

EDITORIAL

Materiality and Ghostliness

The contributions to this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* coalesce around a number of themes central to Palestinian experiences – the relationships between materiality and memory and between space and power. Two articles in this issue, Fredrik Meiton’s “Nation or Industry: The Non-Electrification of Nablus” and Dima Saad’s “Materializing Palestinian Memory: Objects of Home and the Everyday Eternities of Exile,” are the final pieces that *JQ* will publish from the sixth annual New Directions in Palestinian Studies workshop held at Brown University in 2018, thematically organized around “The Shadow Years: Material Histories of Everyday Life.” (Other articles that emerged from this workshop were published in the Autumn 2018 issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* and in the Autumn 2019 issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.) Each, in its own way, focuses on the materiality of Palestinian experiences and their afterlives.

Meiton, author of *Electrical Palestine: Capital and Technology from Empire to Nation* (University of California Press, 2018), reflects here on a “non-event” – the circumstances and decisions that resulted in the city of Nablus remaining disconnected from the electrical grid throughout the Mandate period. The Palestine Electric Corporation (PEC) was established by Pinhas Rutenberg, a Russian-Jewish engineer and Zionist to whom the Mandate authorities granted an exclusive concession to provide electrical power throughout Palestine. This linkage of electricity with Zionism meant that connecting to the electrical grid was always a politically contentious decision for Palestinians, and while Nablus’s politicians sought to negotiate work-

around that would allow for the electrification of Nablus as a joint venture of the PEC and the municipality, the PEC had little interest in pursuing such measures. As negotiations between the two stretched on, and were then largely interrupted by the 1936–39 revolt, the power supply system and the Jewish economy in Palestine became increasingly interconnected. Meanwhile, the exclusivity clause of the concession prevented the development of an infrastructure of electricity to serve Palestine’s Arab communities.

Technological momentum thus deepened ethno-national segregation in ways that would shape the day-to-day experiences of Palestinians during the Mandate period, but also the map of Palestine post-1948. Although we are inclined to understand such boundaries as the product of military conflict or political negotiation (or both), Meiton shows them also to be the product of infrastructural developments that are less obvious and more insidious – cloaked as they are in the seemingly neutral language of technological development. By the mid-1930s, “the areas most densely populated by [Palestinian] Arabs were clearly discernable on the power company’s technical blueprints because of their densely engridded borders.” As Meiton writes, the region between Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarm – what the British referred to as the “Triangle of Terror” during the 1936–39 revolt – “appeared on the maps of the PEC as an area demarcated by thick borders of wire along each side, and blank within – wires and violence implying each other.” This implication continued in the decade following the revolt and during the 1948 war. As Meiton notes, the boundary produced by the 1949 armistice lines, the so-called Green Line along the western border of the West Bank, follows the same line as the high-tension line that ran from the Jordan River to Tel Aviv, constructed in the 1930s.

The prehistories of boundaries made by war and political decision-making also emerge in Nazmi Jubeh’s article on Patrick Geddes and British urban planning in Jerusalem. As Jubeh describes, Geddes drew up plans for Jerusalem based on a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European biblical imaginary. He envisioned the Mughrabi Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City destroyed to allow for an uninhibited view of the “Western Wall” (al-Buraq) and sought to forestall the expansion of villages in Jerusalem’s hinterlands (including areas like Silwan and al-Tur that were and are intimately connected to Jerusalem) in order to preserve Jerusalem’s imagined singularity. Ultimately, his plans, according to Jubeh, “split the city into two parts: a restricted eastern part with no chance of developing or becoming modern; and a western part with all the features necessary for modern development.” Though largely unrealized during the Mandate period, Geddes’s plans are remarkably prescient in their alignment with Israeli policies, especially after 1967, indicating the persistence of an Orientalist colonial vision shared by British imperial and Zionist planners – a vision in which the local Palestinian population is at best an irrelevance to be ignored and at worst a hindrance to be eliminated.

The implementation of this vision has produced an environment in Jerusalem that, for its Palestinian residents, obstructs the economy, expropriates and restricts land resources, and restricts movement. Marya Farah’s “The Atarot Exception? Business

and Human Rights under Colonization” (recipient of honorable mention for the 2019 Ibrahim Dakkak Award) explores how these restrictions impact the ability of Palestinians in Jerusalem to sustain themselves, and the decision by some to establish businesses in the Atarot industrial settlement bordering Qalandiya. For Jerusalemites who reached their maturity during the 1967 war, Qalandiya evokes the “gold days” of the 1960s, when Jerusalem Airport (called Qalandiya Airport because of its proximity to the village, and later refugee camp, of the same name) was the gateway to Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and beyond. This gateway was transformed after 2000 by the hellish mechanisms of checkpoints, Israel’s West Bank wall, and “border controls” supervising the entry – or, more accurately, the non-entry – of Palestinians into Jerusalem and points west. The massive changes of the past century overlap in Qalandiya: from the now-abandoned airport that had once served as a replacement for the loss of Lydda Airport to the refugee camp that is increasingly absorbed into the suburban sprawl of Ramallah, and from the perspective of Israeli planning, both a major center to control and constrain movement and, the site of the Atarot industrial settlement at the seam lines.

The politics of establishing Palestinian-owned businesses within Atarot are fraught. Business-owners who take this decision explain that their options are constrained by Israeli policies, as Palestinians are denied permission and opportunity to build or expand within Jerusalem, and see the possibility of moving to the West Bank as economically unviable and risky from the standpoint of maintaining their Jerusalem residency. Farah interviews others who frame their decision as no different from setting up shop anywhere else occupied by Israel, including inside Israel’s pre-1967 boundaries: “Atarot is an occupied area and not a settlement,” one business-owner tells Farah, and “in my opinion everything is occupied.” It is no different than Tel Aviv, another affirms. A third goes even further: the Palestinian Authority should encourage Palestinian businesses in industrial settlements, which offer Palestinian workers an alternative to exploitation by Israeli settlers – “This is how we are going to liberate the land.” Meanwhile, Palestinian and international actors urging a boycott of settlement products have to decide whether this boycott applies to Palestinian-owned businesses in Atarot. This conundrum is reminiscent of that facing Nabulsi and other Palestinians vis-à-vis electrification during the Mandate period, what Meiton describes as a question not of nation *and* industry, but nation *or* industry.

While Meiton, Jubeh, and Farah approach materiality from a macro level – the domain of infrastructure, planning, economic development – Dima Saad takes new approaches and raises new questions to think about the intimacy of personal memory, material objects, and Palestinian identification. Based on anthropological fieldwork among Palestinians in Jordan, Saad challenges the narrative focus of structured memory-work, including various endeavors to collect and record Palestinians’ oral histories; instead, Saad calls for the recording and collecting of “practices of remembering that adhere neither to testimonial genres of telling nor to the plotlines of event-centered histories.” By doing so, scholars might begin to portray the “refracted personal catastrophes of the Nakba,” appearing in material form: an embroidered love letter; floor tiles made of stone quarried in Nazareth; the contents of a suitcase found in a

grandmother's attic. For generations of displaced Palestinians, Saad reminds us, "the distance between 1948 and everyday exile is furnished with the remembered belongings of the lost home. Doorbells, vases, curtains, books, forks, plates, carpets, blankets, dresses, and photographs crowd everyday currents of longing; they orchestrate plots for daydreams, they color overwhelming fantasies of return. They offer clues to a past that persists, codes to a past that haunts." Saad explores these unsettling approximations of home that manifest in exile. The uncanny settings and objects that remind one of home and, at the same time, of loss.

In "Traces of the Nakba," a review of four different art exhibitions from 2018 and 2019, Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh engage similar themes of "materiality and ghostliness," as the shadows of 1948 creep into the art spaces of Herzliya, Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv. Johnson and Shehadeh find themselves unsettled, frequently pulled between the powerful evocations of loss in the artwork and the erasure of context that characterizes the institutional or curatorial framing of the exhibitions, between the dismal political situation of Palestine in the present and the ability of current artists – mostly by Palestinians from inside the Green Line, but some as well by Israeli Jewish artists – to offer "sparks from these ashes to stir the imagination."

Johnson and Shehadeh remark on the inclusion of the painting *Refugees* (1957) by Abed Abdi – who was born in Haifa 1942, forced into Lebanon with his family in 1948, and returned to Haifa in 1952 under a limited family reunification scheme – in the Haifa City Museum's exhibition "1948." Absent from the exhibition, however, are works from those Palestinian artists who remained in Lebanon – or in other refugee camps and places of exile. Here, Johnson and Shehadeh turn to the foundational work on Palestinian art by Kamal Boullata, who passed away in Berlin this August. In this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Raja Shehadeh remembers his relationship with Boullata, which began in 1979, when the two met in Washington, DC. Shehadeh recalls Boullata as a friend and companion, an artist and a scholar, a patriot and an exile. As an artist, Boullata consistently returned to two basic shapes, the circle and the square and, Shehadeh writes, "throughout his life he seemed to be trying to square the circle of the various influences on his life, whether Christian and Islamic cultures or Jerusalem and the rest of the world." Needless to say, the Jerusalem of Boullata's birth was not the same Jerusalem in which he was laid to rest, a city transformed and in which Boullata seemingly no longer felt comfortable in his later years. Shehadeh wonders: "Could he have lived there if the bureaucratic obstacles were removed and it was possible to move to Palestine?"

In Donn Hutchison's remembrance of Mildred White, "From "Rag-and-Tatter Town" to Booming-and-Bustling City," the lives of the two Ramallah Friends School teachers are likewise intimately connected to the changing cityscape. White arrived in Ramallah in 1949, and described the impact of the Nakba on the city, as refugees struggled to eke out a life and a living in the aftermath of catastrophe. Ramallah had already undergone significant changes when Hutchison arrived seventeen years later, as Palestinians displaced in 1948 and 1949 "put down tentative roots that eventually grew into sturdy trees." And, of course, the Ramallah of 2019 is a city completely

transformed. On Radio Street, “Ramallah’s version of a lover’s lane” in the 1960s, the trees and stone houses have been replaced by “high-rises, shopping centers, malls, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Popeye’s.” The Ramallah of 1965 or 1949 is only a memory. But then again, as contributions to this issue of *JQ* remind us, what does it mean to say that something is “only” a memory?

This issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is rounded out by an article that takes us back another century still, before living memory, to the Centennial Fair held in Philadelphia in 1876 and to the issue of cultural representation of Palestine in the nineteenth century. Linda K. Jacobs’s quest to unearth the Palestinian presence at the fair is yet further evidence that material culture can travel in unexpected directions and map onto historical metanarratives in surprising ways. The exhibition of items from Jerusalem within the official Ottoman display was dominated by Vester and Company – the business established by German missionary and cabinet-maker Ferdinand Vester, who moved to Jerusalem to join the Swiss-German Mission in 1853 and whose son Frederick continued in the woodworking business and married Bertha Spafford, daughter of the founder of the American Colony. But Jacobs turns her attention primarily to the two small stalls, called bazaars, operated by groups of Palestinians from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Selling olive wood and mother-of-pearl crafts, these merchants were forerunners of Palestinian participation in a global trading economy, in which items associated with religious tourism in the Holy Land became available to those who would never set foot on Palestinian soil, as well as Palestinian migration to the Western hemisphere.

In the only extant photograph of the Palestinian presence at the fair, meanwhile, three blurry figures man a stall attached to the exterior of the fair’s Brazilian café. Jacobs wonders whether they were the merchants who set up the Jerusalem or Bethlehem bazaars, or perhaps they were the three Panayotti (Banayuti) brothers who had arrived from Bethlehem with hundreds of items in olive wood, mother-of-pearl, and seeds to sell at the fair; or maybe they were imposters, trading on the allure of the Holy Land to sell fake goods. Whatever the case, these ghostly figures are a reminder of the way the past haunts the present, the persistence of loss in various forms, and the need to excavate the shadows of history to capture the breadth and depth of Palestinian experiences.