

Al-Atlal: Ruins & Recollections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Karm al-Khalili Garden

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

Reflections

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Ibrahim Dakkak Award For Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

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

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

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

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