

## REDISCOVERING LITTLE SINS: Palestinianhood, Disobedience, and Ramallah

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One common truism across time and geography is the relevance of cities to the advancement of ideological projects in either direction; progressively towards higher socio-economic and political justice or regressively into furthered oppression, discrimination, and deprivation of average citizens from their right to flourish [i:285, ii:40]. They are the podiums of civilizations, conquests and defeats are named after them – Alexandria, Rome, New York. Indeed, rural and provincial landscapes are cradles of societal orderings and are territorially resourceful and profitable. Yet, it is no secret that cashing their riches is factored by levels of accessibility to markets whether regionally or beyond, and certainly, in accordance to their relationship with loci of political and economic power, (i.e. cities). This is partly due to the fact that size, density and interconnectivity of a population within certain geography are relevant and often proportional to impact potentials of citizen mobilisations that target changing established power structures. In the same line, through works of scholars, planners and spatial designers (including those of colonial expansion) another proportionality can be argued; which is that between power and what Harvey refers to as ‘time-space compression’ [iii:426]. As such, ancient and contemporary, rooted and colonial (non)state and capital-based systems alike have constantly worked on expanding and controlling flows to and within geographies (physical and virtual) for market as well as policing functions [iv:v; vi]. A premium modern case is exemplified in

the discrepancies and flows outlined in maps of physical, social and health infrastructures (not) developed by Israeli governments in the territories it controls between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea since 1948 [vii]. As intriguing as the topic of infrastructures of controls happens to be, it is not what I would like to explore here. Rather, I would like to discuss some of the impacts of decades of Anglo-Zionist colonial systems that target socio-political domination and wealth control; and to do so from the perspective of change in sensibilities and imaginations from and about the polemic cityscapes of Ramallah.

A shift in social (hence economic and ideological) agendas is an accumulative and conditional process, thus selective and traceable. Differences and contestations outlining what is casually referred to as the ‘fragmentation’ of Palestinians, the weakening of political parties, and the triumph of ethos of ‘individualism’ in Ramallah is also a statement of two. **First**, geographically disconnected and economic-legally varied communities have – as the state-making project non-surprisingly decays – (re)normalised their reality of crisis, and therewith are a new readapting to multifaceted insecurities and sensibilities. And **second**, these are manifestations of a political transition underway where norms and systems governing relations among strata and communities of Palestinians are re-negotiated on individual, micro, meso-, exo- and macro levels [viii]. In the absence of formal (orientation)

platforms such as functioning parliaments, councils, critical press and debate possibilities and spaces (macro-level), the process of claim-making by (small or large) groupings spills into informal, real and virtual spheres (exo-level); be those streets, hallways, or social media.

Bearing in mind the sensitivities of variables and forces of each case, notwithstanding, the 'problematics' and tensions found in every Palestinian (enclave of) urbanity today – whether in Jenin, Nablus, Jerusalem, Hebron, Gaza, Jaffa, Haifa, Nazareth or Ramallah – are exasperated by the continuation of short sighted Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) identity politics and rhetoric, whether from within Palestine or the exile. Combined these have unintelligently and gradually shifted to promoting a homogenised socio-historic narrative whose political argumentative framework could be – among others – described as a reactive (parallel) positioning to the Zionist imagination of *ethnoreligious* and *ethnobiological* identity [ix:255]. After seven decades of the trauma of the Nakba Palestinian urbanisms are starting to re-live some of their features in the absence of organised, traceable processes of decolonization; and in the absence of well-footed and daring socio-political re-imaginings of what constitutes Palestinianhood. Here it is helpful to ask: Why is Ramallah so loved and hated by Palestinians?

## A landscape of villagers and olive trees

"In 1948, we [Palestinians] were a naive, agrarian, developing people," wrote Rida Abu Rass in an imaginary version of Mahmoud Abbas's address at the UN General Assembly on 30 September 2015 [xi]. Although far from being a common phrasing and farthest from accuracy as the biographies and works of Khalil al Sakakini and Fu'ad Nassar among many others demonstrate; sadly, its primordial associations are not foreign to today's mainstream imaginaries of pre-Israel Palestinianhood. Although the ethnic cleansing of over 400 villages in 1948 is well documented [xi;xii] and memorialised in the consciousness of

Palestinians; in contrast, investigations of the impacts of the Nakba in relation to Palestinian urbanities remain few. The Zionist hijacking of intellectually and financially wealthy and pivotal Palestinian cities did not only provide the newly-born State of Israel and its apparatuses with an infrastructural and capital advantage. As Salim Tamari's lifework expounds, the Nakba also eliminated, exiled, scattered and thus delivered a serious blow to personas, features, and economic sectors that enacted the social relations and customs of Palestinian urban, plural identities up to that point.

The Israeli ethnocentric policies<sup>[xiii]</sup> of subjugation, deformation and marginalization of expressions of modernity of (pre) Mandate Palestine were completed with the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 to which the focus of military-rule was expanded. Streets and public spaces of Palestinians were subjected to intensive surveillance and prosecution. What had remained of theatres, libraries, universities, and sport facilities were shutdown (temporarily or permanently) and forced into the vandalisms of scarcity of resources, restrictions, and abandonment. Among the various impacts, these strategies succeeded in suspending spaces of enactment of modernity from realms of social practices of Palestinians. The everyday routines and nuances of communities from al Jaleel to al Naqab were successfully homogenised, provincialised, and impoverished. The private 'home' – the space defined by codes of familial relations – became the space where resistance and alternatives are engendered. Socio-political co-dependencies and patronage became a necessary and widely desired safety net and 'risk-strategy', and therewith symbols of politics of the Palestinian liberation movement and *sumud* (steadfastness, resilience) became increasingly characterised through solidarity, sacrifice, austerity, discipline within the 'collective' and upholding of 'norms'. A Ramallite female participant of a focus group, 2012<sup>[xiv]</sup> recounted:

"In the period in which the political parties were strong, there were social factors acting against any droop. And our houses, they were the cafés and loci of congregation. Did either of you ever hold a meeting in a café? Or when a journalist called for an interview with a politician? Or

when the members of a party met? There were no headquarters for parties and our houses were the hotels and the cafés.”

Another male participant noted on the post-Oslo NGO-isation of activism:

“[...] the main concern was always the political one, nothing else. From that perspective, if you say we are going to take youth and give them money to do things, at that time, we called this grand treason.”

The louder voices in PLO politics (e.g. Yasser Arafat, George Habash) and creators of collective consciousness in the 1950s-1970s where in exile (e.g. Ghassan Kanafani, Naji al Ali, Ismail Shammout). The guerrillas lifestyle of these and other exiled liberation movement agents did involve some of the leisure of Beirut, Cairo, Tunis, Paris and Prague. Yet the civic concerns of these cities were perceived as distant from the lived realities of the spaces in which the dispossession and precariousness of the people they represent materialised – refugee camps. In the absence of insights into lost and contemporary realities of Palestinian urbanisms (this was the pre-digital era), the reference for common imaginaries of liberation became highly connected to the lived fears and aspirations of refugees, which were in turn comforted through the promise of the devoted, self-sacrificing *fida'yeen* (combatants) <sup>[xvi]</sup>. Debates over basic human and civic rights by the ‘guests’ – in camps and city-neighbourhoods – were suspended until the temporary passes and the chapter of guerrilla operations ends; until the return to the villages where it is not crowded, where houses would be decent and overlook landscapes of olive groves, citrus plantations, and fields of vegetables and legumes that would not leave anybody hungry or out of work.

## The ‘guerrilla-statesmen’ and disobedience

This romantic perspective that may speak to the majority of Palestinians centralises the idea of breaking through borders and re-settling the heavenly landscape, and dwindles from there.

This left some of the main concerns of persons already on the other side unanswered, which in turn were given voice by strategists such as Tawfiq Zayyad and Haidar Abdel Shafi whose tactics did not abandon PLO slogans, but additionally capitalised on issues of quotidian insecurities: workers rights, health and civic services and (make-shift) infrastructures within localities. Among other equally important socio-economic and technological factors, the non-flexibility of the one-dimensional and monolingual identity construct helped in fuelling the schism in official Palestinian discourse between inland and exile wings of the PLO. This started to gain shape after the signature of the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David Peace Agreement in 1978, with the growth in levels of mobilisations and public activities (e.g. work camps, demonstrations, strikes) that enlisted significant numbers of citizens into popular associations, unions, relief and voluntary work committees. This was the embodiment of the mismatches between two sides: liberation ideologies nurtured in ecologies of vertical, institutionalised paradigms of state-making, that extend legitimacy from rituals of ‘officialdom’, and rely on alliances with world (non-/state) actors on one side (the ‘Tunisia politics’); and on the other, those laboured through clandestine, horizontal, localised and rapidly shifting ‘*caminando preguntamos*’ <sup>[xvi]:5]</sup> style of anticolonial operations that revolve around accumulating moments of dignity in spite of the colonial condition, and whose legitimacy rests in the swift hands of the critical mass. Along the 1980s the rift between the two widened and the Oslo Accords marked the overpowering of the latter by the former whose elite has (almost) monopolised decision-making since.

After 1993 popular services networks (exo- and macro-mediums of production of sense-of-purpose among inland Palestinians) were neutralized sous-prétexte that Palestinian Authority (PA) institutions and (paid) staff are becoming the source of securities and just living conditions. We don’t need to repeat here what everyone knows about how this promise is still arriving, soon. For the opposition and independents it was the (paid, largely ineffective) Non-Government Organisations

(NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). For some (state) entrepreneurs it made trade possible: negligible exports, massive imports, and an openly comprador economy. Although the formula of 'don't ask where the money is coming from and for how long' to solve the 'conflict' proved its failure already in the year 2000 yet it remains in place. Paralysing dependency is the bitter reality and the process of re-defining socio-economic safety nets and risk strategies is well underway. In that year some PLO-statesmen thought they could undo the failures of Oslo by fuelling a 'Second' Intifada; a civic disobedience as means to re-boost their negotiations power since (with 'diplomacy') the strategic-guerrilla-attacks style was no more an option. Nevertheless, the problem here was (and sadly still is today) – to quote the artist Yazan al Khalili:

"[...] the Second Intifada is a reply of the image of the First, but lacked the structure and depth of the latter. As a child in the end of the 1980s [...] too often I heard the phrase 'you are the children of stones' [...]. I believe this is due to the fact that this was the only aspect they were able to capture in an image at a time everything else – the non-photographable elements – were the essence of the First Intifada; the reclaiming of lands, refusal to pay taxes to Israel, boycotting [Israeli] civil administration institutions, etc. Thus when the PA leadership – which in 2000 was composed mainly of returnees – attempted to repeat the events of the First Intifada, they pushed the only image they knew, which was far from the reality. This explains why the Second Intifada lacked political, economic and social projects and thus failed to have an impact beyond the destruction inflicted by the Israeli brutality. <sup>[xvii]</sup>"

Israel justifies its longstanding policy of destruction of homes and neighbourhoods by "security". These expensive operations of intensive and extended, direct and indirect sustenance of Palestinian emergency are an existential requirement for the continuation of its superiority; therein maintaining a Palestinian inferiority and impeding the re-emergence of a societal modernity capable of leading a successful revolution. Or so they think. Just as absurd as it would be to reinvent the wheel today it is ridiculous to believe that the settler-

colonial project can foreclose resistance with the creation of deprived cantons of so-called 'self-governance' and zero sovereignty, for a fraction of the Palestinians over a sliver of their pre-Israel geography.

As diplomacy and policy makers continue to assume that Palestinian citizenship and disobedience – hence imaginaries, practices and spaces of direct resistance to Israel – are limited to the 4.5 million Palestinians in the 1967 territories; the forgotten 1.5 million Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are showcasing their weight in demonstrations, cultural productions, and the Knesset. In the enclaves of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Fatah and Hamas guerrilla-statesmen remain preoccupied with modelling mono-party apparatuses to control the population that is stuck with them. They tailor their politics with governments and treasurers in Cairo, Doha, and Washington; arrest and liquidate elements of opposition (politicians, journalists, artists, etc.); promise that corruption will end when the 'occupation' is over; and when necessary, they boast a 'revolutionary spirit' through spraying public mediums with partisan campaigns and street parades by al Aqsa and al Qassam brigades. In contrast, Palestinian politicians on the other side of the border who remained demilitarized and unspoiled with foreign aid were forced to rethink their strategies as their relevance to people's lives dried-up. After long periods of perceived irrelevance, communists, centre and islamists united under the Joint List, and their program is not very different from that of the 1980s: an organized, flexible, accumulative process where issues of equality and the right to space and identity are the focus, where differently-opinioned persons work with one another, and where open confrontation with the state is a tactical and calculated option. Notwithstanding, it remains to be seen if they are able to sustain and positively orient the momentum we see today.

Beyond the fact that they are part of a new vista for the struggle for liberation, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are taking up important space in the economic and socio-cultural sectors (lived spaces and imaginations) of the West Bank: employees, tenants, artists, spouses, tourists, etc. Ramallah's low social hierarchies

(clan power) makes it possible for the tensions between varied socio-political groupings to surface. Some of the strong voices involved in this 'labouring' revolve around dignified living, disobedience against the discriminatory regime, and *joie de vivre*. In a sense, in Ramallah multifaceted circles of social production break through physical divisions imposed by colonial demographic codifications for isolation, disconnection and control; West Banker, Jerusalemite, Israeli, Gazan, temporary visa (diaspora/internationals), and the ideological differences within each or commons with others. In that, it has created a space of unequivocal pluralisms contesting their subjectivities, and therewith bringing back to the scene features of Palestinianhood that were last seen before the Nakba: urban socializations.

## Those others!

"[Cities] shine by bringing like-minded people in from the hinterland [...], but they thrive by asking unlike-minded people to live together in the enveloping metropolis. While the clumping is fun, the coexistence is the greater social miracle. <sup>[xviii]</sup>"

Ramallah has been a city of *new comers* which in effect gave it the comparatively inviting track record of progressive socio-political re-adaptations along the past century of 'divide and conquer'. Given its characteristics, the founding of missionary schools as of the late 1800s and soon after the development of basic infrastructures (roads, electricity, clinic, etc.); by the 1930s Ramallah had grown from an agrarian village to an administrative small town. It now had 'original families', a community of Hebronites – *al Qaisiyyeh*, and few internationals and visitors (e.g. Lebanese, British). In the 1950s it opened its arms to Nakba refugees allowing them to boost existing town spaces instead of erecting distanced camps, thus growing into a successful merchants town and endorsing its nascent features of modernity. Now Ramallah additionally has seasonal tourists and a community of al Lydd and al Ramleh refugees/citizens. As of the 1970s the ethos and practices of *sumud* started to take shape in the city through expanding

politico-regional networks and frameworks that catered for more resilient cityscapes – mental, lived and representational [i:82]. Now, it had more small communities that reflected the geographies to which it was connected; several other parts of Palestine, the USA and nationals of former states of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s Ramallah swung again with the winds; the Cold War was over, the capacities of citizens to endure the uncertainties of – and themselves be – the open civic disobedience were exhausted, and the embrace of the neoliberal economy now and retrospectively looks like an avoidable choice, but in reality at the time no competitive alternative was put forth. Ramallah doubled and tripled in volume and importance, demographics and diversity, wealth and discrepancies. It became a *de facto* capital of PA (quasi) controlled territories.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) census of 2007 established that less than half of those living in the city were born in it, placing Ramallah as a stark contrast to all other localities. In addition, studies estimate a daily in- and out-flow of around 100,000 persons through the district-city of 40,000. The new groupings of Ramallah include internationals, *A'ideen* (returnees), yet mostly persons from many places in Palestine (cities, villages, camps) who work as cadets, construction workers, employees, managers, bankers, journalists, artists, and other professions and positions that are bringing to some excessive wealth and to others too little for a decent life in the expensive city. They moved with or for a job, for a loved-one, for better opportunities, and at least for some, for more social freedoms and little joys in spite of the precarious life; mini public gardens, theatres, cinemas and festivals. Unfortunately, there is also a troubling increase in violations of rights, corruption and brutality by the PA and Israel alike. Among other impacts these are feeding into inaccurate associations, polarization and contestation.

Ramallah's post-Oslo course of development and its reputation/contestation is a result of the coincidence of five factors: **First**, the PA's policy of free market economics and the centralization of its commands of policing apparatuses (along others) in the city has had societal and behavioural impacts in

terms of organizational (labour) hierarchies; spatializations of surveillance and profit; and the shifting of norms governing interpersonal relations and priorities *from we're all in the same trench* to stratifications of privilege – a system where *'individual successes are built on a collective destruction, namely, the failure of the Palestine project'* [xvii]. **Second**, the shortcomings and impunity of international aid agendas, agents and capital power have in effect prevented the rise of alternative and meaningful politics, or change the realities of the embargoed economy; rather, it has accelerated processes of de-development [xix:68, i:127]. **Third**, the heavy-weight presence of private capital that is intimate with decision makers, above accountability, and spoiled by unjustifiable subsidies and privileged access to scarce resources. These methods have increased the vulnerability of average citizens, feelings of injustice, and dependency on networks and nepotisms (rather than law) for securities. **Fourth**, the reality of being hostage to colonialism and its policies of closure and conditional privileges [xx:54] is the main factor that feeds into the afore-noted ecologies. The Zionist obsession with engineering spaces and flows of the Palestinian population it controls has been ensuring the continuation of their subsidiarity; taming imaginations and potentials of visionaries and entrepreneurs; and inducing politico-economic radicalizations inter and intra localities. Among many other effects, these strategies have materialized with the resettlement of many Palestinians from other parts of Palestine to the city that has the highest number of 'like-minded people' (regardless of what this exactly is) and market diversity – Ramallah. **And fifth**, the exponential demographic and physical growth of Ramallah between 2000-2010 was not accompanied by neither critical visionaries nor foresighted managers within public or private realms. This has fostered much of the inequalities and compromised the quality of life as transcribed in the architecture and financial structure of the city. Notwithstanding, this has also created a dense patchwork of social, economic, and ideological colours and aesthetics whose (non)settling of differences has been largely deregulated. On one hand this vacuum has served as space for forging new

basis for relationships that are not calculated in reference to political or familial identity, rather, in reference to shared experiences and social subjectivities. On the other, as can be expected in the absence of functioning and nonpartisan executive, judiciary and legislative systems; the settling of differences is often not fair. Under the current constellation, the others and their sins are the ones being blamed for the imparities of Ramallah – the incompetent internationals, the spoiled A'ideen, the conservative Jeninis, and the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who are abusing the fact that PA police cannot fine or prosecute them for wrong-doings in its territories... amongst others, depending on the perspective.

## Rediscovering little sins...

"[W]hat we academics so often forget is the role played by the sensibilities that arise out of the streets around us, the inevitable feelings of loss provoked by the demolitions, what happens when whole quarters (like Les Halles) get re-engineered [...], or the despair that flows from the glum desperation of marginalization, police repressions and idle youth lost in the sheer boredom of increasing unemployment and neglect in the soulless suburbs that eventually become sites of roiling unrest. (xxi:11)"

In cities associations and mental conceptions are products of processes of accumulation of positive and/or negative experiences [xxii:73]. Hence, happenings and gradations of routines – how people spend their time – are seldom arbitrary and almost always contain expressions of particular ideological subjectivities and/or agendas. Be it festive celebrations, political demonstrations, riots, or natural disasters; the way an event plays out is a product of many (non)systematized frameworks and chain (re) actions. Each case has tensions and stimuli, and on itself, each is a factor in the accumulating unfoldings, therewith shifts in behavioural logic of communities and the way they stage, use, and relate to their (in) direct spaces.

The reason why Ramallah is so loved and hated by Palestinians is because it is part of the imaginaries of many people not only

within it but also in other localities; whether because a document is needed from one of the bureaucratic ministries; or because it has a concentration of customers; or because of the discrepancies and nepotisms that dominate life in it; or because it hosts the command centre of failing PLO politics; or sometimes because it offers little sins, that unfortunately are highly stratified financially. Ramallites casually meet outside the 'private house' where a growing sector exhibits rituals of 'time-out' and unfamiliar individualized sensibilities. And occasionally, several of the ideological and socio-economic stratifications of Ramallites cross path/border and share the spaces of street and open (variably-themed) festivals. Here one has to make a nod for the dedication of Ramallah's Municipality in the domain of direct engagement with citizens, and inquire the reasons of incomparable interest of other (richer) municipalities, close and far.

It is a regular scene in Ramallah to have youth and young families meet in one of the many restaurants, or the few parks and theatres, or attend sport and cultural events and exhibitions. On Fridays streets around mosques turn into parking lanes of frequenters who are predominantly but not exclusively male, and the air is filled with voices from within that too often echo the dangerous growth of neoreligiousities within the city and its surroundings. Concealed by night, a similar but significantly smaller and less loud scene occurs around (largely unaffordable) cafés, bars and hotels. Here some (un-)married couples and un-chaperoned singles meet and one could have a dance on the sounds of live music by one of the bands or DJs that are labouring an unfamiliar Palestinian musical identity; tunes, beats and lyrics that reflect the concerns of a new generation that comes from many places (sets of subjectivities) and convenes in Ramallah.

After 1948 Palestinians tuned in to listen to "Watany al Akbar" (My greater homeland) by the Egyptian composer Mohammed Abdel Wahhab through radio from Cairo; where the political compass and hope centred. In the era of post the Six Day War and the shattering of Pan-Arabism what caught most ears were songs of popular anti-colonial revolutions from Beirut and Damascus where (coincidentally?) creators

of the 'Palestinian consciousness' also shared the space. Here people watched black and white television screens broadcasting footage of Al Ashekeen Group singing „Min Sinjen Akka“ (From Akka's Prison) and later Marcel Khalifeh singing "Inni Ikhtartuka ya Watani" (I chose you my homeland). They also sometimes met at podiums of rallies where local groups like Sabreen and al Funoun performed, and Kamilya Jubran and Walid Abdel Salam became the voices of a Palestinianhood of active protest and engagement. For some the 1990s brought about a long awaited break in the classical music scene in Ramallah which was finally able to expand its infrastructures and scope and size of activities. Today there is an orchestra, choirs, groups of and solo musicians, and even young composers such as Dina Shilleh who was born in Belgrade in 1984 to a Serbian mother and a Palestinian father, moved to Ramallah when she was 11 where she completed school, earned her higher education in the US, works her music in studios and theatres in the city and has just collected her first international prize. That said, the sounds brought *en masse* with the growth of virtual-/media sectors as of the 1990s were the – until then – alien tunes of (artistically poor) propaganda party music by Palestinian factions; which generally promote rhetoric of resistance and heroisms. Today in the era of disintegration of the dream of statehood and the re-emergence of civic rights, increasing numbers of Ramallites are lending their ears to bands like Toot Ard, DAM and Muqata'a (boycott); and songs such as "Ilah al Thawra" (God of the Revolution), "Nashret Akhbar" (news segment), and "Baji, Wainek?" (I'll come, where are you?). Similar patterns of change can be seen in fields of filmmaking, theatre, and visual expressions among others. All of these reflect processes of re-negotiation of norms and re-definition of constituents of decent living, and how life is practiced within the collective mental (pseudo-concrete) and lived (tangible) spaces.

In Ramallah the new socio-ideological formulas of its many communities and their subs are varied; contesting over particular issues and coalescing over others. News, photographs and videos of religious celebrations, festivals and performances that take place on the open

streets of the city are regularly streamed through (mainly but not exclusively) the web, and often unleash threads of both praise and condemnation from within and from outside Ramallah. While the traumas of the years between 2000 and 2005 in terms of disablement of intra-locality mobility (checkpoints, curfews, closures) still have their traces today on the perceptions of distance and journeys by Palestinians; they are relatively active online. Facebook and other blog-format spaces often become the litigation space between different opinions; those who propound the joys Ramallites co-produce and -cultivate as resilience and resistance; those who are supportive and contenders of micro-expressions of liberation of women's bodies; and among more, those who consider such happenings a deflection from aesthetics and practices of 'original norms', meanings of Palestinianhood, and a betrayal to the sacrifices of prisoners and *martyrs*.

Time doesn't go back and the severe damages of two decades of Oslo and a century of Anglo-Zionist colonial projects will not be easily healed. Combating the systems that generate inequalities and consider Palestinians as limited, monochrome subjects of certain regimes of ethno-religious politics is a process that requires practicing of fluid civic agendas through individuals, groupings, organizations and municipalities. Yet the often expressed 'wonderment that Palestinians are capable of intelligible lives' by enthusiastic 'western and Israeli journalist' [xxiii:12] citing Ramallah is it at best naïve and mostly what David Harvey describes as the orientalist logic of 'infantalization'. Equally, it is discriminatory because it turns a blind eye to the fact that a significant portion of the noise about Ramallah has elements, tentacles, and parallels from, to and in other Palestinian localities.

Ramallah is hated by some Palestinians because it is accused of having normalized its colonial reality and 'accepted' its restrictions. Yet such opinions ignore the fact that it is against human nature to live for extended terms under extreme precarity, on one side. And on the other, they imply that modes and spaces of resistance of the colonial project have neither changed nor include the re-nurturing, debating, and adapting of principles and expressions of

shared identities, hence struggles and little sins. Ramallah is loved by some and hated by others because it is receiving more attention and resources than other localities; and it is slowly managing to construct a new, heterogeneous, and vibrant urban identity (hence practices) that has features from Jenin, Haifa, Hebron as well as beyond the fenced borders. Yet mostly, Ramallah is loved and hated because it is the location to which a large number of Palestinians have and still are hitching their fortunes; because it has created some space for pluralism and opportunity, yet today, these seldom encompass its poor.

Like times past, Ramallah is implored to re-articulate what constitutes its persona. Its association has changed from the 'beautiful, lush, summer resort' [xxiv] and *sumud* up until Oslo, to 'Green Zone' [xxv], 'five-star prison' [xxiv], 'bantustan sublime' [xxvi], '*coeur du mirage palestinien*' [xxvii], and 'hornet's nest' [xxviii] post the signature of the accords. If the city wants to break from negative connotations then it has to empower alternative associations that are – preferably – based on principles of civic (non-religious/partisan) rights, freedoms and responsibilities. This necessitates open and serious debates and undertakings, among and by citizens and decision-makers, and with smart curators (e.g. intellectuals, journalists, musicians, designers, etc.). Ramallites should take on the decolonization of the morphology of the city which still abides by the British blueprints of dissection, sterilization, and enablement of surveillance and swift repression through vehicle-friendly (pedestrian unfriendly) infrastructures; for decolonizing systems requires a similar process in the ecologies that produce them.

In the close, Ramallah is loved and hated because the city's name has become the title for some phenomena; yet these still have to grow into a space/idea that is shared by its citizens, one that brings about radical achievements in terms of rights, living conditions, and securities against mounting uncertainties. Ramallah does not lack outspoken critics, creative visionaries, and persons who dare to 'sin'; but it lacks the mindset to have an open, collective conversation, and the courage to experiment new ideas that are more expressive of its



current concerns and desires. It remains to be seen in which direction these nascent features of modernity will swing next... What kind of urbanity will Ramallah stand for?

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## NOTES

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- vii. E.g. infrastructural discrimination features of Jisr alZarqa versus Or Akiva at the coast are highly comparable with those outlined in the Jaba' versus Geva Binyamin layout near Jerusalem.
- viii. "[...] value transition or a reframing process of what community psychologists would call the ecosystem of our lives from individual to micro- (family, schools, work units), meso- (combination of micro-systems), exo- (neighbourhoods, world of work, district cities) and macro-systems (cultural values, customs and institutions)" [ii:42].
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