PLACING PALESTINE: HOMES, FAMILIES & MOBILITIES IN BIRZEIT

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the village of Birzeit is made as place. The reader is taken on a tour designed to show some of the sights of Birzeit and three sets of practices that are key in forging Birzeit-as-place. The first set of practices cohere around homes: the dilapidated houses in the Old City, the modern Spanish Apartments, the frequently empty dwellings of diaspora and two destroyed homes. The second set of practices involves families: the negotiation of different distances by families stretched across continents, the extensive efforts of some families to live in close physical proximity that contrast with others who are witnessing the increasing nuclearization of family living space and attendant family practices. Thirdly, im/mobilities: the movements of diaspora in the summer, students travelling to and from Birzeit University and immigrants who have migrated from the north and south of Palestine to work in and around Ramallah. In offering a passing glimpse at some of the dynamic relationships that cohere around and between these material and imaginative spatial practices, I hope to (re)present Palestine as a vibrant and dynamic place, shaded by social, political, economic and cultural differences that maybe similar to other parts of the world. In doing so my chronicle departs from accounts of Palestinian space that tend to prioritize the ongoing practices of Israeli Occupation and its effects. Nevertheless, Birzeit is coloured by such practices too, which penetrate and complicate practices of home, family and im/mobility.

The tour stages a series of empirical stories and events that were drawn from the eleven months of fieldwork I conducted in Birzeit between June 2005 and October 2007, during which time I conducted participant observation, interviews and archival research. These stories are punctuated by a set of theoretical engagements. I choose to keep these moments separate to explore how theory and Birzeit as I experienced it might converse with one another. I hope that each will be an equal partner in the conversation, that each will complicate and extend the other, and that this conversation will also build a affirmative relation between this place and you.
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List of Interviews

The following is a list of interviews drawn on for direct quotations in the text. I have used pseudonyms to protect the identity of my informants. Some of the people I interviewed I got to know quite well during my eleven months in Birzeit. Some I did not. A few I only met once to interview. I used a snowball sampling technique that built on the limited connections I had, and the extensive social connections residents of the village had. One of the advantages of using snowball sampling was that it also gave me a great deal of insight about the social connections that existed between people in Birzeit. While I could never claim a representative sample of Birzeit residents, my research explores many issues that are common to a number of Palestinians currently living in and/or travelling to the West Bank. The majority of my interviews during my research were with men, which reflects the social-spatial division of genders in this context. However, I was able to talk to some women in the presence of male relatives or on the university campus – a ‘liberal’ space, and I have included many of these accounts. Similarly, many of people I interviewed were Christian, but there was no difficulty talking to Muslims. My respondents were also of varied ages, although I never formally interviewed anyone younger than nineteen due to the constrictions of the ethical review process.

Interviews were generally conducted in people’s homes (usually the room kept for receiving guests) or on the University of Birzeit campus (usually in the case of students). A translator accompanied me to many of these interviews, although his services were not always required because a number of Birzeitis speak English. I only conducted interviews in English when the interviewee was fluent and happy to speak English. I have noted which language was used to conduct each interview in the list that follows. My translator translated any interviews or sections of interviews that were conducted in Arabic, and all translations are his, although since I speak basic colloquial Arabic, I was able to ask for clarification as I transcribed these translations. Many of the gestures I have incorporated into my narrative are drawn from actual behaviours that I observed and noted while conducting the interviews.
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Interview with Abu Wassam, conducted in Arabic, in his shop, Birzeit, 21st June 2006.
Interview with Ibrahim, conducted in Arabic, in his office, Birzeit, 25th June 2006.

Chapter 5:
Interview with Fatima, conducted in English, in the PAS Office, BZU, 21st February 2006.
Interview with Alia, conducted in Arabic, in her living room, Birzeit, 30th April 2006.
Interview with Noor, conducted in English, in her living room, Birzeit, 4th July 2006.

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Interview with Rasha, conducted in English, Women’s Studies Building, BZU, 11th May 2006.
Interview with Fatima, conducted in English, in the PAS Office, BZU, 21st February 2006.

Chapter 8:
Interview with Dina and Jumana, conducted in English, in the Department of Geography Office, BZU, 4th May 2006.
Interview with Omar, conducted in English and Arabic, in the library, BZU, 29th April 2006.

Chapter 9:
Interview with Wajih, conducted in Arabic, in his Ramallah workplace (restaurant), 22nd August 2006.
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Chapter 10:
Interview with Hamid, conducted in English, in his living room, Birzeit, 24th February 2006.
Glossary

I use the term **Israeli Occupation Forces** to highlight the panoply of Israeli organizations and institutions that make the occupation of Palestinian land happen. While the Israeli Defense (sic) Forces (IDF), Border (sic) Police and settler-colonists are the most visible occupiers, the occupation also relies on the work of planners, architects, lawyers and law courts, government officials and civil servants, and some Jewish groups in Diaspora\(^1\). The continual performance of the occupation, through the work of these many disparate individuals and groups also requires a certain punitive ethos among Israeli and other publics\(^2\).

I use the term **settler-colony** and **settler-colonists**, rather than just settlement/settlers to stress the colonial aspect of the settlement process. I suspect the term settler rhetorically mollifies the act of colonization in many places other than Palestine.

I use the term **Occupation Wall** rather than security barrier, fence, Apartheid Wall or simply ‘Apartheid’ as one friend in Ramallah referred to it, because while this colonial project is similar to many other such projects, including Apartheid in South Africa, it is also rooted in and routed through a very specific set of histories and geographies\(^3\).

It should also be noted that Israeli Shekels (NIS), Jordanian Dinars (JD) and US Dollars (US$) are all used as currency in Palestine. During my field research, the following approximations could be made: 1 NIS = 0.2 JD = 0.25 US$.

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\(^1\) Weizman 2007 and Halper 2001 have discussed the roles of these institutions in detail.


\(^3\) See Zreik 2004.
Acknowledgements

Everything that went into producing this thesis – which is a very great deal indeed – was the result of the friendship, assistance and care provided by more people than I’ve remembered to list here. First and foremost, all the people I met in Birzeit and Ramallah gave me so much more than I was ever able to give back. I am particularly grateful to Rasha & Ibtisal for all their help with finding housing, to Immitri, Haifa, Hanna and Omar for housing me during my longest stay, and to Alice and Vivian for my accommodation while I was studying Arabic. My landladies and lords not only provided housing, but also food, advice, frequent conversation and anything else they could offer. I am also particularly grateful to A’tyyeh and Bashar for their assistance as translators on the University of Birzeit campus and in the village respectively, and their friendship. I always enjoyed talking to Wejdan, who served as my conversation partner while I learnt Arabic with a great deal of patience and good humour. Othman Sharkas, Head of Geography at the University of Birzeit, gave me a great deal of help during my time on campus, as did his colleagues, particularly Shadi. The shabab who were studying geography at Birzeit, and the guys from the English department – particularly Suhaib and Hussein who took me olive picking – provided a great deal of companionship and introduced me to the delights of Evil Café and many other Ramallah hot spots. I also enjoyed the intellectual companionship and advice of Peter Lagerquist in Ramallah. Although I had too many friends in the village to name, in addition to those already listed I would like to mention Tarek for his friendship and IT support, and Khadir for his hospitality, both when he was working and when he wasn’t. I also want to thank my flatmates: Simon whose sense of humour made my experience of the PAS program that much more enjoyable, and Damion, who taught me big two (or is it Big Two?).

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in January 2006. Over the course of this research I have also learnt to value to a greater extent the relationships I have with my siblings Patricia, Lucy and Richard, even when large bodies of water and extensive landmasses separate us. My grandma worried about me a great deal despite being just as ‘adventurous’ when she was my age. I’m always grateful for such love and concern. At UBC, my supervisor Gerry has always given me good advice, support in many forms and insightful criticism in all the right places. Her guidance has extended to everything I’ve done in graduate school, and all my successes bear her mark. I’m also very grateful to Derek for his boundless enthusiasm for both the research and writing that went into this project, and his ability to tie everything together and have it all make (some sort of) sense. Elvin and Alison, my two other committee members, have provided a great deal of support and intellectual input, both vital elements in the completion of this work. Marwan, our resident Palestinian brought a great deal of humour to proceedings and was always willing to lend a hand. I’m lucky to have met some wonderful graduate students at UBC, particularly Will, Jess, Kevin, Pablo, Fiona, Tyler, Matt, Eric O. and my squash buddies Erik, Shane and Trevor. Thanks also to Nadia, Jo, and Adam who have all been great interlocutors, usually during my trips to London, even though they all have strong connections to UBC Geography, and Natalie, Dana, Peter and John who were kind enough to comment on individual chapters and/or excursus. Erin drew my map of Birzeit and the corresponding illustrations at the beginning of each chapter for which I am very grateful. Hussein helped me out towards the end of my project by taking additional photographs of Birzeit. I also want to thank Eric L. for helping me cut, paste, draw on and otherwise ‘produce’ the more technical maps. Last but not least, thanks to Alice for her support and love, whether in person or via iChat.
Chapter 1: Preface, or A User’s Guide

The story of Palestine cannot be told smoothly. Instead, the past, like the present, offers only occurrences and coincidences.\(^4\)

This is my magic and this is why we write and why we write strange apotropaic texts like My Cocaine Museum, made of hundreds of spells, hundreds and thousands of spells, intended to break the catastrophic spell of things, starting with the smashing of vitrines whose sole purpose is to uphold the view that you are you and over there is there and here you are – looking at captured objects, from the outside. But now, no more!\(^5\)

This thesis is my attempt to write Palestine as I encountered it. Not the story of Palestine. Just a story of Palestine. A guide to a place – Birzeit – for which no travel guide (at least to my knowledge) currently exists. A few books written recently by Palestinians have used travel writing as a way of apprehending and comprehending other parts of Palestine\(^6\). Such writing is an act of resistance to the extensive Western travel literature of the Holy Lands, in which ‘what mattered was not the land and its inhabitants as they actually were but the confirmation of the viewer’s or reader’s religious or political beliefs’\(^7\). Like Shehadah, I hope my account bears little resemblance to this tradition. Perhaps such an act of writing seems like an easy thing to do. It has not been. Like many researchers before me, the task of writing the complex, constantly changing lives and spaces of the people and things I encountered was simultaneously a task of not writing about so much of the richly detailed and varied socio-spatial fabric that constitutes Birzeit. This process of writing/not writing – a series of decisions about textual absences and presences – was not merely an academic issue (if such a thing exists). For me, writing and thus re-presenting Palestine, was and is an intensely political moment, given the many historical and contemporary practices of Orientalism in the societies (English, Canadian) in which I have moved. Writing alongside the photographs of Jean Mohr (and thus vacillating between text and image), famed Palestinian scholar Edward Said noted in 1986 that ‘to most people Palestinians are visible principally as fighters, terrorists, and

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\(^5\) Taussig 2004: 315.
\(^6\) e.g. Barghouti 2000, Shehadah 2007.
\(^7\) Shehadah 2007: xiv.
lawless pariahs.” Unfortunately little has changed. As Said’s nephew, Saree Makdisi, notes in 2008:

In far too much media coverage, especially in the United States, the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis ends up being reduced simply to sheer violence, and in particular to those forms of violence that lend themselves in one way or another to televisual spectacle. This has the effect of not only decontextualising the violence on both sides, but also overshadowing, even displacing, the much less visible but equally deadly effects of the Israeli apparatus of bureaucracy and control in the occupied territories, which by its nature does not lend itself to televised images (unless you can imagine a five-hour video sequence of a man standing in line).9

However, I think there are currently also other, subtler processes of capture and objectification, to reference Taussig in the opening quotation. These are perhaps all the more subtle because they are taking place in the academic writing of people largely sympathetic to and supportive of the Palestinian cause. In certain manifestations of this work, Palestine is captured as a geopolitical space, an arena for bureaucrats, borders, diplomats and dispossession10. In more recent work that has moved, epistemologically, from seeing through a geopolitical gaze to experiencing through the worldly body, Palestine is captured as an arena of practices, from urbicide11, to a matrix of control12, to a variety of other architectures of occupation13. Weizman’s text ‘Hollow Land’ may be the perfect emblem for such work. This book is a brilliant and incisive piece of analysis and criticism that unfolds the multiplicity of ways in which the Israeli Occupation of Palestine is performed and performative. Weizman examines the history and modus operandi of various spatial mechanisms that have sustained the regime of occupation and its practices of control. The titular architecture of occupation that he traces through settlement-colonies, bypass roads, border policeman, the Occupation Wall and the work of planners, cartographers and architects, is an investigation of Israeli architecture and its politics, but perhaps more than that a concept for understanding how the Occupation has

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9 Makdisi 2008: 268.
conceived, constructed, organized and mobilized space. His architects are ‘military men, militants, politicians, political and other activists’\textsuperscript{14}. And yet, while Weizman demonstrates very effectively how the forces of the Israeli Occupation has hollowed out this land, his book does exactly the same thing imaginatively and rhetorically. We are presented with a space of Israel\textit{i} Occupation, hollowed out of Palestinian people and processes that have agencies of their own.

Making criticisms of sympathetic work is difficult terrain to negotiate for two interconnected reasons. Firstly, as Said suggests, violence has been an ‘extraordinarily important’ aspect of Palestinian lives since 1948\textsuperscript{15}. The Israeli Occupation, the primary (although certainly not the only) manifestation of this violence in Palestine, has been incredibly influential in the lives and spaces of both Palestinians who live there and those who live elsewhere\textsuperscript{16}. Secondly, the work by Weizman and others is therefore incredibly important when confronting and opposing this on-going violence. However, I want to argue that a broader and more differentiated engagement with Palestine is currently needed.

\textit{[N]}o clear and simple narrative is adequate to the complexity of our experience. Even if it is true that Israel has relentlessly pursued us both inside and outside the Arab world, fighting Palestinian nationalism and even the idea of Palestine without quarter since 1948, our experience in the Arab states are Arab experiences after all, and they stand on their own. Wherever we are, we are dogged by our past, but we have also created new realities and relationships that neither fit simple categories nor conform to previously encountered forms\textsuperscript{17}.

It is these new realities and relationships that Said seeks to address in his book \textit{After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives}, when he confronts Jean Mohr’s photographs of Palestinians living in Palestine - a place he is no longer able to travel to himself – and in other parts of the Arab World. Said’s working solution to the problem of engaging with these diverse realities - a ‘personal rendering of the Palestinians as a dispersed national community’ –

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.: 6.
\textsuperscript{15} Said 1986: 5.
\textsuperscript{16} Makdisi 2008 draws together many reports from human rights’ organizations and journalists that collectively document the effects of less spectacular forms of violence on Palestinians.
\textsuperscript{17} Said 1986: 5.
works because he adopts an ‘alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in the works of social science, in popular fiction’\textsuperscript{18}. This seemingly simple act of presentation is far-reaching precisely because of the historical-geographical contexts in which Said wrote, that either denied or caricatured Palestine. In opposition to such accounts, Said presents and examines ‘new realities and relationships’ as a means of recognizing, and demanding recognition of, the existence of Palestine and Palestinians. As he makes clear, this existence, or rather multiplicity of existences, is one that includes resistance and struggle, but is also much more than these tropes.

In following Said’s footsteps, my goals in this thesis are much more modest. While I am interested in challenging media and social science accounts of Palestine epistemologically, I do not have the personal history or social connections to write as Said does. While he suggests that Palestinians see themselves as ‘at once inside and outside our world’, my relationship with (a small part of) Palestine was and is far more tenuous, a product of a particular body moving through particular spaces in ways often very different from the movements of bodies constructed and/or performed as Palestinian. But even this brief (but ongoing) engagement brought me into contact with some of the ‘new realities and relationships’ that Said alluded to. In particular, I am interested in how things such as homes, families and im/mobilities are both a cause and consequence of some of these realities. As I hope to show, these foci, which emerged during my fieldwork, are central concerns in the daily lives of most Birzeit residents. One consequence of this choice to prioritize these quotidian processes over more spectacular ones is that moments of ‘televisual’ violence and the more overt presences of the Israeli Occupation are placed somewhat in the shadows of my text. While this stems from my desire to affirm a distinctly Palestinian spatial formation in Birzeit, as we shall see by the time we reach the end of the journey, the Israeli Occupation and the many forms of overt violence it causes endure as part of everyday life in Birzeit.

In writing Palestine as I encountered it, I tell a story that is highly personal, although this means that it also involves a number of people and places. It is based in one village,

\textsuperscript{18} Said 1986: 6.
although as we will see that does not preclude us from visiting a variety of other cities and countries. Given the ways in which the West Bank is being carved up into a series of isolated enclaves (or Bantustans)\(^9\), the local scale is becoming increasingly important at the present time. The village of Birzeit is also a very particular place. It is a ‘Christian’ town where 60% of the population are Christian in a place (the West Bank) where 98% of the population are Muslim, (although there are a number of such ‘Christian’ villages around Ramallah), and the presence of the university makes it unlike many other villages nearby (although there are other universities in Palestine, albeit mainly in cities). Many people commented on how different life in the Ramallah region is compared with other Palestinian governorates\(^2\), and while my own brief visits to other regions confirmed this, further comparative work is urgently needed. However, I think there are many connections and similarities between Birzeit and other parts of Palestine too. I attempt to draw these relations of identity and difference out by telling a story that focuses on the different homes that different residents of Birzeit make and how these are related to family practices and different forms of mobility and immobility. One way in which all of these processes are drawn together is precisely the context in which they literally take and make place. If place is therefore a central theme in this thesis, and when I say place I mean Birzeit, it is precisely because it does draw together, conceptually and empirically, sets of relations that move through, across and between a vast array of different spatial and temporal extents. These relations, including those with the Israeli Occupation Forces and their practices, refuse in the strongest terms possible the claim that Palestine is, or will ever be, a hollow land, however hard the Occupation Forces try to produce such a time-space. But even more than that, the placeness of place attunes us to the heterogeneity that exists within Palestine. While many of the processes that I have focused on during our time in Birzeit are far from unique, it is vital to remember that Birzeit is also distinct from other places (Palestinian and otherwise), even as it is caught within dynamic webs of spatial and temporal interrelations with them. In writing about this place, I hope that one more affirmative and empowering relation will be formed, between Birzeit and you.

\(^{20}\) See also Giacaman & Taraki 2006, Taraki 2008.
Placing Palestine

Is this a real place? I asked?
No more, no less than any other. She smiled. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent.21

To tell this story, I have decided to take you, the reader, on a walking tour of the village in my text. The duration of the walking tour, one day, filters eleven months of observations and experiences22. As a guidebook would do, I point out some sites (sights/smells/sounds/feelings) of interest by staging a series of events and meetings with people who I interviewed during my eleven months of research. I have chosen this form of textual representation because it allows me to present Birzeit with a certain amount of intimacy. To aid this effect, I sometimes use the second person to address you – the unknown reader23 – in an effort to draw you into my account. I have also edited the interview transcriptions to create a more fluid dialogue, because I want what was said to not only report but also evoke some of the rich complexity of the lives and spaces that I encountered in Birzeit. I have also relied heavily on the testimonies of my research participants because they provide – or create – an archive of oral histories, which range from hundreds of years ago to the recent past and the present that has already passed. It is precisely these sorts of histories that are absent from the accounts of Palestine that Said alludes to in the quotation above. I present these histories not to construct the history of Birzeit, but rather to examine how such histories inform and create the present that is already past. This collection of histories and memories is my way of approaching some of the complex realities that this particular group of Palestinians face in a place that has consistently been hollowed out, materially and rhetorically. The fact that this testimony

22 These eleven months in Birzeit were split into three periods. During my first trip in summer 2005, which lasted two months, I studied Arabic at the University of Birzeit. My second visit began in January 2006 and ended in August 2006, during which time I conducted formal interviews. I had to leave Palestine twice during this period, since Israel only grants 3 month tourist visas to people visiting the West Bank. I went to Birzeit for a month in October 2007 for the olive harvest and to reconnect with many of my friends and acquaintances there.
23 While unknown, many of these moments do assume unfamiliarity with Birzeit, but I have also assumed that most people will only read guides to places they don’t already know.
has been translated into English – the language of one occupier of Palestine – marks the impossibility of escaping this colonial history. I hope my text at least allows something positive to be gleaned from the ruins (although colonialism is of course currently revivified in Palestine). Running alongside my text are images of some quotidian Birzeit landscapes, which aim to provide an alternate visual record of Palestine to the spectacle of televisual violence. In contrast to my words, for the most part these images studiously avoid capturing individuals to maintain anonymity. One recent history of photography in Birzeit in particular – during the second intifada, many Birzeitis told me about being woken up during the night by the Israeli Occupation Forces and made to hold paper signs with their names on in order to have their photographs taken – persuaded me against imitating such violence.

I present Birzeit in this manner not only to affirm the existence of many different Palestinians (and Palestines), but also to make you, the reader, relate to these lands and people. In an upper level undergraduate methodology class I taught at the University of British Columbia in the Spring 2008, I asked my students to conduct a content analysis of photographs I had taken in Birzeit. Many students found it difficult to construct effective coding categories because my photographs did not conform to their representations of Palestine. This experience underscored the need to draw out the connections between ‘there’ and ‘here’ in addition to presenting Palestine differently. I want these connections to be effective and thus I have tried to write evocatively to emphasize not only the material and imaginative, but also the affective associations that might be possible. You will have to decide to what extent I have succeeded in this regard.

In approaching the challenge issued by Said, there are two other authors who have helped and inspired me to write this thesis. Anthropologist Michael Taussig has written many beautiful books, but there is one in particular – *My Cocaine Museum* – that I read and re-read a number of times over the course of this project. This book takes the reader on a remarkable journey, and in doing so it provides a wonderful evocation of place. Taussig

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24 This concern extended to most of the landscape photographs too, which were taken early on Friday morning (the Muslim holy day), when most people relax at home. Hence very few cars or signs of life can be seen in what are otherwise usually busy parts of town.
presents us with the complexity of a life, which is at once politics, histories, economies, materials and desires, while always ensuring that these terms never collapse in on one another. In writing this thesis I too have tried to script a journey, albeit a far more modest one, and evoke a place in the hope that I too might challenge the view that ‘over there is there and here you are’\(^{25}\). While Palestinians might not be kept behind glass in museums, they are captured and objectified through different methods of display in the media and academic writing. Hence I see strong affinities between Taussig’s project and my own. The second author who has spurred my imagination is the philosopher Alphonso Lingis. I read his essay *Innocence* for the first time a number of years ago now and found it deeply moving\(^{26}\). It took me many years however to understand and appreciate why the story he tells in this essay should be published in a collection of social theory essays. After all, he doesn’t use any references, nor does he refer to any ‘theorists’! Reading Lingis has taught me that it is entirely possible to write about particular things without being particularistic and that writing can be passionate in addition to being descriptive and/or analytical.

One trait which links these two authors together in my estimation is their success in seamlessly fusing together the theoretical and empirical in their accounts. I also want to put the empirical and theoretical in conversation, but in a rather different way. Hence my walking tour of Birzeit has another set of stories woven through it. These excursus engage with academic writing in order to make explicit some of the theoretical concerns that are already in the tour guide. However, I have kept these moments separate from the narrative because I am wary of using my empirical materials as a springboard for, or object of, theorization. Rather, I want to explore how these distinct, albeit intertwined moments might have a conversation with each other in which each is an equal partner. I think that each challenges, complicates and extends the other in interesting ways. However, the excursus can also be thought of as information boxes within the guide – albeit very long ones – that focus in detail on one particular aspect of each site we visit. They are there if you want to read them, but you can also pass over and return to them later or simply ignore them altogether.

\(^{25}\) Taussig 2004: 315. 
\(^{26}\) Lingis 1999
Figure 1. Map of Birzeit. *Illustration courtesy of Erin Green*
Whhmmpff.

There’s no word in the English language or the many dialects of Arabic as far as I know, that can describe the sensation of stepping out into the heat. If it could be written I imagine it would look something like whhmmpff. Whhmmpff is not so much the strength of the sun, although you feel its glare soon enough, but the blanket like sensation of being surrounded by the heat from all directions. It literally knocks you off balance ever so slightly. Not enough to make you stumble, but maybe you’ll sway, imperceptibly. It begins to cloud your head, and you feel your thought processes slowing down, as though thinking actually relied on the turning cogs in your brain, cogs that suddenly can’t cope with this heat. Your body feels like it should be sweating, but even that would require too much exertion at that one particular moment when you step into the heat. You just stand, waiting for the sensation, the whhmmpff, the summer heat in Birzeit, to pass. (I keep saying you, when of course I really mean me since I have no way of knowing who you are).

Whhmmpff is also where this guide to Birzeit - which is really a guide to Palestine and a host of other places too – begins. Not in politics or economics or history, but in the heat, and in particular the heat of the summer. Because before politics and economics and history, in the middle of the summer, your first experience of Palestine is the heat, the whhmmpff that surrounds you. The whhmmpff that knocks you imperceptibly off balance as you step out of the slightly musty interior of the yellow service (communal taxi) that drove you at breakneck speed from the Kalandia checkpoint, and into the centre of Birzeit. The whhmmpff that reminds you, in retrospect, that you are already in the middle of things. Already in the middle of politics and histories and lives all played out in and amongst the whhmmpff of the summer heat. Perhaps you have been inside a metaphorical taxi up until this point, not really paying attention to what you were passing by. But now you are surrounded on all sides by the heat. Fighting just to move somewhere else.
The imperceptible sway caused by the whhmmpff of the heat is also an appropriate place for this guide to begin because this tale – my guide to Birzeit, Palestine – is all about speeds and slownesses. What better way to begin in fact than with the sensation of the imperceptible sway, which soon becomes almost gentle, as you stand there, in the centre of Birzeit for the first time, surrounded by the summer heat and already right in the middle of things. The imperceptible, soon to be gentle sway underscores the movement of all things, even the seemingly static queues that slowed the people you saw passing through the Kalandia checkpoint in the opposite direction, as you travelled from Al Quds (Jerusalem) to Ramallah. As you stand there in the face of the whhmmpff of the heat, slowly losing yourself in the sensation of the soon to be gentle, imperceptible sway, you become mindful (if that is indeed the right word) of all the little speeds and slownesses around you. All the little speeds and slownesses that constitute the various other speeds and slownesses that are people’s lives, homes, histories and economies. You become mindful because you have become aware of your own speeds and slownesses. You have been made aware of them, whether you like it or not, by the whhmmpff of the heat. You are made aware of the speeds and slownesses that brought you here: the money, time(s), forms of transportation, the intellectual endeavours, your own curiosities, some political beliefs, a few enduring friendships, a history you call personal and thus your own.

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Perhaps this isn’t the Palestine you know? Perhaps this Palestine is unfamiliar and unexpected? Although the heat of the summer invades your body as you step into a place that is already in the middle of politics and histories and lives lived, you yourself are also already in the middle of things. This moment isn’t your immaculate conception, just as Palestine was always here before you arrived. Before the service ride from the Kalandia checkpoint, before the checkpoint itself, before the taxi from Ben Gurion Airport, (still called Illid Airport in the West Bank after the village that used to exist there), before the hour(s) of questioning upon landing by immigration officials about why you’re visiting the West Bank, (a process that lasts much longer if your reason happens to be visiting family), before the overnight flight, before you even packed your bags, there were the
newspapers, the (academic) articles and the television pictures, the people your life connected with and the things they said.

If you live in England or Canada or other parts of the world that are commonly referred to as ‘the West’, then the words about Palestine that you read in the newspaper and the images of Palestine you see on the television usually depict this place either through masked men, holding guns and often chanting loudly, or men in suits, shaking hands with other men in suits and sitting behind a coffee table. And everything, EVERYTHING is always to do with Israel. Despite the best efforts of the media and all their ‘experts’, maybe it all seems incomprehensible, confusing… in a word foreign. Perhaps you just leave it there. After all, maybe this isn’t something that concerns you. All the things you see are happening a long way from ‘here’, and probably better left to the experts anyway.

But perhaps you are the sort of person who digs a little deeper. Maybe you’re concerned that your government sends your taxes to these people. Maybe you wonder why your politicians are always involving themselves in these people’s problems – don’t ‘we’ already have enough concerns ‘at home’? Perhaps you have a grandparent or great-grandparent who worked, travelled or even fought there in their youth. Possibly when shopping you noticed that some of the goods you were purchasing came from the region. Maybe the family who live down the street or the kids in your class at school/university look similar to the faces you see on TV and also claim to be Palestinian.

If you’re like me (and I realize few if any of you are), you might even be motivated to read research about Palestine, which is called ‘the literature’ in the academic business. Within this ‘literature’ you’ll read about modern histories of different colonial conquest of Palestine, beginning with the Ottomans, then the British, Jordanians and most recently the Jewish Zionists, who changed their name to Israelis after 1948. The more recent histories always revolve around dates – 1948 and 1967, lines on maps (particularly a green one) and more numbers in the form of UN resolutions (194 and 242). The people we meet in these texts invariably are the same ones we see in grey suits on television, and much is written about their diplomatic and geo-strategic acumen. Things like ‘policide’,
‘urbicide’ and ‘ethnocracy’ are discussed, and Palestine is referred to by all sorts of names: the Occupied Territories, the Disputed Territories, Areas A, B and C, even Matrix of Control. While some people use two-dimensional maps, others argue that even these are inadequate given the ‘politics of verticality’. Sometimes you wonder whether the people in Palestine exist for any other reason than to be the object of all these processes and events, which includes a great deal of academic writing.

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Back in the middle of Birzeit there are no men in suits, although a few are wearing a jacket and slacks. The lines that were so easy to discern when looking at maps of Palestine are no longer easy to distinguish, although residents may be well aware of them. And everyone knows what you mean when you refer to Palestine. But surrounded by the whmmppff of the heat, these things don’t seem important at this precise moment. Instead, you stand there, very still but attentive to the almost imperceptible sway of your body in the heat. You pay attention to all the little speeds and slownesses of your body; the tingle underneath your skin as your sweat glands start to lactate in an effort to cool you down; the heaviness of your breath as your lungs exhale carbon dioxide; the gradual increase in your heart rate; the weight of your clothes, which feel a little heavier that usual.

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What can we do when faced with such speeds and slowness - in Palestine of all places! Is it possible to write a geography of such a geography? There are few clues ‘within’ the current discipline (if such spatial demarcation makes any sense), where people frequently write about affects, but their work rarely moves me. I’d much rather follow anthropologists like Michael Taussig on the journeys he takes, through mud, swamps, water and humidity. His description of ‘the languor that dissolves Being into a sticky wet puddle’ offers a far better preparation for fieldwork than any methodology textbook I’ve ever read. ‘So much gold’, he says referencing both Hollywood films and

27 Taussig 2004: 32.
anthropological studies set in the tropics, ‘and so little heat’\textsuperscript{28}. Maybe if he visited Palestine he might be tempted to say ‘so much politics…’

So I set out to mimic Taussig, and move with the village of Birzeit, Palestine, trying to discern its speeds and slownesses, even as other relations of force are always coming into play and changing those that move me. And since I’m more interested in heat than gold, I want to follow the homes that are made in and through Birzeit. Home is something that is at once as concrete as stones and breeze blocs and at the same time as abstract as emotions and a set of social relationships. Like the heat, home exceeds politics, economics and history, even as it is thoroughly interwoven with each of these sets of relations. Home is something that it seems like we can all relate to, even as we do so in vastly different ways. Meghan Morris once wrote that home is a ‘neither origin nor destination’ but rather ‘an effort to organize a “limited space” that is never sealed in, and so it is not an enclosure but a way of going outside’\textsuperscript{29}. Home as means of working with speeds and slownesses. The fun in following home is discovering what and where this ‘outside’ becomes. In Birzeit, following this homely movement allowed me to learn some things about family, place and even movement itself (or lots of different movements to be precise). It seemed important to follow these movements precisely because they were not like the images I had seen on television or read about in ‘the literature’. Another Palestine.

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After a time, your body starts to adjust. Your light shirt and loose fitting trousers don’t feel quite so heavy as they did a minute ago. It’s almost as though the blanket of heat that is the effect of the whhmpff starts to empower you and charge you like a battery. The glare of the sun starts to will you to move, like a car’s headlights telling you to get out of the way. And after all, you can’t just stand there all day, in the middle of things, in the centre of Birzeit. It would look really strange (and perhaps like me you’ll already stand

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. 37.
\textsuperscript{29} Morris 1996: 386.
out). Besides, everyone else seems to be moving along. You feel the speeds of the cars as they pass you by, the slow, rolling steps of people walking towards the area where the taxis and services come to fleeting stops, and the occasional hint of a breeze blowing in from the coast that everyone can see but only ‘foreigners’ can visit. It’s time for this guide to begin in earnest, so pick up your baggage – or extend the handle if you were smart enough to bring a suitcase with wheels – and let’s go.
Chapter 3. Birzeit’s Old City: A History of Place

Figure 2. The Old City. *Illustration courtesy of Erin Green*

Where shall we begin this guide to Birzeit, Palestine, which is also a guide to many other places? In true guidebook fashion, let’s begin our tour in the past, with a history of this place, so that you feel like you know Birzeit. It seems slightly strange that books which want to encourage people to visit somewhere and get to know that place themselves (that is, form their own set of relations with it), would first dictate what they should know in advance (and subsequently what they should see and do there). Nevertheless, it also provides a sense of comfort, something to cling on to in the face of all the new sensual and cognitive experiences. And since I want you to become better acquainted with Birzeit, I’m going to stick with this convention and offer some historical context to this place. However, rather than provide a narrative or laundry list of historical dates and accompanying facts, why don’t we begin by walking into part of the town that has
endured, or perhaps evolved, into the present. We’ll head towards the Old City (*medina qadima*), where the history of (this) place seems to sit right before our very eyes. A history that is both enduring in abandoned stone buildings and created in other such buildings that have been recently renovated, and of course the stories told about all of these buildings.

Our first task is to navigate the traffic that seems to be coming at us from all directions. Maybe you are slightly surprised to encounter so much traffic in what seems like such a small village, but the main road running through Birzeit is currently also the primary artery for Palestine traffic travelling between Ramallah and Nablus. At this point in the middle of town, where the *services* stop, a number of smaller side roads converge, hence the particularly frenzied scene before us. Despite the fact that everyone seems intent on getting where they want to go as quickly as possible with little regard for other road users, after a short while it becomes clear that an unspoken system of sorts is in place, that keeps everyone moving while avoiding collisions (usually). In fact, as you become more accustomed to the effects of the sun and the heat that surrounds you, you’ll notice that you are in fact not the only person standing in the centre of town. A few private taxi drivers stand chatting as they wait for clientele. Next to their parked cars is the bakery, which people pop in and out of with some speed. On the opposite side of the road, a rather tired looking young man clutching a folder is waiving at *services* heading towards Ramallah. A group of three young women are stood a few metres further on, also waiting for transport. In the area where some *services* have stopped, stands a large telegraph pole with a large circular base, on which a sculpted marble slab stands with the face of Yasser Arafat engraved on it, and the words ‘The sea will not die. The guardian of our food.’

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30 Thanks to Marwan Hassan for this translation. He also suggested a less literal translation might be ‘Immortal like the sea, guardian of the future’.
A couple of guys wearing old t-shirts and jeans covered in dust, sit on a raised step nearby, seemingly content just to stare at what or whoever passes, which in this case is us. Standing in the sun and heat staring at other people, some of whom stare back, you will also begin to notice that people who wish to cross the street wait for a momentary gap in the traffic, and then just begin to walk across. Like other road users, drivers avoid them by either slowing down or driving around them if there is enough space. Taking their lead, we watch a service speed by and then begin to walk towards the bakery on the other side of the street, breaking into a quick trot when the car coming in the other direction doesn’t seem to be slowing down. As we walk past the bakery, a man is grabbing pita loaves from a large wooden crate and tossing them into plastic bags five at a time with the sort of speed and skill that only comes from repetition. When the number of pitas the customer desires is reached, the plastic bag is tied with equal alacrity and exchanged for a few coins.
We head along the side road nearest the bakery, trying as much as possible to walk beneath the shop awnings, which provide some shelter from the sun. We pass one of the many convenience stores in Birzeit, known locally as ‘supermarkets’, although they are all the size of a corner store, and some are smaller still. Further on there are a couple of barbers, a mobile phone store and a door leading to a small Shia court, where the local cleric, among other things, issues certificates outlining inheritance to all of Birzeit’s residents, both Christian and Muslim. A large building with an all glass exterior on the ground floor offers photographic and reproduction services, although no one seems to need them at this moment in time. A side street leads off up the hill and as we continue towards the Old City, houses replace the shops. Between these houses, which are unevenly spaced, you can see the village of Jifna further down the valley. Standing above Jifna on the far side of the valley is the Jalazone Refugee Camp, and beyond that the Israeli settlement-colony of Beit El. Here is Palestine as spectacle, on view for everyone to see. Refugee Camp and Settlement-Colony, side by side. In fact all that divides them is a road (which Palestinians are forbidden to use). This is Palestine at its most recognizable to foreigners; the Palestine of CNN and the BBC. The groups of international students who arrive every semester to take Arabic courses at the University – the most regular group of tourists to visit Birzeit – will have this very vista pointed out to them, and many will take pictures.
But just as we begin to get lost in this (Kodak) moment and take yet another snap shot, a voice cries out and jolts us out of our reverie.

‘Keef’ak Chris? Iffadulu!’

Mazen, a man who you would be sure was in his sixties if you never met his youngest daughter who is only ten years old, slouches in a chair that has been placed in the small amount of shade created by the shadow of his house. A coffee cup hangs precariously from his left hand, and despite the heat he wears a loose cardigan over his grey shirt. He stands when we walk towards him and greets us with a slightly limp shake of the hand. I introduce you and then Mazen, motioning to the front door, welcomes us into his house once more. Mazen’s welcome – *iffadulu* – is a common refrain and courtesy, and I am
unsure if his reception is genuinely enthusiastic. Mazen has an inexpressive countenance, but the strength of the sun is enough to guide us inside. We climb the six flights of stairs to reach his apartment on the second floor [third floor in UK], and enter his spacious living room, which in contrast to the faded paint of the staircases is bright.

‘Ahlan wa sahlan’ (You are very welcome). ‘How are you? Please sit down.’ We sit on the decorative sofas at one end of the room that seem to be reserved for receiving guests. These sofas, we will discover, are a common feature of the houses here in Palestine. At the other end of this large sitting room is a slightly well worn three piece suite, on which a ten year old girl, Mazen’s aforementioned daughter, sits watching television. While Mazen walks over to his daughter and asks her to turn the volume down, we have a short amount of time to glance at the furniture, including the glass table in front of us, the bookcase against the wall and the computer that is just visible through a doorway. As he returns to us and sits down, his second eldest daughter (he has four and also a son) appears from the kitchen carrying a tray of glasses filled with orange juice. The speed at which these drinks have been produced is somewhat amazing and the debt we owe to the barely seen female labour that produced them less than obvious. We drain our glasses, quenching the thirst generated in the heat of the morning. Mazen enquires about our health and also the health of our respective families, even though he has certainly never met mine. I enquire after his family and then explain that I’m attempting to give you a tour of Birzeit. This evokes a brief smile from Mazen, and he points out how strange it is for a foreigner to give a tour of Birzeit. I agree with him, but suggest that at least we’ve come to meet the right person. For Mazen is not just a shop owner, but also a writer and local historian, and a well respected and often consulted one at that. Flattering him a little more, I ask him to share his expertise with us.

Mazen sits back slightly in his chair, interlocks his fingers in front of him and begins.

Muslims lived in Birzeit before the Christians, on Khirbay [a large hill, whose name means ‘ruins’]. There were the ruins of a mosque on Khirbay and also the Islamic cemetery. The University of Birzeit conducted an archeological dig, and they also found ovens and Crusader ruins.
However, there was a quarrel. Some people refused to pay tax, which was one hundred and fifty jars of olive oil. So the Kase leader summoned a force and kicked the Birzeitis out. Most of them went to a place called Masara Al Nobernei. Up till now, there are a lot of families originally from Birzeit that still live in Masara Al Nobernei. Some other people intervened and tried to help them return to their land. The Kase leader accepted this, but they had to live at the bottom of the mountain, because when they were living at the top they had a good place to defend.

It was at this point, Mazen continues, that people started to live in what is now called the Old City. Even though I have heard this story before, I am a little confused at this point, so I interrupt to ask who the Kase are? The Kase, he tells us, are a tribe who many centuries ago lived in what is now Saudi Arabia.
Yemenites migrated to the North after the destruction of the dam of Maghreb, and they quarrelled with the Saudi people, and soon there were fights between the Kase of Saudi Arabia and the people of Yemen.

Mazen then relates how the Kase and Yemen tribes would both migrate and continue to fight with each other all over what is now considered the Arab world.

In Palestine during the Ottoman period, there were always quarrels between the Kase and the Yemen, right up until the British Mandate. So they wanted to separate the Kase and Yemen tribes in Palestine. The Kase tribes came to Birzeit from Aein Ariik and the Yemen tribes went to Aein Ariik from Birzeit. And Christians came here with the Muslims who are Kase. Christian Kase and Muslim Kase began to live together in Birzeit in 1730.

At this point, Mazen begins to talk about the Old City. Each *hamula* [extended family or clan, although it is usually translated as family] he says, used to live in its own quarter, and each quarter only had one entrance in case the *hamula* had to defend itself against any attackers.

The oldest quarter is called the ‘Dark Quarter’. If you go there, you’ll see the old Marmaluke place called Al Khan [The Small Inn]. Al Khan was built from the stones of the Roman ruin. There was the Church of Jacob in this area, and they used stones from this too. The Marmalukes built the Khan. Sometimes you see rocks in other parts of the quarter that also came from the Roman ruins or the ruins of the church. Then there is the Omri Mosque, which was built north of Al Khan. They call it the Omri Mosque because Omar Kattab, when he invaded Al Quds [Jerusalem], didn’t pray inside the church. He prayed beside it. So like all mosques that are built next to a church, it’s called Omri Mosque.

To begin with, there were four quarters, one for each *hamula*. There were three Christian *hamulas* - Abdullah, Im Eid and M’Sellem - and one Muslim *hamula* - Abu Awwad.

He then explains how as *hamulas* got larger, they split into smaller families, using the example of the M’Sellem family, which split to form the Nasser household, the Kassis household and the M’Sellem household.

If you go and see these quarters and how they were built, if the door was here, in the back would be stairs, in order to escape if there is an attack on your house and
you can no longer defend it. You can run to another quarter and let people there help you. The houses of M'Sellem, Kassis and Nasser formed three parts [gesturing the shape of a triangle with his hands].

The Abdullah hamula and the Um Eid hamula also split up. The Um Eid was in the Dark Quarter, but they needed more space so they went to another quarter called Kalieh. But it’s part of the same hamula.

I note that most people no longer live in the Old City, and wonder when this depopulation began to occur.

They left after the English came [1918], because after the Kase and Yemen moved, it was more secure. Also, if there were any problems the [British] police, army, or government would assist and defend you. That’s when people started to have their own name. At that time all the people built their houses away from the Old City. After 1941, when they opened the road to Ramallah, all the building began to be in this area because of this road.

Mazen then quickly explains how Birzeitis used to travel through Jifna, Jalazone and Al-Beirah to reach Ramallah. However, after the revolution between 1936 and 1939 [referred to as the Arab Revolt in English language publications], the British Occupation wanted easy access to Birzeit and the villages around in order to control them.

From 1936 until 1939 the centre of the revolution for the whole of Palestine was in Birzeit, because it was easy to defend. They could see the British soldiers coming along the road to Nablus. They could see through Jifna, and they would escape in the hills. You could see the troops coming from any place in Birzeit. So it’s easy to defend and also to escape.

Mazen then somewhat contradicts himself – chronologically – by talking about his own family.

We left the Old City, a long time ago, in 1934. We left the house to my uncle and built a small room here, beside us. I was born in 1947 in this room. Jihad Al-Mukhadis [Holy Jihad] were where the scouts are now.

I used to have ten siblings, living in one room. Then my brothers travelled to Kuwait to work and in ’60, built the first two floors of this building. In ’83 I built the next floor, and I built the top floor in ’94.
As Mazen relates the movements of his family around the nations of the Arab World, it’s clear that the history of Birzeit he tells is a deeply personal one, wrapped up in the history of his family and their work-related migration. The house that we sit in is a physical manifestation of family; of the months and years spent travelling and working to build it; its very structure ensuring that each brother has a floor to live on while remaining close to his siblings. Both history and home make a very audible claim to the land we are on; not so much ‘this is my place’ as ‘this is our place, the place of my family, my hamula’.

I ask Mazen how many people live in the village now.

Just 2600 Birzeiti people. Now there are six hamulas: six big families, two Muslim and four Christian. There are 900 Muslims and 1700 Christians. In addition to this, there are more than 500 people who live in Birzeit that work in the university and the municipality and in manufacturing. And there are 500 refugees, and some people came from Hebron, shepherds.

He also estimates that 1000 students live in Birzeit during the two main semesters, which run from September through to the end of May, with almost no break between. I’m tempted to interrupt once more to ask how he is able to give such precise figures – although since every Palestinian over sixteen is forced to carry an identity card by both the Palestinian Authorities and the Israeli Occupation Forces enumeration is perhaps not as difficult as you might think – but before I do Mazen returns to the history of the village once more.

There were twenty-seven families in 1596, only 130 people. In 1880, there were 1800 people. A French travel writer called Girard wrote in his book, that in 1863, there were 1800. In 1914, the First World War began, and cholera came to this country. Half of the population died from cholera. And many people migrated to the US, because after 1908, the Turkish government made new laws for Christians. Before that, Christians used to pay a small amount of money so they wouldn’t have to fight in the army. There was someone in Turkey who said, this is our land, and the war is to defend our land. It’s not Christian land or Muslim land, it’s our land, so both have to fight. So they came to Birzeit in 1910 to conscript the young men for the army and so the young men ran away to Yaffa. They thought anyone who went to the army would die, so they ran away. They
didn’t have a destination. They got on a ship at Yaffa and they didn’t know where it was going, to Europe, North America, South America, they didn’t know. After the cholera epidemic and after these people had migrated, the population of Birzeit was just 700.

His recourse to history not only gives context to the contemporary place in which we find ourselves, but also stands as testament to the strength of its endurance. Despite disease, conscription, Ottoman, British and Israeli occupations, Birzeit persists. And Birzeit today can no longer just be placed as a dot on the map slightly above a larger dot marked Ramallah, if indeed it ever could. I ask Mazen how many Birzeitis live abroad now? He gives a slight shrug of his shoulders and replies that there are 2600 people in North America alone, which doesn’t include all those living in Jordan - like his two brothers - and other Arab states. As we will see throughout this tour, the dispersion of these people and the social networks that are maintained between them make a mockery of cartographic efforts that rely solely on something as lifeless and static as lines and points.

Mazen’s 10 year old daughter has obviously got impatient at the length of our visit, and has turned the volume of the TV up, provoking Mazen to leave his chair and switch the TV off. Disgruntled at her treatment, his daughter joins her slightly older brother in the adjoining room, who is amusing himself (and subsequently his younger sister) on the computer. Mazen’s second oldest daughter returns again, this time with glasses of Coca Cola. Slightly flustered by his youngest daughter’s behaviour and worried it might reflect on him as a host, Mazen apologises for the interruption, and suggests we might be better off visiting the Old City. The time we’ve spent sitting in his cool apartment has diminished both the impact and the memory of the heat, which hits us with full force once more as we leave his apartment and set off back down the road.
After passing more houses we come to the large and ostentatious Roman Catholic Church – known locally as Deir Latin (‘Latin Church’) – at a cross section in the road, and then a little further down the road we arrive at one of the ‘entrances’ to the Old City. Although it is just a side street now, the closeness of the buildings on one side of the street to those on the other side creates an almost arch-like portal to this ‘other’ part of town that is nevertheless part of, and in fact the very ‘origins’ of this place. An origin that we now know has its own (pre)history and directions of movement. An origin that didn’t even exist when Birzeit used to be a place located on the hill now called Khirbay.

As we follow Mazen down the street he points out one house where you can still see the soil-based mortar that used to hold together the stones that made the walls that made domiciles, at least until the arrival of concrete. The stones have been carefully arranged so that they fit together like a jigsaw, despite each having a unique shape and angle. The
slow, careful work necessary to build these structures lies there, right before your eyes, although it takes some work of the imagination to summon it forth. In fact, Mazen says, the soil mortar is used mainly to keep the wind from whistling between the small cracks. The way in which the stones are placed together ensures they can withstand most forces of nature just by their very structure. The colour of the stones indicates just how much of nature’s force they have endured. While there are still a few that are sandy white and possess an air of freshness, the dirty grey sheen of most tell a history of weather and time not readily visible to our eyes or audible to our ears.

Figure 7 Street in Old City. Photograph by author

Most of the houses we pass however are made from stones cut to a uniform size and volume. Even those still made with stones found lying around are now held together by concrete. Mazen says a friend of his who is an engineer once explained to him that concrete became widely used during the 1940s, when a variety was imported that was
strong enough to build flat roofs. Prior to that the soil mortar would be used to build walls and domed roofs inherited from the Ottoman empire, which would be held together by a single central stone known as the ‘living stone’. Despite the strength of concrete, few of the houses we pass endure in the condition they once were in. Many of the glass windows have been smashed leaving just the odd shard of glass and the ubiquitous iron bars. Few doors fill the portals to these buildings, although occasionally a rusting steel panel will bar entrance unless you have the key. Weeds and plants creep up and down walls, and with the aid of grasses, cover the courtyards of these domiciles that used to house entire families.

A similar sight greets us when we reach the entrance to Dar Ali [the house of Mazen’s family]. Foliage covers most of the ground and there is a pile of stones that was once a wall but has not stood the test of time. Mazen re-tells the story of how his father had
grown up with his brothers and sisters in their two room house here, before moving out and building his one room house right next to the building where Mazen currently lives. His father was not the only person to flee the crowded and cramped surroundings of the Old City, and it has become apparent as we have walked through the Old City that most of these houses are dilapidated and unused now. Mazen points out the lower floor of the building where his family would keep their livestock and then gestures up the somewhat unstable stairs to indicate where his family used to live.

After this short stop we return to the narrow streets and continue walking towards the southeast. As we reach the outskirts of ‘the old town’, we pass a courtyard with a clothesline drying someone’s linens, where the stonework has been conspicuously renovated with concrete. Its newness and smooth finish compared with the more jagged edges of the older stone buildings has something of a shine about it. A bit further on another courtyard is conspicuously clean, devoid of any of the foliage that filled those we had seen earlier on. Mazen tells us that most of the people living in the Old City now are students renting apartments or former refugees who have been able to buy these old buildings from their former owners who no longer cared about them, or could not afford to renovate them on their own. A few young children rush in and out of an entrance in the distance, as if to confirm that there are still a few people living their lives in this part of town.

As we pass the entrance to Dar Khalil, we see Hamid, a man in his mid-twenties recently graduated from Birzeit University, scribbling some notes on a piece of paper. Mazen tells Hamid about my tour, laughing once more at the thought that I could possibly offer a tour of Birzeit. Hamid smiles, greets us warmly, and then waving in the air the paper that is actually a plan of the Old City, tells us he is working for an NGO - one of the many in Palestine – which has been locally created in order to preserve the Old City. The group is called Rozana – the name for the outlet in the roof of an old home that allows for air circulation. The project began, says Hamid who has obviously delivered this story more than once before, after Riwaq, an NGO that works to protect and develop the architectural heritage of Palestine, conducted an assessment of the Old City’s potential for restoration.
However, the Mayor of Birzeit wanted to take the project one step further and develop and revitalize the area. The owners of the homes were invited to be part of the Rozana’s board of directors, and the municipality also has a seat. The University of Birzeit has also come on board recently after beginning a project with a sister university in England designed to create sustainable renewal of old towns.

Reaching the pinnacle of his enthusiasm, Hamid spreads out the plan that he has been jotting notes on, but instead of disused houses, rubble and foliage there are cafes, cultural centres, a museum and street festivals, all of which will be accompanied by tourist shekels or so Hamid implies. The only problem is of course the money, says Hamid with a smile on his face. With an economy in ruins since the start of the second intifada, living in Palestine is very expensive these days, and living the past-in-the-present even more so. Hamid is adamant that these circumstances will not stop them. It’s quite an amazing thing
to witness a vision of the future anchored firmly in the past-in-the-present. There is as much contrast between the map and the buildings we’re standing among, as between the bright colours of the plan and the faded greys of the stones. It takes quite a leap of the imagination to move away from these grey stones, which have endured for so long and reach the brightly coloured and neatly planned future of ‘the old town’ we can see before us right now. Hamid believes though.

Hamid’s belief, the bright colours of the map and, more than anything else, Mazen’s richly textured history of this place affirm the importance of the past-in-the-present as a source of geographical belonging, grounded in the families that used to live here (and some that still do) and the houses that remain in varying states of repair. In Arabic, the word *baladi* can mean both my village and my place. Amongst the stones and stories of the Old City we can begin to find Birzeit as *balad*, a place that is still very much alive through the renovations of villagers and refugees, the plans of Rozana and the histories embodied in houses. This is particularly important here, given the ways in which the language of conquest is quite literally written over so many of the hills and in so many different corners of Palestine\(^{31}\). However, as the dilapidation and proliferation of grass and weeds suggest, there are also other presents being forged that are not as encumbered to these pasts, so let’s leave this past-in-the-present and explore other parts of contemporary Birzeit. Taking the time to thank both Hamid who returns to his jottings, and Mazen who walks back towards his house, we leave the Old City.

\(^{31}\) Shehadeh 2007: 114.
Excursus: Palestine?

The setting for this thesis is Birzeit, Palestine. While I have found it easy to define Birzeit, a village just north of Ramallah, defining Palestine is not such an easy task. I think it is useful to begin with historical accounts of Palestine, most of which begin after the turn of the twentieth century, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of the First World War, and Great Britain received a mandate in 1920 to administer the territory of Palestine, which from 1921 onwards encompassed the lands between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan, stretching to, but not including, the Golan Heights (which became part of the French mandate) in the North and the Egyptian border in the South.

Figure 10. Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1. *Map courtesy of Derek Gregory, The Colonial Present, Blackwell, 2004 (Figure 5.1)*

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I draw primarily on Gregory 2004 for this concise rendering of history. More detailed and nuanced accounts can be found in Khalidi 1997, Kimmerling & Midgal 2003, Pappe 2004.
Jewish Zionist migration, which had begun at the end of the previous century, increased rapidly during the mandate after the British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour declared that the British government favoured the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. After the Arab revolution began in 1936 against Zionist immigration and the British occupation forces, Lord Peel suggested the abolition of the mandate and the partition of Palestine to form an Arab state on 80% of the land and a separate Jewish state on the remaining 20% of the land, a plan which the Arab High Commission rejected.
Eleven years later in 1947, at the end of the Second World War and the Shoah (Nazi holocaust), the newly created United Nations proposed in resolution 181 a partition plan...
that gave Zionists 56% of the land, even though only 35% of the population of Mandatory Palestine was Jewish.

Figure 12. UN Partition Plan, 1947. Map courtesy of Derek Gregory, The Colonial Present, Blackwell, 2004 (Figure 5.3)
Civil war ensued, and after May 14th 1948 when David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the foundation of the state of Israel, the armies of Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon invaded. At end of the conflict in 1949, over 700,000 Palestinians had been displaced from their homes and villages in what they termed the *Nakba* (disaster).

Most of them fled as a direct result of Israeli military action, much of it before the Arab armies intervened; there were massacres of Palestinian villages, forced expulsions, and wholesale intimidation of the civilian population. Many people sought refuge in Gaza and the West Bank, while others fled to Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Wherever the refugees found themselves, however, they found no sign of any Palestinian state. After an armistice had been concluded with Egypt and Jordan, establishing a series of so-called “Green Lines,” the coastal plain around Gaza was administered by Egypt, and East Jerusalem and the West Bank were administered by Jordan.\(^33\)

Israel, which now controlled 78% of the former Mandatory Palestine, set about erasing the Palestinian presence from their newly established state through the transfer of land to Jewish ownership, the destruction of over 400 Palestinian villages and concomitant construction of Jewish settlements, and renaming Arab places with Hebrew or biblical names.

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\(^{33}\) Gregory 2004: 84-6. For a detailed account constructed from the Zionist archive, see Morris 2004.
In 1967, Israel further expanded the territory it controlled during the so-called six-day war. Pre-emptive Israeli strikes against Egypt and Syria captured the Sinai Peninsula and...
Gaza in the South and the Golan Heights in the North. After Jordan had declared war in response to Israel’s aggression, the Israeli military drove the Jordanian forces from Jerusalem and the West Bank, so that the state of Israel now controlled 100% of Mandatory Palestine, or what Israelis called Eretz Israel, Greater Israel. Although the UN Security Council passed Resolution 242 in November 1967, which demanded Israel withdraw from the territories captured during the conflict, the Sinai Peninsula was the only territory returned to its former sovereign, and this was in 1979. The West Bank and Gaza Strip have remained under Israeli occupation since this time, an occupation that includes the sustained theft of Palestinian land largely through the proliferation of illegal Jewish settlement-colonies and infrastructure, a bureaucracy of ID cards, travel permits and closures designed to control and subjugate the Palestinian population and the near constant use of military force to administer collective punishments such as house demolitions, widespread closures, the detention of political prisoners, and unlawful killings. The first Palestinian intifada (uprising), a non-violent anti-colonial revolt in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that began in 1987, brought the plight of the Palestinians to the attention of the world and legitimized the Palestinians as a political entity. The resultant Oslo accords, established in 1993 and signed by a Palestinian leadership in exile that knew little of what was happening in Occupied Territories, established a Palestinian Authority as powerless façade for continued Israeli control, and a territorial framework that allowed Israel to increase its colonization of the West Bank.
Figure 14. The West Bank after Oslo, circa.1995. *Map courtesy of Derek Gregory, The Colonial Present, Blackwell, 2004* (Figure 5.6)
The injustices of this so-called peace process ultimately resulted in the second, Al Aqsa intifada, a much more militarized colonial revolt that was crushed by the far greater military might of Israel.

Given such a history, what does the word Palestine signify now? Does it, for instance, refer to a nation, a state, a nation-state? Is Palestine inherently spatial, and what temporalities (past, present, future) does it emerge from and in turn create?

The far less ambiguous term Palestinians describes a group of people, so one way to understand Palestine would be as a nation to these people. Certainly many of the components of banal nationalism now exist in the West Bank and Gaza. There are Palestinian newspapers, policeman, a Palestinian school system and curriculum, and plenty of Palestinian flags.

I watched Palestinian television programs for the first time here. Throughout these last years we would name the things that – as refugees in other people’s countries — we did not have: Palestinian airlines, Palestinian police, Palestinian television, Palestinian government.

However, while Palestinians imagine themselves as a national community of people with a distinct identity, since 1948 this community is no longer bounded territorially. This is one of Anderson’s measures of nationhood. Another attribute a nation should possess, but Palestine doesn’t as I discuss later, is sovereignty over the lands claimed as their own. Indeed, for authors such as Said, it is precisely the rupture of 1948 and the condition of exile that resulted that now defines Palestine.

Wherever we Palestinians are, we are not in our Palestine, which no longer exists.

Palestinian communities have been disastrously depleted or destroyed, where much of their life is undocumented, where they themselves are uncounted.

34 Billig 1995.
35 Barghouti 2000: 121.
37 Said 1986: 11.
Palestine is exile, dispossession, the inaccurate memories of one place slipping into vague memories of another, a confused recovery of general wares, passive presences scattered around in the Arab environment.\textsuperscript{39}

And yet despite this seemingly clear definition of what Palestine is, Said nevertheless also invokes Palestine as somewhere that can be found on a map.

Palestine is a small place. It is also incredibly crowded with the traces and claims of peoples… Cover a map of Palestine with the legends, insignia, icons and routes of all the people who have lived there, and you will have no more space left for terrain.\textsuperscript{40}

We think of Palestine not as ‘an extensive Palestinian state’ but as a small, extremely congested piece of land from which we have been pushed. Every effort we make to retain our Palestinian identity is also an effort to get back on the map, the help those $\textit{fil-dakhil}$ [Palestinians living ‘inside’ Palestine] to keep their precarious foothold.\textsuperscript{41}

The second way in which we can understand Palestine is therefore as land. However, tying Palestine to a particular land is not a simple matter.

Everything about Arab Palestine is rewritten. Turn it into something extremely suspect, show that it is connected to terrorism, or ridicule it and push it away derisively. There are no Arab Palestinians. The land did not exist as Palestine, and perhaps the people did not exist either. ‘We Palestinians’ have almost imperceptibly become ‘they,’ a very doubtful lot.\textsuperscript{42}

My homeland? The West Bank and Gaza? The Occupied Territories? The Areas? Judea and Samaria? The Autonomous Government? Israel? Palestine? Is there any other country in the world that so perplexes you with its names? Last time I was here and things were clear. Now I am ambiguous and vague. Everything is ambiguous and vague.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. 21.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 30.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. 61-2.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. 62.  
\textsuperscript{42} Said 1986: 75.  
\textsuperscript{43} Barghouti 2000: 13.
It is important to note, that this questionable existence did not occur by accident. Rather, the malaise and ambiguity so eloquently expressed by Barghouti above, is the result of very specific discursive work.

This is not an arbitrary inventory; Israel has redistributed the splinters of Palestine into a series of abstract categories located in a purely topological imaginary. These redistributions – or “spacings,” since they have performative force – possess such consistency and systematicity that they amount to a concerted project to fold the sacralization of the land of Israel – and particularly of “Judea” and “Samaria” – into the reduction of the Palestinian people to so many *hominès sacri*.  

However, despite these efforts to make Palestine abstract and anachronistic, Palestine’s erasure by such methods has not been possible. Palestine still has a material existence, embodied in the lives of those living on lands that they themselves call Palestine, and by its nature this existence is simultaneously a means of resisting processes of material and discursive erasure. Their sedimented presences – and I am also thinking about all the buildings in Birzeit’s Old City - testify to their continuous inhabitation of the land, and their conversations refer to Palestine as matter-of-factly as I would use the terms England or Canada. In the geography textbooks that Dr. Othman Sharkas, Head of Geography at the University of Birzeit, writes for Palestinian school children, Palestine-as-land is clearly outlined as a territory, which, like other places, has a physical and social geography. However, if Palestine refers to land, why does Mourid Barghouti, born near Ramallah, make the following comment as he is entering the West Bank.

When Palestine is no longer a chain worn with an evening dress, an ornament or a memory or a golden Qur’an, when we walk on Palestinian dust, and wipe it off our shirt collars and off our shoes, hurrying to conduct our daily affairs – our passing, normal, boring affairs – when we grumble about the heat in Palestine and the dullness of staying there too long, then we will really have come close to it.

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44 Gregory 2004: 135. See also figure 6.10 The abstract spaces of Palestine, on p137.
45 Elmusa 2005 queers the phrase ‘facts on the ground’ to refer to Palestinians living on the lands that compromised Mandatory Palestine
Initially, life in Birzeit would seem to fulfill Barghouti’s criteria for getting close to Palestine. There is plenty of dust and ordinary affairs. A female student I interviewed even talked about taking some soil with her when she visits relatives in America, so that they have a piece of the land with them. This speaks to the power of materially belonging somewhere, and the ability to make this claim. However, Barghouti quite deliberately writes *Palestinian* dust. In my reading, the use of the adjective here implies that Barghouti is not only concerned with belonging, but also with sovereignty over the land. The ability to own the dust and call it one’s own is what is at stake, and walking on and bottling it for friends does not necessarily imply full ownership.

Much as been written about Palestinian sovereignty (or lack thereof) over the lands of Palestine since the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created in 1993. Barghouti uses the term ‘cartoon control’\(^\text{47}\) to describe the current state of Palestine self-determination, while Weizman describes the PA as a ‘system of prosthetic sovereignty’\(^\text{48}\).

What Palestinians have gotten is a series of municipal responsibilities in Bantustans controlled from the outside by Israel. What Israel has secured is official consent to the Israeli occupation, which continues in a streamlined and more economical form.\(^\text{49}\)

\(^{47}\) Barghouti 2000: 125.
\(^{48}\) Weizman 2007: 155.
An existing Palestinian Authority with an elected ‘government’ and ‘parliament’ disguises a reality of social and political fragmentation and total chaos within
Palestinian society. Government control was lost to armed organizations (and the conflicts between them) and local gangs on the one hand and to international and humanitarian organizations on the other, with the effective services and provisions bypassing the mechanisms and bureaucracy of the Palestinian Authority altogether.\(^{50}\)

Neither this [Palestinian Authority] ID nor even the new Palestinian passport that the Palestinian Authority has started to issue after the Oslo Agreement will solve our problems at borders. The states of the world acknowledge the Palestinian ID and the Palestinian passport on paper only. But at the border, in airports, they tell the holder of these papers: “You have to be pre-approved by security.” And this pre-approval we will never obtain.\(^{51}\)

The question of sovereignty implies the further question of Palestine as state. While symbols of statehood exist, including some abilities to define a population to be governed through statistics, they lack performative force and are therefore ineffective. If sovereignty in the form of power over a defined territory and the ability to control (‘secure’) a population are hallmarks of modern states\(^{52}\), we might conclude that Palestine is not (at this moment in time) a state, or at least not recognizable as one by any existing criteria. This is not a novel argument. In 2005 a group of scholars discussed the future of Palestine in a special issue of the *Arab World Geographer*\(^ {53}\). Jarbawi sardonically refers to ‘a Palestinian autonomy that may be called a “state” or, if it wishes, even an “empire”’\(^ {54}\). Yiftachel describes the current situation as ‘creeping apartheid’\(^ {55}\). Other contributors also use the language of Apartheid (isolated cantons, ghettos, Bantustans) as descriptors of Palestine\(^ {56}\). It is worth noting that these terms describe a political system that is simultaneously a spatial formation. These terms also describe a Palestine in the temporal present. However, when discussing Palestine in the future, the language of states (re)appears. Some authors envision Palestine as a state alongside the state of Israel\(^ {57}\), while others foresee a single state that encompasses Israel and

\(^{50}\) Weizman 2007: 158.  
\(^{52}\) Foucault 2007  
\(^{53}\) Arab World Geographer 2005.  
\(^{54}\) Jarbawi 2005  
\(^{55}\) Yiftachel 2005  
Palestine\textsuperscript{58}, (and in one case Jordan too\textsuperscript{59}). However, rather than adjudicate the merits of these future proposals as two of the commentators did\textsuperscript{60}, I want to think about the act of envisioning (a future) Palestine itself. Judith Butler asks some provocative questions about states that I think can be brought to bear on this discussion.

What state are we in that we ask these questions about global states? And which states do we mean? States are loci of power, but the state is not all that there is of power. The state is not always the nation-state. We have, for instance, non-national states, and we have security states that actively contest the national basis of the state. So already the term state can be dissociated from the term “nation” and the two can be cobbled together through a hyphen, but what work does the hyphen do? Does the hyphen finesse the relation that needs to be explained? Does it mark a certain soldering that has taken place historically? Does it suggest a fallibility at the heart of the relation?

The state we are in when we ask this question may or may not have to do with the state we are in. So: how do we understand those sets of conditions and dispositions that account for the “state we are in” (which could, after all, be a state of mind) from the “state” we are in when and if we hold rights of citizenship or when the state functions as the provisional domicile for our work? If we pause for a moment on the meaning of “states” as the “conditions in which we find ourselves,” then it seems we reference the moment of writing itself or perhaps even a certain condition of being upset, out of sorts: what kind of state are we in when we start to think about the state?\textsuperscript{61}

Butler’s discussion of mental states in the context of global states is an important reminder that lines on maps, and the political-juridical-bureaucratic regimes they ostensibly demarcate, have significant material and affective effects on individual and social bodies within those borders. In the context of Palestine, the lack of a recognizable state formation has led to numerous experiences of being ‘out of sorts’. Barghouti, for example, trying to sort through the many names by which his birth place is known, writes ‘[n]ow I am ambiguous and vague. Everything is ambiguous and vague’\textsuperscript{62}. Said (whose biography was called \textit{Out of Place}, a more geographical rendering of being out of sorts), makes multiple and seemingly contradictory uses of the word Palestine. Butler helps us to

\textsuperscript{59} Elmusa 2005.
\textsuperscript{60} Falah 2005, O’ Tuathail 2005.
\textsuperscript{61} Butler & Spivak 2007: 1-3.
\textsuperscript{62} Barghouti 2000: 13.
understand that these ‘certain conditions of being’ are one of the consequences of the geopolitical practices that have created an ambiguous Palestinian ‘state’, or a Palestinian entity that has state-like features. The confused state(s) of mind may in fact be the clearest indicator that Palestine is not (at present) a recognizable state.

However, Butler’s reminder that there are all kinds of states, which may or may not have a relation with the term nation, encourages me to think about Palestine as a state, albeit one which I don’t yet have the language to describe. This line of thinking is reinforced by the critique that she develops later in the conversation of the ways in which sovereignty has been fused to power in contemporary critical theory.

It is one thing to trace the logic of how constitutionalism secures the rights of the sovereign to suspect constitutional protections, but it is quite another to install this logic as the exclusive way in which to apprehend the workings of contemporary power. If our attention is captured by the lure of the arbitrary decisionism of the sovereign, then we risk inscribing that logic as necessary and forgetting what prompted this inquiry to begin with: the massive problem of statelessness and the demand to find post-national forms of political opposition that might begin to address the problem with some efficacy.

I think this critique is important because it allows us to articulate the ways in which Palestinians still have some power over the land of Palestine through their fleshy embodied presences and sense of belonging, even in the face of ‘prosthetic sovereignty’ (or cartoon control) and the Israeli occupation. It might be argued that such forms of power (or resistance to other forms of power) are largely ineffective given the increasing dispossession of Palestine. However, this does not make them irrelevant, and given the persistence of Palestinian claims and the growing international grassroots support even this opinion may ultimately be inaccurate. Butler’s refocusing on the political problem of statelessness is also highly relevant in a Palestinian context, even as the discussions in the Arab World Geographer discussed above suggest that Palestine may challenge the

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64 I am thinking particularly of the ICJ ruling against the Occupation Wall (ICJ 2004) and the growing boycott, sanctions and divestment movement (BIG 2008), which includes organizations such as the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW 2008).
post-national character of the opposition that Butler is trying to build. To explore this point further we need to examine Butler’s reading of Arendt.

Butler notes that Arendt’s understanding of statelessness is directly tied to the formation of nation-states, and she cites the property laws passed in Israel between 1948 and 1953 as one way in which the creation of a nation-state is directly responsible for the simultaneous creation of statelessness. Butler then notes that although Arendt critiques statelessness, she does not call for statehood as an alternative. In fact, the title of Arendt’s essay is ‘the end of the nation-state’.

She [Arendt] is declaring it, in some sense. Other words come to take its place, sometimes “federation” and sometimes “polity”. The declaring does not make it so, but it is part of the discursive process of beginning something new; it is an inducement, an incitation, a solicitation. There is some wager over whether or not her speech will be efficacious.

What I want to suggest here is that the word Palestine can also be a performative utterance. While Palestine may be both a historical reference, and an ambiguous marker of both present fragmented territory and exile from that territory, I think it can also serve as ‘an inducement, an incitation, a solicitation’ for the future. Indeed, in the pages of the Arab World Geographer this is precisely how it functions. Barghouti also notes that ‘[t]he Occupation forced us to remain with the old. That is its crime. It did not deprive us of the clay ovens of yesterday, but of the mystery of what we would invent tomorrow’.

In the face of discursive efforts to make Palestine anachronistic, declaring the name Palestine as a (different) future space is a form of discursive resistance.

Two further questions then present themselves. The first is exactly what is meant by the discursive declaration of Palestine, or which Palestine is being declared. As the discussion in the Arab World Geographer demonstrates, there is little consensus on Palestine as future space. Rather than adding to this (geopolitical) debate, I seek to affirm

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65 Butler & Spivak 2007: 54-5.
66 Ibid. 55.
67 Ibid.
68 Barghouti 2000: 69.
Palestine as it is lived through the everyday lives of individuals and families, even as these quotidian lives run up against or are interrupted by agents of states. This approach demands that, regardless of the ‘solution’ proposed, there must be reparative justice that addresses the dispossession of Palestine land, the displacement of Palestinian peoples and other crimes of Occupation since 1948. As recently noted by Benvenisti, if current economic inequality is not addressed, the one or two state debate is simply a moot argument.

The second issue is the question of the wager. Will such an utterance (or utterances) be effective? The answer, of course, cannot be known. However, given the multiple efforts to resist the erasure of Palestinian futures, materially through the lives of Palestinians and their supporters living in Palestine, legally through the work of international governance organizations (UN), Human Rights Organizations and other Non Governmental Organizations, and discursively through the work of many groups and individuals there are many reasons to be optimistic.

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69 These are issues that are largely ignored by the contributors to the *Arab World Geographer*, although see Falah 2005.

70 Benvenisti 2008. He points to a GDP per capita ratio between Palestinians and Israelis of 1:10 in the West Bank and 1:20 in the Gaza Strip, as well as the enormous inequality in the use of natural resources (land, water).
Now that we have had a chance to explore Birzeit’s past-in-the-present and gain some sense of the history of this place as it is told by some of those who live here, I want to visit another part of Birzeit to show you how far the village has travelled since the days of living in two room buildings, surrounded by one’s entire family (hamula). This change is not just a metaphorical one though. As the walk we are about to take will demonstrate, Birzeit has moved quite a distance away from its ‘origins’ in ‘the old city’, (which of course had moved away from its ‘origins’ on khirbay in turn).

We set off back up the hill, passing Deir Latin and a restaurant that remains shuttered until nightfall, when a small group of shabab (young men) will sit outside imbibing argilehs (water pipes). As they do so they will watch the people passing by, greeting their friends, staring at young women and glaring at anyone they don’t know. As we continue up the road a couple of services speed pass. One slams to a halt suddenly a few hundred metres further on, deposits a passenger and then speeds off once more. Like the passenger who has just alighted, we walk mainly on the road itself, even though there are
pavements for pedestrians. Slightly further up the hill is the rather inauspicious entrance to the old university campus. The rusting gate, now chained up, hides what was once a bustling centre of academia. Many of the stories of the first intifada – protest marches, confrontations with the Occupation forces, and visits by foreign diplomats – revolve around the building with its now broken windows that hides behind these gates. The university, like the village, has moved away from this part of town. Unlike the persistence of village life in this area though, the old campus premises are thoroughly deserted and suffering from neglect. A few buildings further on, the broken windows of the women’s hostel suggest it is in a similar condition to the old campus buildings. However, a hand-painted sign on the gate advertises a music camp, and a number of children rushing around or huddled in small groups can be seen through the iron railings that demarcate the compound.

Figure 17. Pile of construction materials. Photograph by author
After avoiding a huge pile of sand and some other materials that are being used to construct a two-storey building, we come to the Atara roundabout, where two newsagents face each other on opposite sides of the street. Although at first you might think the competition for customers would be fierce, they are in fact owned by different branches of the same family (hamula). As the road curves ahead of us, a sign with arrows pointing both left and right indicates the presence of ‘Birzeit Camp’. However, there is little evidence of any camp, aside from one narrow alley that leads between the shell of a recently constructed building and on the other side of the street a house that has corrugated iron sheeting for a roof, held in place by a number of large stones. Nor, should you go to the trouble of checking the records of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), would you find any camp listed in the village of Birzeit. Closer scrutiny of the sign – written in both English and Arabic – reveals that the “Refugees Affairs Department of the Palestinian (sic) Liberation Organization” has determined this land to be “Birzeit Camp”. Like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the camp still exists, but its presence in Birzeit is now minimal.71

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71 The camp was established in 1948, prior to formal establishment of the nearby Jalazeone Refugee Camp by UNRWA (see chapter 7), on land largely owned by churches in Birzeit. Many former residents now rent or have purchased land elsewhere in Birzeit. A few have begun to build on site, despite stories that the Orthodox Church would like to reclaim the land to build a new church.
After the camp, we reach the main North-South road running through Birzeit, which takes us to Ramallah in one direction and Nablus in the other. This was the same road we travelled along when we came to Birzeit this morning. However, at the present time our journey dictates that we cross over this thoroughfare to another side street. Since there is a speed bump outside Mattam Birzeit (Birzeit Restaurant) that forces the traffic to slow down, avoiding the cars, services, buses and lorries is not as challenging here as further down the road. On the corner of the side street is a butcher’s shop, where a slightly unsettling stream of blood mixed with water (or should that be the other way around) is gently meandering down the hillside. Behind the slightly cloudy window of the butcher’s shop, the probable cause of the blood flow – a dismembered carcass of what might have been a sheep or goat – hangs with the hope of enticing customers in. The stream of blood and water soon drains into the scrub on the side of the road, and the only obstacle
remaining is the occasional piece of sheep shit, small enough to get between the grooves of your trainers.

We don’t have to walk far down the hill before our destination comes into view. Standing ostentatiously overlooking the valley below, the Spanish Apartments like most of the housing in this area have been built very recently. The Apartments consist of five buildings, each with six floors staggered to follow the contours of the hillside. The way in which they jut out of the hillside and the red tiles on the roof are somewhat reminiscent of Israeli colony-settlements…but before this thought has a chance to germinate we’re distracted by a small group of young children pedalling their bicycles as hard as they can along the road. A few of the older ones call out ‘Hi Chris. How are you?’ in heavily accented English, but don’t wait for a response as they rush by. Each apartment has a small balcony, and across some of these clothes, bed sheets and towels have been hung
on lines or over the railings to dry. As we approach the apartments, Rae’d, a young man in his thirties, pulls up in his slightly worse-for-wear Fiat Punto.

‘Chris! Keef’ak? Iffadulu!’

Rae’d wears glasses and a slight mischievous smile on his face. We follow Rae’d down a short flight of stone stairs and into his ground floor suite, welcoming the opportunity to sit down on his sofa and rest our feet. Rae’d introduces his wife Majd, who leaves and then shortly returns carrying a tray of drinks, which she offers to us. The large room we are sat in contains a number of decorative objects, including a large antique crossbow, a vase, and two large paintings on the far wall, one of horses, the other showing a traditional Palestinian wedding. I ask Rae’d if the decorations are family heirlooms, but he says he just bought them to make the house look good. He follows this with an assertion that he likes to look at them, made slightly comic by the fact that at this precise moment he is far more enthralled by the large television that seems to be the focal point for the three-piece suite on which we are sitting. I glance briefly at the TV, currently tuned into the news on Al Jazeera, before my gaze shifts to the wooden dining table and chairs and then beyond to the kitchen and a small corridor leading to the bedrooms. Almost absent-mindedly, Rae’d mentions ‘I have Adda Arabia [traditional Bedouin style furnishings], but I only bring them out in winter’.

Majd returns from the kitchen where she has deposited the tea-tray, and sits down on another sofa. As she does, there is a knock at the door. Rae’d gets up, and greets his friend Waleed, another resident of the Spanish Apartments who has come for a social visit. Majd gets up once more to fetch another cup filled with coffee, while we are all introduced. In contrast to Rae’d who is clean-shaven, well groomed and neatly dressed, Waleed is bearded and his shirt hangs over his slightly rotund belt. His heavy build makes him look older than he is; his chronological age being thirty. Rae’d remarks that Waleed looks slightly worn out, and Waleed explains he has just done the shopping. He then turns to us and explains that he has three kids, one of whom is too young to walk, and he lives on the top floor of these apartments.
When it was just my wife and I it wasn’t a problem. We could just go and buy something from the supermarket and take it home. But now you can’t carry shopping and your kids at the same time. It’s very hard.

Waleed adds that there was a promise to build an elevator, but Rae’d’s snorted laugh confirms the implication that this promise never materialized. I explain to them that we’re doing a tour of Birzeit, and give a brief summary of what Mazen told and showed us, which draws appreciative nods. Waleed mentions that his family has a small apartment behind the Nadi Birzeit (Birzeit Club), so I asked how he ended up living here in the Spanish Apartments. ‘Father Emile told me they were going to build a building and he told me to put a deposit down so we could get a place’. Without prompting he continues

The land belonged to the church but the money for the building came from Spain, from the taxes, from the people of Spain. Father William came and told us about the work and what he was doing. He told us that he and Father Emile went to Spain and told them we need a building because everyone is leaving to the USA or Canada, and aren’t coming back. They told him and Father Emile, if he has the land they can build the building.

The apartments were inhabitable by 2000, and according to Rae’d, all but one of the sixty flats are currently occupied. Rae’d takes up Waleed’s narrative to expand upon it.

No one can start a house, afford to pay a high rent and they can’t live together with their family. There is no woman who would accept living with ten family members. She wants her privacy.

‘No woman wants to get married and live with her mother-in-law’ interjects Majd, eliciting laughter from everyone in the room. In Birzeit there is a strong and widely held social expectation that young men should build a house, get married and then have children.

Waleed butts in once more to reinforce his point.
The flats were also built because the church wanted to keep young Christian men in Palestine. Before I got married I was thinking about leaving the country and going to Canada or America, but now I’m married and I’ve found a place to live it’s good.

I ask him whether any one can live in the flats since the Catholic Church was responsible for their development? ‘The flats can only be owned by Christians, although they don’t have to be Catholic. There are also Protestant and Orthodox churches in Birzeit’. No one in the room is quite sure what percentage of people living in Birzeit are Christian, but the general consensus is that they make up 60% of the village’s population, and they are all agreed that Christians are definitely in the majority here. This of course is in stark contrast to the Christian population within the West Bank as a whole, which the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimates to be 2% of the total population.

I begin to wonder why it is that Christians are leaving Palestine? Then I’m reminded of something Khaled, a friend of mine who also lives in these apartments, once said.

Finances are a very big problem here, because of the lack of jobs and if you get a job it won’t last for long. Just a few families have jobs in certain institutions and companies. They can afford to live. Anyone who lives, or works in a private business doesn’t have anything left. A friend of ours is a very good architect, but he can’t find jobs or business all the time. He is supported by his wife. She works as a teacher in a school. Because of this they are able to live, but otherwise it would be a very big deal. Because of this, a lot of young people are leaving the country, because they say, ‘this is one life, we should lead it the proper way’. We have a lot of our problems. We’ve seen a lot of the Israeli Occupation, and we’ve also suffered through the corruption of the PA. A lot of youngsters say there is no future for such a country.

Returning to my present company, I try to compensate for my absentmindedness by asking them why they think more Christian families have left Palestine? Waleed suggests that Christians find it easier to live in North America since their religion allows them to acculturate better once there. Majd adds that the history of Christian migration during the Ottoman Empire makes modern day migration easier via family reunification visas. Rae’d picks up on this point and talks about a friend of his, Khader, who is now studying
in Ohio. Khader was apparently able to do so because his grandmother was born in the States, after his great-grandparents migrated. Even though she returned to Birzeit, she was able to transfer her citizenship privileges and most importantly her passport to her son who in turn passed it on to his son. I also recall what Mazen told us about the Ottoman conscription at the turn of the previous century, and the image of Birzeitis fleeing to the Yaffa and jumping on the first ship to leave, regardless of where it was going. Mazen suggested that there were as many Birzeitis living in North America as there were in the village, which makes me think, what makes some people leave and others stay?

So I ask Rae’d, Majd and Waleed how they feel about living in these apartments. [All have jobs in Ramallah and Al Quds and spend their days there]. Rae’d and Majd immediately complain about the children. They have none of their own yet, but living on the ground floor they are constantly bothered by other people’s offspring. ‘There’s no privacy here, because every morning we’re woken up by our neighbours yelling at their kids’ moans Majd. ‘Sometimes we try to sleep during the day but we can’t because of the kids upstairs’. Rae’d chimes in: ‘They also drop litter around our flat, and when you tell them to stop, they just drop more’. Waleed, who has three children, adds slightly defensively, ‘We need a garden and more things for the kids to do. We need more space for the cars’. Trying to change the subject, he mentions the lack of lifts in a six-floor apartment building once more. He also has a bone to pick with the building manager at the diocese.

A while ago the water was entering my flat from the stairs, and I went to tell him that we needed maintenance. He didn’t get back to us. He told us to get it fixed and then bring the bill and then he would pay. And this was five years ago, and they still haven’t paid me back. We fixed it and gave them the bill, but they haven’t paid.

Rae’d then lets on that he never wanted to move here in the first place.

In the beginning I didn’t want to come here, because I was used to living with my family and I love my father and mother. But we came here and lived here.
Although I’ve lived here a while, I still don’t do much in the house. If I need to do anything I just call my brother Sami. If I need the water fixed, hello Sami. If I need the car, hello Sami. If the door won’t open or if it won’t shut [I call my brother]. I’m still very close to them.

Majd says that they have a house with Rae’d’s family, but his older brother is currently living in it, until he gets married. ‘A house is better than living in a building’ Rae’d says bluntly. The fact that he uses the word building rather than apartment or home speaks volumes about his sense of (not) belonging in the Spanish Apartments. Waleed concurs: ‘if I had twenty thousand dollars, I could build a small place just for myself, with no neighbours, away from everyone. Maybe I could build in the mountains.’

When I ask about how the residents have overcome the problems they mention Waleed talks about the creation of apartment committees and a central committee, which co-
ordinate things such as the bills for communal utilities, and the equitable division of water during the summer when the supply frequently runs out. The committee has apparently also designated a specified outdoors play-time for young children – six till eight pm – although, Rae’d smirks, this is adhered to with varying levels of compliance. Majd points to the wall outside their apartment, which they built to prevent young children from playing outside their flat. ‘We can’t wait to leave’. When I ask Waleed if he would like to return to live with his family, he is less forthcoming, saying something about a lack of money and space. ‘What can you do in these times’ he asks plaintively? ‘You have to live!’

As he says this, Waleed moves to get up, and thanking Rae’d and Majd for the coffee, leaves. We have also been here for some time now, and before we exhaust our welcome I think it is time for us to leave too. Thanking Rae’d and Majd we leave the Spanish Apartments and walk towards the main road. At the end of the Apartments is a shop with two older men sat outside, and despite only walking a few metres, I think it might be a good idea to pop in and buy a bottle of water. The shop, although a ‘supermarket’ in name, only has a few aisles, although the shelves are well stocked. The shop owner is sat behind the counter with one hand propping up his cheek, peering over a thin pair of glasses as we approach with bottled water in hand. He straightens up, runs the bottle under a scanner – uncommon in many of the Birzeit supermarkets – which makes an electronic beeping sound as the item registers, and then asks us for two shekels in English. He thanks us as we pay and then enquires about what we are doing. We explain and his response – ‘sounds exciting’ – seems sarcastic, until he complains that he is stuck in the shop babysitting other people’s children when he’d rather be running his computer business. As we leave he sinks back into his chair and resumes his original pose.

As we leave, we greet the two men sat in the shade provide by the shop’s roof, who return our greeting and also ask us what we are doing. After explaining we are on a village tour, one of the men, who introduces himself as Abu Wassam and tells us he has lived here since he was born, starts to give his own introduction to the village.
What distinguishes Birzeit from other places is the good social relations between Christians and Muslims. The amount of Christians and Muslims is almost equal. Their peaceful coexistence is difficult for other people to understand. We are happy together and sad together. We are one people. We visit each other a lot. A lot of the youth live with each other as brothers. You don’t feel like there’s any difference between Muslim and Christian and you don’t know which is which. Long ago, socially, life in Birzeit, everyone lived together. If you lived in the Old City of Birzeit, you would live in quarters as a big family. Since many women in the past used to die during childbirth, the children needed to be fed. So if my mum’s neighbour died during childbirth, she would breast-feed the child. So it’s famous in Birzeit to say that I was breast fed by this woman. So I have Christian brothers and Muslim brothers, because we drank the same milk.

As he is talking, Abu Wassam gets up to fetch two more plastic chairs, and we sit down without interrupting him.

Life in Birzeit was, and still is, one of the perfect ways to live inside Palestine, because the people have and still have this bond with one another. I always say that Birzeit is special. Birzeit is one of the villages in which schooling began earlier. Birzeit School began in 1921. Sitt Nabeeha, began the school in Birzeit and worked to make it big and better. She started with an elementary class, and increased it. It was a boarding school, and this school graduated a lot of important people in Palestine and Jordan, politicians and businessmen. Because Birzeit was an education centre for the whole of Palestine. In the old days it wasn’t easy for families to pay for their children’s education, so only the big families sent their children. That’s why many important people were educated at Birzeit. It turned from a college to a university in ’64-5, for first and second year students. And they say Birzeit University was a branch for AUB [American University of Beirut], and they use it when AUB was full. It stayed this way until ’67. We had students here from Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, from the Jmail family, from Lebanon, Jordan. They stayed in the university hostel or they rented accommodation around the university. And then it became this university, the one you came and studied in, and the University of Birzeit is one of the best universities in the Middle East.

And we also have public schools and UN schools. And also we have private schools, such as the school at the Latin Church. We also had an elementary school for the Orthodox Church, but there isn’t one now. And then they opened the Amir Hassan School. So you do elementary schooling at these schools, and then you go to Amir Hassan for the secondary schooling, which was the first school you could finish High School in the whole Birzeit area. Before the Amir Hassan School [was built], those who wanted to continue secondary school went to Ramallah High School for art subjects and for science, they went to El Beira, to a school called Hashme’a. Girls went to Ramallah High School for arts, and El Beira High
School for sciences. So all the students who finish elementary here had to go to Ramallah for High School.

We briefly interject to tell Abu Wassam that we have visited the Old City, which sets him off again.

Of course life was hard for people in the old days, but you didn’t have all these expenses. People in the village used to help other people building their houses. Let’s say someone wants to build. Regardless of whether he’s Muslim or Christian, all the people in the village will be prepared to build his house. They used to make a huge hole and they used to put calcium in it. Then they filled it with soil to make the [substance used for building before cement]. Then they set the hole on fire, and then afterwards they would dig the calcium out and use it to build the house. They used to put calcium from the rocks, with ashes and soil, and a material called [huwar]. So all the people got together and help each other to build houses.

After they finished building we used to have a huge feast for the whole village. They would sit and eat lunch. They would sing and have fun, just because they built the house. When you have a wedding the preparation for it took one week. Everyday and every night singing, from Monday to Sunday for Christians and from Saturday to Friday for Muslims. So every night they would light a huge bonfire. When people used to come to these celebrations, they would bring the wood for the bonfire already alight, so the whole area would be lit up. Of course, in the middle of the area they would build a massive bonfire.

Look at what’s happening now. Land is being sold freely, because this generation does not care about land, because they didn’t work on it. In the past, this was the home’s only income. The father and the children and his wife use to play and plant and these things. But nowadays, you have markets all over Birzeit where people can buy vegetables. But before you didn’t have any grocery stores or markets in Birzeit. You used to plant and harvest, and you would have to keep some crops for the winter. For example, if you couldn’t find any tomatoes, in the past they would dry some tomatoes and when you wanted to make salad, you would add oil, water and a little bread, and some salt. That would be it. It was very delicious. In two minutes, we would annihilate a large bowl of this salad. There are ten things that every home should have: wheat, foul, hummus, oil, sugar, addis, hay, onions, garlic, teen. If someone has these ten things, they would be a king at that time. If you wanted to eat meat, for instance, you would have to kill a chicken, even if this chicken produces an egg everyday. If you found these ten things in someone’s house, they would live on them, and they wouldn’t have to ask for anything else. You could make cous cous, spaghetti from wheat. We use to make rice noodle with our hands. They could cook it in winter with rice. Today is not as nice as the old days. This strong relationship has become weaker.
In the old days we used to need each other, and we were not shy to ask for each other’s help. That’s how we lived. Sometimes we didn’t have any bread, or we finished it, so we went to the neighbour to get some bread. And when your mum bakes some, you would take some to your neighbour. Sometimes it was salt, sometimes coffee, sometimes rice. You wouldn’t be embarrassed at all. This made the bond between people stronger. We all needed each other. Nowadays, life is a bit easier and more comfortable, because you have everything around you. You can buy food. You don’t have to plant it or store it. There was no TV. If people want to spend the night, the TV talks to them and they don’t talk to each other. You too are just sitting and listening to the TV.

The other man sat next to Abu Wassam, who has been silent up to this point, chimes in.

In the past, we were living in two rooms, and now we live in four rooms. There wasn’t electricity or running water, and now we have electricity and everything else. When I was a kid, we played under the olive trees and made our own toys. But now my kids play on the computer and don’t know the games we used to play. So I always remember the old times and the stuff I used to do. I miss it a lot, but you have to cope with the new improvements and innovations. I always say, imagine if someone died in the 60s or 70’s and came back to life now. You could give him your mobile and tell him to call someone, and he would be surprised. He wouldn’t believe it, or you could tell them that a fax would reach America.

Abu Wassam, shaking his head slightly, tells us that he currently owns a building on the Nablus Road, but he is building a new house in *El Majj*. 
I want to guarantee my children’s future. In the coming years, the biggest problem for young people, in the future, is the house. If you guarantee a house for your children’s families, they will live comfortably, because they won’t have to pay rent every month. Their monthly rent will be used for other purposes.

Abu Wassam tells us his new house is almost complete on the outside, but the inside is still bare, with only a few electrical wires hanging out of the walls like creepers from a vine. He also points to the Spanish Apartments and says he is thinking about putting some red tiles of the roof. Apparently, Ibrahim, the name of the man currently sat next to him, knows a lot about these tiles. Ibrahim begins to speak once again.

Look at the buildings in Birzeit. Look at the hostel, it has red tiles, and the club also has red bricks. This was from the British time. When the British were here, these were the materials used in building. Cement was a new invention, so they didn’t use it in the 30s. But today the tiles are only for decoration. So the house that has red bricks is a bit extravagant, like a villa, because it’s not a basic
building material. If you want to find red bricks, you’ll find them above the entrance door, or on part of the roof, not all of the roof. Cement is much better.

When I ask why the older buildings have red tiles, he tells us that when the British occupied Palestine, they didn’t have the cement that is now used to cover roofs, which is a certain type of ‘strong’ cement, so they use the tiles instead.

People started using cement after the Second World War, but some people were using it in the thirties and forties. If you see the old buildings in the old city, they don’t use cement for building and the walls are wide, unlike these days. They used to (material containing soil, sheed, water) and stone for the roofs. In the middle they would put a stone, which holds the whole roof together. It’s very expensive, and won’t hold many floors like the modern houses. Now in buildings, we have to consider earthquakes and wind and snow, because these days we have many floors. In the past, when you had two floors it was like a castle for the owner. If you want 3, 4, 5, 6 floors now, it depends on the soil, wind, it’s all
related. Nowadays everything is taken into consideration. In the past there was just a builder, who would know his job and that would be it.

The shade, which has been slowly disappearing as our conversation has gone on, has now totally vanished. Feeling the heat once more, we say goodbye and continue on our way.
Excursus: One or Several Occupations?

The Spanish Apartments in Birzeit fascinate me for a number of reasons. They certainly weren’t what I expected to see in a village of just four thousand people. My expectations had undoubtedly been shaped by discourses around a vernacular Palestinian architecture: ‘old, soft-coloured, traditional houses… gentle domes blending naturally with the rolling hills surrounding them’\textsuperscript{72}. As Amiry & Tamari note though, visitors to Palestine are frequently struck by the contrast between the old and the new.

Scattered around this old village core are large, individual houses, recently built from smoothly-cut limestone blocks. These modern structures are cluttered by showy multi-faceted walls built in a haphazard order, their flat roofs often crowned by television antennae resembling the Eiffel Tower, symbols of new affluence. Neither the building style nor the ‘aesthetics’ of these new houses reflect any clear link with the past\textsuperscript{73}.

While I do not agree with the conservatism of this analysis, the description nevertheless resonates with my own encounter with Birzeit. The Spanish Apartments, jutting out from the hillside on which they are built, at first glance seem to make little attempt aesthetically to link with the past. And what’s more, the feature that really grabbed my attention – the red roof tiles – invoked a rather disturbing comparison. Instead of mimicking past Palestinian architectural styles, they made the Spanish Apartments look far more like houses in Israeli settlement-colonies! Weizman argues that red tiles are an emblematic feature of settlement-colony architecture, which both respond to a middle class suburban aesthetic while also serving a security function. In fact this distinctive architectural practice has been mandated in Israeli settlement-colonies since the 1980s by the Israeli military.

This common architectural practice was formalized when, in the 1980s, the military recommended that settlement councils impose the construction of red-tiled roofs as part of the settlement planning bylaw. Besides allowing the settlers

\textsuperscript{72} Amiry & Tamari 1989: 7.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
to orient themselves within the landscape, the roofs aid the military to better navigate and identify ‘friend from foe’, from both ground and air\textsuperscript{74}. Weizman also notes that during the post-Oslo years – roughly 1994 to 2000 – there was a real-estate boom in Palestine as wealthy Palestinian returnees and diaspora invested in property. He argues that red tiled roofs began to be seen in Palestinian villages and cities as these investors reproduced the same urban and architectural typologies as the settlement-colonies, while ‘similarly responding to the anxieties that drive the middle class everywhere to seek privacy and security away from the congested and potentially dangerous city centres\textsuperscript{75}. Indeed the Spanish Apartments were certainly not the only buildings in Birzeit to have red roof tiles. The sheer size of these dwellings and the relative affluence that must have been necessary to construct them – money that was in many cases earned abroad such as the tale of two brothers in chapter 5 – would seem to give credence to the process of middle class enclavisation and the links to wealthy diaspora that Weizman examines\textsuperscript{76}.

As I discovered though, this is one occasion that proves the maxim: looks can be deceiving. I was fascinated by the mimicry these red roof tiles enacted and wanted to know why Palestinians would copy the architectural style of the colonizer? Birzeit is such as Ibrahim suggested these tiles were a luxury decoration, which people with money to burn could afford to place on their roof. This affluence is even more significant when you take into consideration that building a sloped roof prevents construction of further floors in the future, which is the cheapest way to build new living space. In a context where land theft by the occupier and a rapidly increasing population make land both incredibly scarce and, consequentially, expensive, many families now build multi-storey buildings to house the next generation. While this keeps families in close proximity just as the hamula courtyard system in the Old City did, multi-storey buildings often only house one

\textsuperscript{74} Weizman 2007: 127.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} The presence of a six-storey apartment in a village is also an indicator of the increasingly limited space available to Palestinians on which they can build. See Shehadah 2007: 102.
ayla (nuclear family), and hence are one of the ways in which family is gradually becoming increasingly nuclearized\textsuperscript{77}.

However, Ibrahim also suggests that the origins of red tiled roofs in Palestine were far more specific – historically and geographically - than a preference for a general globalized suburban aesthetic, (which is not to discount the influence of other aesthetic styles in this context). In fact, situating these tiles solely within the ongoing Israeli Occupation and the Oslo years overlooks their much earlier arrival in Palestine and subsequent history during the British Occupation (1917-48). As Ibrahim explains, red tiles were bought from the British in the 1930s and were used to protect roofs before being replaced in the 1940s and 50s by what he called ‘strong’ cement, that was suitable for roofing. Birzeit Hostel and the Nadi Birzeit (Birzeit Club), the two examples he points to, are both long-standing buildings.

Hence in stark contrast to Amiry & Tamari’s claim that new buildings such as the Spanish Apartments do not reflect any link to the past, these red tiles embody a history of Birzeit that stretches back before the Nakba and the Israeli Occupation. These tiles also dispute Weizman’s abbreviated history of Palestinian homes. While red tiles may embody a colonial mimicry, this process is far more complex. While there are a number of accounts about the ways in which the Israeli Occupation Forces have selectively applied law from the mandatory era\textsuperscript{78}, I argue that the Spanish Apartments materially embody a British Occupational presence that continues to subtend both Palestinian and Israeli lives and buildings in the present.

Perversely enough, these roots in colonial history allow for certain claims to be made in opposition to the current Israeli Occupation. While only built around the turn of the millennium, the Spanish Apartments nevertheless materialize broader Palestinian claims to the continuous inhabitation of the land, claims made audible by Ibrahim, whose history

\textsuperscript{77} See Taraki 2008.
\textsuperscript{78} See for example Forman & Kedar 2004, Weizman 2007, Lein & Weizman 2002. It is of course significant to the argument that I am developing here that both Ottoman and Jordanian land laws were and continue to be used by the Israeli Occupation Forces.
of place is subtly different from Mazen’s (chapter 3). Ibrahim’s history is not only constructed through the buildings that have endured (like Mazen’s) but also through the continuities and differences between past and present that the red tiles embody. Abu Wassam’s narrative is similar, tracing the history of education and the changing inter-family dynamics in the village across his and his children’s generations. While these are claims to a spatial belonging, they are made in the face of a range of processes of erasure that have been enacted by the Israeli Occupation since 1948\(^{79}\). Lagerquist encounters one such erasure when he visits a dispossessed Palestinian village in the north of Israel that has now been materially and discursively refigured as a Club Med resort, an experience he tersely describes as a ‘vacation from history’\(^{80}\). Unlike this experience, the architecture of the Spanish Apartments is rooted discursively in one colonial history of Palestine, and thus refutes the erasure of Palestinians, or what Gregory refers to as ‘casting out’, made by another more recent colonial occupation. This analysis could be extended even further, since many other buildings, particularly those in Birzeit’s Old City [medina qadima] that we encounter in chapter 3, materialize the influence and legacy of the much longer Ottoman Occupation that preceded British colonial rule in Palestine.

I think it is important to re-envision Birzeit as a landscape that has been shaped by (among other things) several occupations rather than just one for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is important to note the continuities between various colonial pasts and the colonial present that occupies Palestine to understand how this context has been in part formed by the long history of Ottoman and Euro-American imperialism and Orientalism\(^{81}\). Mazen and Ibrahim were not the only Birzeitis who talked about the British Occupation with me. One friend even joked that he would like to speak to the Queen of England and invite the British back to re-occupy Palestine, because he saw the British Occupation as relatively benign compared to the current Israeli presence. Secondly, to reawaken this history is also to foreground the ability of Palestinians to endure several occupations, and to recognize that everyday life in Birzeit is a hybrid of


\(^{80}\) Lagerquist 2006.

\(^{81}\) Gregory 2004.
the many lives lived in this place under various occupations. This does not imply that these lives are any less authentic (because we are all thoroughly impure), nor does living under several occupying powers mean Birzeiti life is wholly dominated by those occupations. If that were the case, the occupied would no longer consider themselves occupied as such because of the erasure that all occupations seek to put in place. It is very significant then that Ibrahim’s discussion of red tiles is accompanied by Abu Wassam’s concerns about securing his children’s future and other changes in the Birzeit community. Although the Israeli occupation affects these and many other things, perhaps to a far greater extent than the Jordanian, British and Ottoman occupations did in the past, it does not determine them, as we will see in the chapters and excursus that follow.

Furthermore, the messy ways in which several occupations are entangled in the built environment of Birzeit also points to the impurity of the Israeli Occupation. This observation does not absolve the Israeli Occupation Forces of the damage they continue to do to Palestinian lives. It does insist on an analysis that envisions the Israeli Occupation not as a structure or totality, but rather a more or less coherent set of practices with many different antecedents. For instance, I use the phrase Occupation Forces to mean both an organized body of subjects and things and something that causes change or movement in bodies and things. While it is sometimes tempting given the plight of most Palestinians to imagine a grand project that is responsible for all the wrongdoing (The Occupation, Zionism, Capitalism, US Imperialism, etc), to do so can be politically disabling, since it creates a stage on which only ‘great’ characters (diplomats, statesmen) can act. Thinking about the Israel Occupation as something that is continually done, and thus relies on a set of more or less scripted performances, allows us to examine multiple sites at which things could be done differently. The contingency of these practices is exposed. Even seemingly stable and permanent things like buildings or entire settlement-colonies can be undone or removed (as in Gaza 2006). Perhaps one of the greatest successes of the first Palestinian Intifada was that through widespread protest and civil disobedience, it challenged many of the daily practices of occupation, such as the

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82 See Harker 2006 for an account of how such discourses also intersect with Orientalist narratives of Palestinian space. This homogenization reminds me of the time when someone asked me if my research would solve the (entire) conflict and create peace.
bureaucracy and policing⁸³. As I suggested in the Palestine excursus, there is a pressing need to address issues such as land and property dispossession, travel restrictions and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, irrespective of political dialogues around the two (or one) state solution. These challenges to occupation as a series of practices are the ones that will benefit residents of Birzeit the most, as we will see in the following chapter.

⁸³ This accomplishment stands in stark contrast to the second intifada, which due to its militarization only challenged Israel’s military presence and could thus be portrayed as an attack on security, rather than an affirmation/defense of Palestinian rights.
Nablus Street takes its name from its destination roughly 40 km to the North. It is now the main North-South road in the West Bank, after the Israeli Occupation banned Palestinians from driving on the road Israel calls Route 60. While this explains the presence of large articulated trucks thundering down the road and around the side of the mountain towards Atara, it certainly doesn’t prepare you for that jolt of fear that rushes through you as these vehicles scream past, just narrowly missing you, something you may never truly get used to. Having said that, you might notice that many of the pedestrians you encounter on this route – and there aren’t many – seem to have no trouble walking along the edge of the road, almost oblivious to the high volume of traffic that uses this route.
Stretching down the side of the valley are terraces filled with olive trees, which terminate in a well-cultivated grove on the valley floor. However, at points along the valley slopes the olive trees disappear, replaced by empty shells of houses that are slowly coming into existence, almost like they have been grown rather than built. Roads move away from these construction sites, back up the side of the valley to the Nablus Road, ensuring that the eventual occupants will be thoroughly connected with the rest of the West Bank – that is, if their ID allows them into Nablus. The city that was once a thirty-minute drive to the North is now very difficult to access due to the Israeli checkpoint built at Huwara on the outskirts of the city. Families who used to shop in Nablus – where prices are cheaper than Ramallah – no longer do so. ‘I have to carry a lot of stuff and then get checked by Israelis. Maybe we stay there for one hour or two at the checkpoint and so now we would rather stay in our area,’ Fatima, a friend of mine once told me. ‘I prefer to be here and close my eyes and pretend that there is nothing wrong and try to live a normal life, you know. It’s not normal, but you want to make it as normal as you can’.

We climb the hill leaving the Spanish Apartments behind us and gently amble along the dirt track at the side of Nablus Street whilst all the time trying to avoid the particularly large stones that litter our path. Who knows where these stones come from? Perhaps they were cut from the hillside when the olive terraces were built? Perhaps they once were part of the walls that demarcate people’s property? Perhaps they fell off the back of a lorry – literally – stone cutting being big business in a part of the world where older houses were built from stone and many of the newer houses use a thin stone layer as a façade to hide the breeze blocks and concrete which are now most commonly used.

Running directly parallel to Nablus Street further up the side of the mountain is Atara Street – also named after its destination: the neighbouring village of Atara. There are noticeably more houses built along Atara Street, and they seem to grow in size the further they are from the village centre, which is now at our back. From what seem like small two floor accommodations to much grander villas with three floors and even larger apartments which reach six stories - despite the four storey limit that the municipality is supposed to enforce – these properties stand in stark contrast to the small and crowded
dwellings of ‘the Old City’. Like the Spanish Apartments, many of these houses still have the sheen of the new about them. Most of them are also surrounded by different styles of gates and walls, which give them a slightly less than welcoming air. Perhaps their position at the top of the hill adds to this air of elitism. Didn’t Mazen say something about Birzeitis wanting to live at the top of the hill?

Back on Nablus Street, most of the houses also have walls, although down here next to the busy road they seem much more like the first (and only) line of defense against the roar of passing cars, services and trucks. We peer through the iron railings of the house closest to us and see Alia, an old lady sweeping the marble steps and patio in front of her house. Despite the intensity of the mid-morning heat, and her age, Alia wields her brush with considerable vigour. Her gown, covered in a faded floral pattern, is perhaps the perfect garment for the summer weather. A clothesline strung across the patio dries various other garments in full view of anyone walking or driving by. Peering over her glasses perched on the end of her nose, she glances towards us and the corners of her mouth spread into a warm smile as she greets us.

Before we know it, and in spite of my rather half-hearted protestations, we find ourselves in Alia’s small living room awaiting tea. Alia disappears down the corridor towards the kitchen, and after some rattling of pots and the whistle of a stove top kettle sounds, she emerges carrying a tray on which sits a pot of tea and glass cups for each of us. After placing the cups in front of us and then filling them with tea she motions to sit down in a well-worn armchair before changing her mind and returning to the kitchen. On the wall above the armchair hangs a tapestry of the Sacred Heart – Mary holding a baby Jesus whose heart is superimposed on to the outside of his skin. This is a familiar picture in the Christian homes of Birzeit.
Alia returns once more carrying a tin of date biscuits, which apparently are usually baked around Easter. We are not so much invited to take one as much as a biscuit and a paper napkin are thrust into our lap. Finally sitting down, Alia tells us she has just returned from Canada and the US where she has been visiting some of her children. Before I get the chance to ask her how her trip went, she begins to introduce her home and family (in absentia) to us.

This house is our house, which was built in ’65. To begin with we didn’t have any money. We went to Deir Rassani and Beit Rema and bought some cheap stone and brought it back. It only cost me one thousand dinars.

Although she quickly points out, a dinar was worth a lot more then, and to emphasize the point she tells us that at that time a kilo of meat cost ten rouge.
I have seven children, five daughters and two sons. My eldest son studied in Bethlehem. He went there, studied and taught at the same time. He studied to be a car mechanic. The girls studied too. Lana to be a travel agent. Farah did a Masters in Hospital Management, and now she works in the International Bank in Washington. Fadi lives in Amman. He didn’t finish studying, but he got some manual labour as a carpenter. We were living better before my husband’s death than we do now. In ’75, we continued building this house, with the balcony and the second floor. In ’78 the owner of the house [her first husband] died. Then we were all separated, as my children left. Some are in Amman, some in Canada, some in Washington [D.C.].

Alia also left Palestine at that time.

I went to Canada twenty years ago, but I come and go. The first three years I didn’t come back at all, but after that I come back for six months and then go back for a while. I come back so I can take care of the house, which the students always rent.

The Canadian passport that Alia was able to acquire after living in Canada for three years is not the only benefit she acquired from moving to a country that is recognized as a state, and in turn provides for those who wish to become its citizens. A soft bone condition, combined with arthritis and a medical certificate allows Alia to live ‘abroad’ (i.e. outside Canada) in a warm country while still receiving her Canadian pension. However, Alia states assuredly that Canada is in fact warmer than Palestine because ‘they have central heating there’. I am reminded that the whhmmmpf of the sun is a distinctly personal experience.

Alia tells us that she doesn’t have a house in Canada, but her son does, so she is able to live with him. However, she only spends two months in Hamilton with her son and his children, before moving down to Washington, D.C. to live with her two daughters who live there, ‘because Canada is so cold. For four or five months it snows’.

While I let this apparent contradiction distract me, Alia’s begins to talk once more. Her youngest son in Hamilton, as it turns out, also owns the house we are sitting in. She says after the death of the ‘owner of the house’ – referring to her late husband once again – she gave the house to her two sons. However, the elder son, who lives in Amman sold his
share to the younger for twenty five thousand dollars. When I ask why Fadi sold his share, Alia replies that he doesn’t like to come here, and only spends ten days at a time when he does. Rather than elaborating on that subject though, Alia begins to talk about her two other daughters, Lana and Lulu who both live in Birzeit. Lulu actually owns the house next door – although with four floors it is more of an apartment. However she spends a great deal of time in Zebabde, another Christian village near Jenin, where her husband grew up. Lulu used to live in Birzeit during the week so she could work in Ramallah, and then make the arduous journey North on weekends to spend time with her family. Having recently quit her job, she is now able to spend more time with her family.

Lulu went to Canada two weeks ago to complete her income tax. She came back yesterday, and she wanted to go to Zababde first, and then she’ll come back here.

Lulu also spent time in Canada, as in fact did Lana so that their families could all get passports. I ask why Lulu still needs to file her income tax in Canada if she works in Palestine.

She has a passport, and if she didn’t file her income tax, she wouldn’t be allowed into Canada any more. And of course she would lose her passport, so she went with her husband.

Probing further on this matter is for once successful, as Alia explains

Lana didn’t work in Canada, so she didn’t have any income tax, so she can go wherever she wants. But Lulu worked, she collected child support, which was $150 dollars a month for every child. So she went and told them I don’t work or claim benefits, so she doesn’t need to travel there anymore. Lulu after she did this, is now free. She doesn’t need to go to Canada every year.

Alia obviously decides that no further elucidation is necessary on the topic of her daughters in Birzeit, because she moves swiftly and almost seamlessly on to travel times.

The plane takes twelve and half hours roughly to reach Hamilton from Amman. From here to Jordan takes three to five hours. I sleep in my son’s house, until I have to catch my plane. You have an hour and a half layover in London.
Alia’s tangents seem much like her journeys around the world – designed to spend time with all of her children. Since her conversation is so travel-like, I ask her how Canada compares to Palestine. This is subject about which Alia has a great deal to say.

Here is more beautiful than there, because of the weather, it’s is very nice here. Winter’s winter and summer’s summer, but in Canada you don’t know whether it’s summer or winter. I swear. It’s hot, then a little later it’s cold, then it’s thunder and lightning, then raining. I prefer it here.

Here, when you are in the house, you feel safer. Over there a match will light up your entire house. Over here, if something catches on fire, your building will not be destroyed. Over there, your building will be ashes.

If you want to travel and live over there, because you’re working and you take money with you, you live pretty well. But over here life is more social. Over there you could die in the house and no one would know. But over here it’s very different. There nobody says good morning, not even your neighbour. I lived alone, alone in my house.

You’ll sit between four walls and do nothing. Over here you have all the life you could ever want. Now, we old folks have to be independent in our home, because if someone passes by the house, they’ll notice something is missing or wrong. My kids told me to stay in Canada or Washington. We want you to die beside us, but I said, I will die in my own country. I want to be buried beside my mother and father. Over here you go to church, you know people. If there’s a wedding you get invited, have fun and see people you know. Over there you have no one to talk to. If I planted a tomato plant, I can eat from it all year, and it will cost me nothing. Over there it’s very expensive. Over there if I need to go and buy groceries, I need to drive an hour to the mall. Here, I can call a taxi, go to the store and five minutes later I’ll be back.

I ask her if she enjoys travelling to see her children or whether it would be better if they returned to Birzeit?

No, I don’t like travelling, but I’m forced to do it. I have to go and see my children. I would like all my family to come back here. If the father dies, then no one will return to the house. They’ll all separate. I never knew my father. He died when he was twenty-five years old. He was ill for three days. Do you know Tata Mazuuza?
And just like that Alia is on another subject – in this case a woman who was ‘the prettiest girl in Birzeit’ and, as it turns out, her mum. At that moment another older woman swings open the iron gate, walks deliberately up the path and then slowly pulls the screen door open. ‘Iftadduli’ says Alia, getting up and hurrying off towards the kitchen to fetch another cup of tea. We introduce ourselves, although the woman who has just entered seems to pick up on our poor Arabic, because she tells us with a clipped English accent that her name is Noor. Almost as if to prove Alia’s point about life in Birzeit being more social, Noor has just popped in for a visit. Noor explains that her accent derives not only from her education, but also from her career working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which brought her into close and frequent contact with English citizens. Alia returns from the kitchen with tea and biscuits in hand, and tells us that Noor also has to travel around the world to see her children. After Alia offers Noor a quick aside summarizing what we have been talking about, Noor welcomes the opportunity to share her biography.

I was born in Birzeit. I studied, got married and had five children in Birzeit. My children went to study abroad and they stayed there because of the Occupation. They can’t come. They are treated as foreigners, even though they were born here. So I go, move around and see them, and come back. For five years, five and a half years I have been in the States. I have a son in London. He graduated from the University of London with a PhD in Computer Science. I have a son in Boston. He is a cardiac surgeon. I have a son in Houston. He works for Continental Airlines. And I have two daughters. One is in Jerusalem. Her husband is a priest. The other is in the States and is coming next Friday.

In the States I lived with my daughter in San Francisco. And then both of us moved to Boston, to take care of my son and his children there, because his wife moved away. I came and my daughter stayed, but she is following me. I don’t know how long I will stay here. It depends on my health, because I had a major operation, a triple bypass, and it depends on the situation here.

All of her children hold passports from the countries they live in, but unlike some of Alia’s children, none of Noor’s offspring can live in Birzeit permanently, and save for her daughter in Jerusalem, can only enter Palestine on a three-month Israeli tourist visa. Noor tells us she is now eighty-four, and like Alia travelling between four countries isn’t very easy at her age.
All my children are abroad. I am alone here. I used to come and go, three months, four months, five months, and then come back. But this time, because of the situation, I prepared myself to come back a year and a half ago, and I packed everything, and then I had the heart attack. I had to stay for the operation, and to recover.

Before I have a chance to ask her more about her travels, she starts to recall the day she arrived back in Palestine after her operation.

You know, I think I almost knelt at the door, and I made the sign of the cross, and I prayed, I thanked God, because I didn’t believe I would come back, especially when I had the operation. I was 83 years old when I had the operation. So I didn’t think I would survive to return.

[Singing in English] Home, sweet home. There’s no place like home. With pleasures and palaces though we may roam, be it so understood, there’s no place like home. Home, sweet home, there’s no place like home.

You know once I sang this in the church, and tears were streaming down my face, and everybody was very…

Her voice trails off and she eventually stops trying to find the right word and just hugs herself. “It was a very sensitive moment”.

After a short pause in which the emotion of the moment washes over everyone, Alia asks Noor what she thought about living in the States.

Living here I have my people, my cousins, my friends, my everyone, although my children are not here. There is better. The situation is better, especially in San Francisco. I loved the transportation there. I used to go wherever I wanted on public transportation. I used to go to the seniors centre to exercise, yoga, tai chi, you know all of that, and I used to take three vehicles to get there, but it was fun and I liked it. And you know, there is good and my children are there. And here, I was anxious to come back. I didn’t believe it when I arrived, because I was so anxious to return. You know, my house, my room, my everything, my people… especially my neighbours, who I love.

I ask Alia what she thinks about modern Birzeit.
There are many houses and they’re beautiful, but the problem is no one lives in the houses. Everyone is living outside the country, the owners don’t stay here. They build and they leave, and the situation in the country is miserable, so why would they stay. No business. There’s no work, no money! They can’t live here.

Figure 26. Houses that are only occupied in the summer. *Photograph by author*

Noor’s discussion of her neighbours prompts Alia to talk about hers and it quickly becomes clear that these two women aren’t the only people to spend part or most of the year abroad. Gesturing in the general direction of Atara Street, Alia talks about the Kadi family who currently have two sons living in America and apparently even built their house using an American design template. She then mentions two houses at the end of the road that are apparently almost identical, which belong to two brothers who moved to the States. The dollars they earned there returned and morphed into villas, which are only occupied for three months every year if that. Noor mentions another neighbour, Abu
Tamar, whose house is apparently a lot older than most of the other ones in this area. He is the only one of his six siblings to remain in Birzeit. All the rest have moved to America, although one returned and now lives in Ramallah. Apparently Abu Tamar tried to get an immigration visa too through his mother, but her untimely death prevented him from doing so and now none of his brothers will help him. ‘He says he doesn’t care about himself,’ Alia reports wistfully, ‘he just wants it for his children’.

Lost for a moment, perhaps pondering this situation, Alia suddenly sparks to life again, and starts to tell us about the Birzeit Society. Although her description is somewhat spartan the important points seem to be that the Society was formed in America, and organizes events for diasporic Birzeits to keep in contact with one another. Their main event is a biennial conference, normally in one of the big American cities where most of the diaspora live: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, New York. However, this year they’re having their conference here in Birzeit, and Alia says, they’re holding a meet-and-greet BBQ today at El Majj Swimming Pool. Alia suggests that we might like to go, and feeling the pangs of hunger, we leave her house and hail one of the services that hurtle down the road past her door.
**Excursus: Family Practices**

In the excursus titled ‘one or several occupations’, I examined how the red tiles on the roof are both a signifier of wealth and also a context for understanding lives lived within the multiple, intersecting histories and geographies of different occupations. However, this discussion of Birzeit’s architecture is incomplete and runs the risk of (re-)creating a land hollowed out of its people, not in this case by the Israeli Occupation, but rather rhetorically, in the manner similar to Weizman’s work\(^{84}\). Examining roof tiles quite literally overlooks the important changes that are happening under the roofs of these apartments and in other houses throughout Birzeit. In this excursus I want to move from the architecture of occupation to the architecture of living under occupation and in particular how this is affecting family life\(^{85}\).

Before I proceed with this discussion it is important to pause and think about exactly what I mean when I use the word family. At first it might seem very easy to explain what a family is in this context. People frequently talk about their parents, siblings, children, grandparents and grandchildren, and the nuclear family (*ayla*) plays a key role in creating peoples’ homes and Birzeit as place (see excursus on home and place). The family is also the *hamula*, often translated as big family or clan, which as Mazen (chapter 3) suggests also plays an important role in the creation of home and place. ‘The’ family in Birzeit is therefore a heteronormative, extended, multigenerational family although it is important to state that this meaning of family is a discursive achievement (or an extremely efficacious discourse).

However, while a discursive analysis of family may tell us a great deal about how family is known and produced by a range of statements, it struggles to engage with how family is done and felt. While discourse and practices are heavily entangled, it is useful to examine practices – and not just discourses - of family. There has been a great deal of

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\(^{84}\) As I discussed in the preface, Weizman (2007) is interested in how the Israeli Occupation works to empty out Palestinian space. However, in doing so, he often overlooks the role Palestinians have in creating such spatial formations, even if within highly asymmetric power relations.

\(^{85}\) Lees 2001 argument for a critical geography of architecture articulates a similar link between architecture and dwelling. See also Llewellyn 2003, Kraftl & Adey 2008.
work on the production of the family, but geographers have with a few exceptions tended to overlook different family practices. For instance, Rose’s discussion of family photographs acknowledges that the families in question are specific, but her analysis concentrates on how these photographs as objects extend domestic space beyond the home. The tangled practices of family that are evident in her discussion, including the ways in which photographs make present absent family members, are used to create ‘a more complicated account of family photography’s domestic integration’, while the practices of family itself go unremarked. Nash’s work on the geographies of relatedness goes further than most in recognizing different ‘versions’ of the family, and exploring how the ‘intimate family’, the ‘nation as family’ and the ‘family of man’ work in creating and maintaining certain ideas around kinship. However, her work is more concerned with the biosocial production of relatedness, rather than the social practice of family. Some of the literature on immigration and transnationalism begins to explore families as things that can be done, rather than a structure to be lived ‘within’. For example, Waters work on astronaut families discusses the ways in which certain ‘transnational family strategies’ by Chinese migrant women in Canada result in practices that challenge the notion of the ‘flexible’ Chinese family. Duncan and Smith use the national census to map different family formations in the UK, which they quantify through the activities of partnering and parenting. Significantly, the heterosexual couple/dependent housewife is the norm through/against which these measures are established. Their method is useful because it disrupts national and regionally based assumptions about family formations in favour of more situated local differences, although their system of measurement reinforces more ‘conventional’ ideas about family’s ontological status. It is productive to read this quantitative mapping exercise alongside Valentine et al’s in depth qualitative work on negotiating homosexual identities within the family. In response to social theory that has valorized the increasing individualization of ‘society’ (although exactly which society is never made explicit), the authors examine how the process of ‘coming

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87 Nash 2005.
88 Waters 2002.
89 Duncan & Smith 2002
out’ is entangled with and produces a variety of different family practices at the levels of identity, emotional and economic support, and a retrenchment or reorientation to social norms. They think about families as processes defined by a set of dynamic relations and responsibilities (rather than as structures), drawing on a quite substantial sociology of the family literature that geographers might usefully engage with further and contribute to in turn.

A useful starting point when approach this literature is Morgan’s work on family practices. Morgan begins by charting the ways in which earlier Marxist and feminist approaches created a very specific set of linkages between the family and class and gender-based oppression respectively. He builds on these approaches to argue for a much broader engagement with the family, which also makes connections with the body, work, home, care, food and time-space. To encourage this pluralistic approach, Morgan suggests that we need to think about family as an adjective or a verb rather than a noun - something that is continually done - and so he uses the term family practices. The addition of the term ‘practices’ captures the dynamic, active ways in which families continually performed themselves, in different social contexts. Exploring practices allows researchers to jettison preconceived notions of what families are, and instead look at the everyday, situated, routine (and I might add ritualistic) ways in which different families are done differently. While this method doesn’t establish an a priori family norm, Morgan also recognizes that family practices are situated in and take place through more temporally and spatially extensive social discourses around the family. Morgan’s approach not only establishes family as an important practice to study in its own right (and not simply as a derivative of processes such as immigration, home-making, gender relations), but his approach also responds to the ways in which the term family has endured and is still meaningful as a description of quite different ways in which kinship relations are done. It is also worth noting though that his theorization is initially

91 Geographers have also explored mothering (Holloway 1998, 1999), fathering (Aitken forthcoming) and sibling relationships (Punch 2007).
92 Morgan 1996, see also Morgan 1999.
93 Morgan 1999: 16.
developed\textsuperscript{94} without explicit reference to specific families or their practices, his work draws on studies conducted around the UK, (which allows him to cite ‘debates’ about the decline in significance of family practices).

Morgan’s concept of family practices has been embraced, extended and specified since it was introduced in the mid 90s. Finch seeks to broaden the notion of practice Morgan uses by introducing the term display\textsuperscript{95}. She argues that practices of family are not only done, but to different extents are required to be recognized (made meaningful) as family practices by others and the families themselves\textsuperscript{96}. Edwards et al focus very specifically on sibling practices and how these create sibling identities and relationships\textsuperscript{97}. Without drawing explicitly on Morgan’s work, there have also been a number of recent studies that examine the history of different family practices. Gillis, for instance, historicizes the concept of the European and North American family and shows how the notion of ‘family values’ is not only a relatively recent idea, but has also always been a dynamic one\textsuperscript{98}. Within sociology, Seymour has begun to explicitly spatialize the notion of family practices in her study of family run hotels, pubs and boarding houses in the UK\textsuperscript{99}, by tracing how different practices of family and spaces of home are co-constitutive in these environments.

I find the concept of family practices very useful for unpacking the diverse and dynamic relations that constitute different families in Birzeit. Alia and Noor’s family practices (chapter 5), which involve a great deal of international travel, provide a notable contrast with Abu Wassam’s (chapter 4) efforts to build a ‘family’ home in Birzeit. The focus on processes of doing family resonates with a great deal of recent work in geography that

\textsuperscript{94} I am referring to the concluding chapter in Morgan 1996 here.
\textsuperscript{95} Finch 2007
\textsuperscript{96} Finch’s work inadvertently points to the strong links that could be made between concepts of performance and family practices. I say inadvertently because Finch defines display against a caricature concept of performance, which for her is too individual (she claims Butler’s work on performativity is more concerned with individual identity), metaphorical (she claims performance maintains a neat distinction between audience and performer) and implies face-to-face interaction.
\textsuperscript{97} Edwards et al 2006.
\textsuperscript{98} Gillis 1996, see also Farrell 1999, Tadmor 2001
\textsuperscript{99} Seymour 2007
examines space as on-going practice or performance\textsuperscript{100}. Morgan’s work also encourages us to be promiscuous and examine the connections between family and other aspects of social life to the point where the concept of family cannot be thought without reference to these other social processes, such as education, the labour market and provision of medical care, sanitation and other social services. While this is a roundabout way of arguing that there is a great deal geographers might learn from this work, there is also significant scope for further spatialising the concept of family practices as it has developed in Sociology. Nearly all the empirical work I have covered above takes place in Europe (mainly the UK) and North America. A recent collection that does examine the family in other national contexts resorts to an examination of the ways state discourses construct and govern families, rather than the ways different situated practices emerge from and engage with such policies\textsuperscript{101}. In chapter 6, for instance, we encounter a number of stories about Birzeitis who were prevented from entering the West Bank for the Birzeit Society Convention. What is missing from this account is the phone calls, emails and meetings in other cities that happen as a necessary response to maintain familial relations. In chapter 6 we will also meet Ghaleb, who moves every three months between Palestine, Lebanon and Europe because he does not have a Palestinian ID despite the fact he grew up in Birzeit. His elaborate travel routine that enables him to live in his house with his family in Birzeit can be seen as another family practice that is shaped by the Israeli Immigration regulations and procedures. However, Ghaleb’s family practice in this instance is also shaped by his upbringing in Birzeit, the traveling he has done since then (that allowed him to obtain an Australian passport), and his business interests (that he uses as a reason for entry).

The normative discourses around family in Birzeit very much situate the practices of family in home as the space of the family. Family practices cannot be understood without reference to family spacings. The space of the home is to some degree a family practice. There are many examples of the ways in which different family practices emerged in, and constitute different spaces in Birzeit. I want to briefly explore two. Alia and Noors’

\textsuperscript{100} See Rose 1999, Thrift 2000.
\textsuperscript{101} Haney & Pollard 2003
frequent travelling in order to spend time with their children, maintains the ayla as a central part of their lives, even as that family is spread over many countries. These practices lead to contradictory situations. In Alia’s case, she prefers to live in Birzeit because of the social life, her feelings of belonging and personal safety, and yet she is ‘forced’ to travel. Noor prefers life in San Francisco and yet she was anxious to return to Birzeit. While her big family live in Birzeit, her children reside elsewhere in the world. These women both practice family as periodic itinerancy, despite their age and poor health. The spaces of their family practices are very specific transnational routes and the stopping points where their children now live. Such spatial practices emerge from the extensive discourses on the importance of family, but their mobility also challenges the equation of family space with home space or the space of the balad (village). Like many other Birzeitis, Alia and Noor cannot maintain the connection between family, home and place without considerable personal mobility and cost. Other Birzeitis might argue that Alia and Noor are fortunate enough to have foreign passports – acquired though their offspring’s migration - which allow them to maintain this connection. As many of the participants who were not able to attend the Birzeit conference attest to, these connections can be very fragile and easily broken. In this context it is therefore possible to think about the passport as a technology for enabling not just mobility, but also a specific way of practicing family; one of the creative and progressively more important solutions to the problem posed by these increasingly vulnerable networks that traverse borders.

My second example examines how living in an apartment as opposed to a house has resulted in a number of different ways in which families are practiced in the Spanish Apartments (see chapter 4). Waleed’s difficulties carrying shopping bags and children up six flights of stairs highlights not just a need for an elevator, but also the need for a father to do tasks that might fall to other (female) relatives if he still lived with his family. Rae’d and Majd’s frustration with other people’s children dropping litter and making noise when they are trying to sleep during the daytime, might be more easily rectified if the children were part of their family and they had disciplinary authority over them. While the change from living with or in very close proximity to family members to living
besides people who are not relatives certainly causes antagonism, the formation of a committee to pay bills and regulate water distribution also highlights a new form of collective inhabitation that unsettles the equation of family space with home space, or vice versa. Changing family practices may also in turn have promoted the growth of buildings like the Spanish Apartments. Rae’d and Majd suggest that women no longer want to live with their husbands’ families, and so in a place where land is in short supply and building expensive, apartments are the most economic solution to this problem. However, there are still large families living together in this manner in Birzeit (i.e. women moving in with their parents-in-law), perhaps indicating the relative affluence of those living in the Spanish Apartments, who have bought a space of their own. The fact that lack of space often makes a multi-generational, extended family household a necessity in refugee camps adds credence to this supposition. These differences also point to a diversity of family practices across Palestine, which frequently must deal with things as the death/imprisonment of a patriarch, dispossession and extreme poverty, and the difficult of studying them using survey methods.

While all of the above examples point to changes in family practices and housing, there are also continuities between life in the Spanish Apartments and life in ‘family homes’. Rae’d is constantly on the phone to his brother, and plans on moving back to his house when his younger brother gets married. The formation of committees is very similar to the popular committees that work in refugee camp communities to maintain order. While family practices in the Spanish Apartments are not emerging ex nihilo, I would argue that they do represent a new way of doing family, which might be described as more focused temporally and spatially on the ayla (nuclear family) and less on the hamula (big family). Such practices are emerging in concert with the quite literal rise of the high rise in Ramallah, and it would be reasonable to expect that these changes will foment new patterns of social, economic and political behaviour that might form the basis of future studies of the spatial practices of families.

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102 See Rosenfeld 2004.
103 See Abu Nahleh’s 2006 ethnographic study of six families. Rosenfeld 2004 also employs ethnography to explore family practices in Dheisheh Refugee Camp.
Chapter 6. At the Convention: Birzeitis ‘visiting’ Palestine

As we travel along Nablus Road through the centre of Birzeit, it seems far busier than when we traversed it a few hours earlier. Most of the shop shutters are now up and
everyone is open for business, although only the grocers and the many newsagents seem to have any customers. Several shopkeepers have taken residence on plastic chairs in front of their stores, drinking coffee and watching the traffic pass by. One large man outside a restaurant holds a conversation across the street with an older man who sits in front of a scrap metal shop. The presence of not one but two mobile phone shops seems at first slightly peculiar, but after a while you begin to understand the importance of mobile phones in a place where the ‘unexpected’ comes to be expected, and thus coped with. However, I feel I ought to warn you that should you need to call anyone, don’t ask to borrow someone else’s mobile phone. They may look pretty, but more often than not they don’t have any calling credit on them. In fact, dropped calls are the norm and it’s a surprise when someone will stay on the line and pay for the call themselves. But maybe I’ve been hanging around with too many students…

Figure 28. Main Street through Birzeit. Photograph by author
The mobile phone shops and the rest of the town centre are soon behind us, as we speed back in the direction of Ramallah along the road which takes all traffic north and south through the West Bank, or all of the traffic that is permitted to travel in this area. The service screeches to a halt a couple of times to pick up a mother and daughter, and a tired looking student, who greets everyone (salaamo alaikom) as he gets in. This courtesy, common in most other villages, is rarely used in Birzeit anymore. Perhaps it’s the influx of strangers – students and work migrants from the North – that has led people in this village to adapt to those they don’t know in their midst in the same way their relatives in North America are treated. ‘People here are more sociable’ opines Alia although her comment seems less applicable to Birzeitis than it might to other Palestinians.

We soon reach Il Majj, the area of flatland – essentially a valley floor – between Birzeit and Abu Kash, the neighbouring village. All of this area used to be farmland. Currently the valley slopes to the south of the road are still covered in olive trees and the flatter land to the north of the road grows crops. However, the recent proliferation of residential and commercial construction along both sides of this road has begun to devour the fertile land. This is the same road that initially arrived in Birzeit from Ramallah courtesy of the British Occupation Forces. Now, the village of Birzeit has begun to bite back, as its houses and their residents creep down the hill and along the southern ridge of the valley. At the very edge of the village lands stands the largest development in Il Majj, the new Birzeit University campus, although it is largely obscured from the view of Birzeitis by the contours of the mountain it is built upon. As we approach the university, you can see the steady flow of services curving around the base of the mountain and up towards the Western Gate. However, just before we reach the entrance ourselves, our driver comes to yet another abrupt halt, and Alia motions for us to get out. Built into the hillside at the end of one of many recently built side-roads is Ein Il Majj Swimming Pool, our destination, and judging from all the cars already sitting outside, we are a little late to the party.
The atmosphere is lively, and amidst the hum of young people splashing about in the pool and adults sitting and conversing with each other on the patios at either end, a number of American accents become audible, especially from the younger generations. Alia is greeted warmly by a number of people, and introduces us to some of them in turn. Most say hello in English, and the American accents betray their country of residence, which most tell you about anyway. Before we even have a chance to find a chair, someone holding a clipboard and looking slightly officious tells everyone the meal is ready and they should take their seats. A few parents move to fish their children out of the pool, while others have to rearrange their seats around tables, which are now being laid with plates of salad, bottles of water and cutlery.

We take a seat under the large awning, which is shielding the sun’s glare and strike up conversation with Ramez, a man in his fifties who lives in Los Angeles now, with his
wife and three children. Ramez is a member of the organizing committee for the convention and very knowledgeable on the workings of the society. As plates of grilled chicken and chips appear in front of us, Ramez starts to tell us the story of the Birzeit Society, which was founded in 1987 in California. At this time there was heightened media coverage of Palestine due to the first intifada, prompting Birzeitis who had moved to America to find a way of staying in touch with each other and also with the community back home. Many people had grown up in Birzeit like he had, and then moved to the States to study or work. However, they missed the sense of community they enjoyed here, the food and the culture. The Birzeit Society began as a meeting in someone’s house, but soon flourished and the first convention was held in 1990. At this convention, Birzeitis who live all over the US and Canada were able to socialize with many of their extended family (hamula) and friends and such was the success that these conventions have been repeated every two years since then. While conventions are usually held in big US cities, the current convention is actually the second to be held in the village of Birzeit itself; the first time was in 1998. Ramez then explains that the Society is now a registered non-profit agency in the US run by a committee of volunteers, with a national president currently based in Los Angeles and an annual gross income of over one hundred and thirty thousand dollars. There are seven chapters in Southern California, Northern California, Washington DC, New York, the Midwest, Texas and Canada, each of which organizes their own local events. The Society also does a great deal of fundraising, particularly to raise money for academic scholarships to Birzeit University, which are usually given to young people who live in the village of Birzeit.

While eating his plate of chicken, Ramez tells me that this year’s convention actually began with a week in Amman, since there are many Birzeitis living there too. He pulls out a glossy program, which has a photograph of an olive tree standing behind a stone wall on the cover, with the words ‘Birzeit: How Sweet The Return’ printed below, opens the program and points to the list of activities that were scheduled for last week in Jordan.
Figure 30. Birzeit Society 2006 Convention Program. *Photograph by author*
On the next page this week’s program is laid out, and includes a variety of tours and trips including visits to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, a youth forum and a big banquet party to finish up. I ask Ramez if I can have a closer look at the program, and a quick flick through reveals some welcome messages from the president of the Birzeit Society (the man with the clipboard), one of the convention chairs and the Mayor of Birzeit, a concise history of the village (including emigration from it), and information about the Birzeit Society and their charitable efforts. Following these are pages of advertisements, placed mainly by Birzeiti diaspora (including a number of real estate agents and food wholesalers) who have not been able to attend the convention, but who offer their best wishes to all who do (and encourage attendees to make use of their professional services).

Before I become too engrossed however, Ramez, who has polished off his chicken, starts to talk again. His enthusiasm for the Society and the Convention is very apparent, and he is obviously enjoying being back in his birthplace. He rattles off an anecdote about his daughter visiting a newsagent in town the day before, and being recognized (as his daughter) by the proprietor, despite the fact that she never met him before. Ramez’s daughter is nowhere to be seen currently, so there is no way to judge the physical similarities, nor gauge what she thinks of this incident. However, before he has a chance to rattle off another tale, I must excuse myself and visit the toilet.

Toilets in Palestine are both somewhat familiar and somewhat different to those I have used in Britain and Canada. Were it not such an unconventional topic, it might be fun to ask some of those visiting Birzeit for the convention what they thought about the ablutionary facilities, particularly the younger people who grew up in North America. Here at Ein El Majj Swimming Pool, in the gentleman’s washroom, two cubicles each contain a flush toilet. However, unlike in parts of the world that have access to large quantities of water, there is no water in the bowl. The flush handle also divides into two, with a smaller cream-coloured handle superimposed on the front of the larger black handle. The smaller handle equates to a smaller flush using less water, which is invaluable in a country with little access to water and thus expensive water rates. Next to each toilet is a bin lined with a plastic bag, another common feature of toilets in Palestine.
Since the plumbing – another remnant of the British Occupation that ended in 1948 – cannot handle toilet paper, it must be carefully placed in the bin after use. This delicate art takes some getting used to, and I’ve certainly flushed paper down the toilet by accident on more than once occasion. I’ll refrain from detailing what happens in lavatories during one of the semi-frequent water-shortage periods in the summer, except to say that it’s wise to have bottled water to hand.

![Restaurant Patio](image)

Figure 31. Restaurant Patio. *Photograph courtesy of Hussein Zuhour*

On my way back down the steps to the patio area I run into Khaled, a chef and restaurateur, who gives me a big smile and then scratches my cheeks with his stubble as he kisses me on both cheeks. Khaled is the former owner of *Seasons* restaurant, which was forced to close by the owner of the building after Khaled was unable to pay the rent for three straight months. These days in Palestine, financial difficulties are the norm and usually it is only a particularly hardhearted landlord who would evict their tenants in such
circumstances, even though it is within the law to do so. According to Khaled, the landlord was planning to lease the property to a bank. However, this bank subsequently decided to open in a building right across the street, and as a result the building that was once Seasons remains lifeless, with a large chain and padlock securing the entrance.

Khaled tells me he is now catering events and also working in the restaurant here at the swimming pool. I compliment his delicious food and, glancing over at the different groups lost in conversation, remark on how successful the event appears to be. Khaled’s smile changes to a frown in the blink of an eye, and he begins to swear. The convention organizers told him to prepare food for three hundred people, but only seventy-five had shown up. Apparently this was partially the result of many people being prevented from crossing the Allenby Bridge that separates the West Bank from Jordan. Khaled also seems to think the event has been priced too highly for most locals anyway. He then starts to complain about all the food that will go to waste and the cost to the restaurant, spreading swear words liberally throughout his sentences. His tirade is interrupted by one of the wait staff, with a problem that requires Khaled to disappear back into the kitchen.

I’m intrigued by this news of travel problems, and so upon returning to the table, I ask some of the people sat there if they had problems entering the country. Although their very presence here in Birzeit suggests they were successful, everyone seems to have a story about a cousin or aunt who was turned back at the border, or only given a one-week visa. An elderly man called Ghassan relates how when he returned to Birzeit in 2000 for his son’s wedding, his Palestinian identity card was confiscated, and he was forced to travel on his American passport.

They said I’m not entitled anymore to the ID. That means I lost my identity here. They said you are an American now and they confiscated my ID.

When I come here I come as an American and not as a Palestinian, which I don’t like. When I come back here, I love to come back as a Palestinian too. Maybe Palestinian American yes, no problem to be Palestinian American, but at least I
want it to be Palestinian. But to the Israelis unfortunately, they don’t want me to be a Palestinian. They want me to be only an American.

His family have suffered a similar fate:

My wife and daughter lost their IDs this time, when we entered. And my other son also lost it, when was that, I believe it was in 2001 he lost his ID. Now our whole family has lost our IDs except my eldest son, who’s in the States. And I’m sure when he comes back he will lose his ID too.

Ghassan’s loss of identity not only affects his sense of self, but also his very livelihood and plans for the future.

We intend to come next year now, to stay a little longer here. I’m thinking about retiring back home, stay longer here and maybe just go back home [America] in winter. But I hope the rules with Israel change a little bit, because I understand lately there have been difficulties in staying in here, restrictions you know. You stay here three months and once you leave you won’t be able to come back. Some people say after three months you can’t come back [till] three months after you leave. Some people say a year or something, I’m not sure. Next year we intend to come for three months and see if we can renew. If we can renew for another three months until they kick us out. This is the difficulty you know. You won’t be able to stay in your house.

While he owns his house here in Birzeit, he has to rent an apartment in San Francisco.

We live in a city called San Mateo, which is San Francisco area, near the airport. We’ve lived there for 15 years, in San Mateo. We live in an apartment. It’s a rented apartment. I could not buy a house. I am working for a hotel down there called Best Western. I resigned when I came in here. When I go back I know it will be hard for me, because it’s rented. I don’t know how I will pay the rent. Maybe I’ll have to go to work again. I’m 68 years of age, and I wanted to retire and stay here, but now since I’m American only, I lost my ID, I don’t know if I can stay here. This will be hard for me.

I’m retiring now and to tell you frankly I cannot retire and stay in the US. That’s why I want to stay longer here. When I go back [to the US] I’ll go to my son’s and then see what I can do. But I hope the rules and regulation will change, and I hope the Occupation will end, because as human beings you want to be free. You don’t want to be under occupation. We’ve been under occupation for almost forty years now, and now the longest occupation in the whole world. And unfortunately
the world is blind when it comes to this situation, and nobody is taking any action. And I believe the world is supposed to move and end this occupation. People want their freedom, they want their identity, they want to say this is my real home, not a home under occupation. I’m sitting in the house and I’m afraid the soldiers will come one day, banging on the door with the gun, asking me where is your ID and all those silly questions.

Mourid, who is a permanent resident of Birzeit, explains to me that this summer the Israelis have been stopping many Palestinians who don’t have West Bank IDs from entering the West Bank. Mourid is the local village liaison for the Convention organizing committee, and he estimates that 25% of the people who were going to come were prevented from doing so by these new border restrictions.

I have a list here of people who attended. I reached one hundred and thirty and the list is not complete yet, but maybe the list is ninety-five percent complete. Now the people who didn’t make it, who were refused entry at the bridges...ten heads of family, so maybe together it will be twenty, twenty-five people who were refused entry. Some of them tried once via Allenby Bridge, and lost hope when their passport was stamped ‘Refused Entry’. Some went, after two or three days, via Sheik Hussein Bridge, and we were telling them don’t say you are coming to the West Bank. Say you’re going to Jerusalem. So some of them did it and it didn’t work because some of them didn’t want to tell a lie, some were saying the soldiers tricked them. After saying they were going to Jerusalem, they asked them if they had family in the West Bank. Some of them, yes we have, so [they said] please go back.

Despite the fact that Mourid has been documenting the issue meticulously, he’s still not sure what the reason is for these people being refused entry to Palestine.

Up till now I don’t know why, because I was collecting the answers from many people. As a scientist, I cannot make a line. I don’t know why, because every time the soldiers at the border give the families another reason. So I cannot draw a line.

As various people sat around begin to discuss the issue further, and how it has touched them and their families personally, I’m distracted by a gurgling sound behind me. Turning around, I see that a small child is being bounced on the knee of a man who looks to be in his fifties. A quick smile in her direction is returned by the man, who introduces himself as Ghaleb and then his daughter, Maia. While Maia, who is apparently just 8
months old, is enjoying her knee-bouncing far too much to be concerned with other people, I ask Ghaleb if he has had similar problems at the border. With a wry smile he tells me that he has border problems but of a slightly different nature to some of the conference attendees. Ghaleb explains that he lives in Birzeit, at least for as long as his visa will let him. However, he also tells us that he has houses in Australia and Lebanon.

You see I move in between, it’s not by choice, it’s by force. Due to the status they impose on you here, the Israelis, I cannot stay more than three months. Therefore I have to create options for myself. And every time we come here it’s like an adventure. Are they going to let us in, or are they going to not let us in? It’s always a relief when they let you in, and we’d like to stay longer, and I’d like to leave here of my own free will, not because the visa expired. So what I really call home basically I’m not enjoying it fully, and it is something that is imposed on me, and therefore that sense of home is still missing. It’s incomplete. Even here.

The ‘we’ Ghaleb is referring to includes not only Maia but also his wife and another daughter, Lido, who is two years old now. After a short comment on marrying late in life, Ghaleb tells us that he grew up in Birzeit, but since he was studying in the USA during 1967 does not have a West Bank ID. However, while completing graduate education in Australia he was able to obtain an Australian passport.

Until 1992, I used to travel on the Jordanian passport. That was always a liability. If you want to go anywhere, you need a visa. To apply for a visa is a long process, and many times you feel de-motivated to go through this process, and you say, to hell with it, I don’t want to go anywhere. But when I got my Australian passport it eases everything up, it opens doors, I’m a free moving soul. I can go anywhere, and no one tells me I can’t. Immediately, a complete change. And I believe this passport did me more good than my own education. And if you say what is the best thing that ever happened to you in this life, it was when I changed this identity, from a Palestinian-Jordanian into an Australian. It’s better than my B.Sc., my Master’s degree, better than anything else.

When I ask Ghaleb what it’s like to live in three homes and be continually moving between them, he answers:

I’m not moving around three houses, I’m moving around three continents. Though Lebanon is next door, it might as well be in a different continent, because to reach Lebanon, there is a direct and an indirect way. This is the case with
Lebanon when you are here, and when I go to Lebanon you can’t call here, so you are incommunicado with these people, except through internet, sometimes, thanks for the internet. But when I go to Australia it’s very easy. I just dial and I am in contact. Now how this effects: culturally, because I was forced to move around, I was able to bridge many cultures. And I think I benefited from a lot of flexibility in my thinking, so I can absorb other people’s stupidity, as well as their intelligence, I understand.

Since you have this ability to adapt to all these sorts of things, I feel I can live anywhere in the world, but not for a long duration. I must always come back. I’m like a fish. I have to come back to the water, and here where I find a lot of balance in my life. Now my wife being a foreigner, because she travels a lot outside, again this helps. She’s taking this style of life in doses and she’s adapting to it bit by bit. And every time she’s close to losing her sanity, she’s already on the airplane out of here. You understand. Now this will, in the future, pose a problem for the children for school. If you want to school your children, you have to be in one school, you can’t keep moving around. So I’m now entertaining the idea of either settling in Lebanon, or finding a way to have a yearly contract here and settle here, if I can, but these are far-fetched things. I really don’t know. I don’t think about it hoping that something will happen, and it will resolve itself by itself, but I know my wife thinks a lot about it and she drives me crazy, always asking which school, what school, where are we going to keep them?

Ghaleb explains that over the last three years his yearly travel cycle has consisted of three months in Birzeit, the next three months in Lebanon where he has a apple juice business that works seasonally, three more months in Birzeit, followed by three months in Europe, particularly in Germany where his wife is from. While he hasn’t been to Australia in three years and doesn’t intend to return any time soon, he does caution ‘Australia is my last line of defence. If I’m kicked out of here, having problems in Lebanon, Australia will be my refuge’. At the mention of refuge, I ask Ghaleb whether he gets scared every time he has to cross international boundaries.

The only apprehension I have is when I come to Israel, because they really exercise many techniques on you, which you are not familiar with, and sometimes they tip you out of your balance you know. They, probably they have very good scientists working on how to get on your nerves. They teach them, they train them, and the more I travel into Israel, the less this apprehension is, because I’ve started to understand them more and more. So they’re not, they try to project an image on you, and now I understand this image, so I’m outsmarting them probably, though I’m not out-powering them, I’m outsmarting them.
I ask him what he means by ‘image’, and he replies:

You know, first of all they give you the impression you are not welcome. Secondly, when they do the things any other nation does, they do it and they make you feel, we did it not out of respect or out of love, we did it with no interest in your wellbeing. We did it just because we had to do it. Third, they come and ask about security and they know that none of the questions they ask are about security. It’s only to hassle you and to make you feel uncomfortable. All these things make people very afraid in a sense, especially if you have vested interests to come here. I mean, if you are coming here to pray in the Holy Sepulchre, then to hell with the Holy Sepulchre. But if you have interests here, you have family, you have land, you have property and you want to really take care of it, then yeah, they scare the hell out of you. Therefore you are forced to lie, you have to tell them different stories, etc, etc. And you have to be a master of these things, because if they outsmart you then they will win.

So what does Ghaleb make of all the stories and reports about people being refused entry?

You know it worries me a lot, but at the same time I always analyze this news, because I see why they are doing this, and I try to find a way to respond to it. For instance, they are making life difficult for people who come in here, for three months, then they go for one day or two days and come back. This does not apply to me. When I go, I disappear at least for one month, two months, three months, then I come back. And when I come back I come back as a businessman, I have interests here, I have representatives in Israel, I am selling something, I have to talk to them. You see. They will take a different look. I don’t tell them I’m coming here to sit in my house, they don’t know that I have a house. I don’t tell them this. I’m lying to them. That’s why I told you, you learn how to outsmart them. Give them the answers that they want to hear, not the answers that are really the true answers, because they are devious and you have to be more devious. But I feel, one day, maybe, I will make a mistake, and then it will rebound. You take it as it comes.

After this pessimistic statement, there is a pause in the conversation, as if the implications of what Ghaleb has said need time to be fully thought through. After a minute or so he continues:

You know I’m walking in this area with my eyes closed, my ears closed, and just pretend life is beautiful and good. I do everything as if there’s nothing. This is how I’m behaving.
I deal with Israelis as I deal with Palestinians. I don’t look at them as enemies or anything. I look at them as another stupid bunch that believe in what they are doing. And with this mentality, this type of philosophy, you can live happily ever after. This is how I adapted. I could be a target. I could be passing a bridge and someone decides to blow up the bridge, but you could be on the highway in Ontario and someone could bump into you and you’re killed. It’s the same probability. The likelihood, the probability is the same. Here you go as a martyr, there you go as a stupid person, a road accident. Another statistic.

Maia, who is now just sitting on Ghaleb’s lap, starts to squirm, and Ghaleb explains that it is time for a nappy change. As he heads off, I hear Ghassan commenting on how much El Majj has changed – for the worst – since he was last in Birzeit. As more nostalgic reflections about what Birzeit used to be like reach our ears, I wonder how much people in the Society actually know about contemporary Birzeit, apart from what they see on their brief holidays here. Staring out across the hillside, my eyes lose focus and my mind begins to wander. I think it’s time to move on, and El Majj might be an interesting place to explore next.
Excursus: Place

Human geography is the study of places. It is, of course, many other things but it is, on an intuitive level, a discipline which has place as one of its principle (sic) objects of study\textsuperscript{104}.

What I mean is this: that if it was mud and hands in gravel and sweat, all the time sweat and rain and heat, that took over my being – this ever so decided and decisive \textipa{m-a-t-e-r-i-a-l} – then so that, too, came to be overlaid by another set of sensations having to do with the placeness of place, in this case the Pacific Coast; the river, the village at the end of the river, the mines, breadfruit trees, swimming the \textit{largo} with the kids in the bend in the river, the mountains beyond where Juan Pablo plays his flute and traps animals – and the endless connections people make with all that through history and the forgetting of history\textsuperscript{105}.

Place has a long conceptual history, both within and beyond the discipline of geography. It has been produced to mean location, a way of being in the world (for humans), as a social construct, as a topos for politics, as a milieu interwoven with practices and it has even been declared extinct in some non-places. Places have been analyzed according to their authenticity (or lack there of), boundedness and penetrability and as sites of belonging and memory. I do not intend to re-tell this history here, especially because others have already done so\textsuperscript{106}. What I would like to do is pick the story up as it reaches the almost-present and use one recent attempt to define place by Massey to help me think about Birzeit as place. Massey’s work on place has been developed over a number of years and has culminated in her text \textit{For Space}. In this book she articulates a concept of place that builds on and nuances some of her earlier theorizations of a ‘progressive’ or ‘global’ sense of place\textsuperscript{107}. In what follows I try to summarize her main points before raising a couple of contentions that arise when trying to use this work to think about Birzeit.

Massey suggests that places are continuously ongoing processes or what she terms spatio-temporal events. This theorization explicitly counters ideas of place as static or fixed,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Cresswell 2004: 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Taussig 2004: 314.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Cresswell 2004.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} See Massey 1993 and May 1996 for critique.
\end{itemize}
which are then opposed to an idea of space as dynamic or fluid. A series of binaries is then constructed from this opposition (e.g. open-closed; conservative-progressive). Secondly, Massey suggests places are a series of juxtapositions (‘throwntogetherness’), constructed by differently mobile material, affective and imaginative processes operating through and across different spatial and temporal extents. Places, in other words, are not isolated, but always already interconnected. These processes through which they connect are both ‘natural’ and ‘social’ (where these two terms are already understood as thoroughly hybrid and impure). Places can extend from the subatomic to the global (and are not necessarily tied to territory), while simultaneously being structured by temporalities that range from the glacial to the momentary. In this formulation, places have no fixed (or strong) ontological identity, but are rather particular relations of identity and difference that emerge from contested and dynamic spatial, temporal and political processes in particular contexts, and in turn co-constitute these very same contexts.

Thirdly, and related to the previous claim, Massey states that there are no rules of space and place, or in other words, there is no essence of place. Places are thus neither open, nor closed, but are constantly performed (as more or less open and/or closed) according to different relations of boundedness and permeability. Differential relations of power modify these relations of identity/difference and openness/closure, resulting in a two-tiered politics of place. Firstly, there is what Amin\textsuperscript{108}, a collaborator of Massey’s, calls a politics of propinquity – the agonistic and antagonistic negotiations that necessarily develop from the condition of being throwntogether. In other words, how do you live, work, play, struggle, etc with the people and things with whom your share a place in common? There is also, secondly, a politics of connectivity, which involves struggles over the extent to which particular places are outward looking and responsive to and responsible for those living at a variety of distances. How do you connect your place(s) in the world with the place(s) of other people and things?

Massey (and Amin’s) work is useful for helping me think about Birzeit in a number of different ways. As the Birzeit Society Convention attendees testify to in chapter 6, Birzeit

\textsuperscript{108} Amin 2004
as place is in no way static. In addition to the movement of people, also visible in the 
comings and goings of students (chapter 8) and work migrants (chapter 9), there is also 
the movement of materials such as houses being constructed in Il Majj (chapter 4 and 7), 
while others in the Old City slowly fall down (chapter 3). In the history of place that 
Mazen tells in chapter 3, Birzeit moves from Khirbey to the Old City and then back in the 
direction of Ramallah. The uncertainty about whether Birzeit currently constitutes a 
village or a town is itself a trace of the currently changing imaginations about this place. 
These changes are always as much temporal as they are spatial. For instance, the trips 
home made by university students who rent accommodation in Birzeit do not conform to 
one temporality. While Jumana visits her home near Nablus every two weeks, Samir 
travels north to Jenin once every three months (see chapter 8). Similarly, some Birzeitis 
living in diaspora visit for three months every summer, while others might only come 
back once in thirty-eight years\(^\text{109}\), that is if they are able to cross *il jissar* (the bridge) and 
enter at all. The ghosts of those denied entry for the Birzeit Society Conference but who 
nevertheless were (absently) present also remind me that Birzeit is not simply the product 
of bodies, imaginations and affects that circulate through the streets and olive trees in the 
West Bank. Mazen claims that there are as many Birzeitis living abroad as there are in 
the village itself (chapter 3), and their absence is also quite forcibly present in the lives of 
people like Alia and Noor (see chapter 5). Despite the absence of Birzeitis living abroad, 
their houses, their hereditary/legal claims on pieces of land and the flows of capital that 
help the municipality buy water meters are considerable presences too. The international 
reputation of the University of Birzeit is another way in which the event of place I call 
Birzeit is not simply bounded to particular lands, but rather also embedded in a variety of 
different material, imaginative and affective processes and networks. My explorations of 
different homes *in* Birzeit (and consequently elsewhere) draws attention to the ways in 
which this place is open to flows of Palestinians students, migrants and foreigners like me 
among other things. At the same time there was a quiet hostility to these same people 
(chapter 9), a desire to keep young Christians in the town (chapter 4), and outright 
antagonism to the Occupation Forces, all processes of spatial closure. These desires form

a range of shifting demarcations that in turn map a particular (recent) history of place, since the event of place can never be stopped (except heuristically).

One element of Massey’s discussion that I think it is important to dwell on when thinking about Birzeit as place is what she calls the ‘chance of space’\textsuperscript{110}. Massey argues that it is important to consider the roles both chance/chaos and necessity play in creating places, since they are mutually constitutive moments. While she avoids coming to any firm conclusions, the structure of her argument and her figure of the ‘accidental neighbour’\textsuperscript{111} in effect talk up the potential of contingency/chance for creating more multifarious spaces or affecting the throwntogetherness of places. This emphasis is very different from the approach many scholars have taken to exploring Palestinian space in the West Bank\textsuperscript{112}, because these spaces, perhaps to a greater extent than many others, are carefully scripted, rehearsed and staged by the Israeli Occupation. While some of these authors may ignore the co-constitutive role of chance\textsuperscript{113}, Gregory demonstrates how a particular form of contingency (spaces of exception, where anything can happen) is produced in the West Bank by particular spatial logic of occupation\textsuperscript{114}. Such a point does not necessarily disagree with Massey’s work, which does discuss different kinds of chance\textsuperscript{115}, but it does start to question, as Kraftl and Adey do in their discussion of architecture, how ‘what we are “thrown together” with’ is (pre)determined\textsuperscript{116}, or in other words probe her talking up of a certain sort of chance. A greater focus on necessity, whether conceptual or empirical, also invites us to think of and through the verb ‘to place’ (which in most contexts is a deliberative act), rather than using the noun ‘place’. I would argue that when working from the context of Birzeit, there is a need to explore the possibilities of different forms of spatial organization (or, philosophically speaking, different materializations of necessity) in addition to the question(s) of contingency/chance\textsuperscript{117}. Massey makes a

\textsuperscript{110} Massey 2005: 111-117.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid: 111.
\textsuperscript{113} This is not true for all of them. Kimmerling’s (2003) biography of Sharon makes it very clear he was an opportunist.
\textsuperscript{114} Gregory 2004.
\textsuperscript{115} Massey 2005: 115.
\textsuperscript{116} Kraftl & Adey 2008: 226.
\textsuperscript{117} This argument could also be made through discussion of Nietzsche’s dice landing and showing a particular combination. Deleuze reminds us ‘[t]o know how to affirm chance is to know how to play. But
similar argument – ‘much “spatial politics” is concerned with how such chaos can be ordered, how juxtaposition may be regulated, how space might be coded, how the terms of connectivity might be negotiated’\textsuperscript{118}. However, her tendency to emphasize chance causes further pause at two other significant moments in her analysis.

Firstly, as I summarized earlier Massey argues that places are performed through a range of dynamic connections, and thus there is a need for what she terms a politics of connectivity. However, when faced with the ways in which homes and mobilities in Birzeit are connected to processes of the Israeli Occupation – such as the act of passing through a checkpoint described in the Im/mobilities excursus – severing these connections or establishing disconnections seems as important, if not more so than establishing connections at the present time. While Massey suggests there are no rules for space and place, she almost always affirms a politics of engagement – ‘the challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness’\textsuperscript{119}. The focus on ‘outwardlookingness’ seems to favour a particular set of responses that equate interrelatedness with connection (as opposed to articulating situated positions that negotiate a set of relations between connection and disconnection). In other words, I wonder why there isn’t more room for a politics that negotiates relations of engagement \textit{and disengagement}? Massey’s theorization of place allows for a politics of dis/engagement, even if she does not foreground it. As Harrison points out, ontologically and ethically, a non-relation constitutes every relation\textsuperscript{120}. My journey through Birzeit persuades me to think that a similar argument can be made politically and empirically, and thus a politics of engagement is already also one of disengagement\textsuperscript{121}, or vice versa as the events in Gaza in 2005 taught us\textsuperscript{122}. Despite this

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\item \textit{we do not know how to play}’ (Deleuze 1986: 26, my emphasis). If Deleuze is correct, and we do not know how to play, then it is analytically important to examine the actions of playing and particularly in this context, ‘the bad player’. Palestine-as-place seems to be marked to a much greater extent by the false chance: a throw where the outcome is already known or circumscribed in advanced. Flying checkpoints are chance encounters, but they can only be considered ‘chance’ within a much more extensive event of place in which they are planned and routinized.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Massey 2005: 152.
\item\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.: 195.
\item\textsuperscript{120} Harrison 2007
\item\textsuperscript{121} For instance, Cresswell 2008 introduces the term ‘distributed sense of place’ to counter this globalizing force of place in Massey’s work.
\item\textsuperscript{122} Although much was made of Israel’s disengagement from Gaza, the number of Israeli settler-colonists residing illegally on Palestinian land increased that year. This was due in part to the relocation of some
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ineffectual example of disconnection, people in Birzeit remain far more interested in the
disengagement side of the coin, at least with regards to the role the Israeli occupation
forces play in shaping their place. The removal of the Atara checkpoint, for instance,
would make a great deal of difference to the lives of many Palestinians who travel
through Birzeit (see Im/mobilities excursus). The need for disengagement is also an
important point to consider in the context of the debates over a one- or two-state solution
that I discussed in the Palestine excursus. As Benvenisti notes\(^\text{123}\), these debates are futile
if the politics of places within Palestine and the transformation of their dis/connections
with ‘Israel’ is not seriously addressed.

Secondly, Massey and Amin’s politics of propinquity and connectivity encourage us to
think through politics as a process of engaging in processes that we are already immersed
in. It is precisely because we always find ourselves in the middle of things, that there is
also a necessity for a politics that challenges how these relations of chance (contingency)
and necessity (organization) came to be (or become). However, when addressing the
thorny issue of indigeneity and place, Massey’s analysis shies away from her own
invocation to engage each place through its own unique connections. In a text box,
Massey reproduces a Greenpeace report in order to examine the case of Deni Indians
living in the Brazilian Amazon. The Greenpeace report describes how these people are
using the process of land demarcation to prevent a multinational logging corporation
from destroying the forest in which they live and work. However, rather than exploring
the vignette in any detail, Massey simply asserts that in this instance a politics of relative
closure is appropriate, mentioning a prior lack of democracy over the use of this space.
However, this assertion relies to a certain extent on an already established politics of
indigeneity that in part mobilizes a static or closed definition of place. Rather than
articulating or develop a stance as she advocates in regards to all places (since there are
no rules of space and place), Massey seems content to fall back on a position in this
instance.

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\(^{123}\) Benvenisti 2008.
In the context of Palestine, the political difficulties of falling back on an already established politics of indigeneity to claim space are brought into sharp focus. While Palestinians claim they belong on the land and were ‘here’ first, the Israeli Occupation Forces have mobilized architecture and bible studies\textsuperscript{124} to contest these claims and make originary claims of their own. Mazen’s history of Birzeit (chapter 3) is one of conflict, population movements and dispossession that also disrupt any easy originary myth. However, while an already established politics of indigeneity is clearly insufficient, it is nevertheless still a powerful political discourse for both Palestinians and Israelis, and therefore a discourse that must be engaged with in order to explore how politics of propinquity and connectivity are manifest in the present moment. The difficulties Palestinians have faced in their efforts to (re-)claim ‘their’ place remind us that efforts to do (script, stage) place differently (or establish a different politics of propinquity) must not only face the challenge of inequitable relations of power, but also past scriptings of place that are made to dynamically endure\textsuperscript{125}, (or particular politics of indigeneity). These endurances of place are one of the primary ways through which inequitable relations of power are themselves maintained\textsuperscript{126}.

Among other things the dismantling of the Occupation Wall, the dismantling of Israeli settlement-colonies or their re-entitlement to the Palestinian owners of the land, equitable use of infrastructure and resources (water, airspace) and reparations for past land theft and property destruction are pressing political needs in contemporary Palestine. These all seem like necessities to secure a just future that must be considered simultaneously with, and not follow from, any affirmation of, or proposition for, working within and through ‘chance’ encounters with ‘accidental neighbours’ in the almost-present, which in Palestine might be manifest in debates around secure sovereign borders and control of/over territory.

\textsuperscript{125} An example of this would be the arguments made against the dismantling of settlement-colonies on the grounds that it creates homelessness.
\textsuperscript{126} Weizman 2007.
We leave the swimming pool and walk beside some farmland along what looks like a fairly recently paved road. In addition to being flat, El Majj is also discernable by the greater amounts of open space between the houses than in other parts of Birzeit. Most of the houses are large, especially compared to houses nearer the Old City, and most look new, like Abu Wassam’s, As we pass one building, a man working in his garden stares at us for a second before greeting us and inviting us into his house. I am curious to see inside, so we accept the invitation, introduce ourselves and he in turn tells us his name is Abdullah.

Abdullah is in his early thirties, has heavy stubble and deep-set eyes that stare intently at you. He seems distrustful when I tell him that we are doing a tour of Birzeit, and his response – that Palestine is for everyone except the Palestinians – while not hostile, lets us know that he is aware of the uneven relations of power that make our tour possible. His house is in fact an apartment - one of eight, spread four to a floor, in what looks like a brand new two-storey building.
As we enter, I make a comment about how new the building looks, and we are invited to sit on what look like brand new sofas as well. He tells us he just moved in five months ago.

I am originally from a village called Beit Nabela. It is a village beside Ben Gurion Airport, beside Lid, a village around Lid city. We moved to live in Jalazone [Refugee] Camp. I’ve lived here in Birzeit for five months now. I lived in Jifna for one year after I got married and then I moved here to Birzeit.

Abdullah goes on to explain that his father-in-law, who is originally from Birzeit, left Palestine in 1967, and hence wasn’t given a West Bank ID card. He therefore continues to live in America, where he was studying in 1967 and now runs one or many businesses that must have been successful enough to allow him to build such a large property. While
three other flats in the building belong to Abdullah’s father-in-law and his two brother-in-laws, all of them are unoccupied since they still live in America. While Abdullah mentions something about them returning, this sounds more hopeful than concrete.

I ask him how he is adapting to his new home and life in Birzeit. He begins with a short explanation about how his wife, who grew up in America, came to study and then work at Birzeit University, where he met her.

She lived in America, so to bring her to live in a refugee camp, it will be hard for her, she will go crazy. So we moved to Jifna. It’s better. It’s not better, but the life is not depressed like Jalazone. You know, in Jalazone, everyone knows everyone else, it’s a conservative society, you know the rules of the family, and for my wife she had another life. She was in America. She used to drive her car one hour to her school, from her school to her place. If you take her to Jalazone, it will be hard for her. Slowly but surely she’s getting used to living in this society. Imagine me going to America. I wouldn’t be happy. Or if I go to Europe, the weather…I can go now, because she is an American citizen, but I would be scared of change.

This comparison between life in Jalazone and America reminds me of Majd’s comment that no woman wants to live with her mother-in-law. Few refugees have the luxury of holding that opinion or the opportunity to live in their own single-family homes, although Abdullah’s wife is obviously one of the few who do. Their apartment in Birzeit is testament to the spatial distribution of this privilege. Abdullah and his wife’s connections with Jalazone nevertheless remain strong.

We moved from Jalazone right, but we spend all of our time in Jalazone. We only come here to sleep. First of all, we go to work in the morning and leave our daughter in Jalazone with my mother. We return back, eat at my mother’s house, sleep or relax there, then go out in Jalazone. Then we come back here at night. You cannot leave the Jalazone camp. Even if I have to drive there, it’s like a routine. And you can’t cut your relationships with the people. And slowly but surely we’re also forming relationships with the people in Birzeit, and also with the people in Jifna. However, when I want to sit in a café I go to Jalazone to sit in the café. I don’t go to Ramallah, I don’t go to Birzeit, I go to sit in the café Jalazone and smoke arguilla in Jalazone, in the souk. This is how it is.

But you know, moving is very hard. When you move you have to get used to the new home. In Jifna we lived alone. There was an apartment above us, but we each
had separate entrances. And we had a garden around the home, so it was very beautiful. I grew flowers and some trees. But here we live in a building, an apartment, so you have to climb the stairs to get up here, and there are neighbours. But you know slowly but surely I like the building. I will dig up the earth and plant some trees. Now I administer this building, because her father, the owner, isn’t here. So I help the tenants, and do whatever’s needed. I attend to the needs of the building, I manage things. And you know, if you want to live somewhere, and the situation is not good, the circumstances are unfavourable, at least your home should be good. When you come back, even if there is a checkpoint, you can come home and relax. You don’t need any more problems at home.

Abdullah’s wife enters the sitting room at this point with a pot of tea, which she pours into glasses while simultaneously greeting us. She says something to her husband, who then follows her into the kitchen before returning with Zeina, his daughter who looks to be only a few months old. Abdullah tries to reach over and pick up his tea from the table. However, realizing half way through that this intricate procedure would likely disturb his daughter’s slumber, he remains sat in his chair and returns to the topic of Jalazone.

In Jalazone, in the beginning we had UNRWA rooms, you know, small rooms built by UNRWA, the United Nations that cares for refugees, and it’s only one room and there is a toilet far away from the building. After a while, there was progress. They built another room beside it, then another one, so it became many rooms. And they built the rooms in the direction of the toilet, so it becomes like one room. So you don’t need to go outside to go to the toilet during the night. Now, it’s all the same building. And you know because of the demographic increase, in the beginning there was only my mother and father, and now they have thirteen kids too.

So this kind of home is not enough, and there’s very little space in refugee camps, so you have to build above your home, and because it’s hard to build another building above this old building, you have to renovate it in such a way that you build columns inside the old home and then a new flat, and then you’ll build the new home, so you’ll have two homes, one new and one old. But you don’t need to destroy the old home, because you can use it. And people after a while used the two flats. So now in Jalazone you’ll find that all the buildings are growing upwards, not outwards. You can see many flats, and this is because people don’t have any space or distance from each other. I mean, we share a wall with our neighbours. Now everything’s very close. Our building shares a wall with other people, but my father was worried about this so he was very careful to leave space around the home. He spent a lot of money to have space around his home. So we only share one wall with our neighbours. Other people don’t even have a place for the windows. The only windows look out onto the street. And you know the
street, because everything is so small, the street is small, you can find steps in the street, so everything is closed and crowded you know, with a lot of people. This is what is in Jalazone. They use concrete and blocks. We don’t use stones because it’s expensive. And inside it’s normal; we have electricity, water, everything is normal. But the stones are too expensive.

As he relates the history of his family, Abdullah tenderly cradles the sleeping Zeina in his arms, occasionally glancing down at her.

In 1988, we were living with my father, my uncle, two of my uncles who weren’t married, and my grandfather. It was three storeys, and it was the biggest building at that time in Jalazone. My grandfather was the head of Jalazone committee, in UNRWA, and he finished working and got his pension. He built a good home. And my uncle was arrested, my father was arrested and my grandfather was also arrested. When they were released from jail, there was a problem with one of my uncles and three days later the Israelis came to destroy the home. They brought bulldozers, but found they could not do it using a bulldozer, because the streets in Jalazone are so narrow. It couldn’t fit. Also, if it was used, it would destroy other homes. But they did it all the same. They brought bombs, put them in the home, and destroyed it. But this destroyed all the homes in the neighbourhood. UNRWA re-built the other homes, but they didn’t rebuild our home because the Israelis forbade it. After that we rented close to Jalazone. But after they destroyed our home, we were also forbidden from building anything on the same site. For a long time it was forbidden to build on that site.

I ask him what reason was given for the destruction of their house?

It was just as a punishment. They wanted to punish us. It was forbidden to build in the same place and that was it. We rented houses. Then my grandfather bought a new house and my father bought a new house next to it. And it wasn’t far from our real home, about 150m. So we rented two houses, and they’re very close. My uncle now lives above, my two [unmarried] uncles live above, and my grandfather lives below. Another of my uncles lives in Jifna. He has a farm, which he lives on, and another one lives in Ramallah. I have six uncles, and eight aunts.

You know when they blew up our house, most of the windows in the camp were broken, because the blast was so strong. Now if something happens in Jalazone, most of the homes will collapse because they’re not strong. There’s also another problem, which is that if you dig for 15 centimeters, you’ll find sewage water. The pipes aren’t connected well. So in past there was a well for water, clean water, but since all the people have come all the holes have become filled with sewage, and destroyed.
Abdullah still seems really attached to Jalazone, perhaps not a surprise since he only left less than 18 months ago. I ask him how the experience of moving away from his family has been?

Really, this is just a place where I sleep. You need privacy with your wife and daughter. This is also better than a crowded home. But it’s like we didn’t move. I mean I just sleep here. I spend most of my time in Jalazone. My brothers and sisters are there, always, and when I don’t go there they come here. They need some change. But as I told you it’s the same thing, with friends too. If there is some occasion you have to be in Jalazone, you can’t miss it. If my father calls and says ‘come’, then that’s it, I go.

I worked for about one month here. I helped a relative of my wife with his supermarket in the main street. I spent a lot of time there, and I stopped going to Jalazone, so they started thinking in Jalazone that I left them. So I couldn’t work, because I had to go there. My mother started to think that I left her, because I would go from work to the market and then home. I just called them, and it caused a big problem. They want, they need me in Jalazone. They don’t only need me, but they need me to be around them. Where is Abdullah? It was the same thing with my brothers and cousins.
So what do the people of Birzeit make of a refugee living in their midst?

You know throughout the whole world there are problems or cultural differences between the city and the country. This person is from the country and this person is from the city. But here in Palestine we have three: country, city and camp. And it’s known everywhere that the people from the camps stick together. So in the past we’ve had problems with Birzeit, with the people of Birzeit.

The whole story, if you have time to hear it, is that there was a Muslim guy who is in love with a Christian girl from Birzeit. She is in the university. They want to marry, but her family doesn’t want her to. So she ran away with him, and this led to the problem between the people in Jalazone and the people from Birzeit. In the last intifada, or previously, if anything happened in Jalazone during the curfew, we would take food and other things, and would escape from Jalazone to Birzeit. It is like the good home, the good relatives, the good neighbours. But lately, if someone wants to drink beer or anything alcohol and get drunk, it’s forbidden in Jalazone in the local society, so he goes to Jifna or Birzeit. And when he’s drunk,
he causes problems. Now in Jifna it’s forbidden to sell alcohol to non-residents of Jifna, so there is no problem. Birzeit should also do the same thing.

I am from “Jalazone”, and they think that I have a backup. I do in fact have a backup. The poverty makes people stick together, not like here in Birzeit, where you have some friends and that’s it. Also, it’s because you don’t have many things to lose. The only thing that can control you is your dignity, for any occasion. If you lose your dignity, why do you need money? Why do you need your mobile [phone], why anything? There are many occasions at checkpoints that revolve around dignity. If they want me to go back, I’ll go back. I won’t go to the checkpoint. I’ll miss work. But I won’t allow them to catch me or beat me. And what happens is you’ll get shot. This happened with a guy from Jalazone. He didn’t allow the soldiers to beat him, so he got shot. They ask many guys to lift their shirts, to check them. They refused and so they arrested them and beat them, and after they beat and punished them, the soldiers removed their clothes by force. It’s a matter of stubbornness. This is the problem. And this happens all over our society.

It is not quite clear whether the problem Abdullah is referring to is the stubbornness of Palestinians or the Israeli soldiers’ propensity to beat and humiliate Palestinians at checkpoints (see Im/mobilities excursus). However, given his belief in the important of dignity, something he obviously associates strongly with camp life, I assume he is criticizing the soldiers for robbing disposed people of what little they have left. His next sentence continues this validation of camp society.

I always say, if you want to raise your children, send them to the camp. They’ll learn to look after themselves, and then they can look after the whole of society. In Jalazone there are now thirteen thousand people. It’s about two kilometers squared. My father is head of the school in Jalazone, the school has 1700 kids from age six to fifteen. This is just the boys! There are more girls, about 1800. This is just the children. Imagine this, because Jalazone was just built in 1958\textsuperscript{127}.

\textsuperscript{127} Sixteen months before I spoke with Abdullah, in March 2005, UNRWA listed the registered refugee population in Jalazone as 10390, of which 1104 were male school children and 1135 female school children. UNRWA dates the founding of Jalazone to 1949 (UNRWA 2008).
Figure 35. Old refugee house, Birzeit Camp. *Photograph by author*

I am confused why a refugee camp was only built in 1958, ten years after the dispossession of Palestine in 1948. Abduallah explains that the camp was built at that time by UNRWA so that refugees who were living in smaller camps in Birzeit and other villages nearby would be in one location. The camp is now structured according to village of origin, Abdullah explains.

For instance I’m from Beit Nabela and we have a ‘big man’ [leader] from our village. We have thirteen villages in the camp.

Each village has its own leader who tries to resolve the problems that occur in the community.

There is also the popular committee. The popular committee was created among the political movements in Jalazone to fix things instead of a municipality. We
don’t have rules for building. You can build as you want to. And we don’t have rules about where to build. If you have a place, build there. But there is a rule now to not take any more space from the street, because the streets are getting narrower. If my home is very small, I will take one metre to make my home wider. People have to do this, because they can’t leave and buy land. Land is too expensive and we lost our land. In Jalazone, people die just to get a small piece of land. But when someone loses something, he will value it very highly. Here in Birzeit, people have their land, so it’s normal. But for us, it’s not normal to have land. If you want to have mint for your tea, you have to grow it in a window box. You don’t have a small piece of land to grow it on.

Abdullah, as an outsider living in Birzeit, has a very different perspective of the local society from the Birzeitis living in North America that we met earlier in the day. I ask him to compare Birzeit society and Jalazone society.

You know Birzeit is very different because they have students. If Birzeit didn’t have students it would be like Abu Kash or Jifna. It’s a village, but imagine if there was a village, and about five thousand people went there, they would need new supermarkets, buildings, they would need to live. The village would need many things you know. This has led to Birzeit’s development towards a city. Also, these people, the students, are different from the local society. They think more about freedom, they think liberally. They are students and you know how student life is – they’re free and like revolutionaries. They have ideas about revolting against tradition. Everyone who goes to university has these thoughts, and then when they enter the real world, that’s it. So this makes Birzeit different from other places. The society is open. We know some of our neighbours. I have a good relationship with them. I have good relationships with other people. But still, I am from outside Birzeit. I am not from Birzeit. I have good relationships with the students in Birzeit. They call me the Jalazoni.

At this point, Zeina starts to stir and become agitated. Abdullah asks his wife to bring Zeina a bottle, which seems to pacify her once again. He turns to us again and mentions one of the questions I asked him earlier about making home in Birzeit.

You know, home is not the building. Home is your mother or a good wife. People are the home. If you feel safe, then this is home. But this is a problem: where is home? If I am in Jordan, this will not be my home. There are chemical processes in the mind which make you related to your home. I think my home is in Jalazone. I always make the mistake of saying to my wife, let’s go to our home. And she knows that my home is not here. She asks me, you mean Jalazone. I say yes, of course. When I want to say let’s go to our house, I say let’s go to Birzeit. But I
still think of home as in Jalazone you know. It’s the place where you were raised. It’s not the furniture. You know you can sleep on the carpet or on earth, but if you are relaxed, you have your people, your family around you, it’s your home. It’s not a matter of stones. It’s very silly to think of the stones as your home. Maybe the apartment is your apartment, yes, it’s my apartment in Birzeit. You can talk about material things, but home, in Arabic *beit*, is the place where you sleep and eat. This place must be safe. You are relaxed there too. The most important thing for home is where your people are.

Imagine if my grandfather talks about his destroyed home. The destroyed home in Jalazone? No, the destroyed home there in the village of Beit Nabela. His home is there. I went there once and I didn’t see it, but I still have it in my heart.

As he says this, Abdullah tries placing his hand on heart, but since he is holding his daughter’s bottle, he only succeeds in stretching his little finger so that it touches his shirt pocket.

One day I will build a home there. If I am alive, I’ll do it. If not, my daughter will. In Jalazone you can ask the guys where they’re from and they’ll say Nabeli, from Beit Nabela; Abbasi, from Abbassiya; Lidawi, from Lid. But if you ask a Jalazoni where do you live, he’ll say Jalazone. I live in Birzeit. I was in Jalazone, I was in Jifna. It’s just places, a trip. Like a man who has different moods, but he is still the same man, there’s no change. But he has different moods. This is roots. I told you I live in Jalazone and my home is in Jalazone, but my real roots are not there. The ground in Jalazone belongs to the people of Jifna and Dura. The roots, as I see them, come from the land.

Abdullah’s division of origins (where are you from) and residence (where do you live) invokes a mobile sense of belonging, which at first seems to contradict his assertion that people are rooted to the land. However, if roots are thought of something that is grown over time, leading to a deep and enduring attachment, perhaps this sense of mooring is relatively mobile too, albeit to a different spatial and temporal extent.
When you own land - you know how expensive it is here - you can build your home. But we don’t have land, so it’s even more expensive for us to buy it. For example, I will do anything to have a small piece of land. At least I can go and sit there. My uncles gathered together all of their money and bought some land in Jifna. They care about it more than anyone else around them. We go there all the time in summer. We go in winter to pick some herbs for tea and eating. You know zaater [thyme]. We don’t buy zaater, but people who have land buy zaater. You see the problem. We make olive oil. It’s very delicious. You like it so much because it’s from your land. You can say, eat it, this is from our land. And my grandfather and some of my uncles drink it. It’s from the land. Original. He doesn’t use fertilizer with the olive tree, but he knows it, and he, my grandfather, does the same thing every morning. A small cup of tea full of olive oil, and he drinks it. My cousin also does it. My uncle who is in Jifna does the same thing. And only from our olives.

When we don’t have any, my grandfather buys the olives and he sends them to the [pressing] machine, because he wants to make sure what he’s eating. In the past, in Beit Nabela, they put the olive oil in a big hole in the land, because there was too much. And people used it all, and because of that they are strong. You know
in Jalazone, the new generation that grew up in Jalazone die earlier than the old generation, which grew up in the villages. The roots in the villages are much stronger. They grew up eating original things, they didn’t use chemicals. And when we came to Jalazone, UNRWA gave us cans to eat. Olives in the can, fish in the can, milk in the can, everything in the can. You don’t know what’s in the can. In Jalazone we have one hundred and fifty men who have died from cancer. I don’t know what happened. But they died from cancer. Some of them have died and some of them are still alive but suffering from cancer. But there weren’t any occurrences of cancer amongst the older generation. It’s all among the new generation.

Zeina, who has by now has lost interest in her bottle, is starting to get restless, and not wanting to impose upon Abdullah any longer, we thank him for his hospitality, and leave him to tend to his daughter. As we walk down the stairs, our conversation with Abdullah made me realize that we have been in Birzeit for some time now, and still not visited the university. So without any further delay, let’s head there directly.
**Excursus: Home**

When I first visited Birzeit in 2005, I was amazed not only by the incredible variety of built structures in what otherwise seemed like a small village, but also by their juxtaposition. A single storey dwelling built from stones with a corrugated iron roof lies just metres away from a three or four storey ‘modern’ villa with orange tiled roof, which in turn make houses constructed from concrete breeze-blocs with flat roofs and the steel wiring still exposed seem drab in comparison. On the many occasions I walked around Birzeit, passing the Old City and the Spanish Apartments, I felt challenged to come up with a concept of home that is adequate to this diversity of housing and the different lives of the people who live within these structures and make them their homes.

Luckily, home is very much on the geographical agenda these days. In addition to the publication of many articles and monographs, there is now even a journal devoted to *Home Cultures*. Much of this work has been usefully gathered together and summarized by Blunt & Dowling in their book entitled *home*[^128]. If the diversity of Birzeit’ homes weren’t enough, in this book we encounter the Ideal Home Exhibition, domestic violence and homelessness, Bungalows, The US Department of Homeland Security, ‘monster houses’, refugees and cohousing. It is quite clear reading this book that homes are made at many different scales (not just in houses), in many different places, and are shot through with a large variety of other socio-spatial power relations. Given this incredible diversity of homes, is it possible to say anything concrete about what home is, or to put it another way, how can we approach home conceptually? The authors certainly think so, suggesting that home is both a place and a spatial imaginary. ‘Put most simply, home is a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two’[^129]. The understanding of home they promote is also politicized, attentive to oppression and resistance in imaginaries and processes of home[^130]. These foci allow them to construct a critical geography of home, which is simultaneously material and imaginative, wrapped up in relations of power and identity, and multi-scalar. This theorization is useful,

[^128]: Blunt and Dowling 2006.
[^129]: Ibid. 2-3.
[^130]: Ibid 22.
drawing together many of the complex, overlapping aspects of different homes through a spatial envisioning. Concepts like place, emotion, power, identity and scale are incredibly spatially extensive themselves, and can therefore do a great deal of conceptual work creating a definitional identity for home that allows us to talk about and relate many different homes. I want to build on just one aspect of Blunt and Dowling’s discussion at this point - the differences between homes - because it is difference and diversity that has been a key feature of my encounters with home, both in Birzeit and in the academic literature. Is it possible to create a concept of home that acknowledges and works with these differences but still allow us to speak about homes at more varied temporal and spatial extents than the ones circulating through with our own bodies and research projects?

To think about difference I turn to the work of Deleuze and his conceptualization of the virtual and the actual. Deleuze suggests that while bodies and states of affairs are actual – which is to say part of something we might call empirical reality or everyday life – they emerge from the virtual where they are ‘pure events’. Leaving aside the notion of the pure event for the moment, let’s first examine the concept of the virtual. Deleuze’s notion of the virtual certainly does not correspond to the virtual reality of science fiction or the internet - ‘a representational system that configures an irreal space of interaction’\textsuperscript{131}. Nor should the virtual be thought of as unreal in any sense. In fact, Deleuze is adamant that the virtual is always real, inaccessible but necessary, and cotemporaneous to the present\textsuperscript{132}. We might think of the virtual as a field of potential, which ‘create[s] its own lines of actualization in positive acts’ through a process of intensive differentiation (differentiating itself from itself)\textsuperscript{133}. Hence new bodies and states of affair (the actual) emerge from the virtual through a process of differentiation. This theorization of the virtual-actual works in opposition to theories of the possible and the real, in which novel things are made by a subtracting one possibility (the real) from many (the possible). In this formulation of creation, there is no conceptual difference between the real and the possible, since the real will already have been given as one form of the possible. In this

\textsuperscript{131}Dewsbury 2000: 480
\textsuperscript{132}Deleuze 1994: 208-214.
\textsuperscript{133}Deleuze 1988: 97.
instance – which Deleuze calls a false problem - ‘everything is already completely given’\textsuperscript{134}, hence there is no creation as such. In the creative relationship between the virtual and the actual however, there is no resemblance, only difference. The importance of thinking life, and by extension home, in this manner is that it allows for the emergence of something truly new, which is not conditioned by any form of transcendent plan or scheme (e.g. any form of dialectic). It is in the new that Deleuze founds a possibility for politics that is immanent to life, something I will think about in relation to the home later on.

We now return to Deleuze’s notion of the pure event, which is to say something that exists as a virtuality. Thinking about the home as a pure event means thinking about it as a verb in the infinitive. What can this possibly mean? Surely the home is a noun? While initially counterintuituitive, I think that many writers who deal with the home already do so in a way which treats home as a verb. Morris suggests that the home is neither origin nor destination but rather an effort to organize a place - a contingent creation against the chaos\textsuperscript{135}. As she notes this dynamic place is never sealed in, but rather a way of venturing towards the outside. Taking a rather different (although not wholly disconnected) philosophical bent, Heidegger’s often cited essay on building, dwelling and thinking suggests a sense of being at home in the world in which process is primary\textsuperscript{136}.

Both of these instances also provide examples of how home becomes differentiated in each line of its actualization. Blunt & Dowling’s collection is full of examples to this effect. In each instance though, and even when viewed collectively, there is always an excess, always a(nother) home to be invented. The home as a pure event in the virtual continues to produce different lines of actualization. The question then becomes how do we empirically acknowledge or deal with this diversity, this excess that cannot by definition be summed up. I think one means of making space for this inevitable surplus can be found in Buckley’s ‘A guided tour of the kitchen: seven Japanese domestic

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid. 98.  
\textsuperscript{135} Morris 1996: 386  
\textsuperscript{136} Heidegger 1978
Buckley, more than any other author in my opinion, succeeds in writing the home as a pure event. During her seven-part story, the Japanese kitchen is seen in many different ways through a Yoshimoto Banana novel, the Japanese state, garbage disposal practices, male pornographic comics and hi-tech electronics. In each instance the pure event of the home/kitchen generates another line of actualization. These tales not only demonstrate the multiplicity of the Japanese kitchen, but collectively, by their very manifold nature, make space through implication for the excessiveness of a virtual that cannot be spoken. Buckley’s final subheading – ‘An ending without closure’ – could just as much apply to the pure event of the home, as it does to her empirical study.

What are the implications for thinking about home as virtual pure event? The virtual as I have suggested can be thought of as a field of potential. Since this field of potential is never fully actualized – there is only this particular line of actualization, this particular home – there is always an excess, always more home(s). In other words, thinking about the home as a pure event means leaving the future open to new becomings of home (if we want to adopt Deleuze’s diction), always open to another conjunction. This is not to suggest that such potential is unconstrained when actualized, since this would ignore the relationship between the past and the present. However, it demands a certain ethics of home as pure event, which I take to mean an attunement to the potentiality and hence the contingency and (always relative) fluidity of the home when and wherever we encounter it. An ethics of the home (or, becoming with the pure event) in this case translates as: does what we say about a home (actual) allow for the home (virtual) to continue to be(come) differently, even as we capture it in this particular form. It is this style of ethical engagement which acknowledges that the virtual as such can never be incorporated into any account of home, while moving with the line(s) of actualization that construct any number of new homes in particular.

Such an ethics makes two specific demands when placed in the context of the Birzeiti homes I described at the start of this excursus. Firstly, it encourages skepticism towards

\[137\] Buckley 1996.
\[138\] This question has been adopted and adapted from Massumi, himself quoted in McCormack 2003.
notions of a ‘vernacular’ Arabic or Palestinian architecture, which is simply one way of building amongst many (or in fact, one vernacular amongst many). Secondly, we must be careful when approaching the normative definition of home in Birzeit, which is constructed through the intermeshing of family, *balad* (my place, village of origin) and security.

Hanna: The home is the family, which is the core of the Palestinian society.

Mohammad: The home is where I was raised, where I’ve been looked after since my childhood and where I’m still looked after. It’s mine and it is a part of me.

Moumen: I feel safe because I live with my brothers, sisters, father and mother. You feel secure when you are surrounded by your relatives.

Moussa: It means everything. The home is family, loyalty, devotion, birthplace. The last thing you defend.

Rasha: I’m lucky to have one, because otherwise I wouldn’t have a house and we would have to rent, and in this country renting is a disaster, with this economic situation, and the political one.

Fatima: At least, worst comes to worst, you have a roof to stay under. Here they say this thing: you can eat Zeit ou Zaater [Oil and Thyme on Bread] and not worry because you have a home.

This interweaving of family, *balad* and security allows home to be firmly located by many Palestinians in (Euclidian) space. These connections are strong and durable, as we will see in the final excursus, Representing Palestinian Homes, which explores what happens when homes (and by extension the family, the *balad* and security) are attacked and/or destroyed. However, there are a number of processes that have disrupted and continue to disrupt this sense of home, particularly the recent migration of people from the North and South of Palestine towards Ramallah for work (chapter 9) and the much longer problem of expulsion and refugee status (chapter 7). Abdullah’s case (chapter 7) is particularly interesting because he neither lives in a place (Birzeit) that he considers to be his own, nor does he live with his family anymore. He lives at a double remove from home, or perhaps triple since as a refugee he suggests his real roots are not in Jalazone.

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139 Amiry & Tamari 1989.
Refugee Camp, and he still wants to make a home in Beit Nabela. His sense of home as a security is also troubled by the displacement his grandfather suffered in 1948, and the destruction of his home in Jalazone in 1988, although growing up in a refugee camp also ensures he has ‘backup’.

As a refugee his homelessness is also two-fold. His family were not only expelled from their land in 1948, but since land is the primary source of wealth and income for many Palestinians, as a refugee he is consigned to a poverty (he is home poor) from which there is little chance of escape. His family has almost no land (aside from the small piece his uncles were able to buy in Jifna) and buying land in Palestine is prohibitively expensive due to shrinking land resources that result from land theft and population increase. Abdullah has ‘escaped’ to a certain extent from this land poverty cycle by moving into his wife’s family home, an unconventional gender role reversal in this context. He also talks about Jalazone as a home, and has planted trees and flowers around his apartment in Birzeit so that he can ‘come home and relax’. His construction of home is complex – shaped by the expulsion of his grandfather from Beit Nabela in 1948 and his own move out of Jalazone after his marriage – and it simultaneously contradicts and reshapes the normative relationship between home and family, balad and security. Home for Abdullah is distributed across, or circulates between, Beit Nabela, Jalazone and even to a small extent Birzeit, as his house is no longer in his balad (Beit Nabela), nor in the place where his family lives (Jalazone). Abdullah’s situation is just one example of why defining home in Birzeit (and Palestine) as family, security and balad is just simply one way in which home is created or organized, albeit the most common method. However, there are always more homes, and hence anything we say and write about particular homes will always represent one line of actualization. This is important to state, because it emphasizes that the Birzeit of my research is not necessarily the same place other people encounter. The representations of homes are of a particular time-space, and yet they also provoke connections with other homes, families and places that allow for more extensive knowledges to be generated.
We walk back towards the main Ramallah-Nablus road, and when we get there hail one of the distinctive university mini-buses, which are white with a red stripe and the words Birzeit – Banzeid Bus Company in both English and Arabic printed along the side. The bus speeds towards campus, swinging violently around a sharp curve in the road and then up a steep hill to the Eastern Campus Gate, where a fleet of yellow services have momentarily parked. The university mini-bus stops at a barrier and waits for us to get out, before the barrier is raised and the bus speeds off along a side road, narrowly avoiding a few passing students. As we walk on to the campus a few people are starting to drift in the opposite direction towards the taxi rank, but most students seem to be sitting on walls, benches, beneath trees and anywhere else that is shaded at this point in the middle of the afternoon. In fact there are so many people sat outside, you begin to wonder if anyone is actually in class.

The University of Birzeit is a private university. It is also the oldest university in Palestine, and demands the highest tawjihi (or high school leaving certificate) score of any of Palestine’s eleven universities. Beginning life as a school in 1924, the first bachelor degrees were awarded in 1976 and there are now Faculties of Arts, Science, Engineering, Information Technology, Commerce & Economics, Law & Public Administration and Graduate Studies. At present the university offers twenty-two
Masters degrees, but those wishing to do doctoral research must study in other countries. Recently, this has become an increasingly difficult task to accomplish. There are 7800 students currently attending the university, the majority of which now come from villages and cities around the West Bank. Prior to the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000, there were 350 students from the Gaza Strip. However since Gazans are no longer permitted to travel to the West Bank, there are currently less than fifteen students from Gaza attending the University of Birzeit, all of whom have been residing ‘illegally’ in the West Bank since 2000.

Figure 38. Road to Campus. Photograph by author

141 Birzeit University 2007.
142 Right to Education 2007a.
143 Right to Education 2007a; Hass 2007a, 2007b
The buildings on campus are all large and built from a white sandy coloured stone. Some of the buildings are large enough to house an entire faculty, such as the Engineering Building and Graduate Studies Building. They provide a very striking contrast with the disused space of the Old Campus on the outskirts of the Old City. The University, like the village, has come a long way in the fifteen years since the Old Campus was last inhabited. We stroll rather lazily up the incline towards the far side of campus, taking in the bubble of noise surrounding the steps of the administration building, where students sit and talk. As we walk towards the cafeteria, more students become visible, leaning against the walls of buildings. While many of the young women on campus are veiled, the young women who socialize and seek shade here tend not to be. They might be Christian, but maybe not. As we walk away from the crowds and towards the second new sports hall – the first new sports hall built on the same site collapsed when it snowed – we can also start to see a few young couples hidden in the nooks and crannies that the built environment and social rules of the university permit. In the distance along this road stands the Women’s Studies Building, and coming from that direction are two of my friends, Jumana and Dina.

Jumana extends her hand and gives a loose and rather unenthusiastic shake. Dina smiles, says she is good when I ask, and tells us they’re not doing much. I suggest sitting down, and we find a patch of wall shaded by an overhanging newly planted tree. While my enquires about their academic studies meet with nothing more than bland, unenthusiastic responses, Jumana has something more interesting she wants to talk about. Without giving us a reason, Jumana nevertheless seems happy to tell us that she has moved again for the third time in as many years. This is not unusual in and of itself, especially within a student population, but just like the previous move, Jumana says she is no longer speaking to ‘them’, meaning her previous flatmates. My entreaties for more details are rebuffed, so I ask her where she is living now? Dina butts in to tell me Jumana is now living with her and two other girls. Given Jumana’s track record, I wonder whether Dina’s enthusiasm is misplaced, but I don’t say anything as she begins to tell me about their new place. Apparently it’s the ground floor of a house in Birzeit, much bigger than Jumana’s previous apartment, and it also comes partially furnished. I ask whether this is
usual for student accommodation, and both Jumana and Dina immediately reply that it is not. Dina then lists the things she has bought for the house including plastic cutlery, a table, her bed and also the bed Jumana sleeps on. ‘And she makes good use of it’, continues Dina. ‘Did you know she usually goes to bed at 8pm, and sleeps 12 hours a night!’ ‘It’s because there’s nothing to do,’ retorts Jumana, ‘although now we have a TV I don’t always go to bed so early’.

I am slightly surprised to learn that these young women, who eat with plastic cutlery, have a TV. ‘We love movies. MBC 2. It’s my favourite. Silence of the Lambs, Braveheart. I love this movie’ Dina tells us.

MBC, a Saudi satellite company based in Dubai, offer a variety of programming on three channels, most of which is American TV shows and movies. In Palestine, due to a thriving and sophisticated pirating industry, these channels are free as long as you can afford to buy a television set and a satellite dish. However, I am slightly surprised that a student residence would include these two pieces of hardware. Dina explains:

   We have the local channels that record these movies and then play them back, and we watch them. We don’t have MBC 2. We have the local channels.

Jumana also says she likes to listen to the radio.

   Jumana: I sleep with it on.

   Dina: She sleeps a lot. When I see her sleeping I say, Jumana, are you sleeping. She says “No”. [laughs]. Then she goes to sleep. She loves to sleep a lot. She sleeps with the radio on.

Jumana’s preference is to listen to romance songs, particularly those sung by Arabic heart throb Amr Diab. I ask what else they’ve been up to, but apart from talking and eating they don’t come up with much. In fact, their opinion of life in Birzeit is that it is quite dull.
Dina: It’s not very enjoyable. You could say that people here are not nice. They’re not kind. They don’t help you when you need their help.

Jumana: They’re not social with each other. For example, you can’t visit your neighbours, or they won’t visit us for help.

Dina: No. It’s hard to make relationships with people around here.

As a result of this, both Dina and Jumana make frequent trips back home. Home for Jumana is the village in the Nablus district, and Dina’s family also live in the North, in the city of Tulkarem. Both visit their families every two weeks, so I ask how long this takes given the delays caused by checkpoints and road closures?

Figure 39. Flying checkpoint. Photograph by author

Dina: It differs from one time to the next. One time it could take six hours and another time it could take two hours. It varies. Sometimes five hours, four hours. In the worst case, six hours. In the best case, about eighty minutes.
Although the road that runs through Birzeit goes directly from Ramallah to Nablus, and from there another road goes directly to Tulkarem, the journeys Dina and Jumana take are far from straightforward, since they usually cannot use this road. Since there is a checkpoint at Huwara controlling traffic in and out of Nablus, Dina must first take a road that circumvents Nablus.

Then we go to C area, which belongs to Israel. We call it C. This area belongs to Israel. It consists of settlements. We go through these areas, not straight. It’s a very difficult road. There are about five checkpoints.

Jumana interjects that sometimes even moving between Ramallah and the outskirts of Nablus is difficult.

Jumana: Normally it takes about one hour, but last time it took me three hours. Firstly, Atara was closed.

Dina: We had to go around. You go through four villages, then Beit Tounia, then Ramallah, Birzeit.

The Atara checkpoint, so called because it was built on a bridge that connects Birzeit with the village of Atara, controls and sometimes prevents Palestinian traffic moving along the Nablus Road that connects Ramallah with the Northern West Bank. The journey described by Dina when the checkpoint is closed involves detouring to the east of Ramallah, and then back north to Birzeit, turning a one hour journey into three hours.

However, despite this, both are adamant that they prefer spending time ‘at home’, citing the presence of family (particularly their mothers’ cooking and cleaning), and a sense of relaxation, comfort and familiarity when there.

I ask if there are any positives to living in Birzeit? Jumana suggests that ‘there are lots of green areas and it’s quieter’. Dina also mentions that you see the Israeli army far less in Birzeit than back home.
Dina: In my city we have areas that overlap with the Israeli people, so we see them a great deal. The tanks come through our area a great deal, so there’s no peace. You hear a lot of bad sounds. The army came into my house one time. I lived in another house with my friends here in Birzeit and one time they came into our house. About six soldiers maybe, and it was about two AM. It was so scary and I started crying. We were living in a flat. Six soldiers came into our house and inspected everything, every room. They asked to see our IDs. They took photos of us.

Jumana: But in my village, we don’t live in the same situation as Dina, because these things happen more in cities than in villages.

Dina: Like in Tulkarem, Jenin, Nablus, it’s very difficult. Their planes, oh my gosh, Apache and F16. Their sound is very annoying. But during the night, sometimes they come through Birzeit, and you don’t know, you can’t be sure because it’s night. You can’t go outside and check. So, in the night sometimes…

Despite the traumatic nature of everything they are talking about, they discuss it in a very matter of fact tone of voice. So I ask if they were traumatized by the army incursion into their home.

Dina: We couldn’t sleep later, like after they left. We just talked about it and were like, woah, that was scary. It was a familiar scene. For me, I don’t know about her. It’s not the first time, and they came into my school more than once. And sometimes when we were going home, you know, leaving school, they would start to follow us in their jeeps and talk to us and shoot their guns just to scare us.

Jumana: The strangest thing was that Dina, although it was familiar to her, cried a great deal.

Dina: Yes, because I was away from my family. We didn’t have a man in the house. It makes it worse. It’s was very scary, because at home I have my father and brother so it’s kind of easier. You feel better because you’re with your family. It’s easier for you.

I ask if they would prefer to live elsewhere, perhaps after graduating.

Dina: I catch myself dreaming sometimes, about a chance I have to go to the USA to continue my studies in Accountancy. If I achieve this, I’ll stay there, if I can. I hate Palestine. I don’t hate the place or the people, but the situation is really bad. You feel, I don’t know, like being in jail.
Dina explains that she has relatives in the US, who would be able to assist her. Jumana’s post-graduation prospects are located closer to home.

Jumana: I’ll return to my village and work there teaching English unfortunately. I would like to work here and continue my education, but my father will force me to work there.

Jumana then tells us that she would like to see the world too, but her father won’t permit her to leave Palestine to study. He, in fact, wanted her to attend Najah University in Nablus, but because of the closures during the height of the second intifada, it was easier for her to attend Birzeit. Her older brother is also a student here. She notes the irony that this brother was given the opportunity to study abroad that she craved, but preferred to stay in Palestine.

As we sit on the wall, a few people have been drifting by. However, this occasional trickle suddenly turns into a fairly sizable torrent, indicating that one class has just ended and another one is about to begin. Dina and Jumana explain that they have to go to lessons, and they slowly drift back towards the cafeteria. As we rest for a moment longer, drained of energy by the strength of the sun, someone from amongst the passing crowd calls out my name, and a young man named Omar comes over and offers his hand in greeting. He is a fourth year student from Khalil (Hebron), who studies business and economics. I explain to Omar that we are conducting a tour of Birzeit, and he smiles and tells us that he would be an excellent guide. In the four years that he has studied at Birzeit, he has lived in five different student accommodations in the village. I ask him why he has moved so often?

I like the change of scenery. I want to make connections with lots of people in Birzeit.

Omar then explains that he has also had some landlords that he didn’t see eye to eye with.

The best place I lived was the Nasser place. He’s an old man. He was good. During Ramadan, he would invite us for the feast at sunset. What else? The
second place, the landlord was forty-five. He just saw us as people to earn him money, not as students or people. And he wasn’t flexible with paying the rent. He didn’t invite us in. He didn’t care about us. The electricity, water and gas weren’t very good, nor was the bath. I just want to forget about him. The third guy was a Sheikh. He was a religious man. He prayed five times a day. He didn’t work. He just went to the mosque five times a day. He only came at the end of the month to collect his money, like the previous guy. So I had a quarrel with him. The third place was an old place. It wasn’t in the old city, but it was an old place. The temperature was very hot. It wasn’t very healthy. The fourth place I rented from a woman. She was forty. Not attractive.

This woman was really crazy. Six or seven mornings she came to our lodging, open the door without knocking or greeting us, and disturbed us. She would loudly say, where is the money, the rent money. She was a noisy woman. And sometimes we wouldn’t have electricity or water. When I came to the lodging for the first time, she told us, there were peach and plum trees around the lodging. She said you can eat the fruit, but don’t let anyone from outside eat. After we left, one of my friends picked a peach, and she came flying out, saying why did you take that. She cursed him. Her behaviour was very bad. And after that we had an ongoing argument.

The current lodging is the best place because the landlady is good. It’s a woman. She’s Christian, seventy years old. She’s a spinster. She’s a good woman, very flexible with paying the rent. Whenever there is a special occasion, she invites us. She brings us food, sweets. She’s very nice. What else. It’s not noisy but calm and relaxed. She has a nephew – son of her brother – who works at the university and helps her. We pay two hundred shekels every month [about thirty-four Jordanian Dinar (JD)].

I ask him if that is a standard rent for student accommodation in the village, but he tells us that his rent has varied from place to place.

In the first place, we paid thirty JD. In the next place we paid thirty-five JD. In the fourth place, we paid forty JD.

While on the topic of money, Omar begins to talk about the troubles he had getting home to his village in the Khalil district, a trip he usually makes only every two months. His journey consists of taking a service from Birzeit to Ramallah, then another taxi to the Kalandia checkpoint. From there he goes to Al Khader, a village near Bethlehem. Then from Al Khader there are buses that travel to the city of Khalil. One final service ride takes him from the city to his home. This three-hour journey normally costs between
forty and fifty shekels. However, on his previous trip two weeks ago, there were a number of flying checkpoints, resulting in a total of nine taxi rides at a cost of around one hundred shekels.
Figure 40. Omar’s journey home. Map adapted from UN OCHA
Omar segues once again from his difficulties traveling home to his future plans to move to Abu Dhabi, although when it takes three hours to return home he might as well be living in a foreign country. He has a friend who lived and studied in the Emirates, and who can provide the necessary connections to arrange a job for him. Omar’s plan is to work there for four years and save money, after which time he will be able to return to Khalil and build his own home. As he explains his plan, a friend of Omar’s who was strolling past, stops to say hi to him. Omar introduces him as Samir and then tells him what he has just told us about traveling to Khalil. Samir, a student who also rents in Birzeit, is from the Jenin district. He laughs when he hears Omar’s story, and explains to us that when he first started attending Birzeit four years ago, they used to travel via Jericho [to the east] to get between Jenin and Ramallah. However, after this route was closed by Israel, they started to go via Tulkaren [to the West]. Since Israel has closed this route too, they now literally have to drive through olive groves on the outskirts of Tulkarem to continue travelling north. Faced with such problems, Samir only visits his family every three or four months. To compensate for the separation, his family meets once a week in a private Yahoo chat room (VOIP), something that’s been going on for two years now.
Figure 41. Samir’s journey home. Map adapted from UN OCHA
Samir and Omar mention they are returning to the village and invite us to join them. This seems like a good idea, and we walk back towards where the buses stop. One of the white Birzeit – Banzeid Bus Company buses is sat at the stop full of passengers. The driver indicates there are two spaces left, and Samir insists that we catch this bus and let them wait for the next one. The driver begins to accelerate before we sit down and soon we are speeding down the hill away from campus.
Excursus: Im/mobilities

All the world seems to be on the move\textsuperscript{144}.

In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century issues of mobility are now centre stage, or so we are told, as all sorts of human and non-human bodies are on the move, whether this is travel, immigration, terrorism, SARS, global warming or the internet. Concomitantly, there has been a great deal of work on the concept of mobility in the social sciences. In fact, there has been so much work that not only is there a new journal titled \textit{Mobilities}, but some authors have heralded the arrival of a new intellectual paradigm.

A ‘mobility turn’ is spreading into and transforming the social sciences, transcending the dichotomy between transport research and social research, putting social relations into travel and connecting different forms of transport with complex patterns of social experience conducted through communications at-a-distance. It seems that a new paradigm is being formed in the social sciences, the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm\textsuperscript{145}.

Issues around mobility are very important in both Birzeit and in studies of Palestine\textsuperscript{146}, and so I want to examine how this ‘new mobilities paradigm’ might inform our understanding of some of the stories I encountered during my research. If we overlook the performative utterance in the quote above that seeks to create the very thing that it purports to describe and, consequentially, put aside the question of to what extent this work is ‘new’, I think another good reason for this engagement is because my research in Palestine also has interesting things to say back to work emerging in this area.

The story that proponents\textsuperscript{147} of the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm tell is fairly clear-cut. It begins with the argument that social sciences, by and large, have until recently been static or a-mobile\textsuperscript{148}. Movement and travel have been treated as black boxes that allow for

\textsuperscript{144} Sheller & Urry 2006: 207.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid. 208.
\textsuperscript{147} The two main position papers I am drawing on in this paragraph and what follows are Sheller & Urry 2006 and Hannam et al 2006.
\textsuperscript{148} This argument is developed at length in Urry 2000.
broader narratives about economic, social and political processes to be told. Scholarship on mobilities explicitly seeks to challenge sedentarist perspectives, which treat stasis as the norm and change as abnormal. However, proponents of the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm are also wary of nomadic perspectives, which talk up (post-national) deterritorialising processes and flows that become detached from places and subjectivities.

In place of these twin polarities, proponents of the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm argue for work that not only engages with both mobilities and immobilities, but also charts the connections between them. They suggest that social science work should engage the multiple mobilities of people, technologies, objects and knowledges that are forging new social, economic and political time-spaces, all of which are animated by unequal relations of power.

It is important to have a clear understanding of the word mobility. Perhaps the most concrete definition of this term can be found in the work of Cresswell, who suggests that mobility describes movements shot through with relations of power/knowledge. Mobilities, he argues, must be understood as simultaneously corporeal practices that are experienced and representations that (re-)iterate meaning(s). He is quick to point out that these materials and meanings are constantly in the process of intersecting and interacting, leading to dynamic and contingent mobilities. All mobilities therefore, must be understood in relation to one another. Consequently, some processes and movements will appear to be more or less mobile in the course of this comparison. A focus on the less mobile or immobile is extended by Adey, who uses the term ‘relative immobilities’ to emphasize not only the relational, but also the differential ways in which mobilities interact. His work is also noteworthy for summarizing some of the long history of work on the politics of mobility, which challenges more hyperbolic representations of past social science scholarship as sedentarist and/or nomadic. More importantly though, Adey uses this work to make the point that differential mobilities are politically charged. Relative immobilities not only interact, but do so agonistically and antagonistically,

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149 Cresswell 2006: 2-4, 9.
150 Adey 2006.
leading to contestations. Certain mobilites actively require other relative immobilities to take place, although these relations are contingent.

Cresswell exemplifies this point well in his discussion of the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union’s (BRU) struggle and court case against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), after the MTA sought to raise bus fares, which adversely affected poor residents, while simultaneously subsidizing a light rail system that predominantly benefited more affluent suburban residents.

The actions of the Bus Riders Union are remarkable in that they have enacted a politics of mobility based on the recognition that different people, in different places, are differently enabled and constrained in terms of their mobility… The Bus Riders Union insisted on a form of spatial justice, pointing out the inequities created by the production of one form of mobility at the expense of another. To the activists it is not possible to think of mobility in the form of public transit without thinking about race. While some, principally white and suburban, areas of Los Angeles were having their modes of mobility enhanced, the vast majority of poor, nonwhite, urban areas, were having theirs reduced. 151

Cresswell’s study of public transportation is noteworthy given the preponderance of mobility studies that have focused on cars and automobility. 152 It is also one of the few studies that take relative immobility as its empirical focus. Despite theoretical statements by those extolling the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm that proclaim the related and differential nature of all mobilities, relative immobilities are usually only incorporated into their accounts as supports – both literally and rhetorically – for more mobile materials and processes. So while Sheller & Urry 153 list a whole host of relatively less mobile objects including mobile phone masts and coaxial cable systems, these materials serve not only to facilitate greater mobility in the world, but also in their text, playing a minor role to the broader discussions of internet and other telecommunication mobilities that the authors wish to stage.

152 For instance, in the seven volumes of the journal Mobilities that have been published at the time of writing, the following papers deal with automobilities: Cohen 2006; Hagman 2006; Freund & Martin 2007; Schonfelder et al 2007; Redshaw 2007; Huijbens & Benediktsson 2007; Laurier et al 2008; Kellerman 2008.
But what if the immutable mobiles in question were checkpoints and bridges, and what if relative immobilities took centre stage in an accounting of these materials? Nearly all Palestinians face serious challenges to their relative mobility when trying to travel through the West Bank. B’Tselem, The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, state that as of December 2007 there are 99 permanent Israeli checkpoints throughout the West Bank\textsuperscript{154}. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) also record the number of flying (‘surprise’) checkpoints, which varied from an average of 69 a week in December 2007 to 141 a week in May 2007\textsuperscript{155}, figures that in themselves demonstrate how arbitrary and unpredictable these barriers to movement are. In October 2007 there were also 387 obstructions (in the form of dirt piles, fences, locked gates and trenches) that have closed roads, and Palestinian traffic is also restricted from or forbidden to use twenty-four sections of roads in the West Bank, covering a distance of some 311 km\textsuperscript{156}. The number of all these barriers and impediments fluctuate according to political and so-called security developments.

However, these numbers cannot begin to describe the experience of going through a checkpoint that Abduallah alludes to (in chapter 7), and the loss of dignity that results from such experiences\textsuperscript{157}. Hammami describes very eloquently the experience of moving through the Kalandia checkpoint – separating Ramallah from Al Quds (Jerusalem) – prior to 2006:

Heat wind dust garbage. Cars stuck in line, jammed bumper to bumper -- probably a two-hour wait. I squeeze through the few inches between an articulated lorry and the next car. On the other side is a porter shifting two television sets tied to his cart weaving in between the oncoming traffic. \textit{Ramallah, Ramallah, Ramallah}, the calls of the van organizers. I shake my head -- and point toward the checkpoint. Up through the first set of blocks, the wind blows up white dust from the quarry, the peddlers clutch on to their sun umbrellas. I pick up my pace, its rush hour. Through the second row of blocks and I can see the crowd up

\textsuperscript{154} B’Tselem 2008
\textsuperscript{155} UN OCHA 2007
\textsuperscript{156} B’Tselem 2008
\textsuperscript{157} See also Jamoul 2004.
ahead, spilling out from under the zinc roof and concrete pens of the crossing. I reach them and ask an old man, how long he's been waiting: "From the time of the Caliphate".
"Open the way, I have children, where's the women's line?" A mother is overwhelmed with a toddler, a baby and a heavy shoulder bag.
"There's no women's line today, just chaos", replies a young woman.
"Did they close it?" A new arrival asks anxiously.
"We can't tell." Comes the collective response.
The toddler, a little boy starts crying.
There are maybe 300 people here waiting to cross -- too many to be able to see what's happening up front and more people keep piling up behind us.
The woman with the children squeezes over to the far side of the crowd and pushes her way forward -- she shouts and cajoles her way through. Someone lifts the little boy up and he's passed wailing over people's heads.
The crowd loosens to the side -- they must have opened another lane and people scramble towards it. But in a moment we're back to being stuck, packed body to body pushing ourselves forward into the caged structure and boiling under the zinc roof.
The crowd pushes in from the back.
"For God's sake stop pushing" -- shouts a young woman, "it's enough what we've got in front of us".

Something sharp jabs my back and I turn -- the man looks at me apologetically hugging the culprit -- his briefcase. Slowly the crowd is becoming lines up to the turnstyles (sic), but I can't tell which one I'm in yet. I ask the man in front of me if he thinks this is the line for blue I.D.'s today, 'You'll only know when it's the wrong one'.
We're close enough to hear the soldiers now.
Irja, Irja -- "go back go back" the screeching voice of a woman soldier.
Ta'al ta'al "come forward, come forward".
Irja, ta'al the only two words they know in Arabic.

We finally get close to our turnstile and beyond it is a glum looking teenage soldier leaning against the side chewing gum.
The man in front of me shows his orange I.D. card and the soldier says "tasriich (permit) over there" laconically gesturing to the last line. The man looks modest but respectable like an accountant or schoolteacher he's probably older than the soldier's father. He starts arguing politely in broken English -- "it's not possible, I wait long time". The soldier, disinterested shakes his head - "Over their permit".
The man's shoulders slump, it means a lot of pushing and shoving across two lines. He moves closer to the turnstile and gives it another try, patient explaining.
The soldier snaps and lunges towards him, shouting 'Itlaa, itlaa' (get out, get out) -- their third Arabic vocabulary word. The man backs off, mumbling under his breathe and starts to negotiate his way through to the next line. I hold up my blue I.D. card, but the soldier is now in a "mood" and ignores me.
"Here take this", a steel walker arrives overhead, and after a shove, an old peasant woman grabs my arm. "Come on Hajji", as I put her walker on top of the turnstile
then we turn and look at the soldier. He sees it but won't look at us then finally relents and takes the walker down and waves her in.

She struggles through the first turnstile and slowly makes her way up to the metal spindle then freezes. She stares back at us with a look of utter confusion and fear. She can't get herself and the walker through at the same time. I glare at the soldier and he waves me through. The woman soldier on the other side of the spindle is shouting at her to come forward. "God protect us from evil" the Hajji mumbles as I help her and then the walker through the bizarre contraption. On the other side the soldier girl passes her through without looking at her I.D. card. Just as I pass through the spindle, the girl soldier's mobile phone rings. I stop while she answers it. I look over at the next soldier, a young man keeps holding up his permit and the soldier keeps shaking his head. He keeps saying he has to go to the Eye Hospital to see his father, and the soldier keeps telling him the permit's no good. My girl soldier is now giggling with whoever's on the phone. The young man in the next line won't quit, "Look, I just want to see my father in hospital" he shouts. Suddenly another soldier comes over and grabs him by the arm -- and violently drags him out the exit, the young man still shouting about the hospital. The girl soldier still chatting on the phone beckons me forward then signals to put my bag down on the concrete block in front of her and with her free hand clumsily fumbles through my things. I open my I.D. card, she glances at it and waves me through. Outside on the "corrections bench" in the sun, they're holding the young man who wanted to go the eye hospital. Like everyone else who will pass him on their way out, I lower my eyes.

While my experiences of travelling through this checkpoint were similar the first time I visited Palestine in 2005, I found a very different checkpoint when I returned the next year in 2006. The ‘new’ Kalandia checkpoint resembles an immigration point at an airport - a good indication of where Israel considers its current border lie. On top of the terminal building there is a little electronic sign saying 'Welcome to Asharot', the name of a nearby Israeli settlement. The checkpoint is now a series of turnstile gates controlled by shadowy figures largely hidden behind bullet-proof glass. It felt like walking through a ghost village, except suddenly a speaker would crackle into life and a shadowy figure would demand to see someone's ID. The turnstile would lock suddenly, allowing only a handful of people into the terminal building at any one time. Once through the first turnstile there are x-ray machines, through which you have to put your bags, a metal detector through which you have to walk, all while being observed by soldiers sitting behind a more transparent Perspex panel. Most Palestinians hold their Jerusalem ID up to the window and continue walking. I was always stopped and asked to press my British

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passport right up to the glass, and show the tourist visa stamp, before being allowed to continue. In 2007, foreigners like me could stay on the buses that were once again allowed to drive all the way from Ramallah to Jerusalem (or visa versa), at least when I visited in October.

Many people that I met in Birzeit had never crossed the Kalandia checkpoint, because they have West Bank IDs that prevents them from travelling to Al Quds (Jerusalem). Their experiences of checkpoints are derived from crossing the Surda checkpoint, that was built on the northern edge of Ramallah in 2001 and lasted until 2003, and the Atara checkpoint that is on the northern edge of Birzeit. While this checkpoint is designed to allow Palestinians driving to and from Ramallah to pass through in their cars and services, albeit at unpredictably different speeds, there have been several occasions when vehicles are prevented from crossing altogether and people have to walk through or around the checkpoint on foot (see chapter 10). It is experiences such as these\textsuperscript{159}, and the loss of dignity that they entail, which form the basis of a micropolitics of im/mobility that I discuss later in this excursus.

\textsuperscript{159} See also Hammami 2004.
Figure 42. Movement restrictions around Birzeit. Map adapted from UN OCHA
As Cresswell and Adey suggest, examining these relative immobilities in their relations with other relative mobilities is important for understanding movement in the West Bank. The relative Palestinian immobilities that these checkpoints, obstacles and road closures enforce, create relative mobilities for Israeli settlers living illegally on Palestinian land.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank are dormitory suburbs, reliant on roads connecting them with the urban centres of Israel proper. So-called ‘bypass’ roads were a feature of the Oslo accord. The Israeli government was allowed (with specially allocated American money) to construct a network of fast, wide security roads that bypass Arab towns and connect the settlements to Israel.

The bypass roads, some still in the process of paving, would become a massive system of twenty-nine highways spanning four hundred and fifty kilometres. They allow four hundred thousand Jews living in land occupied in 1967 to have freedom of movement. About three million Palestinians are left locked into isolated enclaves... The bypass roads attempt to separate Israeli traffic networks from Palestinian ones, preferably without allowing them ever to cross. They emphasize the overlapping of two separate geographies that inhabit the same landscape. At points where the networks do cross, a makeshift separation is created. Most often, small dust roads are dug out to allow Palestinians to cross under the fast, wide highways on which Israeli vans and military vehicles rush between settlements.\(^\text{160}\)

While materials and technologies such as checkpoints and the identity card system\(^\text{161}\) do allow for a range of mobilities, they also act as barriers - material and socio-technical processes - that render Palestinian bodies and materials less mobile (irrespective of the mobility they enable). It is important to stress that these barriers operate through apparatus that are simultaneously material (checkpoints), legal-bureaucratic (the ID and permit system) and imaginative (people’s unwillingness to travel). These (relatively) immobile materials and social technologies are therefore of a somewhat different nature than the mobile phone masts and coaxial cable systems Sheller and Urry discuss\(^\text{162}\), because they are designed to facilitate further relative immobilities.

However, listening to some of the narratives of im/mobility that I heard in Birzeit, their

\(^{161}\) See Abu Zahra 2007; Weizman 2007.
\(^{162}\) Sheller & Urry 2006: 210-1.
immobility is relative not just to these barriers and other peoples’ mobility (e.g. Israeli settlers) – that is to say materials and mobilities that are proximate in time and space - but also to prior and future experiences of mobility (an else when) and to experiences of mobility in other spaces (an else where). Ghaleb (chapter 6) discusses the liability of having a Jordanian passport for travelling, and the importance of getting his Australian passport in 1992. Dina’s (chapter 8) compares an imagined life in America with her current existence in Palestine, where ‘you feel… like being in jail’. Iman (chapter 9) prefers to live in Ramallah, because of the potential effects of a checkpoint closure in Salfit when one of her children is ill. The outbreak of the second intifada in 2000 is a key moment for many Birzeit residents, and provides the chronological fulcrum around which relatively mobile (prior to the intifada) and relatively immobile (post 2000) experiences are contrasted. The ability to move relatively freely within the Ramallah region compared with other parts of Palestine was also noted by a number of students who rent accommodation in Birzeit. These students, such as Dina, Jumana, Samir & Omar (chapter 8) experience this relative immobility every time they travel to and from home, as different, ‘longer’ routes are necessary, and journeys take greater amounts of time.

Travelling outside the West Bank is also a fraught process. Il jissar (The Bridge), and I use the definite article deliberately since it is the only route that Palestinians with West Bank IDs can currently use to enter and depart from the West Bank, is also known as the Al-Karameh Bridge, the King Hussein Bridge and the Allenby Bridge. Perhaps these many names are appropriate, given the fractured nature of the border that this bridge enforces. Weizman argues that one-way mirrors in the Israeli controlled terminal building, ‘created a new conceptual border to the concept of sovereignty’\textsuperscript{163} when the terminal was enlarged and reopened after the Oslo agreements (in 1993). While the terminal was ostensibly a Palestinian controlled land border, the one-way mirrors positioned behind Palestinian officials allowed Israeli security personnel to decide who was and who wasn’t permitted to enter and leave the Occupied Territories. As Weizman notes, this created the appearance of Palestinian sovereignty where there was none\textsuperscript{164}.

\textsuperscript{163} Weizman 2007: 144
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid. See also Barghouti’s 2005 account that Weizman draws on.
This charade had discontinued by the time I travelled over/through *il jissar* in summer 2005, and Israeli immigration officials sat in the little immigration booths in plain sight. In my travel journal I described the terminal building as a site of ‘deliberately disorganized chaos’, and I also noted that this was an ‘experience I don’t want to repeat any time soon.’ It’s hard to even imagine what crossing *il jissar* must be like for those who only have a Palestinian passport and are older and less healthy than me.

In Birzeit, *il jissar* is a site of frustration, delays, denials and separation. Someone like Alia (chapter 5) is relatively lucky, because she can stay with her son in Amman before flying to Canada and the US. For Osama, the grandson of one of my landladies, *il jissar* was as close as he came to travelling to Brazil for a church-related conference, before being denied exit on security grounds. *Il jissar* was a spectral presence during the Birzeit Society Convention (chapter 6), a cipher for all those who had not been permitted entry to the West Bank, and for the movement restrictions the Israelis place on people wishing to enter Palestine. However, it’s also important to note, as in Ghalid’s (chapter 6) story, that the problem of entering and leaving Palestine is not one that can simply be located at *il jissar*. While West Bank ID holders must use the bridge, many Palestinians like Ghalid were never granted this identification or were unable to maintain it when living abroad. While such people usually have foreign citizenship and passports, they have been denied entry at Israel’s borders - for being Palestinian - with increasing frequency. This became such a serious problem that the Right to Enter grassroots campaign began during my stay in Birzeit in 2006, to oppose and seek an end to these Israeli policies.

The Right to Enter campaign is just one manifestation of the distinctly spatial politics that has developed around the issue of differential im/mobilities in Palestine and their immersion in uneven relations of power. Weizman uses the phrase ‘politics of verticality’ to describe how three-dimensional space is split into six dimensions, three Jewish and three Arab. However, it is not simply a matter of three Israeli dimensions being overlaid on three Palestinian ones. Rather, Weizman suggests the spatiality of occupation

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165 Abu Zahra 2007
166 http://www.righttoenter.ps See Hass 2006a, b, c, d, e, f, g for more on this issue.
167 Weizman 2007; see also Gregory 2004.
is ‘Escher like’, as Palestinians and Israeli spaces pass through, around, below and above one another: Israeli tunnels dive into Palestinians mountains; Palestinian dirt tracks pass beneath Israeli highways. This ‘politics of verticality’ has led to roads, checkpoints, bridges and tunnels all becoming key signifiers in negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian politicians. This politics is not just the domain of elected officials and bureaucrats. The Israeli checkpoints and the relative Palestinian immobility that they cause have also become lightening rods for grass-roots activism. In addition to the statistics and monitoring produced by B’Tselem that I have already drawn on (see http://www.btselem.org/), Machsom Watch, a group of Israeli ‘Women for Human Rights’ produce frequent (in some cases daily) first hand reports of the conditions and relative im/mobilities for Palestinians at the permanent checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip (http://www.machsomwatch.org/). Their goals are threefold: i) monitor the behaviour of the Israeli military, ii) monitor/protect Palestinian human and civil rights, and iii) bear witness in the form of reports after each observation. The ‘Right to Education Campaign’ (http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/), an indigenous Palestinian organization set up within the University of Birzeit, seeks to address the difficulties Palestinian students face while trying to obtain tertiary education. A significant part of this campaign focuses on problems of access and mobility that many students and staff currently face at universities throughout Palestine.

There are also the everyday and periodic practices of Palestinians. Alia’s transfer of her Canadian pension (chapter 5), Ghalid’s encounters with the immigration officials (chapter 6) and Dina’s dreams of going to America (chapter 8) are just some of the panoply of mobilities in Palestine, which are more or less related to the Occupation, but also related to a number of other processes. Another way of putting this would be to suggest that their mobilities are much more than a series of encounters with the barriers that are constantly constructed and maintained by the Israeli Occupation Forces. Palestinians are forced to enact what after Connolly we might term a micropolitics of im/mobility. Connolly describes micropolitical practices as techniques of the self.

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168 Machsom Watch 2008.
170 c.f. Weizman 2007
organized and deployed collectively, which ‘operate below the threshold of large legislative acts and executive initiatives’ while nevertheless setting the ‘conditions of possibility for these more visible actions’\textsuperscript{171}. Hammami’s ethnographic studies of the Surda checkpoint between Ramallah and Birzeit/the North and the Kalandia checkpoint that still blocks the road between Ramallah and Jerusalem\textsuperscript{172}, provide an insightful description of how a micropolitics of im/mobility unfolds at checkpoints. Her work explores how ‘thugs’, porters and taxi drivers continually adapted to the existence and conditions of these checkpoints to enhance and where possible increase the mobility of other Palestinians. However, a micropolitics of im/mobility might also include practices such as the improvisation of service drivers to avoid checkpoints, a greater unwillingness to travel to other cities, and increased immigration abroad, and also desires such as the aspiration to study at the oldest and most prestigious university in Palestine, see family members and live ‘at home’. It is precisely because of practices and desires such as these that Palestinians will never accept the cantonisation of the West Bank that the Israeli Occupation Forces are currently trying to impose. This micropolitics of im/mobility is also the reason why such efforts will ultimately not succeed.

\textsuperscript{171} Connolly 2002: 20-1.  
\textsuperscript{172} Hammami 2004, 2006.
The *Birzeit – Banzeid Bus Company* bus speeds along the Nablus Road through *El Majj* and back towards the village centre. Periodically, it comes to an abrupt halt when passengers request to get off. At the taxi stop in the centre of the village the bus veers off to the right and heads towards the Old City along the same route we walked this morning. However, at the Latin Church the bus turns left and begins to climb the hill that heads in the opposite direction from the Old City. At this time of day, Nadi Birzeit is usually a lively venue, so as we approach the entrance we ask the driver to let us off.
Nadi Birzeit, which translates as Birzeit Club, is a large stone building next to the Latin Church, surrounded by playground equipment on one side, a basketball court cum football pitch around the back and an area covered in patchy grass, where clusters of plastic table and chairs are set out and a couple of guys in a small hut serve snacks. We sit at one of the tables as one of the two guys running the snack bar starts to roast some corn on a barbeque. As we wait for it to cook, a young man sat nearby introduces himself as Wajih. He is from a village near Tulkarem in the North, but when I ask if he studies at the university, he says he works.

I moved to Birzeit three years ago. I went to Amman in 2001 to study hospitality. Of course this was after my Tawjihi and I spent nine months there. After that there was no work at home so I decided to work in Ramallah. But it was cheaper to rent in Birzeit, so I decided to live in Birzeit and work in Ramallah.
However, he initially started working in Birzeit, at the university.

I went to the university because my brother was studying there, and I asked at the cafeteria if they had any work and I was lucky, because they had a position. So I worked there, and I got to know some of the guys at the university, which made things easier. But in the beginning it was hard.

Wajih tells us he is currently working as a waiter in a restaurant in El Beirah (part of the Ramallah-El Beirah conurbation), which pays okay because it’s a well-located and hence busy restaurant. Over the past year he has also worked in a restaurant in Birzeit that closed for financial reasons, on a building site during the winter, and as a gardener in Ramallah. He has two younger brothers who currently study at the university, and he lives with the younger of the two.

I was lucky in renting my house, because the landlord is a very good man. If I don’t have money this month, he’ll wait, he doesn’t mind. We pay one hundred dinars for our place, which is not very expensive at all for two people sharing together. It’s better than other students because they’ll have to pay more rent, and they might have six or seven students in the same apartment, which creates problems for the students and the landlords.

However, the apartment is not very good because it gets a bit humid, because it’s old, and it doesn’t have any windows. In the two bedrooms there are no windows. There’s one in the corridor between the two rooms, but I can’t open it because it opens on to the road, and if I open it the house will get dirty. So I keep it closed.

Wajih also tells us that relations between outsiders like himself and Birzeitis usually comes back to one thing.

The relationship is not bad, but often the relationship is based on profit. The landlords always want rent from the students so they can make a profit on the rent. But it’s not bad. Sometimes we’ll help them [literally: ‘stand up with each other’] if Birzeit is in trouble with other villages, for example with guys from Surda, Atara, Ramallah and there’s a huge fight. I like the students a lot.

As he says this, I think about how close-knit the Birzeit community seemed when listening to Abu Wassam earlier in the day, especially when he described infants sharing breast-milk and the communal construction of village houses. However, even though
Wajih is an outsider, it seems as though he has integrated himself into Birzeit life, especially if he is helping the local *shabab* (young men) in fights. I ask him what his life in Tulkarem was like before he moved here.

The house in Tulkarem is a good house. It’s a healthy house, a house you can live in. There are windows and air. But the problem is we’re not a wealthy family. We’re poor, so it’s a small house. But at the end of the day it’s our own house. We own it, so we can do whatever we want.

The life in my village is also a bit easier without money, because the village is surrounded by farmland. So the land might be your cousin’s and so you can eat from it. You can live off the land. But in Birzeit I can’t live off farming, because I don’t know anyone and I have to work for money and buy food. The second thing is that people in Birzeit are open-minded, because of religion, because there are Christians and Muslims. So there’s a difference in the kind of village between my village and Birzeit. For example, in my village there are just three women who don’t wear the *hijab*. There are sixteen thousand people and only three women don’t wear the *hijab*.

He then tells us he hasn’t been able to visit his village for nine months now, ‘because of the problems in the North it’s very difficult. In my village there are a lot of problems with the Israelis.’

There were three people from my village who conducted martyrdom operations in Israel. Also it’s five hundred metres away from the border, the Green Line, between Israel and Palestine, so they have a very large military presence around. There are always problems. There’s also an army camp about one kilometre from the village, on higher ground. So whenever something happens they start firing, which is dangerous obviously.

Besides the dangers of living there, another consequence of the village’s location is that travelling there is extremely difficult.

If there’s no checkpoints, it would take forty-five minutes to an hour. But with the checkpoints maybe it’ll take two days. There’s one at Zattara, one at A’Lidan, one at Atara and the Bar checkpoint. These ones are always shut.

Two days is an entire weekend, which explains why Wajih hasn’t seen his family for nine months. The poor economic circumstances in Palestine also discourage work migrants
from travelling to see their families, since they cannot risk getting stuck at home and consequently losing their job in Ramallah. One of the effects of not spending time with his family – except for his brothers who live in Birzeit – is that Wajih has a broader sense of belonging than some of the Birzeitis we met earlier who have lived in Birzeit their whole lives.

I consider the whole of Palestine my home. When I was a child, my father taught me that the land was very beautiful and I should love all the land. So I love all of Palestine, and I don’t care if I live in Jerusalem, Jenin or Tulkarem. It’s all my home. I can learn to adapt to anything and live with anyone, and treat it like home. Of course Tulkarem is my home, where I can return. It’s beautiful memories, where I spent my childhood and I miss it a lot. I love it a lot. If I didn’t have one I would be no one, but in the end I will adapt my life.

To this end, he announces that he has just got engaged to a girl from Al Bireh.

My wife’s family is also poor, and they understand what I’m going through, so they didn’t ask for a lot of money or other guarantees. So I’m lucky in my marriage life too.

After offering my congratulations, I ask him whether he’ll be returning to his village near Tulkarem once he’s married.

I won’t go back because at the end of the day Ramallah is calmer, with regards to the political struggle, and also there is work here and beautiful girls here. My wife’s family is also here. Eventually I would love to buy something, because as I said, I consider the whole of Palestine my home, so I would love to live in any place. But of course the problem is the money. My wife’s family and my wife understand that we will be renting.

Wajih says he wants to move to Ramallah if possible, because he currently has to pay thirty shekels to get home every night, since he has to work until midnight and therefore catch a private taxi. ‘Also my wife’s family is there, so if she gets pregnant they’ll be able to take care of her.’
Wajih’s situation is far from unprecedented, since Ramallah has a long history of attracting immigrants. Ramallah was a village like many others until the mid-nineteenth century, when Christian missionaries began to build schools and churches there.\textsuperscript{173} Emigration to the Americas, and the remittances that were sent back, continued to propel the town’s growth in the early twentieth century. The emigration of young men and the beginning of the British mandate also created job opportunities that were filled by immigrants from other parts of Palestine, particularly Al Khalil (Hebron). However, it was the \textit{Nakba} in 1948 that caused the most profound changes, as middle class Christian refugees came to Ramallah from coastal towns such as Jaffa, Ramla and al-Lidd to foment a new urban middle class, while peasant refugees were settled in camps within and outside the new city. While the city is now predominantly Muslim,\textsuperscript{174} the Christian identity established since the arrival of the missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century has been one of the reasons why Ramallah maintains a reputation for diversity, openness and tolerance, as Wajih maintains. The presence of the university in Birzeit, the arrival of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, the encirclement and siege of Al Quds (Jerusalem) in the late nineties and the major restrictions to mobility since the beginning of the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000, ensured the continuation of this identity, continued immigration and the development of Ramallah as the central city in Palestine. These changes have also affected surrounding villages such as Birzeit.

\textsuperscript{173} The following paragraph draws on Taraki & Giacaman 2006: 20-8.
\textsuperscript{174} The 1997 census indicates that only 32\% of Ramallah’s population is Christian.
The guy running the snack shack, who I later find out is called Tarek, shouts to tell us the corn is ready. I go over to get a couple of pieces, and while I’m over there, he tells me under his breath that all the Northerners in Ramallah are actually causing problems. According to him, they’re taking all the jobs away from local people, because they’ll work for less money. I discretely ask Tarek why he thinks they don’t get jobs where they live, and Tarek tells me it’s because most people used to work in Israel. However, when the second intifada began in 2000, Israeli banned Palestinians in the West Bank from working in Israel and they all started to come to Ramallah. Tarek asserts that you used to be able to walk through Birzeit and you would know everyone you met. Now, he claims he doesn’t know anyone. I return to the table with the corn, and we satisfy our hunger.
Wajih has begun to talk to another young man who has sat down with him, who I recognize from the Old City as Hamid. Sat at another table close by are a couple with two children, who rush between their parents and the playground.

![Playground](image)

Figure 46. Playground. *Photograph courtesy of Hussein Zuhour*

As we finish eating, the eldest child, a boy who looks about three years old, bumps into my chair on his way back to the playground. His mother apologizes, although I assure her it wasn’t a problem. The woman says the Nadi Birzeit is one of the few places in the village where her children can run around. She introduces herself as Iman and tells us she comes from a village that is north of Birzeit in the Salfit area, but moved to Birzeit with her family when she was ten years old. Although her husband, Said, is from the same village in Salfit and they built a home there, they and their two children only spend two nights a week there before returning to Birzeit, where they share a rented house with seven other members of their family.
There is better because we can go to my father’s land. I mean if there’s a holiday we always go to my father’s land, play among the trees, and we have free time to be with them but here we’re always both busy. He works as a teacher and I work at the university. They’re in day care and we’re both busy. That’s why we’ll be happier there. I also feel more comfortable. I get some privacy there. I can eat what I like. I can do things with my children, cook, I use my own stuff, I don’t have to share it. Here I’m always busy. And I can’t control my sons much here.

Given that Iman prefers living in her village, I ask her why she chooses to remain in Birzeit. The answer is employment, which both Iman and her husband have living in the Ramallah area. Her village in Salfit, which is near the Green Line, is surrounded by the wall, and the two roads that connect the town with the rest of the West Bank are now blocked by checkpoints, one of which they will soon not be permitted to use. Hence, although Salfit is only half an hour from Nablus, it now takes four hours to get there because of the checkpoint at Hawara. While Ramallah is forty-five minutes away, the road is much easier, and hence Ramallah has in effect become much closer. The movement restrictions have also factored into her decision to live in Birzeit in another way:

If one of the kids gets ill, I find it very difficult to reach a doctor, because every five or six villages has only one doctor, and he’s a general doctor not a specialist. I believe in specialist doctors more than general doctors, because it’s better for my kid’s health. In Salfit, the doctors come once every few days. And if there is an emergency for example, and the checkpoint is closed, I cannot go to Ramallah to the hospital. Living here in Birzeit is better because you can get to Ramallah.

In Ramallah, with all the money from the PA’s arrival, a lot of new houses were built, so the people who are coming from Jenin, and work in Ramallah have to rent houses in Ramallah. So all the houses are full and the Ramallah people have income from this. Plus Ramallah is the economic centre. It has the hospitals, labs. Everything you need, Ramallah has, so they stimulate the economy further. When these people live in Ramallah and make money there, they have to spend it there.

The second thing is that after the second intifada started, cities like Nablus, Tulkaren and Jenin were closed and you couldn’t go there. You can’t do any business there because it’s not going to work. The transportation is not working, there are invasions and the situation is not stable. It’s more stable here than anywhere else in the West Bank.
Imam’s discussion of the growing housing industry in and around Ramallah makes me think of Abdullah’s apartment, built by his father-in-law who lives in America (chapter 7). Abdullah’s situation – living in the house of his wife’s family – also points to the fact that increasing economic investment from Palestinian diaspora after the Oslo accords were signed in 1993 has not only driven up the price of land in and around Ramallah, but also led to changing lifestyles and living spaces. Iman makes the point that although her husband is happy with their living arrangement in Birzeit, she is not so satisfied:

The house to a woman is like her kingdom, her own country. But to the man, is just a house that he wants to live in. For example in the house the wife wants to plant some things, to keep everything clean and so on, to arrange the table nice, to choose the colour for the curtains. The man says whatever. The woman looks for small details more than the man does in the house. In a small house like my house in Birzeit, my husband doesn’t find it hard to deal with the house, but sometimes I may find it hard to deal with the house, because I have to deal with it directly. I know better than him that it’s not enough.

When I point out the contradiction between shrinking land resources and expectations for bigger living spaces, Iman offers a short history of housing in Palestine in order to expand her point.

You know, there are houses where there are only two bedrooms, one for the parents, the other one is for the kids, but the house is more organized, and it is more comfortable for the housewife to work in. Before it wasn’t. The kitchen was small, because all the work took place outside. Nowadays more people are university educated and they work in jobs in the city, not on the farm. Not like before harvesting or raising cattle. You still tend to see this in the villages that aren’t near the cities.

And it’s related to social factors. If there is a big family living together, the grandfather with the father and the sons, they get married and live in the same area. The power lies with the oldest man. He’s responsible for everything and he keeps the money for the whole house. Now women work and men work and the money is split between the two. They are able to depend on themselves and they can build their own houses and live far from their big family.

As the population has moved from villages towards the cities, houses have changed.

175 See also Weizman 2007.
Before they used to make the houses depending on how many children you had and how much space you needed. Now, you need a room for the kids to play in, an office for the husband, a place to read, a place for the computer. But before they didn’t need any of these things. So new designs came so that people could incorporate all these things.

It also depends on money. When I have money to build two rooms, I’ll have to manage with this. But if I have more money, I’ll build a bigger and more beautiful house, which will be more suited to my needs.

Although some of these changes, such as the increase in rural-urban migration are related to the on-going occupation, Imam also ties them to global capitalism, technology and Palestinian modernity. And as she perceives, the increased migration has stimulated the economy of Ramallah to the point where it has become the focal point for such changes in Palestine. While Ramallah is at the centre, Birzeit’s close proximity and the mobility of people and objects between the two places ensures that many of the changes occurring in the city are being mirrored in the village, including the reorientation of family practices (see family excursus). Iman, for instance, is unhappy that her husband, like most men, goes out a lot.

Because I work and he works also the responsibility should be split. I can’t be at work and at the house cleaning too. It’s not a big problem but sometimes you feel tired and need to say I’m not responsible for everything in the house. There is a difference between women who live in the home always and those of us who work. When they are at home they have free time to visit someone, to shop, to watch TV, to play with the kids. But we work till 4, so we don’t have time for any of these things. We can only watch TV for half an hour. So we work at the university, then it’s always food and kids when we get back at 4. Our lives are different from the women who stay at home. On weekends, I only work 2 or 3 hours and then I love to go out with my kids. It’s a real relief.

Her earlier comments about preferring to spend time in the village in Salfit because she can be alone with her ayla (nuclear family) also suggest that living with her extended family takes its toll on Imam, something she confirms with a quick aside about watching television.

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My sisters prefer soap operas and movies in Arabic. My brothers always watch MBC movies or other programs on MBC2 while they wait for their program. So on Wednesday is action night and Thursday is for thrillers, so they’re always waiting for these nights. My husband watches Al-Jazeera and the weather channel. When we all sit down, someone wants the news and someone wants the movies and someone wants the soap opera.

My family lives in the main house and I live in a small annex with my husband and the kids. We have a television there, but no kitchen or bathroom, so if we want to use the kitchen or the bathroom we have to go down to my mother’s house. The electricity switchboard is downstairs, and if my husband changes the channel, because the satellite is connected to both TVs, the channel downstairs also changes. However, if he changes the channel and my brothers don’t like it, they turn off the power.

We all laugh, and hearing the noise Iman’s son comes charging back once more. Said decides it’s time to go home, so after wishing us a good evening, they corral their children towards the entrance despite their offspring’s protestations. Noticing that we are no longer engaged with Iman, Hamid asks us how our tour of Birzeit has been? We recount some of our adventures, and as we finish, Hamid tells us we can’t leave without seeing his house.
Chapter 10. The Atara Checkpoint: Destroyed Homes

Figure 47. The Atara Checkpoint. *Illustration courtesy of Erin Green*

We follow Hamid out of Nadi Birzeit to his car, a coffee coloured Ford Escort covered in patches of rust. We jump in and Hamid drives to and then along Atara Street, passing the house where I thought he lived. I point this out to him, but he just says ‘you’ll see’ and continues driving. Eventually as the road winds its way along the top of the hillside, the houses thin out and eventually disappear altogether. It seems as though we are leaving Birzeit, but just as we are about to approach the Atara Bridge, Hamid turns left and stops the car. As we get out we can see a large Star of David flag hanging over the Atara checkpoint. Two floodlights are shining brightly, as they do throughout the day regardless of the natural light conditions. The late afternoon rush hour has obviously passed, because there is only a small queue of four or five cars and services waiting to weave through the large stone barriers and cross the checkpoint (see im/mobilities excursus).

Hamid points in the direction of the checkpoint and says ‘there’s our house’. I’m confused and wonder if Hamid is making a profound point about his homeland being occupied.
He obviously sees my slightly knotted brow, because he quickly explains that he is pointing at the single storey building just to the side of the checkpoint, which I hadn’t noticed until he singles it out.

The house was supposed to be two floors, two stories, but unlike the one I live in now it was supposed to be one big house, not two different houses. Downstairs would be the kitchen and the living room. Upstairs was supposed to be the bedrooms and all that. But then they just took it over before we finished building it, so only one storey was built. They took off all the wood from the windows and burnt it, and broke all the tiles on the floor. And they started making fires inside the house, so now it’s probably going to be impossible to fix up. Even if we did want to built there, and even if they allowed us to, we’d have to demolish the house and build a brand new one.
With such an intimate view of the checkpoint, who would want to live there anyway? Hamid explains that the Israeli Occupation Forces confiscated the land and built a checkpoint blocking off access to the bridge. The irony is that the checkpoint was established after the Oslo accords that were suppose to bring peace. The official Israeli raison d’être for the Atara checkpoint, as it is known locally, is to control movement between zones B (where Palestinians supposedly have administrative control) and C (where Israel has full control). The real reason, Hamid asserts, is to grab more land for settlement roads, such as the one that runs beneath the bridge. The now disused house looks rather lonely sat up on the hillside by itself, and apparently the army doesn’t use it. Hamid thinks at first they used it to house troops, but after a short while they abandoned it and left it ruined. He tells us we can’t get any closer than this unless we actually go through the checkpoint, and seemingly lost in his own thoughts, he begins to explain the importance of home.

As long as someone has a home, then that person is stable. They have somewhere to be. They’re not in the streets, they’re not anywhere else. So most Palestinians see it this way. If you have a home, if you own the house you’re living in, and you’re stable enough, other things will come in time. But the most important thing is establishing yourself in a home.

We get back in the car, more sombre after this depressing spectacle, and Hamid drives back towards the village centre. He tells us there’s another house he wants us to see. We drive around the side of the valley and end up at the back of the Old City. He has trouble getting his Ford Escort to climb the steep hill, but eventually we enter one of the characteristically narrow streets, before coming to a stop once again. We get out and walk a little way down an alley towards an archway.
Figure 49. Entrance to courtyard. *Photograph by author*
As we step through Hamid welcomes us to Dar Khalil, which we passed earlier. Inside is a short corridor leading to a courtyard, covered with piles of bricks and green foliage. On one side of the courtyard is a house with an iron door, and two old armchairs in front. At right angles to this house is the wall of another house. On the third side, opposite the house with the iron door is another door frame but the walls and ceiling which must have once constituted someone’s home are now piles of rubble. Next to this ruin is another pile of stone, covered in grass and bushes. Another doorway is just visible through the vegetation, and when I clambered towards it I can see that the room it serves as an entrance for still survives, although it is filled with plastic garbage and its stink won’t permit anyone inside unless they have artificial breathing equipment, an iron stomach or severely dulled senses.

Hamid explains that this courtyard was home to the Khalil hamula when his grandfather was a child. The room I am currently peering into was where his great uncle’s family kept their animals. He says that the house with the iron door belongs to his grandmother, and there are actually still a couple of students staying there. I peer through the wooden door, which isn’t locked, and there is nothing in the room except a couple of upturned bins that might be seats, and a few pieces of litter. When I wonder aloud why anyone would want to stay there, Hamid says the students are poor Northerners and his grandmother lets them stay there for free.
Figure 50. House in Old City, occupied at time of research. *Photograph by author*
Hamid tells us the courtyard has deteriorated a great deal not only because of neglect, but also because the Israeli Army destroyed his uncle's house a few years ago, hence the rubble and ruins. The army thought some fugitives were hiding in there, so they bombed it. There is, however, some dispute amongst the Khalil family about this account. Apparently Hamid’s cousin tells everyone that a stray missile hit it. Another cousin blames a heavy snowfall one winter for the collapse of the building. Whatever the reason, it seems that Hamid’s family doesn’t seem to have much luck with houses. When I tell him this, he agrees and tells us that the Israeli army even shot out a window in their current home. He also tells us about how a few years ago they came to their house during the middle of the night, woke everyone up, and made them stand holding cards with their names on while they photographed them.
Figure 51. Dilapidated house in Old City. Photograph by author
Hamid, who has been standing near the entrance up until this point, finds a large stone to sit on and tells us more about the house that his grandfather lived in, included a number of tales about the ways in which residents of Birzeit used to live in the earlier part of last century, making frequent reference to the whole family living under one roof, the fact that most people spent most of the day outdoors and the use of the ground floor as a stable for animals. I mention Mazen’s narrative about the movement of villagers away from the crowded old town towards more spacious plots of land, and Hamid recalls a relative who died fighting in the Balkans, after he was conscripted to fight among the Ottoman forces there. He also reflects on the subsequent degeneration of Dar Khalil once people no longer lived there, and mentions how his work with Rozana will rehabilitate the area.

Hamid eventually exhausts his supply of stories, and so we walk back towards his car. The sun has disappeared behind the hill on which the Old City is built, and if we were standing on the Atara Road facing West we could watch the sun slowly fall into the waters of the Mediterranean behind the Tel Aviv skyline. The sea you can see, but can’t swim in (if you’re Palestinian).
Figure 52. Sunset (over Tel Aviv). *Photograph by author*
Excursus: Representing Palestinian Homes

In the preface, I suggested that violence plays an important role in both Palestinian lives, and representations of those lives by the mass media and academics. I want to explore this second point further by focusing on some of the homes I encountered in Birzeit. How, for instance, can we talk about Hamid home (chapter 10), which has been impacted a great deal by the violence of the Occupation, without fetishizing that violence?

One way to develop such an understanding is to put Hamid’s experiences in context. For instance, during the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe) in 1948, an estimated 711,000 Palestinians were forced from their land in what became the state of Israel\textsuperscript{177}, and therefore lost their homes, many of which were subsequently destroyed. Falah, drawing on archival evidence from this period\textsuperscript{178}, revisits 407 of the 418 rural villages that were abandoned by Palestinians during the Nakba and finds that over two-thirds of these villages have been subject to high levels of destruction, which he defines as ‘complete obliteration; complete destruction with rubble of original houses clearly identified but no walls standing; houses mostly demolished with rubble containing standing walls but without roofs’\textsuperscript{179}. The remaining one third of these villages has been subject to ‘major destruction and partial occupancy’\textsuperscript{180}. Falah suggests that the obliteration of Palestinian houses, public and religious buildings in these rural villages is directly linked with Israeli efforts to Judaicize the landscape by destroying markers of past Palestinian identity\textsuperscript{181}. It is possible to contextualise Hamid’s experience of dispossession within a broader trajectory of land theft and house demolitions experienced by Palestinians since 1948. However, Hamid’s house is built on lands that Israeli occupied only after 1967, and unlike the places Falah visits, the rest of the village property remains (largely) untouched by the occupation forces, at least in the manner which Falah describes.

\textsuperscript{177} Morris 2004: 603. This is based on British Foreign Office estimates that put the number of refugees between 600 000 and 760 000. It might also be noted that the Nakba has never really ended, and hence Hamid’s loss of home is part of ongoing processes that result in home demolitions.
\textsuperscript{178} In particular the work of Morris 2004.
\textsuperscript{179} Falah 1996: 268
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid: 273
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid: 281
Let us turn therefore to more recent academic work that analyzes the ongoing and intensifying occupation of the West Bank. Halper has suggested that Israel has established a ‘matrix of control’, a system designed to allow Israel to control every aspect of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories, while lowering Israel's military profile in order to give the impression to the outside that what Palestinians refer to as "occupation" is merely proper administration, and that Israel has a "duty" to defend itself and the status quo, yet creating enough space for a dependent Palestinian mini-state that will relieve Israel of the Palestinian population while deflecting, through the use of "administrative" image and bureaucratic mechanisms, international opposition and thus to maintain control indefinitely and, in the final analysis, to force the Palestinians to despair of ever achieving a viable and truly sovereign state and to accept any settlement offered by Israel. ("Time is on our side" is, as Sharon has often said, a cornerstone of Israeli policy.)

Halper suggests that Israel has achieved this control through a range of military, bureaucratic and legal measures, and most relevant to my discussion, by establishing facts on the ground, which include building illegal settlements, by-pass roads, controlling aquifers and restricting the movement of Palestinians. The destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, (which Halper includes in his list of military measures, presumably because it involves the erasure of facts on the ground rather than their construction), is tackled in much more depth by Graham in his thesis on ‘asymmetric urbicide’: the ‘overwhelming effort of both sides … to try to deny the rights of the “enemy” to their respective, city based, lives’. While Birzeit is located on the rural-urban fringe of Ramallah, the house than Hamid’s father began to build could be one example of the Israeli Occupation Forces’ efforts to ‘forcibly demodernize Palestinian urban society’. As Graham goes on to note, ‘this strategy of deliberate urban destruction is closely integrated with Israel’s efforts at carefully planned construction of place and space in the Occupied Territories’. The presence of the checkpoint now standing next to the shell of Hamid’s house, might also encourage us to turn to the work of Weizman, who scrutinizes

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184 Ibid.
185 Ibid: 194.
Israel’s ‘politics of verticality’ and the resulting ‘geometry of occupation’\textsuperscript{186}. He argues in a vein similar to Graham that ‘a colossal project of strategic, territorial and architectural planning has lain at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The landscape and the built environment became the arena of conflict’\textsuperscript{187}. Weizman describes this process as a ‘politics of verticality’ because as the occupation has become entrenched, ‘new and intricate frontiers were invented, like the temporary borders later drawn up in the Oslo Interim Accord, under which the Palestinian Authority was given control over isolated territorial ‘islands’, but Israel retained control over the airspace above them and the sub-terrain beneath… crashing “three-dimensional space into six dimensions – three Jewish and three Arab”\textsuperscript{188}. Weizman’s thesis is well suited for analyzing the combination of (Atara) checkpoint built on (Atara) bridge over settlement-colony road that we find on the outskirts of Birzeit.

There has also been a great deal of work on Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip carried out by Human Rights Organisations and other NGOs, that in some cases is related to this academic work. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) is a direct action group set up in 1977 specifically to oppose and resist house demolitions. ICAHD estimates that “since 1967 Israel has demolished almost 12,000 Palestinian homes, leaving some 70,000 [people] without shelter and traumatized”\textsuperscript{189}. The demolition of houses in particular has received a growing amount of critical attention since the beginning of the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000. B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, has maintained detailed statistics since 2004 that monitor the number of Palestinian houses that have been destroyed as punishment (668 houses), for alleged military purposes (1739 houses), and those that were built without Israeli permits and thus deemed illegal (1946 houses)\textsuperscript{190}. In addition to a detailed study on house demolition in 2004\textsuperscript{191}, Amnesty International included an entire section on house and property destruction in its 2006 report on Israel and the Occupied

\textsuperscript{187} Weizman 2002: n.p.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} http://www.icahd.org
\textsuperscript{191} Amnesty International 2004
Territories\textsuperscript{192}. Even if someone is not familiar with this academic literature, the work of various NGOS or the statistical monitoring (and these are all interlinked), someone in Birzeit will usually point out the checkpoint at the Atara Bridge if you visit, just as Hamid did when I visited.

All of these accounts explore how Israel occupies Palestine land, and in doing so also represent Palestinian homes in particular ways. In each account, the practice of occupation results in the destruction of Palestinian property and infrastructure, the construction of Israeli property and infrastructure, and increasing Israeli control over Palestinian lives. Combined together, this academic and activist work provides one way of understanding Hamid’s experience and links it with those of other Palestinians and the broader political processes responsible for the destruction/construction/control. Furthermore, given the ongoing nature of these colonial processes, this body of scholarly and activist work can be and has been used to generate important intellectual resources for political struggle in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

However, retelling Hamid’s story in this manner risks not only drowning the particular within the general (a threat that hangs over most social science research), but more importantly approaches these events through the lens of the Israeli Occupation, rather than the Palestinians who live within/under this Occupation. Focusing on the practices of Occupation runs the risk of producing a ‘hollow land’\textsuperscript{193}, devoid of the people who continue to make their lives there. Consider the discursive slippage between the phrases house demolitions and home demolitions when writing about the destruction of Palestinian property. This slippage perhaps occurs easily when moving from Arabic to English, since the Arabic word \textit{beit} can be translated as both house and home. However, in English, while house refers to a built structure, there are multiple experiences of home (See Home Excursus).

\textsuperscript{192} Amnesty International 2006
\textsuperscript{193} Weizman 2007
While talking about house demolitions may invoke images of a bulldozer reducing concrete, steel and other building materials to a pile of rubble, talking about home demolitions can invoke a great deal more. It is useful at this juncture to consider what Porteous and Smith term ‘domicide… defined as the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victim’\(^{194}\). Since home can mean many things to many people, domicide has many different forms, including ‘eviction, exile, expropriation, displacement, dislocation and relocation’\(^{195}\), which take place across a range of spatial extensions, such as the destruction of a single dwelling, a neighbourhood or an ethnic homeland. What unites these experiences is that this destruction of home (in whatever its form) is both meaningful (because people value their homes) and common (the authors suggest thirty million people across the globe have suffered the direct effects of domicide). Porteous and Smith, aware that ‘home has complex, multiple, but interrelated meanings’, nevertheless focus on just two: ‘home as centre – a place of refuge, freedom, possession, shelter and security’, and ‘home as identity – with themes of family, friends and community, attachment, rootedness, memory and nostalgia’\(^{196}\). These dual foci underpin their point that ‘what is lost is not only the physical place, but the entire emotional essence of home – aspects of personal self-identity’\(^{197}\). Their definitions romanticize home – as I argue in the home excursus there is nothing essential about home - as (among others things) particular forms of homelessness\(^{198}\) or victims of domestic violence\(^{199}\) would probably attest to. However, I think their general point – that it is important to consider the great variety of ways in which home demolitions impact people – is valid nevertheless.

In Hamid’s case, given his belief that ‘if you have a home… other things will come in time’, the theft and destruction of the house his father was building not only deprived Hamid of a space to live and feel secure in the present, but also deprived him of a stable future. This destruction of Hamid’s future home – rather than the one in which he lives in

\(^{194}\) Porteous and Smith 2001: 12
\(^{195}\) Ibid.
\(^{196}\) Ibid: 61
\(^{197}\) Ibid: 63
\(^{198}\) May 2000
\(^{199}\) Meth 2003
– complicates and extends Porteous and Smiths’ thesis on domicile by emphasizing the
timportance different temporalities play in creating home. Paradoxically, Hamid
experiences domicile despite the fact that his home (understood as house, but also
community and homeland) has not been destroyed. This experience is possible because of
the multiple, co-existing temporalities of his home.200

The term home demolitions invokes multiple and in each case unique experiences of
destruction and loss, while still connecting those experiences with the more spatially
extensive practices of occupation that cause them. This slight change of phrase
encourages us to think more explicitly about the materiality of the violence caused by the
Israeli Occupation right in the middle of Palestinian everyday lives, rather than just the
spaces that those lives occupy. In other words, rather than an image of bulldozers and
piles of rubble that the phrase house demolitions conjures up, thinking about home
destructions demand a more careful consideration of the economic, social and cultural
networks that constitute and are constituted by people like Hamid. Such networks form
both family and society in Palestine. Hence every home demolition strikes at the core of a
very specific network of social practices.201 These experiences are similar to many other
instances of domicile that have occurred throughout the world, but their specificity
points to the importance of space and time in shaping such experiences. Such an
approach compliments my understanding of Birzeit as a dynamic place that extends
through a variety of material, social and affective networks, which in turn are shaped by
asymmetric relations of power (see place excursus).

However, there remains one problem with this approach. This problem manifests itself in
the form of a disjuncture between representing Birzeiti homes and Palestinians’ homes
more generally as vulnerable (to demolition), while the residents of Birzeit think of home
as a secure space. I think this disjuncture brings to light the broader issue of how
Palestine is scripted as a space more generally. Even when we talk about home
demolitions (as opposed to house demolitions), we inevitably still apprehend Palestinians

200 Chowers 2002
201 See also Amnesty International 2004
homes through the lens of the Israeli Occupation. How might we compliment analyses that take the Israeli Occupation as their focus, with one that has Palestinian homes in themselves as its primary object?

In order to address this challenge I want to think about the second home Hamid takes us to – Dar Khalil – and the different reasons he mentions for its destruction: an Israeli rocket attack, an Israeli Army bomb (because they thought some political agitators were hiding inside), a heavy winter snowfall or perhaps simply not knowing how it happened. Rather than evaluate this progression of narratives as a set of competing truth claims, I want to think about each as an equally valid possibility for telling the story of this particular home’s destruction. I want to do this because I think the competing narratives that accompany the rubble and foliage in creating this particular home space are an effective cipher for stories about Palestinian homes and Palestinian spaces more generally. It is possible to tell stories about Palestinian spaces that begin and end with the Israeli Occupation. It is certainly entirely plausible that Dar Khalil was destroyed by the malevolent actions of the occupation forces. However, telling only these stories, while referencing the manifold ways in which practices of occupation have brutal effects on Palestinian civilians, ignores or minimizes the other ways in which Palestinians live their lives, which may or may not be more or less intertwined with ongoing practices of colonial occupation. Palestinian spaces in academic and activist literature seem to be scripted largely by stories about the Israeli Occupation. However, the possibility of snowfall and also not knowing what happened also point to the possibility of other representational spaces.

Dar Khalil – the house that Hamid’s grandparents lived in – was and remains bound by some of these other lives and spaces as much as by the Israeli Occupation. Hamid’s stories about this home space include histories of life in Birzeit, his relatives and their movement away from Dar Khalil to other parts of the village or even (unwillingly) the Balkans. The deterioration of three houses in Dar Khalil contrasts with his grandmother’s house that is still structurally intact, and continues to provide a free student residence to two young men from Khalil [Hebron], who can’t afford to pay rent and live in a more
modern establishment. Hamid’s attachment to Dar Khalil highlights the importance of these ancient familial homes to modern day residents. While they may no longer live in them, they still use their homes discursively to make interconnected claims to Birzeiti space and familial lineage. While such claims to space could be scripted within the context of living under Occupation, they could just as easily be articulations of belonging that are similar to a number of other practices of making home space around the world.

The Israeli Occupation has made Palestinian spaces into abstractions. Tracing the way in which Palestine has been made into Areas A, B and C – “topological abstractions produced by a strategic-instrumental discourse of political and military power”\(^\text{202}\) – Gregory suggests that “the violence of abstraction has folded into itself an ever more profound de-corporealization of place and space”\(^\text{203}\). While Gregory’s target is the practices of occupation, I think a similar critique of abstracting Palestinian spaces may apply to a great deal of work that is written in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, including some of the geographies that I discussed earlier. Note for instance the abstract geometries implicated in Halper’s matrix of control and Weizman’s politics of verticality. Such writing about Palestine, by taking the practices of the Israeli Occupation as its main subject, (whether these are house demolitions or the many other forms of suffering that result from them), subtly re-creates Palestine as a space that we only come to know through practices of occupation and the violence they entail. Palestine is quite literally performed textually as a ‘hollow land’, where Palestinian lives are alluded to, but rarely elucidated. This rhetorical process has another parallel in the practices of Occupation, as Barghouti suggests:

\begin{quote}
Israel succeeded in tearing away the sacred aspects of the Palestinian cause, turning it into what it is now – a series of ‘procedures’ and ‘schedules’ that are usually only respected by the weaker party in the conflict…
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The Occupation has created generations without a place whose colours, smells and sounds they can remember; a first place that belongs to them, that they can return to in their memories and their cobbled together exiles…
\end{quote}

\(^{202}\) Gregory 2004, 96; see also figure 6.10 on page 137.
\(^{203}\) Ibid: 137.
The Occupation has created generations of us that have to adore an unknown beloved, distant, difficult, surrounded by guards, by walls, by nuclear missiles, by sheer terror\textsuperscript{204}.

While Barghouti is describing the experience of exile, his wonderful turn of phrase offers a strangely appropriate description of my own experience when reading a great of the contemporary literature around Palestine. Instead of Palestinian spacings and places that are animated by colours, smells and sounds, all I am left with is guards, walls, missiles and terror. It is my hope that this thesis animates Palestine in a somewhat different way; one that doesn’t deny the violence and occupation, but tells you something else about how some Palestinian are living their lives in Birzeit (and elsewhere), and the time-spaces that are implicated in these lives. I think it is important to tell these stories too precisely because they enable an alternative envisioning of Palestine that is not tied to the Israeli Occupation, except as a historical reference point. Such work can complement the now quite substantial number of critiques and analyses of the ongoing colonial occupation by providing a positive articulation of a Palestinian future.

As night falls, our tour of Birzeit is almost at an end. We need to find somewhere to sleep for the night. Perhaps Hamid might let us stay at his house, as in fact I did for eight months while visiting Birzeit in 2006. This venue is an appropriate exit point for this thesis not only because it bleeds the fact of Birzeit into the fiction of our journey (as I have done throughout), but also because of an event that happened there at 3am on 27th March 2008. The following description of that event is taken from the website of Birzeit University’s Right to Education Campaign:

In the middle of the night of the 27 March 2008, at around 3am, Hanna Qassis was woken up by a loud thump at the door. When he went into the living room he saw 7 soldiers standing in his house. His mum had opened the door. A soldier who appeared to be the Commander and spoke in broken Arabic, asked who else lives in the house. Hanna, the eldest in the family after his father passed away, said his brother also lives there. He was told to go and wake him up.

Once Omar got up and joined his family, the three of them were locked in the balcony of the house which was guarded by a soldier, while other soldiers searched the house. After 10 minutes, the Commander returned and took Omar into another room for questioning. Hanna could hear their conversation and heard Omar repeat many times that he did not know what they were looking for. This questioning went on for about 5 minutes until the Commander came back into the balcony and asked Hanna to give Omar some clothes - Omar was under arrest.

Omar asked his brother to also get him some money for the taxi-ride home after his interrogation, as he believed he would be home later the same night, knowing he had not done anything wrong and had nothing to hide. This seemed to annoy the Commander, as he interrupted:

"You will go home whenever I decide to write this on my own hands."

...

Despite Omar being from the West Bank and it being illegal under international law for Israel to transfer him into another territory, he was taken to Mascobia Detention Centre in West Jerusalem, where neither his lawyer nor his family were able to see him. It is common practice that lawyers must apply for permission each time they want to visit a detainee in the detention centre and this process commonly takes 8 days. A week later, on 3 April, Omar's interrogation was

[^205]: Right to Education 2008
extended for 19 days and the lawyer was officially forbidden from seeing him. On 21 April the interrogation period was again extended for another 18 days. On 23 April, the lawyer won his appeal against the ban and managed to see Omar. He also appealed against the extended interrogation period and managed to lower it to 9 days. The first hearing on Omar’s case was set for the 29th April, at Ofer military court, near Ramallah.

Despite being held without access to legal counsel for a month, which put Omar at high risk of being subjected to torture, the head of interrogation at Masocobia applied for a further 30 days of interrogation as they did not have anything to charge Omar with. The lawyer appealed the extension and won; the Israeli army was given 2 days after which they had to produce a charge sheet.

On 1st May, an administrative order was issued by the Deputy Military commander of the West Bank putting Omar under 3 months of Administrative Detention. He was also charged with throwing stones some time between 2001 and 2002 to which he pleaded 'not guilty'. The charge of throwing stones does not involve a specific day, making it impossible for Omar even to refute the allegations and provide an alibi, thus denying him the right to a proper defense. He is also being tried as an adult for something he allegedly committed as a 16-year-old, which under international standards means he was a child even though the Israeli military courts treat Palestinians as young as 16 as adults.

…

On the 17th of May 2008, Omar told the Right to Education Campaign at Birzeit University about his conditions while under interrogation and once he arrived in Ofer prison in the West Bank.

"I am O.K. but since my arrest my weight has dropped from 67 to 59 kilos. Since arriving in Ofer I have not been given enough sugar so I have been feeling dizzy and dehydrated, and I couldn't sleep for the first 4 days. I had hemorrhoids which were painful but my requests to see a doctor were ignored. In the end I had to skip meals to be able to see a doctor.

The hemorrhoids developed while I was under interrogation because I wasn't given any clean clothes and the solitary confinement cell I was in - 'the hole' - was really humid. I was in 'the hole' for 11 days. Also when they started interrogating me I was tied down to a chair while intelligence officers questioned me for 4 hours at a time. Some soldiers told me that I would get hemorrhoids from sitting down so much if I didn't start confessing.

I also couldn't sleep because of the mental distress I was under. I wake up easily, every time a soldier walks past. I saw soldiers beating other inmates and fear that I could be next. I'm also very disoriented, I hear sounds of dogs barking and people screaming at night. I think these are recordings but they affect me. I also
heard a siren the other night and I imagined Israel was going to war with Iran and that they had evacuated the prison leaving me there alone. I have lost my bearings and am generally confused about the times of day or night.

The other day I cried. I cried at the sight of an old man, probably in his 60s, sitting alone and looking very fragile. I also know that he is diabetic. I can't stand to see the injustice he is in, and even less to imagine the injustices he has seen.

Now that I am here in prison I am in less physical pain but I am still stressed at the uncertainty of it all. I have no idea how long I will be in prison. I have no idea what they are doing or claiming. All I know is that I'm not a threat to security but I was still being questioned about all sorts of things, so anything and everything is going through their heads.

I basically just want to know when I can see my family again."

In mid-May, Omar's mother and brother, Hanna, applied for permission to visit him in prison but by the end of May Omar had been moved to a prison in the Negev inside Israel. It took one month for the Israeli authorities to process the request and in mid-June, they heard the application was denied.

In Israel, prisoners are usually allowed family visits once every two weeks and by law, every month. Omar has been denied his rights to see his family, which effectively serves as further punishment - punishment for something, although he still doesn't know what that something is. His family are also being denied their right to see him thus they - the family who are undoubtedly innocent - are also being punished.

…

Omar was in his last semester of a four-year course and had been studying every day as soon as he got home. "He was determined to finish his studies and to do well; honestly, I'd never seen my brother so committed to his studies as he was at the beginning of this year. It's as if it was his New Year's resolution," said Hanna. Now Omar will have to wait until next year to be able to graduate - that's if his Administrative Detention order is not renewed.

While violence has become routine and ‘almost’ banal in Palestine\(^{206}\), the experience of a home invasion and abduction is still incredibly shocking, even to me as I sit in Vancouver writing the final pages of this thesis. One of my greatest fears during my first few months in Birzeit was that Israeli soldiers banging at my door would wake me in the middle of the night. I gradually convinced myself I was being paranoid.

\(^{206}\) Makdisi 2008
This incident has forcefully reminded me of two things. Firstly, that amidst the everyday ‘almost’ banal violence of checkpoints, identity cards and permits that Palestinians living in Palestine must endure, there is always the threat of a more spectacular, militarized violence. This more recognizable violence is always on the cusp of erupting into the everyday times and spaces of Palestinian lives, just as it did on 3rd May 2008 in the home in which I lived. Secondly, this act of violence and the constant threat of violence illuminate how the relations that tie homes, families and movement together in this place are simultaneously very strong and yet also vulnerable. Most homes in Birzeit are spaces of security for their residents, and yet Israeli forces have raided many of them since the Al Aqsa Intifada began in 2000. The normative family is one in which the different members lives in close proximity to each other, and thus imprisonment forces family to be practiced differently. And perhaps most obviously, imprisonment is one of the most severe forms of relative immobility that can be inflicted on a person. At the time of writing over 8500 Palestinians are currently imprisoned in Israeli jails, including 730 Administrative Detainees. Omar’s detention was renewed for another three months on the 30th July 2008.

And so this journey ends in the middle of things once again. It ends in the middle of the night (maybe), somewhere between a home and a prison cell or a tent in a prison camp, and the temperature is dropping rapidly. The present is confusing and the future ominous. The only thing that is certain is uncertainty itself.

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