JUNCTION 60/437: A STUDY OF LANDSCAPE RUPTURE IN THE WEST BANK

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Synthesis

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About the EU Funded Project “My Heritage! My Identity!”

In 2018, the European Union provided a grant to fund a project titled, “My Heritage! My Identity!”1 in Palestine. The project is being jointly implemented by four partners: AFRAT - France (www.afrat.com), Bethlehem University / Institute for Community Partnership - Palestine (www.bethlehem.edu), Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People - Palestine (www.pcr.ps) and TÉTRAKTYS - France (www.tetraktys-association.org).

It aims to contribute to preserving and promoting cultural heritage located along the community-based walking Masār Ibrāhīm (trail) in Palestine, in an effort to enhance Palestinian citizenship and identity.

What's more, the project offers activities that will contribute to the cohesiveness of the Palestinian people. It promotes inclusion and trust and aims to create a sense of belonging in order to positively influence relations among the diverse groups in Palestinian society.

For more information on the project, please visit the project website at the following link: www.myheritage.ps and the Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/myheritagemyidentity

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1 The original title of the EU project was “Promoting Governance and Citizenship in Palestine”. EU project reference: ENI/2017/390-692.
About the research process

The present research project has been developed within the framework of the EU funded project “My Heritage! My Identity!”. The four project partners collaborated with academic experts from Palestine and France to identify six topics related to Palestinian cultural heritage. A scientific committee was established at the beginning of 2018 to select relevant topics. The scientific committee is composed of the following scholars:

**Palestinian researchers:**

- **Omar Abed Rabo**
  Research fellow and lecturer of History & archaeology at Bethlehem University

- **Nazmi Amin Jubeh**
  Department of History and Archaeology, Birzeit University. Expert of Cultural Heritage

- **Jamil Khader, Ph.D.**
  Dean of Research at Bethlehem University

- **Zahraa Zawawi**
  Assistant Professor at An-Najah National University, Head, Urban Planning Engineering Department

- **Wael Hamareh**
  Scientific Committee Director – MOTA

**French researchers:**

- **Manoël Pénicaud**
  Research fellow and lecturer of Anthropology (Institute of Mediterranean, European and comparative ethnology)

- **Pauline Bosredon**
  Research fellow and lecturer of Geography & Urban planning (Lille University)

- **Jacques Barou**
  Research fellow and lecturer in Ethnology & sociology (Political Sciences Institute of Grenoble)

- **Najla Nakhle-Cerruti**
  Research fellow in Arts & Litterature (French Institute for the Near East)

- **Kevin Trehuedic**
  Research fellow and lecturer of History & Archaeology (Paris Est-Crèteil University)
The scientific committee identified six topics, five of which were finally approved and selected for completion:

- The Maqām as a place of popular practices: evolution and diversity
- From terraces to settlements: the testimony of Masār Ibrāhīm landscapes
- “The one who has olive oil will never be poor”: Material and political aspects of a Palestinian symbol.
- Architecture and ways of living: traditional and modern Palestinian villages and cities
- Ḥikāyāt Palestine through the Masār Ibrāhīm: dialects, oral memories and histories

Furthermore, members of the committee have been involved throughout the research process in supporting the researchers.

Finally, three Palestinian members of the committee, Dr. Al Jubeh, Dr. Abed Rabo and Dr. Khader, were in charge of the final proof reading and copy editing of the research projects.

To discover the five researches, please visit the project website: www.myheritage.ps

About the Author

Ahmed Alaqra is an architect, a researcher and currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Paris Diderot XII, Paris, URMIS laboratory. He graduated with a bachelor degree in architecture from Birzeit University and a Master of Urbanism from the University of Edinburgh. His interests mainly include politics and the philosophy of architecture and space; he is also interested in mobilising architectural practices to counter political, social and economic hierarchies. Currently, Ahmad is engaged with several academic and artistic projects, highlighting the need for non-architectural practices that would deconstruct spaces rather than constructing them.

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Synthesis

Introduction
The landscape of the Palestinian region had endured severe transformations during the past century. This transformation was aimed at serving the different political and economic structures that governed the area (Wagstaff, 1999). The agrarian landscape was subjected to different processes of transformation that altered it physically and perception wise. Those changes and especially the ones that are associated with politics and economy were to be assumed as a Rupture of the Landscape since they were forced and imposed.

In this research project, I would like to morphologically trace the Palestinian landscape and associate the changes with the different authority structures that contributed to its rupture. The morphological approach will aid in the identification of the different variations and forms of rupture that have existed/still existing in the context of Palestinian landscape and specially along part of the cities and villages of Masār Ibrāhīm.

Framing the rupture
According to the Oxford dictionary, the word LANDSCAPE is defined as “all the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal” (qtd. In Hornby & Deuter, 2015). This definition was criticised for limiting the landscape to only its natural manifestation. Yet, the geographical approach toward the landscape portrays it beyond its natural appeal and rather presents it as a social construct allowing human agency to interpret the physical environment in reference to their experience and context (Greider & Garkovich, 2010).

“Every river is more than just one river. Every rock is more than just one rock. Why does a real estate developer look across an open field and see comfortable suburban ranch homes nestled in quiet cul-de-sacs, while a farmer envisions endless rows of waving wheat and a hunter sees a five-point buck cautiously grazing in preparation for the coming winter?” (Greider & Garkovich, 2010, p. 1)

In that sense, landscape is what we make of it, we signify it and give it meanings emanating from our culture and background. To clarify this issue more, the definition of landscape as a social construct doesn’t contradict the fact there is “nature” at all. Different conceptions of nature can be
established in reference to different cultural realities (Greider & Garkovich, 2010). A wall could be the manifestation of ultimate freedom or it could be the representation of power and oppression. In both cases, it still is a wall, manifested in its physical form, colour, position and all of its technical features.

In the Palestinian case, the variety of natural environments, the rapid shift in the ruling political structures, and the existence of different religious trends/ beliefs allowed for the emergence of different perceptions of landscape. Those perceptions have always been representative of the way people identify themselves with nature and the way of living. Several events during the past century resulted in the alteration of the natural landscape and its perception (Wagstaff, 1999).

For the purpose of this study, I would like to define the term landscape of rupture to refer to the emergence of a landscape that is meant to serve certain political or economic purposes. Linguistically, Rupture means “a breach of a harmonious relationship” (Oxford American Dictionary, 2010). In the case of the landscape, this breach is due to external factors that sabotage the relationship between the landscape and the inhabitants. The rupture indicates a sudden shift in this relationship.

This landscape of rupture is alien to the natural landscape in the sense that it was imposed and erected on top of it, or was just an act of transformation that aimed to subject the landscape and the inhabitants either to new economic reforms or to other forms of territorial control. One would argue that the process of landscape alteration or transformation has been going on since the dawn of time. So, what differentiates a ruptured landscape from a non-ruptured one?

In fact, what differentiates the ruptured landscape are two factors: the motive behind the act of rupture and the volume/ scope of its impact. A landscape of rupture is much more entwined with political and economic motives. With regard to the extent of the impact, usually the ruptured landscape impacts the whole political or economic geography.

**Thus, a landscape of rupture is:**
An alien landscape that emerged as a result of political or economic forces that were inscribed on the landscape by different means, usually “imposed,” to achieve certain objectives and goals.
Tracing the past and visiting the present

To be able to identify the rupture in the landscape, one first needs to understand the origins and the development of the Palestinian natural and man-made landscape. Temporally speaking, and as Wagstaff identifies, the change in the Palestinian landscape started in the late Ottoman empire, and as such we will be studying the landscape before that time and its development after.

1. Origins of the Palestinian landscape

In the 10th century, the Geographer al-Muḳaddasī (or al-Maḳdisī) recognised three zones of terrain in the Palestinian region that run from north to south: the coastal zone, the central uplands and the Jordan river valley (Wagstaff, 1999). Those three zones are distinguished by different features. The Jordan Valley extends from south of al-Ḍjawlân (Golan heights/al-Ḥūla) all the way down south near al-ʿAḳaba (Aqaba) gulf on the Red Sea. The natural landscape of the Jordan valley is of unique and mesmerising nature. Formed two million years ago due to the great African Rift, the Jordan valley is considered the lowest area on earth. It is rich in water and fertile soil and was home to one of the first human settlements ever discovered (Figure 1) (Baroud & Salha, 2016).

![Landscape around Jericho, researcher, 2018](image1.jpg)
On the other hand, Wagstaff (1999) believes that the natural Palestinian landscape in what he called the uplands (meaning the terraced hills of the West Bank and Galilee) have experienced change in its natural form twice. The first happened as a result of the deforestation and the soil erosion before the bronze age. Since then the natural environment of the uplands had been described as agricultural. The terrace systems that exist all around the West Bank now are the extension of that era. It was believed that those artificial terraces helped the farmers minimise soil erosion and prevent the loss of water (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Terraced hills of the highlands, researcher, 2018

Those terrace systems are still an essential part of the Palestinian landscape in its natural and cultural dimensions. They represent the mechanism, by which the Palestinian farming communities and societies arranged themselves within the natural landscape and the way they signified it. Farmers built those terraces to facilitate their work (Sayej, 1999).
The second change in the natural Palestinian landscape in the West Bank was initiated, according to Wagstaff (1999), in the late 18th century with the arrival of the settlers in 1882. The political situation combined with the change in social and economic conditions allowed for the beginning of another change in the Palestinian natural landscape and its perception as a cultural product. This marks an important point in a process that is still on-going and which was referred to earlier as the emergence of the landscape of rupture.

To better understand the Palestinian natural and cultural landscape in the West Bank, it is important to discuss the relationship between the natural landscape and the people at the beginning of the rupture (what Wagstaff calls second change) period (late Ottoman period).

Until the late 18th century, the natural landscape of the West Bank was developing at a slow pace, because of its dependence on agriculture as a main source of production (Nazer, 2008). Although cities and villages were expanding and new technologies were arriving, those technologies and tools were not yet powerful enough and lacked political backing preventing them from initiating tangible changes in the natural landscape. In 18th century Palestine, three forms of communities existed within the natural landscape: Urban communities living in cities, rural communities living in villages, and the Bedouins in permanent mobility (Gadyeh, n.d.).

2. The change in the landscape

In 1917 the British troops entered Palestine which introduced four approaches that remodelled the Palestinian landscape, including town planning, land policies, forestation and agricultural tools. Those four approaches were used to achieve different interests starting from forestation to project the biblical description of the holy land on the non-European Palestine. Town planning and land policies were both used to import the concept of modernity to the new Palestinian colony. These two tools also helped achieve more control and dominance over the Palestinian landscape. The last approach the British used for remodelling the landscape is the introduction of new agricultural tools aimed at putting Palestine on the international trading map as a strong British colony. Those agricultural tools boosted the production of certain crops in Palestine and more land were allocated to them (El-Eini, 2015).
Following the occupation of West Bank in 1967, the Israeli government thought of the landscape as a powerful tool to establish their dominance and narrative over the inhabitants. They continued with the forestation plan as a mean to project the biblical references on the holy landscape and to hide the scars of war from their new and remodelled landscape. Moreover, the Israelis felt the need to erect infrastructure of control and surveillance to maintain their dominance over the landscape; walls, towers and checkpoints were erected all around. Yet one of the most evident manifestation of the rupture that the Israeli government established on the ground is the emergence of settlements over the hilltops of the West Bank (Benveniště, 2002) (Khamaisi, 1997 & Weizman, 2007) (Thawaba, 2016).

The Palestinian Authority was given sovereignty over parts of the West Bank following the signing of 1993 Oslo accords. The landscape for them was a medium toward initiating the state building process. The state building process required reforms in the almost non-existent economy. Rather than acknowledging the abandoned agrarian nature of the Palestinian lifestyle, the PA initiated a process of neo-liberalisation of the Palestinian landscape supported by the US and the EU. Within a decade, what was left from the West Bank was transformed into little pockets of investments. New suburbs were emerging around the hilltops. Mega agricultural and industrial projects were established aiming at profit but wrapped in nationalistic motives. Introduction of new land policies and commodification of the land (Haddād, 2016) (Melhem, 2014).

Classifications of the elements of rupture and the case of the no-man land, the fertile city and the way to Battir

There are two manifestations, in which a ruptured landscape emerges within the overall landscape of Palestine and Israel. The first is of transformative nature. Transformation as a rupture refers to the processes which the political, social or economic agencies use to transform the landscape so it would correspond more to their interests and ideologies. Transformation as a process means substituting one form of landscape with another.

Transformation is used for ideological, political and economic reasons. The ideological references of transformation are entwined with the biblical description of the holy land. The political dimension is very much related to the impositions of the occupation on the landscape. Economic references
of transformation as rupture are related to modernising purposes during the British mandate era and with the economic reforms of the Palestinian Authority.

The second manifestation of rupture is “addition.” *Imposition as a form* of rupture is the emergence of new elements that are alien to the natural and cultural landscape. Those new elements are of different political and economic nature. The emergence of those elements is considered a rupture rather than “a natural development” of the landscape.

They were adopted and imposed (or rather normalised) on the Palestinian landscape (Figure 3).

Imposition is more evident on the landscape, and is associated much more with political and economic references. The political dimension refers to the settler-colonial infrastructure: walls, checkpoints, roads, etc. The economic references of imposition as a rupture are derived from the practices of the Palestinian Authority such as quarries and new suburbs (Figure 4).
To have a more coherent understanding of those manifestations of the rupture in the landscape, I would like to propose three cases in which we can trace the ruptured landscape of Palestine. The case of No-man-land, the case of the fertile city and the case of the isolated village (Table 1) (Figures 5, 6, 7).

Figure 4: Example of imposition as a rupture, The separation wall. Researcher, 2018
Figure 5: Kafr ʿAqab political zones. Researcher, 2018

Figure 6: Toward Battir political zones. Researcher, 2018
Figure 7: Jericho political zones. Researcher, 2018
Conclusion
The change that happened in the Palestinian landscape could be considered as rupture due to its nature and purpose. Rupture in the landscape has negative implications and can be understood as the emergence of alien forms of landscape that were imposed/imported/adopted by different political structures that have existed within the Palestinian/Israeli context.

Such rupture manifests itself differently in reference to the political/ideological/economic powers that produced it. In the Palestinian context, three main political hierarchies were responsible for either biblicizing, modernising, or neo-liberalising or occupying the landscape: the British mandate, the Israeli occupation, and the Palestinian Authority. Each of those structures remodelled the landscape to serve their agendas.

Nowadays, the Palestinian landscape is fragmented, distorted and troubled. Many farmers no longer have access to their lands or water resources. New forms and structures were erected among the landscape for the purpose of surveillance and control. Mega projects were established to transform the former agricultural terraced hills into profitable assets in the hands of those who have the power.
Bibliography


