947638588 (accessed 25 January 2017).

2    Pelletier, "Final Curtain Looms."

3    'Imad Sa'ada, "Qarar hadm 'sinama al-'Asi' yuthiru jadalan fi Nablus" [Decision to Demolish al-Assi Cinema Prompts Debate in Nablus], *al-Quds*, 4 February 2016, online atwww.alquds.com/articles/1454610749695648400 (accessed 26 January 2017).

4    See: Mark Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant," *GeoJournal* 58 (2002): 99–108; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
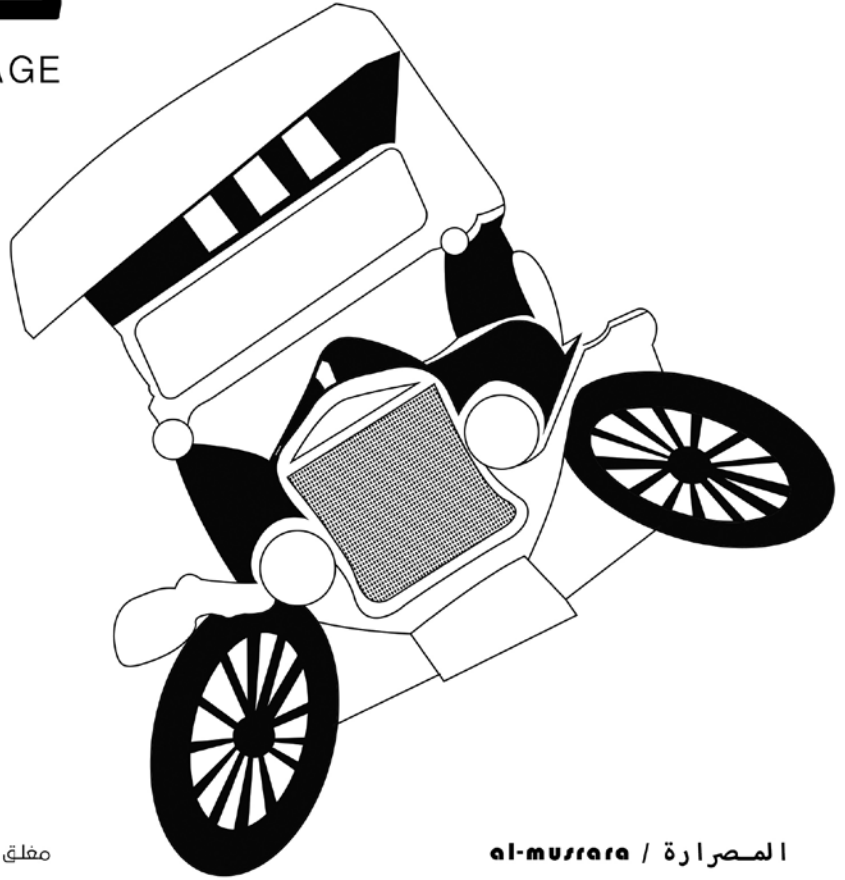
*Mental Map (Issa), 2nd Edition*, 277 x 127 cm, print, 2016, Detail. © Alexandra Sophia Handal.

# Construction, Destruction, and the In-Between:

## al-Na'ama Flourmill, Nablus

Shaden Awad & Manal Bishawi

Al-Na'ama Flourmill is significant not only because of its contribution to the modern industrial heritage of Nablus, or its link to the project of modernity, but also its journey from its inception to its tragic recent destruction. The story of the mill reflects a contradiction between the glorious history of its origins as a model of the manufacturing project and the present ignorance of its historical, cultural, and social values, which led to its demolition. Between genesis and destruction, al-Na'ama Flourmill reveals a significant episode of Nablus city urban life. The construction of the concrete foundation and the import and installation of the machines during the British Mandate are characteristic of an exceptional instance in the manufacturing movement in Nablus. The local and regional networks that came together in this building, forged through the purchase of wheat and the sale of flour – under the control of the British Mandate, the Jordanian government, and the Israeli occupation – are as important as its modernist architectural and industrial values. The abandonment of the building during the 1980s, a result of the Israeli control of the wheat and flour market, its later destruction in 2015, and the current use of the building's land as a parking lot are revealing of the city's urban politics and transformations.

This paper aims to contextualize the flourmill for the reader and situate its specific typology in time and space. Based on archival research, local narratives, and memories, a reconstruction of the birth, life, and death of the mill will restore its image for the reader, articulate the urban and cultural transformations of Nablus, and reflect on the concept of heritage. This exploration will be presented in a progression of three scenes of the flourmill: construction, destruction, and the in-between.

## Construction

Historically, Nablus played a major role in interregional and intraregional trade in Palestine. "The narrow valley which bisects the central highlands and connects the desert with the fertile western plains was a natural corridor for goods heading in all four directions."[1] Nablus was Palestine's principal trade and manufacturing center during the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, its economic and social life sustained by and organized around four main commodities of Jabal Nablus: cotton, textiles, olive oil, and soap. After the mid-nineteenth century, cotton cultivation has declined. The British demand for grains caused a shift in the percentage of land allocated for this purpose. Palestinian peasants welcomed this change, preferring to grow grains, as "there was always a local and regional market for wheat whereas cotton was vulnerable to international price fluctuations and to the health of regional textile industries."[2] At that time, local grain mills produced flour for the city.[3] The increase in wheat crops paved the way for the establishment of a new, modern flourmill during the third decade of the twentieth century.

According to Emad al-Masri, one of the heirs of the mill's founders, the flourmill was established in 1923 or 1924, during the British colonial period. The Masri family and their business partners the Aloul ('Alul) family decided to establish al-Naʿama Flourmill Company,[4] with the Masri family owning six of nine shares, and the Aloul family owning the remaining three shares. According to Emad al-Masri, the milling machines were bought from a well-known Swiss company called the Bühler Group; this company also installed the machines and set up the mill for operation. Al-Naʿama Flourmill was one of the first mills that this company had installed worldwide. Thafir al-Masri, Emad al-Masri recalled, gave the original drawings of the mill, which were drawn on textile, to the Swiss company as a gift. The mill's founding shaped a significant chapter in the social history and the economic development of Nablus during the 1920s. The mill was one of al-Hajj Tahir al-Masri's company projects, which also included a number of factories and investments, including a matchbox factory, gas stations, and an oil factory. These manufacturing projects affected urban life and contributed to socio-economic changes in the community that allowed Nablus to remain a vital point on the economic and commercial map of Palestine, even after the decline in the cotton and textile trade.

The foundation of the flourmill was connected to the industrial and economic development that Palestine witnessed during the British Mandate. This development was a result of the funding that came through Europe to support Jewish immigration to Palestine. As well as the induction of industry during the wartime in order to sustain a regional provision to provide the army with supplies and equipment bearing in mind that Palestine was the empire's second largest military base in the Middle East after Egypt.[5] During World War II, trading and industrial ventures further expanded, but "Arab capital growth was small in comparison to the rapid growth of the Jewish manufacturing during the Mandate, which went from generating 50 percent of Palestine's output in the 1920s to 60 percent in the early 1930s and reached 80 percent during the wartime induced industrialization."[6] In the milling industry, in conjunction with the establishment of al-Naʿama Flourmill in Nablus, important modern flourmills were built in Tel Aviv (Modern
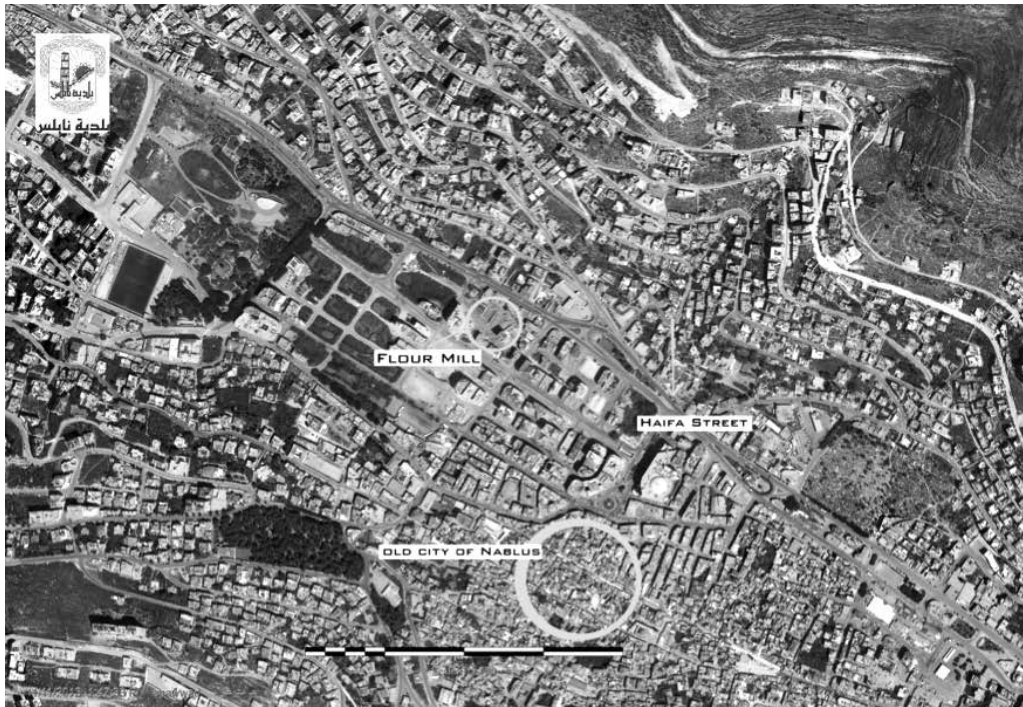
Figure 1. An aerial photo of Nablus showing the location of al-Naʿama Flourmill on Haifa Street to the west of the Old City of Nablus. Source: Nablus Municipality.

Flourmill) and Haifa (the Grand Moulins, established in 1921 with support from Baron de Rothschild). These two mills controlled the flour market, having secured a virtual monopoly. The Mandate government imported Australian wheat and applied a permit system that defined the import amount and the ration of each flourmill, dramatically affecting the amount of flour and its price.[7]

Al-Naʿama Flourmill was erected on 2,450 square meters on the western periphery of Nablus, on Haifa Street, which connects Nablus and Tulkarm. This location made the mill accessible for the trucks that transported wheat from other parts of Palestine and Jordan (figure 1). Emad al-Masri explained that the flourmill formed an important landmark, which contributed to the surrounding area's urban character. The locals started to refer to the entire area as the flourmill area (*al-mathana*). Moreover, the establishment of the flourmill encouraged other investors to launch commercial and industrial developments in the area; in particular, al-Tamimi Gas Station was constructed opposite the mill and an ice factory was constructed next to the mill and later transformed into al-Arz Ice Cream Factory.[8] At that time, the city of Nablus was not connected to the public electricity network and generators were used to provide the mill with electricity.[9] The generators and the machines were so loud that their sound reached even those in the city living far from the mill. This was among the reasons for the delay of residential expansion toward the area.

According to Mahmoud Qatouni – who worked in the mill from 1956 until its demolition – the mill's main building was a fifteen-meter tall, yellow, rectangular concrete structure, which contained the milling machines. In addition to the main building,

Figure 2. A general view of al-Naʿama Flourmill from the west, showing the stores and large piles of grain in the yard, 12 June 1940, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 3. A general view inside the mill showing machines on one of the upper floors, 1940, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

warehouses were connected to the western side of the building and opened onto a large yard that was used as a loading area for wheat and flour (figure 2). The mill's inner space was divided into five different levels by iron beams that were covered with wooden pallets (figure 3). The production process started at the highest level and began with sieving, followed by washing, drying, grinding, and, finally, sorting and packing on the ground level. Later, another floor was added to the building, increasing its height to eighteen meters. At that time, the flourmill was the highest building in the city. The yellow concrete block made an impression on locals and made the mill an extraordinary structure that was valued by the inhabitants of Nablus.

## The In-Between

When the flourmill started operating in the 1920s, Hassan al-Aloul was the principal of the mill. Mazouz al-Masri was responsible for the oil factory and used to pass by every evening to take care of the family business. Hassan al-Aloul and Mazouz al-Masri had no office; instead, they used to sit at the street side in front of the mill to socialize with friends and to discuss their business. The operation manager was a Greek technician called Abu Hanna who lived and died in Nablus. After Abu Hanna's death, his son took responsibility for managing the flourmill and he also stayed in Palestine until his death.

The production capacity was twenty-five to thirty tons per day and the flour was produced in three categories: extra, first-class, and second-class. According to Emad al-Masri and Qatouni, the flour was sold to merchants in Nablus and other Palestinian cities and villages. The mill used to deliver flour for tradesmen in Nablus by donkey – *jahsh al-mathana* (the mill's donkey), as locals used to say –for convenient navigation through the narrow city passages, while the flour was transported by trucks to the other cities.

Enduring Nablus historical position as a main hub of local and regional trade network, the flourmill company used to purchase wheat from the peasants in all parts of Palestine, and from Irbid and Amman in Jordan. In order to cover the flourmill needs for wheat and due to the high demand for flour, the company used to import wheat from the United States through the Aqaba port. Mahmoud Qatouni said workers used to leave Nablus in

the morning going to Amman in order to spend their night, then continued their way to Aqaba, where they would receive ships coming from the United States, offload the wheat, and transfer it to Nablus the following day. This journey was difficult for the drivers since the roads between Amman and Aqaba were unpaved.

In 1948, after the Nakba and the Israeli occupation for Palestine, the noise of the flourmill was the only sound hitting the silence of Nablus nights, according to Emad al-Masri, "the inhabitants used to say: the Masris are making money." The mill was working twenty-four hours a day and its sound was so loud that inhabitants of Nablus used to hear it from 'Ibal Mountain (Northern Mountain). Despite the din, which (as mentioned above) had hindered the residential development of the area near the mill, people started to build and settle in the area in the second half of the twentieth century, after which many residential and commercial blocks were erected and connected the mill with the city's fabric.

Qatouni added that two flourmills were working in Palestine during the Jordanian period: Al-Na'ama Flourmill and another smaller mill in Qalandiya, near Jerusalem, called al-Jallad Flourmill. The flour supply was not enough to cover the demand of the local market, especially after the Nakba and the increase in the population due to the influx of refugees from the occupied Palestinian cities. Thus, the flour merchants used to buy flour from Jordan, since there were four flourmills in Amman and Irbid. Ironically, as a consequence of the Nakba, the Palestinian refugees received wheat as part of the food aid provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and many of them sold it to the flourmill.

After the Israeli occupation for the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, al-Na'ama Flourmill struggled to survive. Emad al-Masri noted that the mill faced difficulties due to out-of-date machines, unavailability of wheat, and competition with the modern flourmill in Haifa (the Grand Moulins), which produced flour in larger quantities and at lower prices.[10] Further, the mill was required to import wheat through the ports controlled by the Israeli occupation, since it was no longer possible to import through Aqaba port or to buy wheat from the Jordanian tradesman as before. Al-Na'ama Flourmill Company managed to keep working until the late 1980s. Emad al-Masri unemotionally described the last day in the flourmill when Qatouni emptied the safe and brought the files and keys to his office. In the 1980s, the Masri and Aloul families tried to sustain their business by establishing a new flourmill outside the city. They again contacted the Swiss Bühler Group and asked them to prepare a cost-benefit analysis: according to Emad al-Masri, the cost was estimated between three and four million dollars, and they thus regretted the project.

The desertion of the mill made it a scary place. Several decades later, however, artists and architects came together in the 2011 Nablus exhibition *Ma bayna 'Ibal wa Jarazim* (Between Ebal and Gerzim), the third in a series of exhibitions focusing on different Palestinian cities, to highlight the importance of the industrial structure.[11] As part of this exhibition, Nabil Anani and Suleiman Mansour created an installation in the flourmill called "On the Mill, I Saw You on the Mill." The intervention aimed to investigate the social history of the mill based on material found in the archives of the Nablus municipality and other official institutions. At that exhibition, the flourmill was opened and many

artists, students, and members of the public visited the place. The exhibition contributed to returning forgotten spaces to the collective memory of the citizens of Nablus and Palestinians from other cities. It was the first time that many of the students, professors, and locals had visited the mill. This visit left its impact on the group perception of the space and was one of the reasons that researchers and students became enthusiastic to write about and investigate the flourmill.

## Destruction

The dramatic post-Oslo rise in land prices encouraged the Masri and Aloul families to sell the mill's land to four investors from Nablus and the surrounding villages. Emad al-Masri and Waleed al-Aloul represented the two families in the business deal. In 2012, the landowners applied for a demolition permit, following the Palestinian law that was announced in 2006. The law states that the demolition of any building older than fifty years should be approved by the ministry of tourism and antiquities. However, Palestinian law in the West Bank, based on the Jordanian law from 1966, defines cultural heritage as:

1. Any unmovable historical evidence, that was structured, formed, builds, produced or modified by man before 1700 CE, including any addition or rebuilt after that date.
2. Anthropological and animal remains dated to 600 CE and before.
3. Any unmovable or movable evidence dated after 1700 CE, but nominated by the minister as historical evidence.[12]

As a consequence of this frozen and out-of-date cultural heritage law, and after the department of antiquities team examination of the building and the lot on which it sits, the demolition process was approved in 2013. Although an old well, a water channel, and an old milling machine were found, Mahmoud al-Birawi, head of the department of antiquities in Nablus, said that no traces of older structures were found and the concrete structure had no architectural value. Emad al-Masri said that the demolition was approved because the structure has no floors and thus was not considered a building that could convey historical or architectural value. The department of antiquities placed one condition on the demolition: that the well and a part of the old milling machine be preserved and any new architectural design should place the machine in a glass box in front or inside the proposed building as a remembrance of the site.[13]

After receiving the demolition permit from the municipality, the investors paid two million dollars in insurance to the municipality and al-Naʿama Flourmill was demolished in November 2015. The mill's destruction provoked public reaction, including the organization by a local initiative of a day of documentation of the site. Many people went to visit the place before the demolition, photographers documented the site, journalists prepared reports for the local media blaming the municipality and the department of antiquities for this loss of heritage, but no one stopped the demolition process. For Qatouni,

the destruction was a big loss: the mill was a success story that held a lot of memories, and it was a pity to lose this history.

The demolition process was cruel; the mill's machinery was left inside, crushed, and sold afterward as scrap. The investors did not comply with the conditions put forward by the municipality and the department of antiquities, namely preserving the old wooden milling machine (figure 4), and as a result they lost the insurance money they had paid to the municipality.

Issam Abu Zaid, the manager of the Nablus chamber of commerce and industry, said that the deserted flourmill was responsible for health problems in the area because wheat remnants provided a shelter for pests and vermin and the space ultimately became a junkyard. The chamber of commerce and industry supported the demolition as investment and a project that could be part of the economic development process. The investors' first plan was to erect a shopping center, a typical post-Oslo proposal; however, the project was suspended and the investors are still conducting business studies to decide the future of the project. Currently, the location of the mill is used as a paid parking lot (figure 5).



Figure 4. A general view of the inner space of al-Na'ama Flourmill showing the wooden machine during the annual cities exhibition, 2011. Photo by Lana Joudeh.



Figure 5. A general view of the empty location of the destroyed mill, now used as a parking area. Photo by the authors.

## The Flourmill's Journey and the Notion of Heritage

The journey of al-Na'ama Flourmill from construction to destruction is not only an example that articulates the urban and cultural transformations of Nablus, it also highlights the concept of heritage within a "post-colonial" society. When revisiting social media and the locals' comments on the demolition of the flourmill in November 2015, two distinct main viewpoints emerge (see, for example, figure 6). One agreed with the municipality and the chamber of commerce and industry and supported the demolition of the flourmill.

Figure 6. A selction of citizens' social media comments on the demolition of the flourmill, November 2015.

This group's viewpoint confirmed that there is an essential need for economic development in the city that overrides the protection of an old, deserted concrete building. People highlighted that the building was not (and should not be) considered a cultural heritage, with one comment on Facebook stating: "the building is not considered heritage, it doesn't contain arches and it is not built from stones." Further, this group considered the flourmill a symbol of oppression and related it to the British colonial era. Many of the comments explained that "you want to protect a symbol of colonialism and oppression," and another commenter marveled that "the building was not destroyed by the Israeli army."

The other group was depressed by the demolition and rejected the municipality's agreement to the destruction. They considered the building an important landmark in the city, a part of its social history, and a cultural heritage site that should be conserved and rehabilitated. An extraordinary comment went so far as to claim that "this building is the pyramid of Nablus," trying to explain the importance of the building for the locals. This group's comments reflected nostalgic views, but by and large it did not take any action to protest or prevent the demolition.

Considering the first position on the flourmill demolition, it seems contradictory that locals would support the demolition because they considered the mill a symbol of oppression and colonialism, while at the same time supporting the call for initiating a consumerist shopping center that will colonize their everyday space. The demolition of the flourmill represents a typical example of neoliberal urban restructuring and emerging forms of spatial ordering and engineering in the post-Oslo regime, which includes

shopping centers, business towers, and high-end gated residential neighborhoods.

The locals' perceptions and attitudes toward the demolition of the flourmill emphasized that the diversity of viewpoints are linked to the socio-political transformations witnessed by the city and the area. Impacted by various colonial powers that controlled Palestine and in order to protect their existence, Palestinians defined their cultural identity based on primordial identity, concentrating on religious and ancient origins and neglecting their modern history. Nablus's beginnings go back to the Canaanite period, its architecture and urban development can be traced back to the Roman, Byzantine, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods, making it a very rich space. As a result, municipality conservation policies focus on the historical Old City and Roman archeological sites and ignore local modern heritage like cinemas, schools, coffee houses, hospitals, and factories. Modern heritage features are located outside the historical Old City; consequently they are not included in Orientalist academic definition of Arab-Islamic city.[14]

The demolition of the flourmill underlined the notion that the concept of heritage is confined to the classical, religious, and ancient monuments (Umayyad and Mamluk in Palestine, Pharaonic in Egypt, Nabataean in Jordan, Phoenician in Lebanon, and so on).[15] It is evident that the Orientalist definition of the Islamic and Arabic city excluded local urban heritage and this definition is reflected in the heritage law and other regulations based on Jordanian laws that originate in British Mandate law. The institutional system, including the laws and regulations, the system of governance, and the education system have paved the way for a *tabula rasa* project, which provides promises for a prosperous future and neglects the recent past and the heritage of modernity. Activities of heritage conservation have necessarily been reframed according to the political, cultural, and economic realities of the present, as well as the attitudes of various stakeholders toward modernity, national identity, and authenticity. Yasser Elsheshtawy has qualified such an approach as "outdated and counterproductive," leading to "a narrative of loss."[16]

Presently, the land on which al-Naʿama Flourmill used to sit is used as a parking lot, while the mill's scenery is still embedded in the mental image of the locals who lived the construction, destruction, and the in-between. In Nablus, it is still typical to say that something is "near the flourmill [*al-mathana*]" or "on the flourmill street [*shariʿ al-mathana*]," maintaining the memory of this place that witnessed the changes throughout the modern history of Nablus. Although no flourmill is there, maybe the future generations will ask: where is the flourmill you are talking about? The power of its absence could be regained in reminiscing.

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## Endnotes

1   Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23.

2   Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 105.

3   Doumani mentions, for example, a flourmill in Wadi al-Tuffah owned by Hajj Ibrahim Muhammad Anabtawi, originally a wealthy peasant from 'Anabta, and the 'Abd al-Hadis. Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 303 (note 115).

4   Al-Na'ama means soft in Arabic, and the Masri family had previously used this name as a brand for its soap factory.

5   Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 2.

6   Seikaly, *Men of Capital*, 14.

7   See, for example: "Wheat & Wheat-Flour Supplies and Prices," Government of Palestine Controller of Supplies Office, 1939, Israel State Archives 4318/5-M, online at www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b07170680031eca/File/0b07170680be940c (accessed 27 January 2017).

8   This factory was also demolished along with the flourmill.

9   Nablus was connected to a public electrical network in the 1959. See Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ), *Nablus City Profile* (Jerusalem: ARIJ, 2014), online at vprofile.arij.org/nablus/pdfs/vprofile/Nablus%20city_vp_en.pdf (accessed 27 January 2017).

10  "The Grand Mills of Israel," Central Zionist Archives website, n.d., online at www.zionistarchives.org.il/en/Pages/GrandMills.aspx (accessed 15 January 2017).

11  For more information on the exhibition, see: "The Third Annual Cities Exhibition 'Between Ebal and Gerzim,'" Birzeit University Museum website, n.d. (2011), online at museum.birzeit.edu/exhibitions/third-annual-cities-exhibition-between-ebal-and-gerzim (accessed 26 January 2017).

12  The text of the original Jordanian law is available online at www.riwaq.org/riwaq/sites/default/files/pdfs/1966%20ANTIQUITIES%20LAW%20.pdf (accessed 25 January 2017). The Palestinian Authority has been working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to develop a new cultural heritage law, but it remains in draft form: see "Palestinian Cultural Heritage Law," UNESCO website, n.d., online at www.unesco.org/new/en/ramallah/culture/institutional-development/cultural-policies-and-planning/palestinian-cultural-heritage-law/ (accessed 27 January 2017).

13  Malak Abu 'Aysha, "Mathanat Nablus . . . irth banahi al-ajdad wa hadmihi al-ahfad" [The Nablus Mill . . . A Legacy of Forefathers' Construction and Grandchildren's Destruction," *Raya*, 21 November 2015, online at www.raya.ps/ar/news/925954.html (accessed 15 January 2017).

14  According to Janet Abu-Lughod, the definition of Arab-Islamic cities was built on limited examples, mainly Fez in Morocco and Damascus and Aleppo in Syria. Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City, Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 155–176.

15  In her study on Amman, Renate Dietrich investigates Orientalist models and highlighted the marginalization of Amman's distinctive urban features – such as the Husayni mosque, coffee houses, the cemetery at Ras al-'Ayn, among others – in a case similar to the marginalization of Nablus's urban features. Renate Dieterich, "What is 'Islamic' about the City of Amman?" paper submitted to the conference "Conservation and Regeneration of Traditional Urban Centers in the Islamic World: Learning from Regional Experiences and Building Partnerships," in Amman, Irbid, and Salt, 2002.

16  Yasser Elsheshtawy, "The Middle East City: Moving beyond the Narrative of Loss," in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London: Routledge, 2004), 3, 5.

# The Ottoman Saraya: All That Did Not Remain

Khaldun Bshara

In Palestine, seventeen buildings were known as *saraya*, meaning castle, palace, or government building or headquarters.[1] Dhahir al-'Umar al-Zaydani, the Ottoman governor from the Galilee, along with his brothers and sons, built seven of these saraya in the second half of the eighteenth century.[2] The other ten headquarters were built by local rulers in Gaza, Acre, and Jaffa, or by the central Ottoman government between the early eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Radwan family built their saraya, known as Dar al-Sa'ada,[3] in Gaza to enforce their authority over southern Palestine, to deter attacks by Bedouin tribes on the city of Gaza and its port – Palestine's southern gateway to Mediterranean trade – and to guarantee safe passage for Christian pilgrims on their way to St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai. In Acre, Sulayman Pasha and his successor 'Abdallah Pasha ordered the construction of two headquarters.[4] In Jaffa, Muhammad Agha Abu al-Nabbut, Jaffa's governor assigned by Sulayman Pasha, built the old saraya of Jaffa.[5]

The remaining six saraya were constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century on the orders of Ottoman sultans, especially during the rule of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II, in order to assert the authority and power of the central government over its distant territories. The new saraya of Jaffa was most probably constructed between 1890 and 1897 to crown the list and cap a series of constructions or adaptations that reflected the centralization tendencies of the post-Tanzimat Ottoman state.[6] The Ottoman saraya served as focal points in conflicts and struggles, both during and after the Ottoman period.

Architecturally, the saraya not only

conveyed central power and status, but also served public functions. The saraya buildings usually consisted of two floors and a basement. The lower levels were used to incarcerate men and women, separately, and also included bathrooms, stables, and possibly military barracks. The upper levels usually housed government departments and a mosque for prayers. Entrances to the saraya are characterized with the decorative arches, inscriptions, and recessed doorways to allow for guards' seating (*maksala*).[7]

Spacious courtyards occupied the center of the saraya. These were used for gatherings and official celebrations of special occasions.[8] Colonnades (*riwaq*) are distinct elements of the saraya courtyards. These usually overlook the courtyards from the first floor and were mainly used as a covered space for circulation where status and symbolic power were manifested in the size and the level of decoration of the columns and columns' capitals. The stairs in the saraya would normally have a monumental, dramatic arrangement where two stair branches met at a single landing on the first floor, or met mid way, with the two branches combining and continuing up to reach the first floor level. Circular windows (*rozana*), simple and flat or decorated, are found in many sarayas, especially those with high vaults, constituting not only decorative elements but also providing fine screens of natural lighting.[9]

This essay builds on a re-reading of Shukri Arraf's book *al-Saraya*, published by Riwaq in 2016;[10] research in Matson Collection of the Library of Congress for the early photography that covered these buildings and their vicinities; and field visits to saraya buildings all over Palestine. It sheds light on "all that did not remain"[11] of the physical structures of regional government headquarters from the mid- and the late Ottoman era in Palestine, including the destroyed saraya of Bethlehem, Jaffa, and Haifa. It nevertheless acknowledges that the socio-cultural-political meanings and functions of the remaining saraya have been long lost. The remaining saraya are either abandoned or utilized for some purpose other than that for which they were originally conceived. This essay poses a methodological question about studying architecture that is missing from the landscape and talking about events that are missing from historical records, and suggests that indirect entry points, such as early photography, can be of great help.

## The Bethlehem Saraya

The Bethlehem saraya was constructed in 1873 at the northwestern edge of present-day Manger Square. On 14 September 1938, during the Great Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939), Palestinian activists and revolutionaries burned down the saraya and the post office of Bethlehem (see figures 1–4). The British authorities demolished the building in 1942 to build a new police station on the same spot.[12] The new building was rectangular with a tower-like corner at the east-southern edge, similar to the Tegart forts of the British era (see figure 5). The police station remained until the late 1990s, when the Palestinian Authority decided to remove and replace the building with the Peace Center (see figure 6). The excavations for the foundations revealed the presence of early Bethlehem town ruins, which are partially present at the lower level of the Peace Center, which serves as a

Figure 1. Saraya Bethlehem plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.


Figure 2. Saraya Bethlehem with military presence in the plaza, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.


Figure 3. Saraya Bethlehem, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.


Figure 4. Saraya Bethlehem, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.


Figure 5. Bethlehem police station and plaza after 1942, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

museum. The Bethlehem saraya, however, disappeared totally from the landscape of the town.

Early photographs and postcards of the Nativity area reveal the vibrant social life of the saraya and Manger Square in its vicinity. They show a grand building constructed with well-cut stone and consisting of a basement and two floors with a red roof. A low stone wall with an iron grill and a grand entrance led to a small garden with pine and cedar trees. Stairs occupied the left side of the façade and the main entrance to the ground floor occupied center space in the main façade

Figure 6. The 1999 Peace Center.



Figure 7. Saraya Bethlehem, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 8. Saraya Bethlehem in an historic postcard. Author's collection.



Figure 9. Saraya Bethlehem and its plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 10. Saraya Bethlehem and its plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 11. Saraya Bethlehem and its plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

(see figure 7). What also appears from early photography of the area is a market place that was enmeshed in social and cultural space. Pilgrims mingle with local inhabitants. Merchants spread their goods at Manger Square (see figure 8). Later, cars and buses parked in front of the saraya and people dressed in different styles wandered about the plaza (see figures 9–11).

## The Haifa Saraya

Shaykh Dhahir al-'Umar seized control of Haifa in the second half of the eighteenth century, after a dispute with the chieftains of Mount Carmel. Dhahir's intervention in Haifa began during the reign of As'ad Pasha al-'Azm of Sidon. As'ad Pasha ordered Dhahir to take over Haifa as it lacked defensive means. Later, Dhahir obtained permission from the Ottoman sultan to fortify Haifa. The sultan granted him permission and provided him with cannons, which were situated in the tower, north of the current Haifa municipality location.[13]

Before Dhahir's interventions, the area in which the saraya was located in Haifa was known as al-Qishla neighborhood or Old Haifa. Dhahir secretly ordered his soldiers to demolish the old site of Haifa and to fill the harbor nearby with large stones. Located at the turn of the coastal road leading to al-Tira and al-Tantura, Dhahir believed that Old Haifa was exposed to enemies and that its harbor, located some distance from the enclosed gulf, was not suitable for ships disembarking. Therefore, in 1758, Dhahir ordered the construction of the new harbor. He chose a location about three kilometers from the previous harbor, where the width of the coast between the sea and Mount Carmel was about eight hundred meters. The new harbor was called *al-'amara al-jadida* (the new edifice) and was later known as New Haifa, stretching from al-Khamra Square west to the eastern gate (Acre Gate) near the King Faysal monument, east of al-Istiqlal Mosque. The use of the term *al-'amara al-jadida* in reference to the site continued until 1806.[14]

The construction of the new Haifa at this narrow passage enabled Dhahir to control the movement and therefore the area between Jaffa and his seat in Acre.[15] Dhahir fortified *al-'amara* with stone walls and three towers along the seaside. The walls of *al-'amara* formed a trapezoid, one side of which was about four hundred paces. The *'amara* area was about twenty dunams (twenty thousand square meters), its walls were seventy-five centimeters thick and four and a half meters tall, and its towers were equipped with cannons[61]. Dhahir also constructed a small fishing harbor. Nearby, he constructed a fortress that served as the customs headquarters, later known as "dar al-saraya." The saraya was used as administrative and political center.

The Haifa saraya was made up of two floors and a basement. While the basement floor was used as the town's prison, the upper floors were used as offices for employees who managed the town affairs and its various facilities such as customs, financial management, and the municipality. In front of the saraya, there was a relatively large plaza that stretched until the Jurayna Mosque (the Great Mosque of Haifa) and the clock tower, which was constructed later. The plaza was the center of life and events within the walled city, where

Haifa's inhabitants met and visitors from the surrounding villages gathered.[17]

During the Egyptian rule of Palestine (1831–1840), Ibrahim Pasha undertook renovation of dar al-saraya, and during the British Mandate era, the saraya was used as the administration center, until the British built another building opposite the current Haifa municipality building. The saraya was home to the city's governor, who headed the judicial council comprised of representatives of the city and the neighboring villages. The council held its sessions in the saraya.[18]

In 1949, Israel decided to implement a project called *Shikamona*, under which the Arab city ought to be demolished, with the exception of places of worship, to construct new buildings and to widen the road that connected the city's lower east side with its western neighborhoods. Shabtai Levy, Haifa's mayor at the time, decided to destroy the saraya and Abba Hushi, who went on to become mayor of the city, supervised the demolition.[19] A public park was constructed on parts of the saraya land before it was, in turn, destroyed to make room for the central post office building. In 2002, the mayor of Haifa and the Israeli government decided to establish the government and administration offices building known as the Sail Tower on the site where the saraya and the plaza associated with it once stood. Today, the street near the site still bears the name Saraya Street,[20] but the Haifa saraya has totally disappeared from the city space. With new roads and massive construction, the cultural landscape dramatically changed to conceal a past that was emblematic not only of the spatial body of the city, but also on the Palestinian body politic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Old photographs of the area reveal a town turning into a cosmopolitan city that speaks to commerce in terms of mobility of goods and people, through the harbor or the nearby railway station. The most intriguing images of the saraya area are those of masses receiving the body of King Faysal of Iraq, who died in Europe, on its way back to Iraq on 14 September 1933. One of these images shows what is now the main road and the second-hand market plaza (*suq al-'utaq*) in front of the Grand (al-Jurayna) Mosque of Haifa, with its clock tower constructed in 1899 (see figure 12). In the upper right-hand corner of the image, behind the Grand Mosque, there is a massive rectangular building, where a contemporary bluish Haifa post office building (Sphinx) stands today (see figure 13); this is, according to Arraf's description, the Haifa saraya, the fortress where customs and city offices were once located. This suggests that the Grand Mosque and the plaza in front of it are still within or at the edge of the parameters of the new city space (*al-'amara al-jadida*). The Jurayna Mosque's eastern wall could be the wall described by Arraf as the one with towers equipped with cannons.[21] The wall was most probably incorporated within the structure of the mosque, constructed later. This theory is supported by the presence of huge tower-like buttresses supporting the eastern walls of the mosque. These buttresses are not structurally needed to support the vaults of the mosque and therefore could have predated the mosque and served defensive purposes (see figures 12 and 13).

From the same image of the funeral of King Faysal, one notices that Mount Carmel was empty of construction. Men dressed both in traditional and modern attire, wearing traditional head covers, turbans, tarbushes, or western hats; women were absent from the public space. The Jurayna Mosque used to have a simple short minaret alongside

the Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II Clock Tower of 1899. Electricity towers were present in the plaza – houses around the plaza were connected to the electric grid in 1933. Cars and a police convoy proceeded along the since-enlarged street. All the buildings apart from the Jurayna Mosque, most notably the four-story building with three-arch salon overlooking the Mediterranean, were leveled and replaced by the Sail Tower skyscraper in 2002 (see figure 14).



Figure 12. Saraya Haifa area receiving King Faysal's body, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

## The Jaffa Saraya

The eighteenth century was a difficult one for Jaffa. By 1763, there were more than four hundred houses in Jaffa surrounded by a wall, but in 1775, 'Ali Bey's closest companion and most trusted general Muhammed Abu al-Dahab massacred many of Jaffa's inhabitants.[22] Again, upon Napoleon's invasion in 1799, the French army massacred at least six thousand soldiers and civilians.[23] The nineteenth century was kinder than its predecessor. Jaffa blossomed during the days of Ottoman governor Muhammad Agha Abu Nabbut (1807–1818), and during the Egyptian rule (1831–1840), when a number of suburbs were constructed. In 1892, after the opening of the Suez Canal, a railway line was extended between Jaffa and Jerusalem. In 1901, a clock tower was constructed to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II's reign over the Ottoman Empire. In 1909, the town of Tel Aviv was established to the north of Jaffa.

The British occupied Jaffa in 1917. During the British Mandate era, the city expanded and the number of its inhabitants rose from almost thirty-two thousand people in 1917 to almost one hundred



Figure 13. The Phoenix building, Haifa, 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.



Figure 14. Sail Tower, Haifa, 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

Figure 15. Saraya Jaffa, April 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.



Figure 17. Saraya Jaffa, April 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.



Figure 16. Saraya Jaffa plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 18. The Jaffa saraya, 1925, photograph by Frank Scholten.



Figure 19. The Jaffa saraya, 1925, photograph by Frank Scholten.

thousand in 1948 (including about thirty thousand Jews). With the end of the Mandate and the withdrawal of the British, Jaffa fell to Zionist military forces and was occupied on 13 May 1948. Only 3,600 of its Arab population remained in the town and were relocated to the ʿAjami neighborhood, while Jewish immigrants were housed in the rest of the city. In 1950, Israel declared the annexation of Jaffa into the municipality of "Tel Aviv–Yafo."[24]

Two buildings in Jaffa are known as saraya. Abu Nabbut constructed the first building. The building functioned as headquarters for the Ottoman army and was later turned into

Figure 20. Jamal Pasha addresses the masses from the Jaffa saraya in the early twentieth century.



Figure 22. The 1933 demonstrations in Jaffa, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
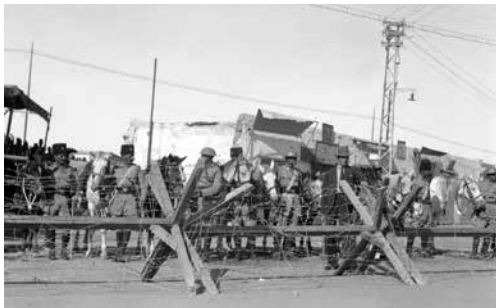


Figure 21. The 1933 demonstrations in Jaffa, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 23. The 1933 demonstrations in Jaffa, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

a soap factory – the largest in Palestine – belonging to Hanna Dawud Damiani (see figure 15).[25] The building hosted the government departments offices in the early nineteenth century, and remained as such until the government departments were relocated to the new saraya at al-Qishla around Clock Tower Square (Saraya Square) (see figure 16).[26] The new saraya was constructed after the demolition of the city walls to allow for urban expansion. Constructed in neo-classical style, the saraya testifies to the European influences on Oriental architecture and was meant to showcase the modernization of the Ottoman Empire (see figure 17). The restored remains of the saraya façade reflect the excellence of building techniques and material including the majestic stairs leading to highly decorated front façade,



Figure 24. Saraya Jaffa, April 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

with four huge columns raised on massive rectangular bases and ending with classical (ionic) capitals carrying an architrave with four circular medallions matching pointed finales at the roof level (see figures 18 and 19). Composed of three floors, the saraya served as the seat of the Ottoman governor, and continued to serve as the courthouse during the British Mandate era.

The saraya and the plaza also witnessed the emergence of space as integral part to the public sphere, where mass political mobilization took place. Saraya Square, being central to the city and located close to the Grand Mosque, became a key location for political rallies and gatherings (see figure 20). The 27 October 1933 demonstrations against the British authorities were among the most celebrated political gatherings in Palestine (see figures 21–23).[27] The saraya also served as the headquarters of the Arab National Committee of Jaffa, before it was turned into the headquarters of the social services department of Jaffa, and remained as such until Sunday, 4 January 1948, when two Jewish paramilitary car bombs (attributed to the Lehi militia) rocked the city of Jaffa. The first targeted the saraya building and the second Barclays Bank, resulting in the death and injury of a large number of civilians.[28] Al-Qishla was used as a police station after the occupation of the city in 1948 and later the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality restored the façade of the saraya, but what remained after the bombing and the restoration does not convey any of the grandeur of the original building, nor of the life that surrounded it (see figure 24).[29]


## All That Did Not Remain: Rewriting Narratives

Public architecture is almost always a representation of state power and usually conceals the contradictions behind its production – that is, efforts to control space, goods, and bodies.[30] The saraya localized central power in the form of built structures and walls and thus mirrored the governing regime. The state channeled its power to its subjects through pre-identified bureaus and bureaucrats.

Missing from the urban escapes of Bethlehem, Haifa, and Jaffa, the saraya edifices that disappeared gain particular significance and lend us insight into notions of power and resistance. They force us to look into other material and immaterial cultures to capture the history, politics, and social and economic life around such important edifices. For example, photographs that show heavy armor in the vicinity of Bethlehem saraya and barbed wire fences in front of the Jaffa saraya indicate that the saraya are sites of power and thus should convey the message not only through majestic architecture but also through machine guns and manpower. The way people, men and women, dressed "from head to toe" and moved in the spaces around the saraya convey a sense of significant ethnic, religious, or class diversity. The association of the saraya with a market place in Bethlehem, with the customs in Haifa, or with the main commercial plaza in Jaffa points to the coexistence of social, economical, and political spheres within the same space. This integration of spheres would be sacrificed during the British Mandate era as the colonial authorities distanced their headquarters from residential and commercial areas

while investing in street networks and transportation to overcome the distance.[31]

This modest contribution shows the possibility inherent in early photography to add to the debate about Palestine's past events missing from historical records and its material culture missing from the landscapes. Early photography offers a mosaic of socio-cultural-economic-political life around the saraya that cannot be overshadowed by the representations of power that these buildings aspired to achieve. And in a way, "all that did not remain" calls into existence rich debate about absence that is very much felt in the cityscapes. The "emptiness" calls for opening the possibility to see beyond the missing walls and vaults. What is this space? In what time is this space? What was before and what came after? Who was here before? What architecture can these ruins bring to life?

It is true that material culture is an important element, where memory can be located and collective practices embodied; yet the fourteen saraya that survived destruction – abandoned, left to decay, or adapted for new functions – are the concrete witness to asymmetries and representations of power, and to the deliberate erasure of particular subjects' potentialities and dreams about modernity, the public sphere, and new forms of architecture.

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**Endnotes**

1 Also known as *seray*, *sarai*, *seray*, or *saray*, the term *saray* is Turkish and comes from the Persian word *sarāy*, meaning palace. In Arabic, the term *sariyya* is the singular of *saraya* and refers to a military unit or brigade. Shukri Arraf, *al-Saraya: Government Headquarters in Palestine during the Ottoman Era* (Ramallah: Riwaq, 2016), iii.

2 Between 1750 and 1775, Dhahir adapted the castle of Acre into a *saraya*, and constructed the headquarters in Nazareth and Haifa. His brother Sa'd built the *saraya* of Dayr Hanna and its castle, and his son Salibi built the *saraya* of Tiberias. 'Ali, Zaydani's son, built the *saraya* of Safad, and another son, 'Uthman, built the *saraya* and castle at Shifa 'Amr (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 12–14).

3 The Radwan family built their saraya, known as Dar al-Sa'ada in 1710 (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 11).

4 Sulayman Pasha took the tower of the Acre castle as his saraya early nineteenth century, more particularly between the years 1804 and 1818, his reign over the seat of Acre (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 14). 'Abdallah Pasha, who reigned over Acre from 1818 to 1831, constructed several buildings, one of which was his saraya to the north of al-Majadla Mosque (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 14).

5 Ottoman governor Muhammad Agha Abu Nabbut (1807–1818) built Jaffa's old saraya in 1810 (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 14).

6 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 17.

7 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, iii–v.

8 While some courtyards are small such as the courtyards in Jaffa old saraya and Tulkarm saraya, other courtyards are huge such as the saraya of Acre, Dayr Hannah, Shifa'Amr (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, iv).

9 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, iii–v.

10 Arraf, *al-Saraya*.

11 This is in reference to the encyclopedic work *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, ed. Walid Khalidi (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992). While *All That Remains* brings to life hundreds of depopulated Palestinian villages through extensive research about their socio-economic and cultural life, "all that did not remain" refers to – and seeks to make visible – not only architecture that has disappeared from urban space, but also the lost socio-economic and cultural life around the saraya still standing.

12 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 25.

13 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 45.

14 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 48–49.

15  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 49.
16  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 49.
17  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
18  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
19  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
20  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
21  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 49.
22  'Ali Bey al-Kabir (1728–8 May 1773) was the leader of Egypt. He rose to prominence in 1768, when he rebelled against his Ottoman superiors.
23  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 177.
24  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 177, 180.
25  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 180.
26  Al-Qishla was used as a police station after the occupation of the city in 1948. Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 181.
27  In 1933, the Palestinians decided to declare a general strike against the British Mandate government that had allowed large numbers of Jews to immigrate and settle in Palestine. The political elite of Palestine held a national conference to consider the matter in Jaffa on 26 March 1933. Between five hundred and six hundred delegates attended the conference from all Palestinian cities. The conference decided that the Mandate government in Palestine was the main enemy of the Arab people, and therefore ought to be boycotted. The Executive Committee called for a general strike throughout Palestinian cities on Friday, 3 October 1933, and called for weekly demonstrations in particular Palestinian city after Friday prayers to express their disapproval and discontent about the unjust policy pursued by the British authorities. The most dangerous of those demonstrations was the one in Jaffa after Friday prayers on 27 October 1933. Palestinians gathered from around the country to participate in this demonstration, which started at the Grand Mosque of Jaffa. The British Mandate authorities mobilized armed men and cavalry, and erected barbed wire fences in front of the saraya and the Grand Mosque to prevent the demonstration from taking place (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 181–83).
28  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 182–89.
29  Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 191.
30  I am following the lead of Henri Lefebvre who argues that space signifies power and prohibitions and commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures. Lefebvre claims that it is important to see beyond space, because even in the most obvious architectural forms, such as monumental buildings, there are relations of production and power relations concealed behind the construction. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991[1974]), 138–140.
31  I refer especially to the construction of *al-muqata'at or al-'amara* – the British police headquarters – known as Tegart buildings (named after the British police advisor who envisioned their architecture) during the 1936–1939 Revolt. The British constructed these headquarters at some distance from urban and rural centers. The headquarters of Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, Ramallah, al-Dhahirriyya, al-Far'a, Dayr Qaddis, Rantis, Bani Zayd al-Gharbiyya, and al-Taybeh are good examples.

DERELICT STRUCTURES

# Tegart's Modern Legacy:

## The Reproduction of Power, a Timeless Paradox

Yasid El Rifai, Dima Yaser, and

Adele Jarrar

The new time of architecture is thus that of memory, which replaces history . . . With the introduction of memory into the object, the object comes to embody both an idea of itself and a memory of a former self.[1]

Tegart forts, constructed by the British colonial regime as military installations near or within Palestinian cities during the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt against Jewish waves of immigration to Palestine and British support for the Zionist project, stand as monuments of power.[2] These forts endured continuous physical restructuring and reshaping to accommodate the shifting regimes over the past century. The Tegart forts that have penetrated the Palestinian landscape as monuments of power and machines of control and territorial expansion stand as haunted structures to this day – in a state of transformation accommodating both colonial and national authorities. These inherited monuments of British colonialism in Palestine manifest the power of architecture in the representation of successive political patterns. As architecture represents itself through monuments, it embraces a direct expression of power/control relation between authorities and society. Georges Bataille asserts that monuments are the way authorities speak and impose a state of silence, fear, and acceptable behavior on the multitudes. Thus, "the storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of affairs: it is difficult to explain this impulse of the mob other than by the animosity the people hold against the monuments which are their true masters."[3]

## Monuments of Power, Instruments of Suppression

The British Mandate regime in Palestine was a "temporary" commissioning by the League of Nation for Britain to administer Palestine. The British governance demonstrated a militarized legal and administrative instrument in Palestine aiming at "maintaining peace," while in reality facilitating the Jewish immigrations and the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine. After the outbreak of the *fallahin*-led revolt in 1936, Britain found it imperative to find an effective way to control Palestinians. Britain thus drew on its rich and vast experience in power, control, and repression in its colonies, especially in India, and in 1938 commissioned Sir Charles Tegart, former commissioner of the Calcutta Police, to design about fifty-five forts throughout Palestine based on his experiences in India.[4] They were located on elevated terrain, exposed and isolated from their surrounding but remotely controlling and dominant. The forts were autonomous and self-sustained at their strategic locations (figure 1).



Figure 1. A map illustrating the locations of the Tegart forts, which dotted the Palestinian landscape, with the greatest concentration in the northern and coastal regions, from Kevin Connolly, "Charles Tegart and the Forts that Tower over Israel," BBC, 10 September 2012.

These forts, which were mainly used as police stations, were designed to resist attacks and bombardment. The buildings were fortified and supplied with water and storage in case of siege or attacks. They were built of reinforced concrete, with high walls, small openings, and armored doors. They had a rectangular or square-shaped plan, with internal courtyards that sometimes housed a smaller building, usually a jail (figure 2). They had also two giant observation towers.[5] The architectural language was brutalist and repellent, expressing military iconography par excellence. The architectural design imposed power and control over the observer, as well as a real ability to control and survey through their panoptical design.[6] These stony white structures that dotted the landscape were brutal both in image and in use, serving as centers of torture, interrogation, and investigation.

These forts were not only used by policemen or military personnel, but sometimes were also inhabited by their families. In accordance, the inner courtyards were not only used for exercising control, but also served as social spaces for military and their families

away from the eyes of the Palestinians and adjacent inhabitants. They hosted wrestling games, musicals, and parties; some also had swings for children and regular spaces for training (figure 3). Inside the buildings, which also had secret emergency exits, we find sleeping quarters, laboratories, investigation rooms, and telecommunication facilities (figure 3). The deliberate, comprehensive, and conscious design of the Tegart forts, in terms of space and geographical location, played a key role in assisting the British Mandate to dominate and control the Palestinian population, despite repeated uprisings, until the Nakba.

## Monuments in Transition

These forts, which stand as monuments of a lost empire, also played an important role in the 1948 war. Between 1947 and 1949, in a move that illustrates the strategic alliance between the British



Figure 2. Plans of a number of Tegart forts, illustrating the different spatial typologies and scales of the forts according to location and function, from Gili Merin, "Tegart Forts in Palestine: Adopted and Adapted Monuments of Supervision," *Quaderns d'Arquitectura i Urbanisme*, March 2015.

Mandate and Israeli occupation, British colonial armies evacuated several Tegart forts located along the Palestinian coast, where Jewish immigrant communities settled. As Israeli sources claim, about thirty-three forts were handed to Israelis who served as police groups for the British Mandate.[7] Among these were the Tegart forts of Qatra, 'Iraq Suwaydan, and Metulla, the latter being abandoned by the British in 1941. Other forts witnessed heavy battles during the 1948 war; a significant example is the Latrun fort along the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.[8] The British handed the fort to Jordan's Arab Legion and it was subject to several unsuccessful Israeli attacks during 1948 and 1949, marking a victory of the Arabs and maintaining control over this area until 1967.[9] The symbolic use of the Tegart forts on the Israeli border patrol insignia (figure 4) demonstrates the essential role played by the forts in establishing the Israeli border (the Green Line) during the 1948 war.[10] The effectiveness of the network of forts was demonstrated by their performance during the war.

After 1948, Tegart forts were used as centers for the Jordanian military forces and governors in the West Bank. The existing infrastructure enabled these architectural monuments to function as administrative headquarters, military bases, prisons, and sometimes accommodation for Jordanian governors.[11] In reference to the matrix catalogue drawn by British Mandate architect Otto Hoffman,[12] Tegart forts vary in their structure,

Figure 3. Screenshots from the film Palestine Police, from the Imperial War Museum's collection, which depicted the forts as heterotopias – spaces accommodating different social activities for the military and policemen and their families that inhabited these forts.



Figure 4. The Israeli Border Patrol insignia bears an image of al-Nabu Yusha' fort, from Kevin Connolly, "Charles Tegart and the Forts that Tower over Israel," BBC, 10 September 2012.

category, and function from one location to another. In main cities like Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarm, the forts were classified as divisional headquarters and were introverted structures. In Jenin, the building was a rectangular modern structure with an open court, within which another rectangular building containing yet another court, accentuating an extreme superimposition of spatial control and separation, a sort of panopticon within a panopticon. In Tulkarm, the fort was a rectangular building with a huge open court divided into two parts, where one part has a centrally placed watchtower.

Such a mix of structures led to different uses of the buildings during the Jordanian era, including as residences for the governors. The Jordanians maintained the forts' original structures and spaces during this era. Their locations, which were remote from urban and rural population centers and strategically placed on a sensitive network, served the Jordanian notion of *wisaya*.[13] This kind of remote relation, which aimed at managing the conditions of everyday life without being integrated into society, aligned with the British Mandate strategy of controlling the area from a remove, a core idea reflected in the architectural composition and location of the forts.

After the war of 1967, Israel took control of the remaining Palestinian areas. In many cases, Jewish settlers moved initially into the Tegart forts, taking advantage of the residential facilities and their defensive qualities. In the 1980s, the building of Qatra fort was used as temporary housing for Ethiopian Jewish immigrants.[14] In the West Bank, Israelis used the forts as centers for the Civil Administration, prisons, military courts, and military bases. The forts' walls maintained the military visual language of the structures and functioned well in portraying a message of power to the local inhabitants. The Israelis made minimal interventions on these structures.[15] New additions were built using two different materials: steel for some temporary functions, and stone for the civil administrative functions. The use of stone was a direct representation of the Israeli occupation attempts at normalizing and localizing its relationship to the Palestinian occupation. From another side, the Israeli use of permanent materials in these additions demonstrated an attitude opposed to temporality and an admiration for these monuments as having played a key role in the historical resurrection of the "state of Israel."

Unlike the British Mandate's remote relation to the local Palestinian context, Israel's willingness to open the forts to the public, by placing civil administrative centers within the forts, indicated the Israeli occupation's intention to penetrate the local Palestinian community and thus control it. Tegart forts' reuse – including their material use, their functional use, and the establishment of new networks around them – clearly demonstrates such concepts. The Tegart forts' representation of power persisted, especially after Oslo accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

When the Palestinian Authority took over in 1994, they established their headquarters in the Tegart forts in the Palestinian-administered areas A and B. Some buildings were added to accommodate the spatial needs of the newly established authority during the Arafat era. The official headquarters of the PA were based in the Ramallah *muqata'a*.[16] Several facilities were added: a residential block, a helipad, a VIP guesthouse, a prison, offices of security services, sleeping quarters for guards, a large kitchen, a car repair shop, and a large meeting hall.[17] These structures' signification within the growing

fabric of the city was later amplified by the higher walls that surrounded them. Other *muqataʻat* witnessed similar additions and upgrading in order to serve and reinforce its new "old" role. Although at the beginning this seemed to many Palestinians – recalling the cheering crowds and the celebration of the "victory" – to be one of the liberating efforts in reclaiming and repossessing the legacy of the colonizer, this submissive attitude toward these potent structures established a sense of continuity from the previous administrative and colonial powers rather than change and rupture.[18] The notion of "inhabiting the house of your enemy" has always been present in the postcolonial reuse of colonial structures.

## Destruction and Reconstruction – Resurrection from the Rubble

In 2002, the Israelis bombarded and destroyed these headquarters in an attempt to erase the presence of Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, which was signified by the presence of these structures. Thus, these complexes became the stages of a major attempt to delegitimize and demoralize Arafat, the PA, and the project of an independent state. The *muqataʻa* in Ramallah, which became the Israeli-imposed home/prison/exile of Arafat, was brutally bombarded on live television. The architecture of the colonizer and the colonized together became a homogenized site of concrete rubble, which to many at the time marked an end of a nationwide dream.

The European Union and the ministry of public works under Prime Minister Salam Fayyad initiated the reconstruction of the demolished structures. Six sites – Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm, Hebron, Jericho, and Bethlehem – were commissioned to local architectural firms. What was interesting in the reconstruction attempts was the architectural representation used for the reproduction of power in these sites. The walls became higher, so that no one could actually see what lies behind them. This time they were dressed in stone, a more permanent, though local, material. New watchtowers were installed along these walls, thus mimicking the architecture of the Israeli occupation and reinforcing the alienation between the authority and the people, both physically and psychologically. Some of the original functions of these forts were brought back, mainly the prisons and administrative offices. Ramallah remained separate from these as it held a more official representation of the authority. An elevated green buffer zone was introduced at the main entrance of the complex, replacing the original street level entrance, which was, although monolithic in structure, to some extent accessible and "humble" in Arafat's time. New functions were introduced, including the Arafat Mausoleum – a temporary burial place for the late Arafat – and a museum, both built in a modern typology, and other administrative buildings that were more eclectic in their typology and reincarnations of historical references.

The new image tends to replace and erase the past, "the collective." The eclectic yet meticulous architecture erases the dark history of these military machines, stripping down the overarching colonial attire. The new architecture assumes emergence from a tabula rasa, wiping out the blood of thousands of oppressed Palestinians that once
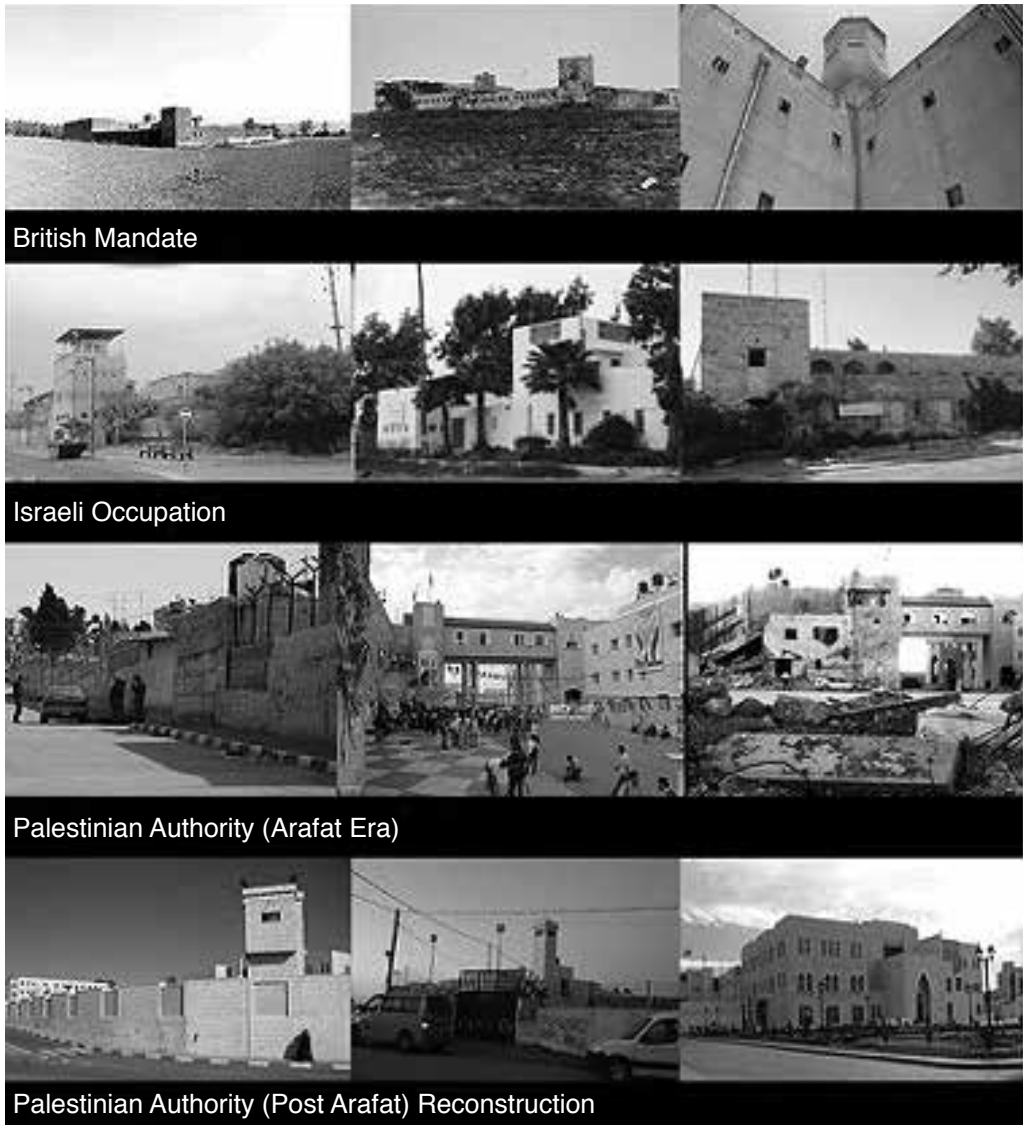
British Mandate

Israeli Occupation

Palestinian Authority (Arafat Era)

Palestinian Authority (Post Arafat) Reconstruction

Figure 5. The emergence and evolution of the Tegart forts during different regimes.

"inhabited" these sites. As a former prisoner recalls: "these sites have always been associated with oppression, atrocity, and colonization and continue to be so . . . it is too sad to see all this history being cleansed, wiped out and replaced with what supposedly is national."[19]

The persistence of Tegart forts, as monuments of power, over the century was crowned by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Yasir Arafat used these colonial structures as the official headquarters of the PA, thus "liberating" them from their haunted realities as prisons and interrogation centers, assuming power from what originally intended to destroy and displace them. Palestinian control over space has always been conditional, fragmented, and provisional, so the very basic notion

of controlling something that was never yours and has always had a potent presence and a symbol of power had a satisfying impact on the very existence of this "interim" authority. The iconography (figure 5) used over time, whether brutalist and harsh concrete facades used by British Mandate for *direct and physical representation of power*, or the Israeli iconography of *normalization*, which manifested in the addition of stone cladding, greenery (especially palm trees), and, later, public seating areas around forts inside the areas of 1948, and finally the PA's use, especially after rebuilding the *muqata'at* and the dreamt-of "nation," of a modern military element, including, for example, watchtowers and high fortified walls. This narrative of different architectural representation and language in accordance with different attitudes of political regimes has always been an instrument in the hand of the rulers to maintain their power. The important question is: could this circuit of power have been broken at some point under the PA regime by the subversion of these sites? Perhaps this question had to be answered at the moment we rebuilt these forts after their destruction in the second intifada.

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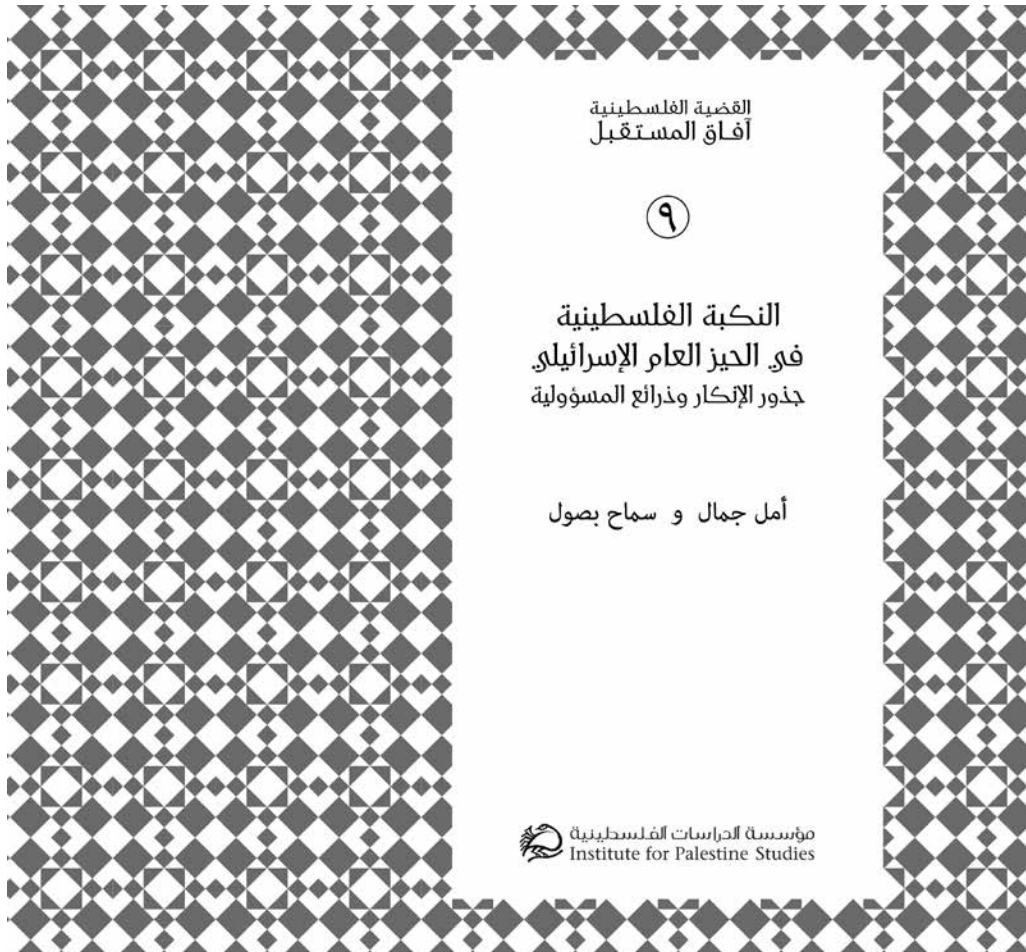
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**Endnotes**

1   Peter Eisenman, "The Houses of Memory: The Texts of Analogue," editor's introduction to Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 7.

2   Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

3   Georges Bataille, "Architecture," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), 20.

4   Kevin Connolly, "Charles Tegart and the Forts that Tower over Israel," BBC, 10 September 2012, online at www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19019949 (accessed 22 December 2016).

5   Dalia Karpel, "Potent Presence," *Ha'Aretz*, 17 June 2010, online at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/potent-presence-1.296813 (accessed 20 November 2016).

6   The panopticon was a concept developed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham. It consisted of a circular building with an observation tower in the center of an open space surrounded by an outer wall. This design would increase security by facilitating more effective surveillance. Occupants of the cells, while invisible to each other, would be readily distinguishable and visible to an official invisibly positioned in the central tower. Michel Foucault famously developed Bentham's concept as a metaphor for modern form of surveillance; see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [1977]).

7   Seth J. Frantzman, "Tegart's Shadow," *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 21 October 2011, online at lisa.biu.ac.il/files/lisa/shared/4444.pdf (accessed 27 November 2016).

8   Connolly, "Charles Tegart."
9   Connolly, "Charles Tegart."
10  Gili Merin, "Tegart Forts in Palestine: Adopted and Adapted Monuments of Supervision," *Quaderns d'Arquitectura i Urbanisme*, March 2015, online at quaderns.coac.net/en/2015/03/tegart-forts/ (accessed 27 November 2016).
11  "Inside Arafat's Compound of Rubble," *BBC*, 22 September 2002, online at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1902566.stm (accessed 26 November 2016).
12  Merin, "Tegart Forts in Palestine."
13  Arabic for custody, *wisaya* implied that the Jordanian administration of Palestine was an act of safekeeping, exercised by the Jordanian government until the effects of the 1948 war could be undone.
14  Merin, "Tegart Forts in Palestine."

15  Author interview with Tawfiq Jarar, 16 November 2016.
16  *Muqata'a* (pl. *muqata'at*) is an Arabic term for headquarters or administrative center. *Muqata'at* were mostly built during the British Mandate as Tegart forts and were used both as British government centers and as dwellings for the British administrative staff. Other names such as *saraya* and *'amara* (building) were used for these headquarters in other cities such as Gaza and Hebron.
17  "Inside Arafat's Compound."
18  Weizman, *Hollow Land*.
19  Author interview with M. Z., a former prisoner who was imprisoned in both Ramallah's *muqata'a* and Hebron's *'amara* during the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, 18 January 2017.

القضية الفلسطينية
آفاق المستقبل

(٩)

النكبة الفلسطينية
في الحيز العام الإسرائيلي
جذور الإنكار وذرائع المسؤولية

أمل جمال و سماح بصول

مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية
Institute for Palestine Studies

# Stolen Land:

## Tracing Traumascapes in Four Leprosaria in the Jerusalem District

Suzannah Henty

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the grating of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightening rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.
– Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 1972

I was introduced to the Palestinian landscape through a visit to Jerusalem in October 2016, on the occasion of the third Qalandiya International biennial collaborative art event, *This Sea Is Mine*. As an Australian, I was confronted by similar colonial trajectories of indigenous populations in exile in their sovereign land. As a non-Indigenous Australian descended from a settler family who arrived in Australia's Port Phillip District in 1834, the histories that I have been taught are not sympathetic to the realities felt by First Nations in Australia since British occupation. In Palestine, I witnessed for the first time in-person the persecution of Firstness outside of the Australian context.

It was in working for the Jerusalem Show VIII: *Before and After Origins* at al-Ma'mal for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem and the Birzeit University Museum that I was introduced to the work of the Western-trained Palestinian physician Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, a medical doctor, folklorist, and late Ottoman Jerusalemite. In learning of the relative absence of knowledge of Canaan outside of academic circles, and discovering the extent to which he contributed to the documentation and archiving of Palestinian history and tradition, the importance of adding to this ongoing effort to document otherwise unrecorded histories became apparent. Extrapolating from my research of the Canaan archive, here I document the fragmented history of four leprosaria in the Jerusalem district to reconstruct the destructed spaces and challenge the fictitious stories told today of the exile of the Palestinian lepers in 1948. It is important to note

that the information gathered in this article has been obtained from a variety of sources. Locating information has been difficult, for the Silwan and Surda Mountain leprosaria in particular, and has relied on many oral narratives and conversations.

The existence and navigation of trauma in fragmented and appropriated landscapes dominates the Palestine struggle for return. I believe through the documentation and historicization of sovereign title that there is the potential for the creation of a reparative process of these silenced histories. This paper focuses on the urban Palestinian context in the Jerusalem district using the Mamilla Asylum, Jesus Hilfe Asyl (Jesus Helps Asylum), the Silwan leprosarium, and the Surda Mountain leprosarium to trace the militarization and dislocation of Palestinian medical staff and leprosy sufferers in 1948.[1] The landscape carries in its occupying architecture testimonials of citizenry of space – that is, truths of proper title and its subsequent theft. Acknowledgement of the significance of the conservation of these testimonies is needed to emphasise the process of the return of Palestinians to rightful title to land and its occupying architecture. In understanding the citizenry of space, the writing of human experience becomes an important tool in understanding the transmission of trauma through space and the potential reparation of these traumas through countering the loss and reconstructing threatened cultural narratives. Silenced histories and spaces of residual Palestinian trauma lie at the heart of this discussion. Through documenting the histories surrounding the leprosaria, I aim to contribute to the return to title by documenting this threatened history. First, I will outline the establishment of Jesus Hilfe Asyl before and after the Nakba in 1948. Second, I will piece together the fragmented histories surrounding the exile of the Palestinian lepers and medical staff to Surda Mountain. Resultantly, the aim of this paper is to look at how, why, and for whom history is made, and in doing so highlight how the erasure of cultural narratives acts as a powerful form of psychological colonialism.

## The Four Leprosaria: Mamilla, Talbiya, Silwan, and Surda Mountain.

One year before the establishment of the German Colony by German Templars in Haifa in 1868, the German-Protestant Moravian Community established a leprosarium called the Mamilla Asylum (figure 1) in 1867. The leprosarium – which still stands today at 20 Agron Street Jerusalem and is now used as a Lazarite Catholic monastery – was established for the treatment of people suffering from Hansen's disease, also known as leprosy. Situated next to the ancient Mamilla Pool (figure 2) and Mamilla Cemetery (figure 3), the building was designed by the German architect for the German Consulate, Conrad Schick, with funding from two parties: Johannes Frutiger, a Swiss German banker from Chrischona, Basel, resident in Jerusalem, and a committee developed under the chairmanship of a Swiss missionary and Protestant Bishop, Samuel Gobat.[2] The German investment in the leprosy cause was a result of a visit to Jerusalem in 1865 by the Pomeranian (German) Baroness von Keffenbrinck-Ascheraden of Nehringen, who reportedly was shocked by the number of lepers begging near the Jaffa Gate in today's East Jerusalem. The baroness

subsequently purchased land outside the Jaffa Gate and contacted the Moravian Church, whose work in Robben Island in South Africa she was familiar with, to develop a hospital for lepers in Palestine. A Unity Elders' Conference was held soon after to establish potential supervisors of the hospital, electing missionaries Friedrich and Magdalena Tappe, who arrived on 20 May 1867, ten days before the consecration of the Mamilla Asylum.

In 1881, the baroness withdrew her financial support of the leprosarium and the Moravian Church's Brudergemeinde (Herrnhut Brothers) acquired ownership. While initially the Palestinian population was cautious of the Christian-run hospital Mamilla Asylum – with only four lepers out of the fifty invited turning up to the hospital upon its opening in 1867 – within twenty years, more beds were required for patients. From 1885 to 1887 a new leprosarium – Jesus Hilfe Asyl, known as the Leper Colony (figure 4), again designed by Conrad Schick – was built at the crossroad of 14 Gedalyahd Alon Street and 17 David Marcus Street in the district of Talbiya, Jerusalem.

At Jesus Hilfe Asyl, Dr. Adolph Einszler, an Austrian Catholic turned Protestant physician who had previously worked with Canaan at the German Hospital in Jerusalem during Dr. Grussendorf's leave, commenced as superintendent and directing physician of the leprosarium. Einszler's wife, Lydia Einszler (née Schick), was the daughter of architect Conrad Schick and passionately studied Palestinian beliefs and practices, magical medicine, and popular culture. Her collection of artifacts and written work on folklore from the 1890s reflect such interest.[3] In 1919, Adolph Einszler died and Canaan succeeded directorship of the hospital.



 בית המחסה ברחוב ממילא 20 (רישום), 1867
Mamilla asylum (drawing)

Figure 1. "Mamilla Asylum Drawing," image courtesy of conradschick.wordpress.com.



Figure 2. Mamilla Pool, Jerusalem, between 1898 and 1946, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 3. Aerial view, Jerusalem: Rehavia neighborhood and Mamilla Cemetery and Pool, viewed from west, between 1928 and 1946, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 4. Jesus Hilfe Asyl, year and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.

With the British occupation of Palestine, by the end of the First World War the political climate became increasing heated. One year before Canaan's directorship, the British administration made it compulsory for all lepers to live at Jesus Hilfe. Previously, the Ottoman Empire had allowed lepers to live in Jerusalem, Ramla, Nablus, or Damascus. This influx of lepers restricted Canaan's movement as he consistently had patients under his care.

While Canaan has been recognized for his contribution as an ethnographer of Palestinian folklore, his contribution to the medical field is lesser acknowledged but equally impressive. Canaan's contribution as the leading physician at Jesus Hilfe Asyl and later at Surda Mountain established his standing as a reputed expert in leprosy. According to Philippe Bourmaud, Canaan's work in the field of leishmaniasis – a skin disease spread by the bite of certain sandflies – across Nazareth, Beersheba, Gaza, Nablus, and Damascus as a mobilized medical military serviceman during World War I was a turning point in Canaan's medical career. As such, his undertaking of this role at Jesus Hilfe Asyl was a natural professional progression. In his research of bacteriology and microscopic examination, Canaan contributed significantly to the cure of leprosy, specifically with the topical application of iodine and his discovery of the ancient use of chaulmoogra oil as a remedy.

However successful Canaan was in his position at the Leper Colony, the political context within which he was working cast a dark shadow of uncertainty on the future of the hospital and the treatment of Palestinians under the new regime. In a 7 January 1948 letter from J. Connor, the Treasurer of the Trust Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel, to the High Commissioner for Palestine in Jerusalem (figures 5 and 6) – sent while Canaan was superintendent and directing physician – Connor requested "any information"

JC/IWP.

7th January 1948.

His Excellency The High Commissioner for Palestine,
Government House,
Jerusalem, PALESTINE.

Your Excellency,

We have heard with gratitude from the Matron of our Leper Home in Jerusalem that the Palestinian Government-in-aid of £1700, the first half of which has already been received. As the Mission Board in charge of the administration of this Home, we should like to thank you for the interest and support that the Government has shown in the work of our Leper Home.

We are reluctant, in these times, when the difficulties of the Government are so great, to intrude what must seem a minor consideration, though to us it is of considerable importance. We know that the Matron of the Leper Home views with great misgiving the prospective withdrawal of British Forces from Palestine, and is anxious, as we are, to know what Government will take the place of the present administration. On the sympathy and effectiveness of the succeeding administration will depend, very largely, the continuance of our work among the Palestine lepers. Is it possible for you to give us any information about the administration to whom we should look for counsel and support when the transition is effected in Palestine? If it is impossible at present to make any statement on this matter, it would re-assure us very greatly if we could know that you will recommend to your successors the work of the Home, and pass on to them the view that your Government has held, that it is an Institution worthy of their interest and support. If we could be assured

- 2 -

that the grant-in-aid would be continued, and that the Leper Home would continue to have a recognised place in the Health Services of the country, we should be able to regard the future of the work with much greater confidence than is possible in the present uncertainty.

If in the midst of the many arduous duties affecting the Government at this time, you were able to give us some information, and an undertaking on the lines I have suggested, we should be extremely grateful.

May we offer to you and to the Government our sympathy and good wishes for the difficult period that lies immediately ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Treasurer,
TRUST SOCIETY FOR THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL (INC).

Figure 5-6. Correspondence from Jesus Hilfe Asyl, 1948, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.

about the succeeding administration in Palestine and asked for assurance that the government grant-in-aid to the Jesus Hilfe Asyl would continue to be provided by the future administration of Palestine. Offering "sympathy and good wishes for the difficult period that lies immediately ahead," the leprosarium requested that the British government pass on to its successors its view of the good work done by the leper home.[4]

The response from Maurice Dorman (figure 7), principal assistant secretary for the High Commissioner, is exemplary of the sense of foreboding and unknown surrounding the forthcoming withdrawal of the British Mandate. Dorman stated that he has been "directed to acknowledge the receipt" of the request from Jerusalem, but regretted that "no specific information" could be given. Dorman merely noted that the Ad-Hoc Committee in Palestine – established by the United Nations General Assembly in September 1947 to address "the Palestinian question" – had recommended the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, but with an administration for Jerusalem "separate from either the Jewish or Arab state."[5]



Figure 7. Correspondence from Jesus Hilfe Asyl, 1948, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.

Upon the division of Jerusalem, Jesus Hilfe Asyl was included as part of the Israeli territory in the west of the city. In readily available media concerning Jesus Hilfe Asyl, and in particular the web site for the building, it is repeatedly stated that the Palestinian "staff and patients chose to leave the Home."[6] It is unlikely that the lepers who were homed and treated decided to leave the hospital considering the presence of Zionist forces expelling Palestinian Jerusalemites.[7] On 29 August 1950, a sale contract was signed between the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael) and the Moravian Church. The Leper Home was transferred to the management of the Ministry of Health of the State of Israel and ran as the Hansen Government Hospital until 2000. The building has since been transformed into the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, a school founded by the "father of Israeli art," Lithuanian Jewish artist Boris Schatz.

With the financial support of Unity Synod in 1957, the Moravian church purchased a block of land in the north of Ramallah on Surda (Star) Mountain upon which a new hospital was built (figures 8 and 9). On 12 June 1960, the new home was opened for the exiled
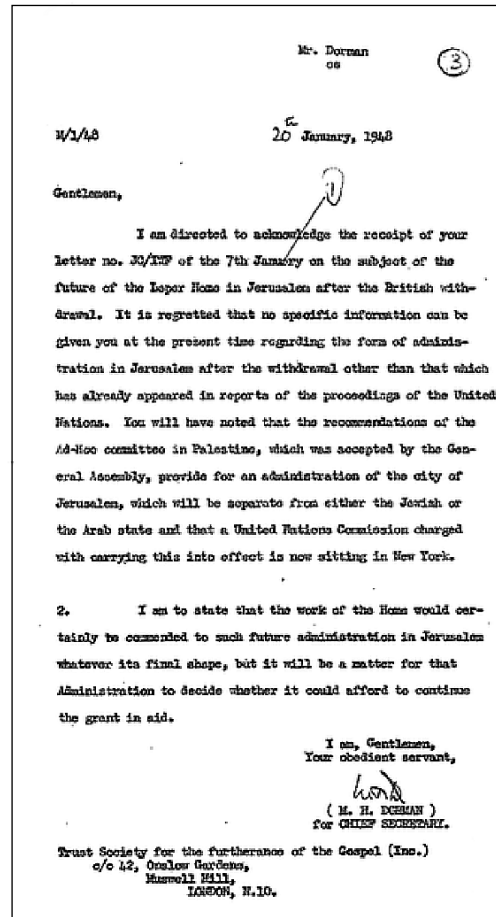
Figure 8. Surda Mountain Leprosarium, year and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.



Figure 9. Star (Surda) Mountain Rehabilitation Center, date and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.

Palestinian leprosy patients. As a result of Canaan's research into bacteriology and treatments for leprosy, specifically with gorjun and chaulmoogra oil, iodine and sulpha, there was a strong decline in the numbers of housed lepers. While a few lepers remained at Surda Mountan, in 1974 the Unity Synod decided to repurpose the facility for disabled children in Palestine. In 1979, the last leper left the hospital. Today, Surda Mountain is a school for disabled children and is still run by the Moravian Church.

While tracing the displacement of the Palestinian patients and medical staff after 1948 has proven difficult due to the lack of resources and written history, through threading together the various narratives it can be speculated that Palestinian lepers were led first to Silwan before finding refuge at Surda Mountain. According to the Moravian archives, in 1875 Conrad Schick built a third leprosarium in the village of Silwan, now in East Jerusalem. It is unknown if it was here that the lepers sought refuge. Israeli texts suggest that Palestinians were moved to this facility and cared for by the Sisters of Charity (Soeurs de Charité). The Moravian archives claim that Canaan was not active in moving Palestinian lepers to Silwan, stating: "In 1953 two Moravian nurses, Johanna Larsen and Ida Ressel, led 15 patients to Silwan in Jordan (now the West Bank), where they re-established their work, albeit in cramped, unsatisfactory conditions."[8] French historian Philippe Bourmaud ignores Silwan in his study of Canaan's medical history and claims he "organized a new leprosarium" at Surda Mountain.[9] The newsletter of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church in North America, in January 2001, claims that the lepers found refuge in an "old Turkish leprosarium in Silwan where treatment was insufficient."[10] A Jerusalem life and travel guide corroborates this claim: "Some of the patients chose to leave with the European staff to the Turkish asylum at Siloah [Silwan], and then to Star [Surda] Mountain near Ramallah."[11] According to Salim Tamari: "Arab patients were taken from Talbieh and marched first to a new location in Silwan and then several years later to Surda Mountain north of Ramallah where Dr. Canaan was invited again to become the caretaker."[12] It is a curious note that there was no trace of lepers travelling to the leprosarium built by Conrad Schick in East Jerusalem. Perhaps the Palestinian lepers did not want to find refuge in a Christian facility, or were unaware of its existence; one can only speculate.

The Mamilla Asylum and Jesus Hilfe Asyl buildings are physical manifestations of how history – through the writing of landscapes – can be stolen. Having been claimed

in Israeli territory, the history of the two buildings has been re-written into Israeli narratives whereby the practical use of the buildings and the landscapes surrounding the buildings have been occupied in the construction of Israeli identity. The Mamilla Asylum – surrounded by the Mamilla Pool (an ancient reservoir, drained since 1948 with Zionist-planted eucalyptus plantations) and Ma'man Allah (Mamilla cemetery, Palestine's oldest Islamic cemetery that was half-destroyed in order to construct "Independence Park") – exists in a place of great conflict, a traumatic landscape and a space of pain in the history of Palestinian exile and ongoing occupation. The walls of Mamilla Asylum encompass a confluence of traumatic human experiences – by both sufferers of leprosy and Palestinians experiencing exile and occupation – and as such it needs to be considered a significant site in the Mamilla district's collective history. Jesus Hilfe Asyl in Talbiya speaks from a different angle in understanding how contemporary Israeli occupation in West Jerusalem is an activating factor for sites of residual trauma. The building in Talbiya, situated in an affluent district, was constructed as a site of hope, medical development, and democratic treatment of leprosy sufferers. As we have seen, Jesus Hilfe Asyl was borne out of the success of the Mamilla Asylum, out of the establishment of trust after initial hesitation, hence representing significant community development in Jerusalem pre-1948. In this building, Tawfiq Canaan succeeded as superintendent and directing physician and contributed momentously to the cure of leprosy. In 1948, Canaan was violently exiled from his position, along with his Palestinian patients. Today, the Bezalel Academy of



Figure 10. Lepers, Jesus Hilfe Asyl, year and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.



Figure 11: Lepers and water cisterns, Jesus Hilfe Asyl, year and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.



Figure 12: Jesus Hilfe Asyl, year and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.

Figure 13: Medical staff at Jesus Hilfe Asyl, year and author unknown, copyright Moravian Church Archives, London.

Arts and Design occupies this space and denies the expulsion – claiming that as a result of the "War of Independence," staff and patients *chose* to leave the home. This falsified history acts as a colonial device to feed apartheid. These two leprosaria speak to the extremely traumatic time when the suburbs bordering the Old City, a space co-inhabited by Muslims, Christians, and Jews, was violently occupied in 1948 and to the continued denial and erasure of their true histories.

On the other hand, the Silwan and Surda Mountain leprosaria sit on another side of history. Existing on Palestinian territory has meant that the Silwan leprosaria (both the old Turkish leprosarium and the Moravian leprosarium) are barely traceable in written histories. The struggle for survival has meant that the conservation of architectural histories has suffered. As the educational center for children with disabilities practices within the Surda Mountain leprosarium, it is easier to imagine the construction and establishment of the leprosarium in 1957–1960 to house the displaced lepers and to trace the existence of trauma in the geopolitics of the building. The connection, linking and contribution to the writing of history of these leprosaria in Israeli-occupied territory on both sides of the Green Line, in East and West Jerusalem and today's West Bank, is an important step in understanding citizenry of space and sovereign title.

Through writing this history and the true reading of a building there is a possibility of better understanding sovereignty and the return to stolen spaces for Palestinians. Reconsidering and questioning the leprosaria is only one step in what can be done for all pre-1948 buildings in Israeli-occupied territory. Stolen histories and appropriated lands are perpetuated by propaganda of denial and falsified histories epitomized by the story of the leprosaria in Jerusalem: So, what about the other buildings in West Jerusalem? These, too, are stolen places denied acknowledgement and history. It is the job of the historian to rewrite these histories truthfully and, in doing so, recognize the trauma that exists within the walls of the buildings.

This complicated and fraught period in Palestinian history has left only traces of what might have happened to the Palestinian lepers in 1948, the places that the exiled may have travelled to for refuge and medical help and the trauma that must have been felt in this violent displacement. Tracing the wounds in these four buildings, marked by honest dedications to help the sufferers of leprosy on one side and – in particular with Jesus Hilfe

Asyl – the subsequent dislocation of this history and ownership of space on the other side gives an important understanding of considering citizenry of space as a return to sovereign title. Rewriting what has been written about the marching of Palestinian lepers to today's "West Bank" interrogates how, why, and for whom history is written. The story of the Palestinian lepers before and after 1948 is a case study in how a building can adopt the trauma of an experience through its appropriation and silencing by oppressing forces. Through it, perhaps, we can begin to think about the subtle ways in which buildings and constructed spaces need to be freed from false historicization.

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### Endnotes

1 The Mamilla Asylum and Jesus Hilfe Asyl were both designed by German architect for the German Consulate, Conrad Schick. The superintendents and physicians in charge of Jesus Hilfe Asyl were Dr. Adolph Einsler (from 1848 to 1919) and Dr. Tawfiq Canaan (from 1919 to 1948).

2 Paul Peucker, Lanie Graf, and Markus Gill, "Moravian Work in Jerusalem," *This Month in Moravian History* 9 (July 2006), online at www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/06_july_jerusalem.pdf (accessed 22 January 2017).

3 Philippe Bourmaud, "'A Son of the Country': Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, Modernist Physician and Palestinian Ethnographer," in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, ed. Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 104.

4 J. Connor, Treasurer, Trust Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel (Inc.), to the High Commissioner for Palestine, 7 January 1948, courtesy of Moravian Archives (Bethlehem, PA).

5 M. H. Dorman, for Chief Secretary, to Trust Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel (Inc.), 20 January 1948, courtesy of Moravian Archives (Bethlehem, PA). Dorman was referring to Special Committee for Palestine (UNSCOP), which recommended the partition of Palestine into two states with a Special International Regime for the city of Jerusalem. Put forth on 29 November 1947, this recommendation was endorsed by General Assembly Resolution 181. See Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: One World Oxford, 2006), 37.

6 "1950 The Hansen House Is Sold to the Jewish National Fund," Hansen House web site, online at hansen.co.il/en/story/#The-Hansen-House-Story__1950-The-Hansen-House-is-sold-to-the-Jewish-National-Fund (accessed 23 January 2017).

7 Bourmaud, "'A Son of the Country,'" 105.

8 "Dedication of Star Mountain in Ramallah, June 12, 1960," *This Month in Moravian History* 54 (June 2010), online at www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/10_06%20Star%20Mountain.pdf (accessed 23 January 2017).

9 Bourmaud, "'A Son of the Country,'" 105.

10 "Care for Former Leprosy Patients of Star Mountain," *MCPS Newsletter* (January 2001), as quoted in Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 200.

11 "Behind the Wall // Historic and Art Exhibition: Hansen Hospital," *JerCity.com*, online at www.jercity.com/eng/events/20373/Behind-the-Wall-Historic-and-art-exhibition/Jerusalem/ (accessed 23 January 2017).

12 Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, 94.
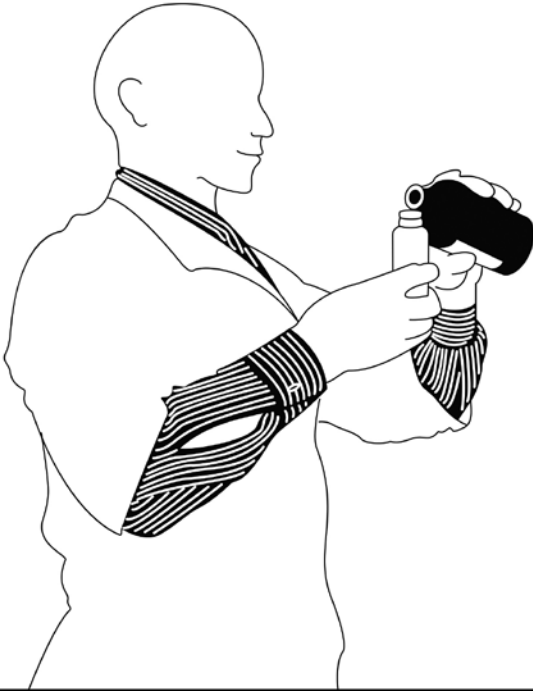
*Mental Map (Issa), 2nd Edition*, 277 x 127 cm, print, 2016, Detail. © Alexandra Sophia Handal.

# Solomon's Pools:

## A Patient Framework Awaiting Its Potential

Dima Srouji

No problem has troubled Jerusalem so constantly since its inception as the issue of water supply.[1] The natural conditions of Jerusalem weren't favorable to support its growing population.[2] The political and religious phenomena of the city were demanding enough to turn a blind eye to the basic natural needs for human inhabitation. To make up for the shortage, multiple underground cisterns were dug in and around Jerusalem to collect water from springs and rainfall. Solomon's Pools were the center of the entire system.[3]

An image of a boy swimming in the muddy pool was chosen to be the thumbnail for a YouTube video. The title, in Arabic, translates: "Koshe – Brand New 2009 – al-Khadr – Swimming in Solomon Pools – Koshe." Koshe101 uploaded this footage of himself with his friends gathering at the edge of one of the pools on 11 April 2009. Three men in their mid-twenties stood fully dressed in preparation to jump in the shallow water; the rest, younger curious boys, sat on the edge to watch the action. The thirty-six-second clip shows one of them taking a step forward, then a leap into a three-second drop to the water while flailing his arms and yelling from the adrenaline rush. The man hits the bottom of the pool, loosening the mud and turning the water from green to brown.[4] Nineteen days later, on 30 April of the same year, two boys, 'Izz al-Din Sulayman Daraghma, twelve years old, and Mahmud 'Ali Mikkawi, thirteen years old, drowned in the third pool of the complex.[5]

According to the Independent Commission of Human Rights, one of the leading causes of child mortality in Palestine is negligence in the provision of care and failure to install public
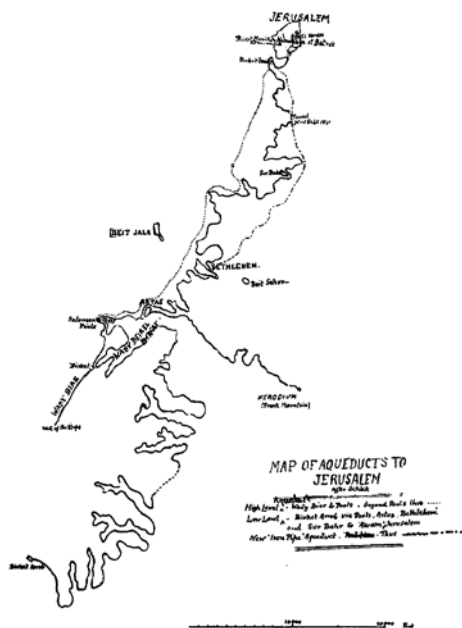
Figure 1. Map of Aqueducts to Jerusalem. Source: E. W. G. Masterman, "The Water Supply of Jerusalem, Ancient and Modern," Biblical World 19, no. 2 (February 1902): 103.

safety precautions. Since 1993, six people drowned in the pools without any authority being held accountable for their deaths. In 2009, the pools had no security measures, no guards on site, no protective fence, and no signs preventing children from jumping in.[6] Following the deaths, the families filed complaints against the Ministry of Awqaf, the holders of the site, and against the operating firm, Solomon's Pools Tourism Agency, and the matter was brought to the Palestinian judiciary.[7]

Negligence has shadowed the site of the pools through many phases of *atlal*.[8] Their ever-changing occupiers and authorities and their varying policies painted different narratives of ruin for each generation. Looking back at this narrative, my own idea of *atlal* in regard to the pools and the surrounding area relates to the Israeli occupation and the effect of the second intifada, and the change in management from *waqf* to the private sector.

In the neighboring village of Artas, the first pool and aqueduct are popularly held to have been built by King Solomon, an attribution reinforced by Artas historian Sanad Mousa. Yet some Palestinians and others involved with the renovation of the pools believe that the traces found through excavation in the last centuries point only as far back as the first century AD. The pools were fed by two supply aqueducts and transported the water through two different distribution aqueducts.[9]

The first supply aqueduct, Wadi al-Biyar, which fed the pools from the south, was probably built by Herod the Great between 37 BC and 4 BC. This was the shortest and steepest aqueduct to connect to the pools, collecting water from three springs in Wadi al-Biyar and rainwater from a series of dams in the valley, and tapping underground water aquifers on its route to the pools. This route remained in service for two thousand years, and was refurbished by the British along with the pools in 1924. This source provided water for Jerusalem's Old City up until 1967.[10]

The second supply aqueduct, the 'Arrub aqueduct, snaked around the ridges and valleys for forty kilometers at an incredibly slight slope of 0.09 percent, as flat as some of the most impressive Roman aqueducts.

A straight line from the beginning point of the route to its end measures only ten kilometers. Along its route, the aqueduct collected waters from a series of springs northwest of the pools. It was neglected during the Ottoman period given its tendency to clog easily. The upper distribution aqueduct began at Solomon's Pools, ran northward

Figure 2. The pool sits empty, exposing its carved stone. Photo by Suha Khamis (1998).

at a higher level than the second lower artery, and skirted around Bethlehem along Hebron Road. The destination for this aqueduct was Hezekiah's Pool in the upper city of Jerusalem.[11] The lower distribution aqueduct, which dated back to the Hasmonean period, ran from Solomon's Pools on lower ground, through the city of Bethlehem via an underground tunnel, to the Temple Mount in the Old City. This route only dropped thirty meters along the 21.5-kilometer route, a slope of only 0.14 percent. To this day it is acknowledged as a precise work of art. This aqueduct along with one of Solomon's Pools were the oldest part of the system and were constructed to alleviate water shortage in Jerusalem as the sources in the city at the time were not sufficient to serve the growing population.[12]

In Artas, the history of these aqueducts and the pools is rooted in folklore. It is said that Artas was a haunted place. Out of one hundred jinn in the world, ninety-nine of them live in the village of Artas, according to the stories of this village. They tell the story of King Solomon, the king of humans, animals, and also the jinn, who ordered the spirits to build him the pools and line them with stone as he sat and watched leaning against his staff. Unbeknownst to the jinn, King Solomon died one day as he was still leaning against his staff waiting for the jinn to finish digging. After his death, the jinn were set free and stayed in Artas to watch over the pools.[13]

In 1998, before the second intifada, my mother, Suha Khamis, who was working in the capacity of project manager of the Solomon's Pools project with the Consolidated Contractors Company to renovate the pools and the Murad Castle and to realize the new

Figure 3. Hundreds of cars piled in the second pool were revealed after draining the water in preparation for renovation. Photo by Suha Khamis (1998).

convention palace, took me to the sites multiple times to experience the preservation of the monuments. This was a time for celebration, a moment of historic importance for the narrative of the pools. The area was conceived as a cultural heritage site connected to Jerusalem. To the disdain of Bethlehemites, the connection between Jerusalem and the pools was strong before the occupation.[14] Jerusalem and its surroundings were constantly at war over scarce water resources in the area, particularly during the dry seasons.[15] As one of the aqueducts ran underground through Bethlehem to quench the thirst of Jerusalemites this intersection of the aqueduct with Bethlehem became the center of a constant conflict between the two cities.

On the other hand, the amicable relationship between Bethlehemites and Jerusalemites was apparent at the location of the pools. Rousseau called the social activity around the watering hole *la fête autour du puits* – the feast around the well – highlighting the political dimension of the watering hole as a place of sociability and exchange.[16] This renewal project was an opportunity to remind ourselves of our own value, to bring Jerusalemites back to the villages for social gatherings of fun and leisure.

The excavation for the newly planned convention center across from the pools revealed many treasures that amused an eight-year-old. The magic of the site transported me to a place of imagination. I found fossils of seashells and snakes, large fossilized animal skeletons, and ancient pottery remains. I spent hours digging through the dirt by the pools. To me this was an archeological landscape rich with layers of partial narratives. I wondered about the generations who built the pools, swam in its waters,
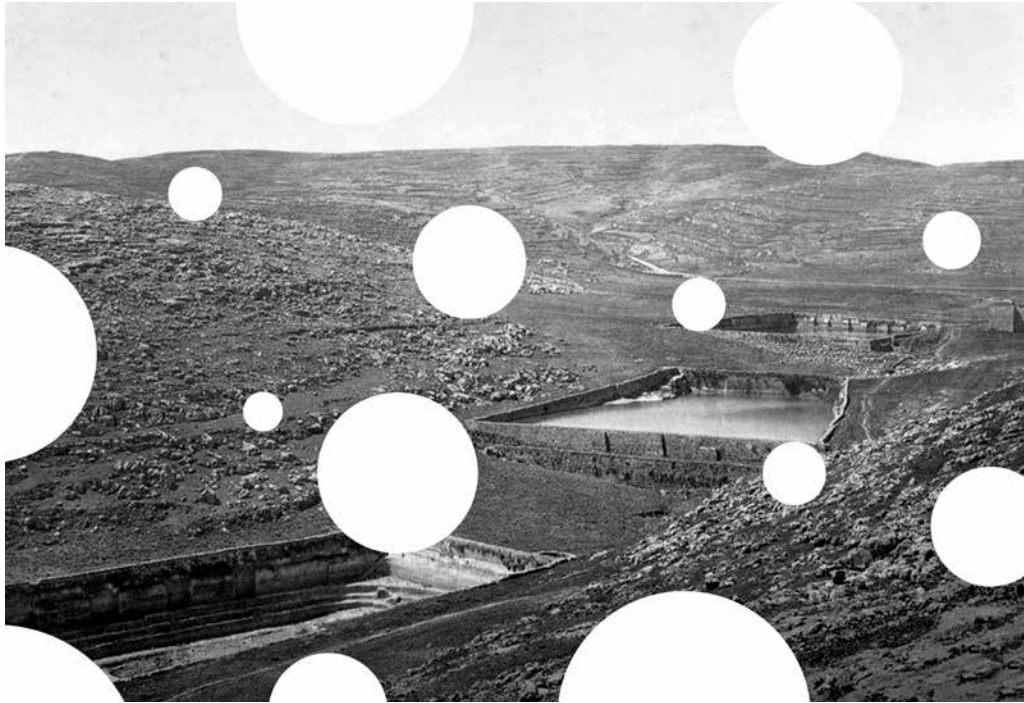
Figure 4. Collage by author representing the confiscated land of Artas superimposed on the ideal untouched land of the Solomon Pools and its surroundings before the occupation.

and drank from its springs. I sat by the edge of the middle pool cleaning my fossils. Below my dangling feet were hundreds of rusty stolen cars sitting in a meter of grassy brown water, stacked up to the top of the pool. According to the locals, these cars were mostly yellow-plated: Israeli gangs were trading cars with their Palestinian underworld partners, who would benefit from selling the yellow-plated cars and would eventually discard hundreds of them in the pools. As the pools were drained to prepare for renovation, it not only revealed the pile of cars, but exposed types of fish and water snakes. These creatures were removed and kept in water tanks in an effort to save them; unfortunately, the renovation and refilling of the pools took longer than expected and the fate of the creatures is unknown.[17]

The Israeli interaction with the pools went further than car gangs' activities. The occupation, namely the construction of settlements in and around Artas, was the cause of much of the water conflict in the area, once known as the food basket of the Bethlehem governorate.[18] The village is now bordered by Israeli settlements visible from the pools. Efrat sits just south of Artas, constructed partially on the village territory in 1979; Gush Etzion sits to its west. Efrat measures 2,180 dunams, 421 of which are built on lands belonging to Artas farmers. The separation barrier confiscates a further 37 percent of the total area of the village, the majority of it agricultural land that once served as a source of income for the residents.[19] The construction of Efrat severed the aqueducts supplying the pools, disrupting the flow of the infrastructure even below ground and capturing much of the subterranean services once controlled by the Palestinians. The

control of this water meant power over infrastructure space and control over services – what Keller Easterling calls extrastatecraft: the undisclosed activities, outside of, in addition to, and sometimes in partnership with statecraft.[20] The state of Israel has used this technique, which could also be called offensive urbanism, as a tool of occupation since its inception.

Below the rock, the aqueducts ran uninterrupted, connecting water from wells and cisterns to pools and to inhabitants in multiple areas in and around Jerusalem. The pools and their aqueducts connected villages to Jerusalem, making the suburban as important as the urban. This connection itself was part of the Palestinian identity until 1967, when the aqueducts were cut off from Jerusalem. Softening the ground, cutting into the rock and shrub, the pools reflected and shimmered in the light of the Mediterranean sun. The connection to the Mediterranean here isn't unfamiliar: the bodies of water are, to me, reminiscent of a time when the notion of a Mediterranean identity was an appropriate one for the area. Jerusalemites and Bethlehemites, as well as villagers, would take a trip to the Mediterranean sea or would choose to go to the pools – closer than the beach and more serene – to dip in the water and picnic. Israel's occupation of the mountainous areas of Palestine after 1967 and their separation by military barriers from the coastal area undermines this historical identity. The occupation authorities also interrupt the flow of water infrastructure from Palestinian villages to Jerusalem, depriving villagers from access to water on the smaller scale of house to street, put visitors of the pools at risk, and undermine the value of these historic structures.[21] These impediments are compounded by mismanagement on the part of the Palestinian Authority.

The ruins of the aqueducts still run under the separation barrier, representing continuity and symbolically defying the borders of the occupation. The continuous grid expressed something of a nightmare in architecture theories of the 1960s, such as the criticism of globalization portrayed by Superstudio through a series of famous collages of grids, symbolizing a world with no architecture, rather a continuous, homogeneous network. Superstudio used the supersurface, which could now be seen as prophetic of the internet, superimposed on natural geographic sites, and megastructures that spanned the entire surface of the earth. The idea of globalization normalizing all was something of a dreaded, albeit rapidly approaching, future.[22] In the case of Palestine, not so much globalization, but continuity, is thought of differently. The concept of a continuous grid from the "inside" to the "outside" – whether it's a water system, flow of information, the internet, or the distribution of services – is where the occupation begins not just to affect the physical crossing of borders on the surface, but to interrupt the idea of continuity of services below and above ground.

Superstudio imagined this continuity as a nightmare; to us, the nightmare is the interruption of such a grid. The recreation of this connection is perhaps a utopian ideal, assuming the end of the occupation and the realization of a Palestinian state, including control of access to Jerusalem. If the water from the pools can remain an uninterrupted source, despite the separation barrier above and despite interruptions below, to connect to the Jerusalem water network, the underlying grid can perhaps be used as the foundation for a solution. The return to this ideal is impossible today, partially because of the

occupation, but also because of population growth. The water sources that previously reached Jerusalem can today barely quench the thirst of the villages in the Bethlehem governorate, including the illegal settlements that benefit from the diversion of much of the Palestinian water supply.

The drowning deaths of 'Izz al-Din al-Daraghma and Mahmud 'Ali Mikkawi exemplifies the lack of management from the authorities involved with the pools. Two weeks after the lawsuit stemming from the drownings, the operating firm, now known as the Solomon's Pools Tourism Agency, began building a fence around the pools. The fence was conditioned decades earlier in the 1994 agreement between the Ministry of Awqaf ("Public Endowments"), the holders of the site, and the private firm. Despite the management breach of contract on multiple occasions, causing a lack of enforcement and lack of accountability for safety precautions and protection for visitors, Awqaf did not terminate the agreements. The operating firm neglected to abide by any of the regulations for safety and security of the visitors to the pools, Awqaf neglected to enforce the regulations, and the Civil Defense team that came to the rescue lacked the facilities necessary to save children from drowning, using ropes, instead of the necessary rescue equipment, to bring the bodies out of the pool after their deaths.

Management has changed from 2009 to today. The Solomon's Pools Tourism Agency now has control over the Bethlehem Convention Palace, as well as Solomon's Pools, Murad Castle, and the surrounding area. Their role has been clarified, encouraging the execution and completion of projects that have been deserted for years. However, the current use of the pools as a source of water is unclear. A source from the Arja Textile Company revealed that, due to this lack of clarity, from 1967 until agreements were made in the 1990s, the water was free-for-all and was collected by multiple factories in the region, including the Arja Textile Company, the Nassar quarry, and other concrete factories. "This was absolutely normal at the time," a manager of Arja Textiles told me, "the water was up for grabs and there was no clarity in management and control, so we took the water for free and used it to dye the fabric in our factory. This was a good thing, we create jobs in the West Bank. A few years ago, after management changes, companies started buying the water from the pools as it was still cheaper than buying it from the municipalities."[23]

It is unclear whether Arja still purchase water from the Pools Agency. Water from the pools is sold to factories, while Artasis along with most Bethlehemites have no access to an affordable water source due to the occupation. The Palestinian Water Authority is forced to buy its water supplies from Israel, given Israel's domination of Palestinian water sources.[24] Today, Artasis struggle with water more than ever in the history of the village, ironic given the origin of the name of the village Artas, a derivative from the Latin *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden).[25]

The drowning incident described at the beginning of this essay, along with many others through the ages, is sometimes blamed on the jinn of Artas taking spirits to their next stage.[26] These stories played a role in the Palestinian identity in its culture and tales. In the 1920s, the pools themselves also played a role in the development of Palestinian

national consciousness.[27] The power of water sources and the control of their routes have led to conflict between Palestinian villages and cities for centuries.

These monuments are unparalleled in the world, with an unrivaled appeal to the imagination. In their appearance, the pools capture the layered aesthetic of the Palestinian locality that began to deteriorate after the second intifada. Extremely rich historical edifices were either demolished or allowed to disappear with little public intervention to rescue them. Today, the pools sit in the shadow of the "modern" convention palace next door. In a time of economic idealism, construction began on what was intended to become a resort at Solomon's Pools – what surely would transform it into a tourist attraction.[28] In 1998, I walked through what was designed to be a hustling, bustling center where merchants could open up small shops to sell their goods to the flood of tourists. Reminiscent of the markets in the Old City of Jerusalem, the freshly poured concrete formed a long open-air bazaar, lined with arches waiting to be clad and small side chapels for shops on either side of the nave, and framing a beautiful view of the cypress trees beyond. The framework of what was to come seemed then to its planners a symbol of growth, a place to finally solidify the ambitious and modern Palestinian identity.

I now consider the description of this project that I overheard growing up to be a Westernized idea of a tourist attraction. A more appropriate typology for such a place could be archeological gardens and a park with contextually sensitive kiosks to serve tea and coffee and sell small souvenirs, such as postcards of old images of the pools and the surrounding villages, and handicrafts from the area, such as olivewood carvings and olive oil soap. This, a utopian ideal, is my mother's *atlal* that in her recollection was how Solomon's Pools were during the Jordanian rule and before the occupation.[29]

As Bethlehem became a place for only a few determined tourists after the second intifada, this dream fell apart. The Israeli army shelled the project systematically throughout the intifada. The damage done was renovated repeatedly despite the systematic destruction. Till now, on a rainy day the copper roof of the new museum allows water in, most likely due to the bullet holes that punctured it since the second intifada. Under this roof, the museum's historic collection of textiles, jewelry, and ancient pottery unfortunately doesn't have the audience it deserves. The architecture of the pools as well as the surrounding complexes must exalt itself as a product of essential human history and problem solving skills. This place was a radical solution to an architectural and spatial problem. The precision of construction of the pools is a work of art by any architectural criteria. The generations involved in building and rebuilding them over the centuries struggled to anticipate scenarios of environmental, domestic, and political issues that remain valid today.

As the newly built structures were restored multiple times after the second intifada, repairing the damage done by their shelling, those involved in the project felt defeated emotionally and psychologically. The completion of the project is itself a testimony to the strength of Palestinian resilience. It stands both as a ghost of the lost potential and as a beautiful patient skeleton, ready to be reactivated by a future generation.

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# DIMINISHING LANDSCAPES

# Balu' as Residual Space:

## Landform and Sociality in Palestine

Omar Imseeh Tesdell and Iyad Issa

Traces and ruins structure the landscape of Palestine. Archeological sites loaded with religious and historical freight litter its urban and rural landscape. However, certain geographic features, too often considered part of a detached "natural" landscape, also embody traces. Here we consider the way that geographic features of the landscape, known as landforms, compose part of the social and economic fabric of Palestinian cities and villages. In particular we turn our attention to the *balu'* – seasonal pools or winter ponds – that form from the collection of runoff from winter rains in a low area. These formations are called balu' in the Palestinian vernacular from the root word "to swallow" and they might be understood as geographic depressions that "swallow" rainwater, allowing it to percolate slowly into the soil. Sometimes these seasonal ponds survive into early summer; sometimes they dry after the winter rains end in March, depending on rainfall amounts and temperatures. Balu' areas can also refer to sinkholes, potholes, or caverns in the ground. The soils in balu' areas tend to be heavy, clayey soils associated with sediment collected from runoff.

Wetland areas – including balu' areas – generally hamper the expansion of both urban and agricultural areas as they require interventions like drainage to render them usable within these spaces. The mass drainage of wetland spaces around the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which made use of improved tiling technologies, has slowly given way to a more measured approach. It has been shown that wetland areas play a crucial role in ecosystem function, including facilitating groundwater recharge, providing habitat, and controlling

floods. Environmental conservationists now push to either retain or reestablish wetland spaces as important features of the hydrological processes.

The destruction of wetlands areas in Palestine has been extensive. Among the most prominent examples are the Ḥuleh wetlands, part of the Ḥuleh Valley ecosystem, were drained by the Israeli government and Zionist colonists in the 1950s. It was brought back in part in the 1990s under pressure from environmentalists after flooding. The majority of wetland areas, meanwhile, have been drained and destroyed to make way for agriculture or urban expansion.

Traces of the antecedent balu' areas remain upon the landscape, however. These balu' trace areas collect runoff, host more varied plant and animal life, and contain distinct soil types owing to their disparate history. This essay provides a preliminary exploration of the balu' areas in Palestine. We explore two distinct balu' spaces that help us to consider the interrelation of landform and Palestinian socio-economic life. Part one explores the Marj Dayr Ballut as a residual space crucial to a unique farming system, and part two investigates the shifting role of the balu' within the urban fabric of Ramallah–al-Bireh.

## Marj Dayr Ballut as Trace

The balu' of the West Bank village of Dayr Ballut offers a unique insight into the relations of sociality and landform in Palestine. The balu' is situated within the *marj*, or agricultural plain, at the edge of the village. The balu' and marj area is host to one of the most diverse agro-ecosystems found in Palestine today.[1] Rain-fed (*ba'li*) systems used to produce wheat, barley, sesame, and lentils, in addition to vegetables like faqqus (Armenian cucumber) across Palestine. These highly diversified agro-ecosystems have declined drastically since the 1960s for a suite of reasons, ranging from changes in labor and social structure to economic shifts to Israeli government restrictions on trade and farmland. Within this context, the Dayr Ballut marj stands out as a rare living trace of a former landscape of rain-fed agro-ecological systems that supported Palestinians for generations.

Land use analysis has established the land area of the Dayr Ballut marj at about 900 dunams (222 acres), which is a large agricultural plain by West Bank mountain standards. The area is located in the Western slopes of the West Bank hill ridge near Salfit, at an elevation of 260 meters (853 feet) above sea level, with a mean annual rainfall of 569.8 millimeters (22 inches), similar to the annual precipitation of Berlin, Germany. The plain lies above Dayr Ballut valley, which snakes down to the coast from an elevation of 500 meters (1,640 feet) in the hill range south of the city of Nablus. The plain's rich complex of colluvial-alluvial and Mediterranean brown forest soils provides an enviable growing medium. At the same time, the village is pinned in by a complex of Israeli restrictions. Settlements hem in the village to the east, south, and north; an Israeli-imposed nature reserve borders on the south; and the separation wall stands to the west.

The physical features of the marj furnish the conditions for a thriving small-scale Palestinian agriculture system. Impressively, the plain is divided into 515 individual parcels farmed by at least 200 people, nearly all women. These parcels are planted in a

diverse array of crops, including wheat, barley, sesame, lentils, faqqus, onion, garlic, and okra. The heavy clayey alluvial soil is tilled by tractor (operated by men, in their main agricultural role), but planting, weeding, and harvesting are done by hand. The crops are grown largely without the use of synthetic chemicals, greenhouses, or irrigation. Using archival photos and oral history, we have been able to document the agro-ecological record of the Dayr Ballut plain for approximately one hundred years in an attempt to understand what accounts for the long-term viability of this dynamic farming system into the present, when the vast majority of similar farming areas in the West Bank have all but disappeared.

The topographic circumstances of the marj may hold part of the answer. Given its plentiful rainfall, its rich soil, its warm climate, and its geomorphological position as a flat plain, the multi-crop farming system does not require costly irrigation or greenhouses. This greatly reduces the overhead of production. Of the total area of about 900 dunams, 106 dunams (26 acres) are located within what local people call the balu' area. It floods with the winter rains and remains wetter than other parts of the plain throughout the year. The farmers of Dayr Ballut plant the wetter balu' area of the marj only with okra because it thrives on the moist soil conditions. Its ability to retain high soil moisture in a wet-dry Mediterranean climate like that of Palestine enables the farmer-women of Dayr Ballut to grow crops profitably without the need for expensive resources: water, irrigation equipment, or chemical inputs. Villagers express a desire to extend drip irrigation and greenhouses into the marj, but cite the Israeli authorities' restrictions on water and construction in the site as the main impediment.

In some cases the ancient traces in the balu' are literal. The balu' in Dayr Ballut is home to tadpole shrimp species, belonging to the Notosraca (Crustacea) family. Studies have found the closes related species *Lepidurus apus* and *Triops cancriformis* in rain pools across Palestine. These tadpole shrimp are living fossils: fossils from the Triassic Period, more than two hundred million years ago, are nearly identical to the specimens found living today. According to a study by Israeli researchers on the reproductive habits of these species in seasonal pond areas, the balu' in Dayr Ballut is home to the *Triops cancriformis*, which is the more rare of the two tadpole shrimp species.[2] Israeli researchers have harvested eggs from the tadpole shrimp species and attempted to establish them in other wetland areas as a protected species. Palestinians from Dayr Ballut have noted that the tiny prehistoric creature may be one reason that the plain falls within Area C under the Oslo interim accords, a classification that facilitates Israeli control of the natural resources.

The landform of the marj and balu' in Dayr Ballut is both a trace and a site of potential. It has galvanized Israeli interest in the area to control a valuable agricultural plain and ostensibly protect rare species. However, at the same time, the landform itself has provided an accommodating geographical situation for a dynamic and highly successful agro-ecosystem, which is largely self-reliant with no need for costly infrastructure. Whereas in conventional thinking the balu' forms an impediment to agricultural and urban expansion, from the vantage point of Dayr Ballut we can see how the landform of balu' itself provides the conditions for a thriving agro-ecosystem. In this sense, balu' is less a trace or ruin and more a site of potential, delivering a viable and successful arrangement

Figure 1. Map showing the location of al-Balu', al-Bireh, and Ramallah, 1880, Sheets 14 and 17 of Map of Western Palestine in 26 sheets, from surveys conducted for the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund by Lieutenants C.R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, R.E., during the years 1872–1877, available online at the website of the National Library of Australia, at nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231670708/view (sheet 14) and nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231670378/view (sheet 17).

of earth, plants, animals, and people. Moving now to Balu' al-Bireh, we explore the changing role of these agricultural and natural areas within the urban development of the Ramallah and al-Bireh area.

## Balu' al-Bireh

Balu' al-Bireh is located 1.7 kilometers north of the historic center of al-Bireh. The balu' lies in a plateau atop of the mountains of al-Bireh and Ramallah area. The altitude of the small plateau ranges from 820–850 meters above sea level and the area where the water is captured during the winter season, forming a seasonal pond, is around 835 meters above sea level.[3] During the winter season, the rainwater is naturally collected from the adjacent slopes around the plain and captured in a lower spot to form a seasonal pond, called al-Balu' by the locals. The balu' is located in a distinctive spot in the central mountains of the West Bank where the rain that falls on the adjacent western slopes is collected by a web of valleys that channel the water to the coastal plains and the Mediterranean Sea,

Figure 2. Aerial photograph showing al-Balu' pond in relation to the historic center of al-Bireh, 1918, Bavarian State Archives, online at www.gda-old.bayern.de/bestaende/viewer/viewer.php?show=/bestaende/palaestina/bayhsta_bs_palaestina_0597.

while the rain that falls in the adjacent eastern slopes is collected by another web of valleys that channel rainwater to the Jordan Valley and ultimately into the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.[4] The water collected in al-Balu' is part of a very small share of the rainwater that does not find its way into either of these widespread webs of valleys. The seasonal pond could usually be seen between the start of the rainy season in December and the spring season (April–May). This could vary based on the amount of rainfall and temperature every season. In a mountain region, which lacks permanent surface water areas, balu' areas and similar seasonal or permanent surface water are exceptional natural features, worthy of investigation and protection.

## Al-Balu' and Village Agriculture

Despite the lack of precise quantitative data regarding the agricultural production of al-Bireh in general, and al-Balu' area specifically, over the past century, oral history and the available archival documents can provide insights. A quick analysis of this history reveals that al-Balu' area, like other highland plains, was utilized for *ba'li* (non-irrigated) seasonal agricultural activities. Compared to the neighboring areas, especially the town of Ramallah, al-Bireh village (now urban area) had numerous plains around the historic

center, especially to the northern and western sides, which were used to grow seasonal crops and vegetables rather than olive groves. Al-Balu' was no exception: okra, legumes, and cereals such as wheat and barley used to be cultivated there. The wet area was used only for summer crops,[5] as it was inaccessible during the winter season due to the existence of the pond.

The distinctive characteristics of al-Balu''s soil and location determined the agricultural activities in the area. The capture of the rainwater in the al-Balu' and the adjacent areas in the plain kept the soil wet for several months and made the *ba'li* agriculture system possible. Moreover, the topsoil of the area was fertile and deep which helped to produce better agriculture crops and vegetation. Another distinctive feature of this area, mentioned by many locals, was the use of this seasonal pond during winter as roosting spot for several types of migratory birds. In addition, locals mentioned the existence of micro-ecosystem that hosts several species of insects and worms during the winter season, forming a temporary natural habitat for the birds.

## Al-Balu' and Urban Development

Like adjacent villages, Ramallah and al-Bireh were subject to gradual urbanization and urban transformation since the turn of the twentieth century. The transformation of al-Bireh from a small village to a town, then to a city has shifted socio-spatial relations away from a community structured around agricultural activities to a more urbanized community based on commerce and services. One of the most prominent transformations was manifested in land use. Village-cultivated land has been gradually transformed to new residential, commercial, and industrial neighborhoods.

Al-Bireh's urban development expanded first in two directions: the first was toward al-Manara, the new urban center for the merged cities of Ramallah and al-Bireh. The second direction was along the Nablus–Jerusalem road. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed development included linear commercial and residential development toward al-Manara and along the Jerusalem–Nablus road. In addition, development to the north of the village, along the Nablus road toward al-Balu' area, included the establishment of an industrial zone. Development also expanded south of the historic center, first along the Jerusalem road then to the adjacent mountains, including the areas of al-Sharafa, Sath Marhaba, and later Umm al-Sharayit. The establishment of an Israeli colony (Psagot) at Jabal al-Tawil in 1981 seriously contained development to the east.[6]

Limited archival material such as maps and aerial photographs can provide some insight into the development of al-Balu' as an urban area and its demise as a wetland. The first wave of urbanization in Ramallah–al-Bireh (1900–1960), left al-Balu' relatively untouched, due to its remoteness from the town center, according to the administrative borders of al-Bireh. Survey of Palestine maps for the Ramallah–al-Bireh urban area in 1943 show the northern urban border did not include al-Balu' and stopped only five hundred meters north of the historic center (less than one-third of the distance between the historic center and al-Balu' area). Its distance from the main development corridors
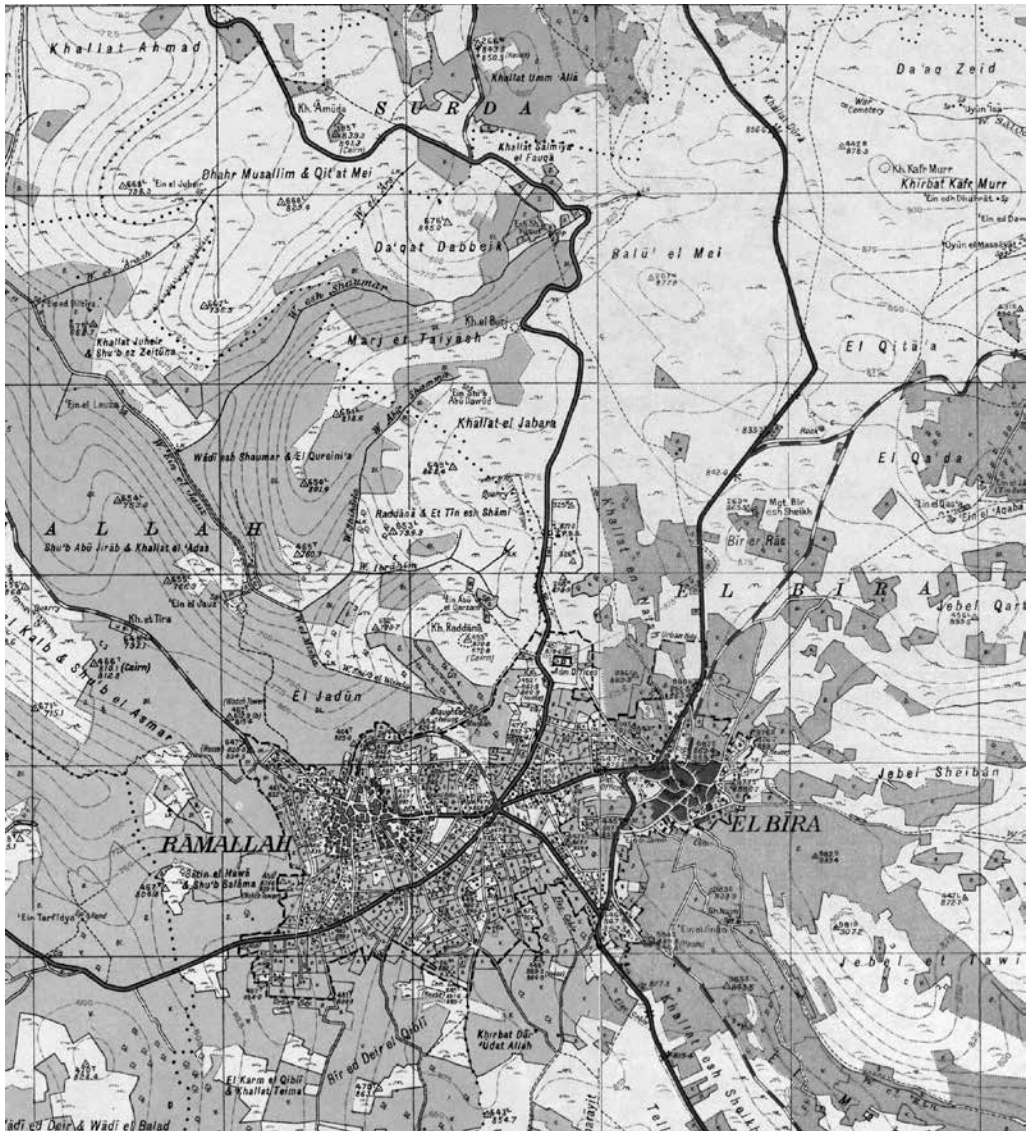
Figure 3. Map showing the location of al-Baluʿ outside the urban development of al-Bireh and Ramallah, 1943, Survey of Palestine.

to its west (al-Manara) and south (Jerusalem road) also kept al-Baluʿ insulated from urban development for a time. Despite these factors, al-Baluʿ was gradually affected by macro socioeconomic dynamics, where the significant shift from land as cultivated space to commodity made al-Baluʿ subject to future urban development rather than a space for agriculture.

In 1966, al-Bireh municipality acted to include al-Baluʿ (among other blocks such as al-Idhaʿa to the west and al-Musqa to the east) in urban development through its master plan expansion proposal.[7] This rational modern planning proposal used tools such as zoning regulations to lay out the future development of the area as an annex to the

Figure 4. Map showing the proposal for al-Bireh master plan extension, 1966, al-Bireh Municipality.

development dynamics of the 1960s. The master plan envisioned the expansion of the city toward the north. The proposal considered the development of al-Balu' area to be mainly residential with minimal local retail activities. Al-Balu' zone was seen as a chunk of land in need of development through the real estate market. This approach overlooked both the historic use of this land and the natural and ecological characteristics of the area. The linear agricultural land plots, known by farmers as *mawaris*, suddenly transformed to empty urban parcels waiting developers to build on them.

Based on this proposal, small-scale urban development of al-Balu' area started at the beginning of the 1970s. It seems reasonable to conclude that development started on the adjacent slopes of the balu', where the bedrock is shallow and building foundations could be erected at minimal cost and where services such as streets, electricity, and running water were available. Buildings were not erected where rainfall formed seasonal ponds. The development was mainly residential, the most prominent being the Abu Laban housing complex at the northwest edge of al-Balu' area and the Jerusalem Water Undertaking housing complex at the southern edge of the area. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, development continued at the edges and expanded significantly beyond al-Balu' to the northern slopes, leaving the heart of the area, where rainwater naturally collects, undeveloped. It is worth mentioning that the area adjacent to al-Balu' on the east (east of the Jerusalem–Nablus road) was not developed due to restrictions imposed by Israeli Civil Administration Office.[8]

During the 1990s, after the Palestinian Authority took control of the major urban areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip according to the Oslo accords, rapid urban growth occurred in the major cities of Palestine. Ramallah and al-Bireh faced huge pressure as a result of urban development. Al-Balu' area was a main scene for continuous construction activities due to its proximity to the city center. The new development started to intensify

Figures 5 and 6. Maps showing al-Balu' and surrounding urban development of al-Bireh and Ramallah in 1996 and 2015, with the darker plateau area surrounding the pond. This map is based on a map produced by al-Bireh Municipality, with lines and borders by the author.

Figure 7. Partial view of the seasonal pond during winter, 1980s. Photo from al-Bireh Municipality annual report, 1987.



Figure 8. Rainwater trapped in scattered spots in al-Balu' in 2016. Photo courtesy Iyad Issa.

gradually. However, the nature of this new development was different from previous development. It included several governmental and national security buildings alongside new commercial and retail facilities such as shopping centers. In addition, new residential buildings were erected, but of types different than the villas, semi-detached housing units, and detached homes built in the 1980s.

The municipality tried hard to provide infrastructure to the area as a whole. The municipal services followed development along the edges of al-Balu' and only later reached the wetland area. The municipality launched the first project to deal with the wetland area drainage in 1998. The first phase was designed to drain the water of the seasonal pond away to the adjacent eastern slopes. The first phase was followed by many phases to expand the infrastructure to cover additional areas where rainwater remained to form small, scattered seasonal ponds. The project is still considered an on-going project by al-Bireh municipality and other areas are planned to be included.

## Al-Balu' Today

Over the twentieth century, al-Balu' has been gradually transformed from an integral part of the village agricultural spatial structure and economy to a busy urban zone within the Ramallah–al-Bireh conglomeration. This transformation has gradually decreased agricultural activities and land use in favor of urban sprawl. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, al-Balu' was fully cultivated with vegetables and crops. Then, for some period, al-Bireh was a town with a remote area that was still cultivated with the same crops and vegetables, but agriculture was no longer the main local economic activity. Later, al-Balu' area shrunk to a limited spot of marginal agricultural activities within an urban surrounding. Nowadays, most of the wetland area has disappeared and buildings are being erected over the land. Agricultural activities are no longer practiced in the area on regular basis and on large scale except a small  seasonal scattered pockets especially at the eastern margin of the plateau (east of the Jerusalem-Nablus road).

Figure 9. Current development trends around al-Balu'. Photocourtesy Iyad Issa.



Figure 10. Current development trends around al-Balu'. Photocourtesy Iyad Issa.

Today, al-Balu' area is considered a key part of the urban development of Ramallah–al-Bireh's urban fabric. The area's development includes public facilities, commercial and retail facilities, residential houses and buildings, governmental buildings, office buildings, and many other urban facilities. The topography of the area is mainly flat, which facilitated such rapid urban development. In addition, the scarcity of land available for new development offset the cost of building foundations, which otherwise may have hindered building in such an area. The topsoil from construction sites in al-Balu', it is worth pointing out, is considered a precious commodity and is sold for gardening activities in other places.

The remnant, residual space (*atlal*) of this area and its ecosystem can still be found in parcels not yet developed and awaiting future development. Those spots at the heart of al-Balu' still have the traces of the agricultural trenches and some still have the old shape of linear *mawaris* plots, but without any cultivated plants. Fragmented spots of wetlands appears during winter, as rainwater forms small water ponds here or there in empty parcels between the existing buildings. The new users of the plots may view these rainwater ponds as a problem or a minor fault in the rainwater drainage system. In fact, those water spots are the remnants of an ancient natural feature that lasted for hundreds or maybe thousands of years.

Nazeh Abu Fkhedeh is an agricultural engineer who is considered one of the last farmers who used to cultivate the wetland area in spring and summer. He described some of the last cultivation activities in the area between 2004 and 2009.[9] Nazeh mentioned that he started growing the vegetables and crops while the foundation of one of the largest multipurpose buildings were under construction. He used to cultivate around twenty-five dunams, divided into five-dunam plots dedicated to growing different types of crops. He described the soil as fertile and suitable for growing several types of vegetables and crops. Nazeh used to cultivate vegetables such as okra and legumes such as chickpeas and beans. He concluded that cultivation was not profitable and demands intensive labor that was not available or affordable when he worked there. Now the building stands in what used to be part of the wetland among empty parcels without any traces of Nazeh's vegetables or crops.

Figure 11. New infrastructure and development trends around al-Balu' and where the seasonal pond used to occur. Photo courtesy Iyad Issa.



Figure 12. New infrastructure and development trends around al-Balu' and where the seasonal pond used to occur. Photo courtesy Iyad Issa.

This article has tried to shed light on a distinctive natural feature of the landscape of Palestine. By studying Balu' al-Bireh and balu' Dayr Ballut, we tried to highlight the demise of such residual natural spaces within the contemporary landscape of Palestine. First, the article tried to show example of surviving balu' in Dayr Ballut. Dayr Ballut's balu' survived due to a complex web of geopolitical and local agro-ecological factors. Nevertheless, an in-depth investigation shows not only the preservation of some ecological features of the system, but also changes in the nature and structure of the agricultural activities associated with the area. Second, the article examined the demise of Balu' al-Bireh as a residual space within the urban expansion of the city. The rapid urban development of al-Bireh–Ramallah reached the balu' area and included it within larger processes of real estate development. In this case, urban development caused a more drastic transformation. The urban transformation contributed not only to eliminating the agro-ecological activities, but also to the natural feature itself – including the soil and the wetland – gradually vanishing.

We hope that this short review will foster further in-depth research to investigate the nature and the importance of such remaining small-scale natural elements and their relation to surrounding landscapes and nature. In addition, we hope this work will foster an examination of the remaining balu' areas and their current situations with the aim of their future preservation as natural features of the threatened Palestinian landscape.

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**Endnotes**

1  Research on the Wadi Dayr Ballut agro-ecosystem is underway in collaboration with researchers Saher Khoury and Yusra Othman.

2  See Michal Sorek, Jacob Douek, Tamar Guy-Haim, Noa Simon-Blecher, Baruch Rinkevich, and Yair Achituv, "Population Genetics and Reproductive Strategies of Two Notostraca (Crustacea) Species from Winter Ponds in Israel," *Zoology in the Middle East* 62, no. 4 (2016): 331–341.

3  The altitudes given here are approximations based on the master plan of al-Bireh produced by al-Bireh municipality.

4  In the case of Balu' al-Bireh, the rainwater moves eastward through Wadi Sha'ban (al-Bireh) and westward through Wadi al-Shawmar (Ramallah).

5  Author interview with Nazeh Abu Fkheda, Ramallah, January 2017.

6  *Al-Mawsu'a al-Filastiniyya* [The Palestinian Encyclopedia] (Damascus: Hay'at al-mawsu'a al-Filastiniyya, 1984), vol. 1, 229.

7  This is based on the master plan extension map provided by al-Bireh municipality.

8  Based on the Israeli Civil Administration's municipal border modification order of October 1982.

9  Author interview with Nazeh Abu Fkheda, Ramallah, January 2017.

# Books, Not Soldiers

Mahmoud Muna

For years now I have been working in my family-run bookshops in Jerusalem, the Educational Bookshop on Salah al-Din Street, established in 1984 by my part-time UNRWA teacher dad and later run by my oldest brother Imad. More than thirty years on, the bookshop has expanded to three branches and is considered by many as a "cultural hub" for the city.

My work as a bookseller has allowed me to take advantage of having to travel often to visit bookshops around the world. I am particularly interested in small, independent bookshops: the style, selection, and method of sorting and displaying books have always fascinated me. One of my favorite moments came on the Greek island of Santorini, when I stumbled upon the Atlantis bookshop in Oia, a charming place, cozy and warm with endless titles in every room. Growing up, my dad had an obsession with how books should be arranged: always standing side by side, "like soldiers," with no gaps in between, and shelved by height from left to right. Then, I never questioned his curious comparison of books to soldiers. Now, if anything, I would argue that books are the opposite of soldiers: their life is longer and they are less exclusive, open to be used by anyone who wants to be enlightened and educated, while soldiers are under the orders of generals, their life spans may well be brief, and above all they must face enemies, whether real or imagined, rather than be open to friends.

My dad's influence stayed with me for years; in fact, it made its imprint on the way I arrange the books in my bookshop. I followed his advice in displaying my books "like soldiers," one standing straight next to the other, even though now I am arranging books in a bookshop, not in my personal library. And customers usually prefer to see books grouped by sections, so they can browse according to

their interest and not spend time looking at titles that do not immediately match their tastes. In private libraries, the owner would have read each book and formed some intimate relationship with the volume, and hence size, color, cover, and the touch of its pages would make the volume distinguishable wherever it was placed and in whatever way; there is thus no need for a system aiding people to navigate to finds certain title, as the library owner would have established his or her own hybrid emotional and visual indicators to locate a particular book.

To use my father's method at the bookshop is strange. Customers are regularly asking me why I don't use the "typical" system. To avoid explaining that my system was inherited from my father, I often say I use a principle called "random organization" – to reflect the reality of the Middle East. Everything in this part of the world is random and there is no system in place, so why should there be one for my bookshop? For years now, I have enjoyed a very colorful view of my bookshop shelves: books aligned side by side, matching in size, grouped according to publishers and height or harmonized by their spine colors. I think the German philosopher Goethe would have been very proud of me applying his color theory in practice!

In fact, now that this "system" has been in operation for a few years, I have begun to reap the benefits. Apart from those who become irritated with not finding what they intended to find, there are many readers whose eyes accidentally land on shelves that they wouldn't usually look at, leading them to buy new titles across genres, books that otherwise would not spark their interest. I am very proud to have found a good explanation, and subsequent positive results, behind an otherwise very weird obsession.

When I spoke again to my wise dad about his analogy of books "like soldiers," he defended it, emphasizing their shared characteristics. He explained the embedded power in each, the ability of books to empower the reader, as soldiers do their leader. His eyes were sparkling, full of emotions. I asked him if books can defend the truth; he said they could, but we need first to defend our books. This last statement came out with much anger, and with a brittle and wheezy voice – I understood and did not utter a word further.

Khalil Sakakini, a pioneering Palestinian educator who reformed the educational system in the 1940s, and Is'af al-Nashashibi, a prolific author and celebrated critic of literature, owned two of the most prestigious and extensive book collections in Palestine, housed in their Jerusalem homes. Book lovers in Haifa, Jaffa and Nazareth, among other locations, developed other important family libraries. During the war of 1948 – the War of Independence as Israel calls it, the Nakba as the Palestinian refers to it – several Israeli librarians, including the librarian of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (established in 1918), joined the military personnel of the Zionist militias and army in search of books. They entered the homes of well-known Palestinian families, the homes of famous writers, teachers, and scholars who were known to be book collectors. The army, directed and aided by the librarians, looted the houses and collected about thirty thousand volumes from Jerusalem alone, and another forty thousand from Haifa, Jaffa, Nazareth, and other places. All were boxed and shipped in vehicles to special locations; later, many were relocated to the National Library in West Jerusalem. Today, about six thousand of these books are categorized there under the shelf marked AP (Abandoned Property)! They are kept in the basement of the National Library, available only upon request, and can be used inside the library building only.

How much can irony manifest itself? Librarians tasked with taking care of books were, and are, shoulder to shoulder with the soldiers stealing them. Property that belonged to those who were forced out of their homes under firepower is labeled abandoned. A society that admired books and literature, art and music, is now deemed "invented" or non-existent, while stolen literary works, journals, and manuscripts are kept in the basement of the "national" library of those who stole it. Why in the basement? Is it because they are the literal foundation of the "national" library? Or perhaps because, like any other stolen goods, they are hidden underground, away from people's eyes.

How unfair that my dad describes books as soldiers! It seems he cannot disassociate the image of soldiers stealing books that is so imprinted in his brain. My dad was born in 1936; he must have been a young boy in 1948. He lived all his life in the Jerusalem city center, literally meters away from the no-man's land dividing East from West Jerusalem. His father lost property in West Jerusalem like many other Jerusalemites; he witnessed the Nakba, or, rather, he lived through it. He must have seen the looting of books, the looting of the country. He never wanted to speak about it – I tried several time to prompt him into talking; he refused, as if he wanted history to be dead and forgotten, unlike me, who sees the future through history. Perhaps, this is why he has spent all of his life being a teacher, educating future generations, while I am planning to spend my life selling books, focused on the history and what happened in the past.

Years later, when I organized the screening of the film *The Great Book Robbery* in the bookshop, an Israeli audience member expressed his sadness and anger after the film and said that Israel must return the books to their true owners "immediately." An elderly Palestinian woman who had also been sitting in the screening responded without asking for permission: "We don't want the books back, just them, we want back the shelves and the houses where they were found." As a chair of that event, I never felt challenged to remain distant or balanced. I agreed, it would be cruel to return the books without returning the houses, it is like returning a soul without a body – they are simply inseparable.

I am still confused: If books are like soldiers as my dad likes to think, then they should fight for their people's liberation and, once dead, their body in uniforms should return home to rest in perfect peace. Palestinian books should be returned, with the houses, with the bookmarks exactly where they were left inside the pages. Books should be finally allowed a dignified rest, inside the libraries of Palestinian universities. Or perhaps books are not soldiers, they are substitutes for soldiers, for their abduction might be the guarantee of weakness for the enemy and their existence is an enlightening power; they are harmless, tender, and promise peace, not war. This is why books are my trade; I have become a cultural warrior, as my friend Tanya likes to call me, promoting books and literature as the substitute for soldiers.

*Mahmoud Muna was born in Jerusalem and received degrees in Media and Communication from University of Sussex and King's College London. Known to many as the "Bookseller of Jerusalem," he is proprietor and host of cultural and literary events at the Educational Bookshop and the bookshop at the American Colony Hotel, and, when not reading or selling books, a writer and commentator on culture, politics, language, and identity.*

**PHOTO MEMOIR**

# As Is When

Zeyad Dajani

In the mid-1960s, King Husayn of Jordan began building a royal palace in Jerusalem. The structure was conceived as two rectangles intersecting at right angles, forming a cross along the north-south and east-west axes. Designed as a two-story building, it was to allow for vast panoramic views in all directions. Strategically located on an elevated hilltop on the road to Ramallah, the palace would provide a clear, uninterrupted line of vision across the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley to the Jordanian capital, Amman – a sightline to symbolically bridge the two cities, crossing and uniting the landscape in-between.

Construction of the palace stopped when Jordan was defeated in the 1967 war and the land upon which the palace was to stand was came under Israeli occupation. The palace – a testament to the king's ambition and desire to leave a legacy in Jerusalem – now stands abandoned and unfinished, out of time and place. It is an anomaly, iconically overlooking the city.

The project *As Is When* was conceived as a three-dimensional scale model, a series of photographs, and a single-channel video

projection. The model is a reconstruction of the unfinished palace; the video tracks through its stairways, corridors, and empty rooms, creating architectural elements in abstract transformation. The building becomes a sequence of pure forms and choreography, alluding to its own ephemeral, failed ambitions, ambiguously reflecting relations between Jordan and Israel at the time.

The work was created during the artist's residency at al-Maʻmal Contemporary Art Foundation in Jerusalem in 2003, his first visit to Jerusalem, and was shown at the Sharjah Biennial in 2005.

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