HOW TO SEE PALESTINE

a writing project

by

Nicholas Mirzoeff
Introduction

ABCs are for beginners. I am that beginner. In May-June 2016, I undertook a militant research visit to Palestine, my first trip to the West Bank, benefiting from amazing and generous help. It is a daunting place to visit for so many reasons, not least the expertise that seems to be required to say anything at all about it. My response here, as in my earlier digital writing project Occupy 2012, has been to document my own experience. I reference only information that was available to me on the ground. I have used only photographs I took myself as visual documentation. These 'rules' constitute this as a digital performance (in the classic sense of twice-performed behavior) of my experience. Or, simply as a digital diary, arranged in non-hierarchical format.

The book is an illustrated alphabetical guide to what I saw, arranged letter by letter. I realized before going that I had no mental picture of what to expect, of what Palestine is like. This project is my response and perhaps others can use it to begin to create such a mental map. At a time when many academics and artists are pondering whether to support calls for BDS but not all of us can go, this alphabet can be useful in helping people to decide. The everyday examples in this project are places from which we can begin to unravel how the occupation does what it does.

Begin: Encountering Palestine

There's no doubt as to my first and most lasting impression: this is what it is to experience colonialism. I have written about colonialism so often but it was different to know what it feels like. Above all else, Palestine was astonishing for the sheer intensity of the occupation. You see soldiers everywhere like the two above, on patrol in Hebron, the largest city in the West Bank. For an outsider, it was stunning to see with what force the regime operates, to experience the daily banality of violence, and to see how everyone who lives there has learned to deal with it. It was humbling to see the challenges of being an activist in Palestine, compared to my own privileged position.

Next, even on a short visit it is impossible not to see that it is complete and exclusive settlement that is now the palpable, visible goal of the occupation, which builds structures to that end everywhere it can. This occupation under construction is exclusive and segregated behind walls, fences, checkpoints, soldiers, CCTV and the all-pervasive security culture that excludes the Palestinians not only from their traditional land and homes, but from services like water, electricity, transport and so on.

The one thing everyone on all sides agrees on is that it's all about land—who owns it, who can farm it, live on it, use the rainwater that falls on it and the minerals below—and so on. Palestine was once a land made to be lived in. It is now a land made to be seen and to be under surveillance. The illegal settlements cluster on the top of hills, rather than spreading across the valleys, to maximize their viewpoint.

The valleys are starkly beautiful but where there is most beauty, there is most colonial arrangement, concealment and destruction. Palestinian olive groves have been replaced by fast growing pines. The mature pines offer timber but also a sense of long-term residence. Palestinians have been evicted from their houses and forbidden to cultivate their land, so a pleasing (to eyes trained by Romanticism) ruination and weathering dominates the prospect. Even the wildlife has been secluded and removed to Israeli territory. Here appropriation meets land art and produces an aesthetic of (non)settlement, at the intersection of the visibility of the settler and the forced invisibility of the Palestinians.
Introduction

ABCs are for beginners. I am that beginner. In May-June 2016, I undertook a militant research visit to Palestine, my first trip to the West Bank, benefiting from amazing and generous help. It is a daunting place to visit for so many reasons, not least the expertise that seems to be required to say anything at all about it. My response here, as in my earlier digital writing project Occupy 2012, has been to document my own experience. I reference only information that was available to me on the ground. I have used only photographs I took myself as visual documentation. These 'rules' constitute this as a digital performance (in the classic sense of twice-performed behavior) of my experience. Or, simply as a digital diary, arranged in non-hierarchical format.

The book is an illustrated alphabetical guide to what I saw, arranged letter by letter. I realized before going that I had no mental picture of what to expect, of what Palestine is like. This project is my response and perhaps others can use it to begin to create such a mental map. At a time when many academics and artists are pondering whether to support calls for BDS but not all of us can go, this alphabet can be useful in helping people to decide. The everyday examples in this project are places from which we can begin to unravel how the occupation does what it does.

Preface

Begin: Encountering Palestine

There's no doubt as to my first and most lasting impression: this is what it is to experience colonialism. I have written about colonialism so often but it was different to know what it feels like. Above all else, Palestine was astonishing for the sheer intensity of the occupation. You see soldiers everywhere like the two above, on patrol in Hebron, the largest city in the West Bank. For an outsider, it was stunning to see with what force the regime operates, to experience the daily banality of violence, and to see how everyone who lives there has learned to deal with it. It was humbling to see the challenges of being an activist in Palestine, compared to my own privileged position.

Next, even on a short visit it is impossible not to see that it is complete and exclusive settlement that is now the palpable, visible goal of the occupation, which builds structures to that end everywhere it can. This occupation under construction is exclusive and segregated behind walls, fences, checkpoints, soldiers, CCTV and the all-pervasive security culture that excludes the Palestinians not only from their traditional land and homes, but from services like water, electricity, transport and so on.

The one thing everyone on all sides agrees on is that it's all about land—who owns it, who can farm it, live on it, use the rainwater that falls on it and the minerals below—and so on. Palestine was once a land made to be lived in. It is now a land made to be seen and to be under surveillance. The illegal settlements cluster on the top of hills, rather than spreading across the valleys, to maximize their viewpoint.

The valleys are starkly beautiful but where there is most beauty, there is most colonial arrangement, concealment and destruction. Palestinian olive groves have been replaced by fast growing pines. The mature pines offer timber but also a sense of long-term residence. Palestinians have been evicted from their houses and forbidden to cultivate their land, so a pleasing (to eyes trained by Romanticism) ruination and weathering dominates the prospect. Even the wildlife has been sedated and removed to Israeli territory. Here appropriation meets land art and produces an aesthetic of (non)settlement, at the intersection of the visibility of the settler and the forced invisibility of the Palestinians.
And so I came to realize that the sight of occupation is the site of occupation. I saw elements of many
different visual regimes struggling to cohere into what might become a new form. Surveillance is universal,
but it’s not a panopticon because the jailers are all too visible. Religion is the justification for settlement, as it
was under high imperialism, but there is no desire to convert the unbelievers. Counterinsurgency seeks “full
spectrum dominance” but expects the insurgency to be permanent unless its conditions of possibility are
removed.

This sight of occupation is designed to produce a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, to keep all the sub-
ject population in full view, and to create an open field of fire in which to be present is to be a target. Against
all that, with the remarkable persistence that they call sumud, Palestinians remain, insist on being seen and
persist with their claims.

{A note to my critics}

Anyone writing on Palestine knows what to expect: accusations of anti-semitism. The haters out there are
going to hate, so this isn’t really for them, it’s for the worried middle.

For the record: all four of my grandparents were Jewish. My paternal grandparents grew up in Jerusalem
where they met and married. On my mother’s side, the family came from Poland and were inevitably part
of the Holocaust. I grew up in England, where anti-semitism was a day-to-day experience. So I know from
anti-semitism. The rule is simple. Never again for anyone. There are no sides in never again.

I live in New York now, a city that is Jewish to its bones, where the Central American wait staff in Katz’s Deli
urge you to be a mensch and have the whole pastrami sandwich, where Seinfeld is sacred writ, and Yiddish
from bupkes to oy vey is part of the vocabulary. So I don’t hate myself either and I certainly don’t hate Jews
because those are so many of my friends.

I’m against the current regime in Israel, yes, just like many Israelis. I support the boycott, yes. It’s not about
Israeli individuals, academics or otherwise, many of whom helped me with this project. Boycott is a peaceful
tactic. Should other places be subject to boycott? If there’s a call from local civil society to do so, then let’s
have that discussion. Should we boycott the US? Some European academics, like Giorgio Agamben, already
do. I can totally see why. I certainly don’t refuse to read or assign Agamben as a result or call for his dismiss-
al.

But this project is not about Israel, it’s about Palestine and how we might see it. It does not make any propos-
als for political solutions, whether in the ‘West Bank’ or the region as a whole. As we’ve written elsewhere,
when we do engage with mainstream politics, the Palestinian Authority are certainly part of that problem.

After Trump (added 11/23/16)

Perhaps the election of Donald Trump clarifies this issue somewhat. The complicated ways in which someone
willing to discuss Palestine gets produced as ‘anti-semitic’ surely pale by comparison with the insertion of
Stephen Bannon, an old-fashioned Jew hater into the White House.
Perhaps the success of a campaign based on the promise of a 'beautiful' wall, xenophobia, hatred of Islam and Muslims and a willingness to separate existing populations will help people understand why Palestine is an example not an exception. Perhaps.

The example of Palestine

In trying to see Palestine, I am trying to see the global conditions in which I too am forced to live. I am not trying to find solutions for the Palestinians, who are doing that for themselves. As the journalist Ben Ehrenreich puts it, “Palestine's realities are not different from our own. They are just starker, denser, more defined.” In understanding solidarity as the work of coming to know how life is lived under occupation, I now see the situation, as Michael Hardt has described it: “rather than [as] an exception, we can see Palestine and the struggles of Palestinians as exemplary”. That is to say, Palestine is an actually existing possibility for the general condition of social life in the twenty-first century. In the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, columnist Gideon Levy pithily called the regime one of 'real estate and messianism.' And now the US has followed the same path.

The Palestinian situation has become exemplary for a new form of settlement and occupation in the era of real-estate driven capitalism. It is marked by a combination of old forms of domination with new modalities of deprivation. The occupation uses spectacular punishment, typical of settler colonies, like the destruction of houses belonging to people designated as terrorists. By its walls and fences it creates physical segregation, typical of the divided cities of both the Cold War and global counterinsurgency post-9/11, as we can see in places like Baghdad.

It also practices service deprivation, meaning cutting off water, electricity and other services, which has become typical of segregated global cities from Detroit to Johannesburg. One of these conditions makes for difficult living— all of them together creates a new paradigm. Putting together the old and the new, as happens in Palestine every day, everyday life under occupation becomes exemplary not exceptional. In these conditions, to have an everyday life and to live every day, is a revolutionary act.

To see every day

Because this is new, we need to be grounded. To understand what it means to live in this global paradigm, in other words, look at how life is lived every day, a condition that is a hybrid of the new and the old. How can we see this condition?

There are four key aspects to the new global society, as I set out in How To See The World. It is comprised of a majority young (under 30), mostly urban, and networked society, undercut and challenged by the effects of climate change. In Palestine, it does so, moreover, in conditions of intensified colonialism. People make images— over 3 billion photos are posted to social media every day in 2016— to first understand the change that is happening and then make social change as a result.

In my earlier work, I have shown that visuality is not a new idea, coined by some contemporary theorist. Rather, it is a colonial technology that renders ground (to use a neutral term) into land for enclosure or terrain for battle. First, the overseer in the slave colony visualized his
labor camp as a means of controlling the enslaved. Then, once battles extended beyond the possibility of one person seeing them, generals visualized battlefields to ensure victory. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this tactic was generalized, as it were, to the supervision of social order as a whole.

In Palestine today, those spaces are indistinguishable. Everywhere is a battlefield, all the land is contested, and occupied order has to be newly imposed every day. The general political question that arises is whether Palestine becomes exemplary for the security society, as advocated by politicians on both sides of the Atlantic and in Australia. Or, just possibly, it becomes the paradigm for a new decolonization.

Mapping the new global everyday is consistent with how the concept came into critical focus. Inspired by his involvement with Surrealist anti-colonialism, Henri Lefebvre published his ground-breaking Critique of Everyday Life in 1947, at height of the decolonial transformation following World War II. India had just become independent, and the disaster of Partition was unfolding. The Nakba was just months away. For Lefebvre, “the revolution...can only be defined concretely, at the level of everyday life.”

Working within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, Lefebvre was perhaps more confident as to what the form of that revolution might be than we are today. Now it seems closer to Grace Lee Boggs’ concept of {r}evolution, meaning “a two-fold transformation of ourselves and our institutions.” This {r}evolution would require structural changes to eliminate poverty, racism and war, accompanied by what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called ‘a mental and spiritual re-evaluation.’ We need to be oriented towards people, not things, so as, said Boggs, “to live more simply so that others can simply live.”

The questions that arise from this interface of revolution and the everyday are those that motivate this project:

- What does it mean to have a life that matters?
- How can we see others, and who counts as human?
- How can we live with non-human life?

A hierarchy of the human

The second way of seeing Palestine is as an exemplary way to learn how to see difference. An ABC is constituted by difference. The letters make sense only by virtue of being different to each other. The alphabet is an assemblage, put together equally for the work of making sense by means of difference. The occupation is also an assemblage, put together in hierarchy for the purpose of domination.

Each of the entries in the ABC is a study of how things connect in this assemblage, by means of ‘articulation.’ An articulation, as Stuart Hall taught us, is both a way of saying something and a way of making connections between practices. These connections are not given but once in place have considerable strength and cannot be undone easily.

Articulations express hierarchy. Hall used the concept to show that at the interface of neo-liberalism and decolonization in 1970s Britain: “race is the modality through which class is lived.” His point was not that this is universally true but that articulation connects, hierarchizes and organizes life.

In Palestine, these connections express the ways in which the colonizer asserts dominance over the occupied and how those occupied try to resist. Racialized difference (between Palestinians and the
regime) articulates the hierarchy of the occupation and organizes lives under that occupation.

Rather than bring an existing analysis to bear on these articulations, I have found, like many activists, that a theoretical understanding could only be found within them. (Technically, I call this the immanent critique of articulation.) It finds a theory of struggle in determining how the occupation does what it does and how it is resisted in everyday life every day. This project is a beginner’s contribution to that ongoing work.

The articulation at stake here is a racialized distinction within the category of the human. That is to say, from the point of view of the occupation, Palestinians are not fully human, just as the refugees seeking asylum in Europe (some of whom are Palestinians based in Syria) have been treated by state officials as a ‘swarm.’ Alexander Weheliye defines ‘racialization’ as “a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and non-humans.” As Western philosophy has held since Aristotle, it is possible to be part of humanity and be designated non-human. Such non-human humans are often enslaved, imprisoned or colonized.

A similar set of hierarchical relations extends from the implicitly ‘fully human’ Israeli citizen; to the Palestinian-Israeli citizen, not-quite human; and the non-human Palestinian/Bedouin. Within this articulated hierarchy, when people are not considered fully human, they can be occupied, displaced, or even shot without sanction. Caged birds are popular pets in Palestine, seen everywhere, from canaries to finches and parrots. I couldn’t help but recall the title of Maya Angelou’s famous autobiography, quoting the African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, ‘I know why the caged bird sings.’ The bird is a symbol for the not-human human being and its song is a kind of freedom.

By extension, the brown bear in Qalqilya Zoo paces without rest, desperately seeking something to end his boredom or a way out of his cage. His confinement is visibly making him insane and it is unbearable.

**Life Lived in Enclosure**

I paid attention to domestic and zoo animals because I went to Palestine hoping to investigate the question of how life might be lived through the relationship between people and the environment and with animals. But I found instead that the force of the racialized articulation of dominance means that such issues cannot be considered separately from the violence of the occupation.

The environment in a settler colony is usually those parts of the territory not under enclosure. In the United States, land is set aside for national parks as wilderness or as so-called Indian reservations outside the formal sovereignty of the colonizer. Clearly, these spaces are not ‘free,’ although they are differentiated from other so-called ‘normal’ spaces.

In Palestine, there is no space whatever outside enclosure. Even the fruit trees are occupied. There is, as a result, no ‘environment.’ That does not mean that there is no pollution or other human-created distortions to the conditions of life, to the contrary. It means that within the articulation of the occupation, it is not possible to have an ‘environment.’ What non-Palestinians might consider environmental questions can only be understood as matters relating to the occupation.

In decolonial struggles of the past, it was felt that such matters could wait until later. Today, it is already later. The struggle is now over land that has been rendered toxic or otherwise (soon-to-be) uninhabitable for lack of
water or excess heat. I do not say this to diminish the importance of the decolonial project in any way whatev-
er, still less out of expectation of changes in its strategy, but rather to sharpen its urgency. Even the Dead Sea
is dying, due to lack of water in the fabled Jordan River that no longer exists in the West Bank. Sink holes are
appearing in areas surrounding the sea for reasons that are not fully understood.

Allow me some poetic license here. Let us take the Dead Sea as a metaphor for the occupation because, as Or-
lando Patterson has put it, in servitude or slavery, a person undergoes ‘social death.’ Social death is a ‘relation
of domination’ such that a person loses all rights, understood as a substitute for death, even for those born into
that relation. The dominated today are often called ‘disposable people’ and these conditions are met in Pales-
tine. Even as that struggle goes on--and there can be no more vital one--the ground is giving out beneath the
feet of the combatants. Never was it more accurately said: liberty or death.
The Alphabet
Across Palestine, the regime covers the territory with signs, expressing its intent. These signs are posted wherever Area A, under the nominal control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), borders with what the regime considers to be the state of Israel. Apparently, the Hebrew and Arabic versions are not quite the same. The English message is clear: Palestinians are dangerous. Red alert. Many leftist Israelis that I met had never been into Palestine, other than the Old City of Jerusalem. The signs work.

Less obvious to the viewer is that Area A covers only 18% of what is still referred to as the ‘West Bank’ in a series of increasingly isolated pockets, centered on the Palestinian cities like Ramallah and Nablus. No functional state can be made from these islands. The ‘two-state solution’ is visibly impossible because the PA has no domain over most of the ‘West Bank.’ Clearly, there is no geo-political entity we can call the ‘West Bank.’

Although Area A signs are quite common, there are no others. Where do you enter Area B (largely considered defunct on the ground) or Area C, where Israeli military rule is in force, now considered to be some 63% of the ‘West Bank’? There are no signs other than the change of rules of engagement and the appearance of settlements, settler buses and the settlers themselves. Palestinians know, as do the settlers and the Israeli Defense Force. So the Area A signs are really for people like me, or Israeli leftists, venturing into the ‘West Bank.’ Nonetheless, I hadn't been there long before the sight of an Area A sign made me relax.

A is for Area A

This Road leads To Area “A”
Under The Palestinian Authority
The Entrance For Israeli Citizens Is Forbidden,
Dangerous To Your Lives
And Is Against The Israeli Law
This is a quite literally a sign of colonialism. It depicts the wolf emblem of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Massive in size and posted high above the ground, it is positioned on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, notionally running through Area C but extensively used by tourists going to the Dead Sea. However, according to legend, Joshua assigned this area to Benjamin. So the sign indicates that Oslo may have designated the land for Palestinians but God had already given it to the Jews. Posted signs indicate that the area is officially known to the regime as ‘Judea and Samaria.’ Benjamin’s land.

The Benjamin sign is only in Hebrew, a message for the colonists alone. But its visual message is clear enough. The howling wolf arcs his body over a cluster of white houses with red roofs, set against green grass and trees. The imperial echo of the Roman wolf cannot be missed. The empire protects. The houses are recognizably those of the illegal settlements that cover every hilltop in the ‘West Bank,’ which all have red roofs, in part to make them visible to the Israeli air force as settlements.

The grass and trees transform the scene into an evocation of American suburbia, the picket fence view of the world. When I took this picture, the temperature was 115 F (45C). Any greenery in a Dead Sea settlement—and there is plenty—is both an ideological production and an environmental fabrication that relies on appropriated water. 10,000 settlers living in the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea area use one-third of the water accessible to the entire Palestinian population in the ‘West Bank’ (estimated at over 2.5 million).
C is for Cherry

The picture above is a cherry orchard, planted and cultivated by Palestinians but confiscated by the Israelis. To protect the orchard, they have both fenced the trees in with razor wire and covered the trees with brown fabric. Presumably the fabric protects the fruit against stones that might be thrown from outside and lets enough light in for the trees to survive. The trees are hard to see--look carefully.

In Anton Chekov’s 1904 play The Cherry Orchard, the aristocrats’ attachment to their orchard is a counterpoint to their bankruptcy. Their futile hope to preserve the cherry trees and salvage their finances but, instead, they lose everything. Stanislavski directed the play as a tragedy, in which the neither the leisure class or the materialism of the bourgeois Lopakhin who claims the orchard have anything to offer. Chekov’s play was seen as prophetic of the 1917 revolution.

The cherry orchard in Palestine is a tragedy for our times. What future does it predict?
D is for Desert

In the Naqab desert (called the Negev by the regime and within what Palestinians call the 48, meaning the 1948 border), Bedouins at the village of al-Aqarib told us how their village had been destroyed 98 times by Israeli police. What's left are two tents, one for meetings and one where people live. The cemetery. And assorted scraps of previous structures--look in the bottom right of the picture and you can see an overturned bench.

Their crops have been sprayed with Round Up from the air. The Jewish National Foundation plants millions of trees over as much of the Bedouin land as they can, aided by well-meaning environmentally inspired donations from the United States and elsewhere. The regime plays tricks. They say the desert is where nobody lives so how can the Bedouin claim to live there? Then they say if there is more than 200mm of rain per year, which there is here, it is not the desert and so it is not Bedouin.

The Bedouin animals are arrested as they graze by the Green Patrol—an ecological unit of the regime—and the Bedouin are forced to pay heavy fines to retrieve them. How so? The regime has declared 85% of the Naqab to be state land or environmental reserves, so any person or animal setting foot in these areas is trespassing. The camels are arrested just like anyone else. Despite these conditions, we were treated to a lavish and delicious meal at al-Aqarib, according to the dictates of hospitality. A week after we left, the structures were demolished yet again. And again a few weeks after that.

These experiences are not specific but general. We also visited the Bedouin community at al-Azaria, which is outside Jerusalem in Area C, close to the Wall. The Israelis want the Bedouin there, already displaced
in 1948, to leave again so they can extend the Wall. The Palestinian Authority want them to stay so that at some future point, their land becomes the entryway to a Palestinian capital in (East) Jerusalem. In the middle are these devastated people, welcoming but impoverished.

They live in aluminum shelters donated by the EU that are routinely demolished by the IDF on one of their 4 a.m. inspection visits. These visits also burst the hosepipes that the community use to bring water from a nearby village. These were once wealthy people, if you measure wealth as they do in animals. Now only a few goats pick around the area.

Eviction is a primary tactic of neo-liberalism and I do not think the Israeli tactics are exceptional, as anyone who has visited Chicago, Milwaukee or Detroit will be aware. This is exemplary, however, because of the capacity of the Bedouin to continue to resist, when it seems to outsiders like an almost hopeless struggle. Palestinians call this sumud, which might be translated as 'persistent endurance.' Like any powerful landlord--Trump springs to mind--the Israelis are trying to make conditions so unpalatable that the Bedouin will prefer the lesser evil.

What's hard for the regime--and it was for me at first sight, frankly--to understand is that however difficult they make it, however desolate the place becomes, leaving is simply not an option, not a possibility. The attachment to the land is not negotiable, it is simply who these people consider themselves to be. Removal would be a form of death to avoid which all other violence is endurable.
E is for Environment

I went to Palestine with the goal of thinking about the interactions of human and non-human life. That would usually fall into the area of environmental studies. But as Sean Cubitt has insightfully pointed out, the 'environment' is what is left over after capitalism and colonialism have enclosed whatever space they need. In Palestine, there is no remainder. The entire territory, including the air and the sub-soil, is claimed by the regime.

So the activists I spoke with had no means, or incentive, to think in terms of environment. In the desert, green concerns become green colonialism. Occupation articulates all issues and leaves no remainder.

One of the projects I had proposed was to follow the Jordan River to measure the decline in the water level and other environmental concerns. It turned out that there is no river any more. The water is diverted by both Jordan and especially Israel further north. Despite well-publicized claims in 2013 that additional water had been pumped into the river, there was no trace of it.

The well-made N90 road that tracks the river, and goes down to the tourist resort of Eilat, does not run adjacent to its (former) course. Every side road we took trying to find it led to a settlement, an army base or a nature reserve like this one.

The sign claims the space as 'Judea and Samaria,' the revived Biblical name for the 'West Bank.' It then institutes a 'wetland' in the desert, where it was 120F the day we visited. Key to the importance of this designation is the stipulation that no one is allowed to remain the park after dusk. Any Palestinian who might own land here or any Bedouin who wanted to graze their animals would be subject to arrest. The wetland in effect annexes the land to the regime.
The consequences are visible once you reach the Dead Sea. Without exaggeration, it is clear that the Dead Sea is dying. Its level has fallen to such an extent that it has divided into two. The present day water level is some forty metres below what is was in the 1930s. That rate is accelerating according to a recent article in Ha’aretz: The level of the Dead Sea... dropped 13 centimeters in August [2016]. Since the beginning of the hydrological year (which begins in October), the Dead Sea level has dropped 103 centimeters, 22 percent more than the drop in the corresponding period of the previous hydrological year. Over the past 25 years, the level of the Dead Sea has dropped nearly 25 meters. Today almost no water flows into it from the Jordan River

This fall is entirely visible when you are at the Dead Sea. In the photograph above, taken from the shoreline, the perspective is foreshortened: the red pier that marked the former level of the Sea is way above the present ‘beach’ that has obviously been constructed using trucked in gravel and sand. In some locations, roads have been built so people can get to the remaining water using golf carts because it's too hot to walk the distance of half a mile or more.

Elsewhere in the area, the sinking water level is leading to the sudden appearance of sink holes, which are thought to be caused by fresh water dissolving the salt and causing the ground to collapse, although no one is really sure. Locals denied to us that there were any such sink holes, even though it was obvious bull dozers had recently been at work. Nearby we found new sinkholes beginning--they start small.

You can still float in the salty water, which is claimed to cure skin ailments. But as you look up at the distant former shore line, or across at a beach fenced off with warnings about mines, it's hard to feel a connection to 'nature.' If, as Amerindians argue, there is one culture but many natures, the Dead Sea is exemplary for what the colonial enclosure of nature looks like--dangerous, deceptive, and in denial.
F is For Food

Food is culture. Palestinian food is both an expression of identity and the contradictions of that identity. It’s good. Farm to table? As in the photo above, it is all very specific. The chickens lay the eggs and sit in cages philosophically above the corpses of their fellows, now prepared for cooking.

Familiar Middle Eastern staples like falafel, kebabs and hummus are joined by specialities like musakhan, spiced roast chicken on flatbread. Or maqlubah, a chicken and rice dish cooked in a cast-iron pan that my Jerusalem-raised Samarkandi grandmother used to cook and call it Bukharian plov (pilaf). In the same way, the ubiquitous chopped salad of tomatoes, cucumbers and onions is known as Arabiya salad in Palestine and Israeli salad in the 48. Desserts are intensely sweet, like knafeh, a mix of cheese, semolina-based pastry and rosewater that comes from Nablus.

It was the herb mix za’atar that came to evoke Palestine for me. It’s offered in many circumstances: at breakfast, with labneh, oil and bread. On salads, yoghurt, or as a dip. Za’atar is called hyssop in English, which sounds impossibly medieval and turns out to be an Anglo-Saxon word, known as early as the 9th century CE, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. The green herb is mixed with sumac and toasted sesame seeds to make za’atar. It’s dusty, aromatic and savory with just a hint of sweetness. It evokes standing on a rocky hillside on a warm day. I bought some in the Old City of Nablus to take home with me and its scent is pervading my kitchen as I write. It’s the kind of taste and smell that words struggle to capture, instantly nostalgic even if you have only just encountered it.
Even in these domestic matters, occupations past and present cannot be avoided. At Palestinian celebrations, like the many graduation parties at the time of our visit, a common gift is a box of the English candy called Quality Street, whose main feature is its lack of quality to my ex-pat English mind. English sweets can be bought in Jerusalem’s Old City, like sherbets and chewies of all kinds, some shaped like fried eggs. The British Mandate persists in little treats, for all its historic violence. You could see that as ironic or you might see in it generosity and forgiveness.
G is for Gaza

The road to Gaza goes through bucolic wheat fields, fringed with olive trees like anywhere else in the Mediterranean. And then you come over a rise and there it is, the impossible sight of Gaza, like nowhere else. A low, grey smudge on the horizon at the end of a country road seen through a gap in the trees.

We drive further down the road. A checkpoint comes into view, so forbidding that we turn immediately and head in the opposite direction. We give some IDF hitchhikers a ride to ask if we are allowed down there. They are appalled: ‘forbidden zone!’

We continue to circumnavigate the forbidden city. It takes about 15 minutes, driving at moderate speed, to travel its length. 1.8 million people live in the strip, mostly under 18. Each minute that we drive we pass 100,000 people.

To the north of the city, we visit the Erez checkpoint, which is dramatic in size with a steel-and-glass atrium built by the Emirates. It’s almost totally deserted, except for a few middle-aged men passing slowly through.

Turning back, we head down another back road to encounter an American-style housing development for seniors, complete with golf carts for local transportation and grandparents taking children for walks. Only the view that’s available from their green walkways is Gaza, seen through razor wire and a chain-
link fence.

The first word that pops into my mind is ‘surreal.’ Then I reflect that the anti-colonial Surrealists were simply describing colonial reality as they experienced it. These impossible sights are the colonial reality of the twenty-first century.
Cities are the testing ground for what is now in formation. Worldwide, most people now live in cities, which have become the default global location. Cities have also been, since the time of Napoleon, the hardest place for counterinsurgency operations. The Israeli regime is trying to change that.

Hebron has become the front line of settler colonialism in Palestine. For Palestinians, the city is called al-Khalil. The renaming prefigures the intent not just to dominate but to occupy the city. The settlers are expanding, street by street, using their mix of the carceral state, religion and military force. To visit Shuhada Street, formerly a shopping hub of the Palestinian neighborhood, you have to pass through a forbidding checkpoint. The street is closed, all Palestinian shops barred and sealed. Settlers and soldiers patrol to make sure you know who's in charge.

Although the street has been closed for years, it was nonetheless disturbing to see Stars of David painted on the closed doors, as if in active forgetfulness of those other times and places where such Stars were painted on Jewish shops to different ends. It's hard to know what the painters of these signs could have been thinking. You felt, as was obvious from the hostility shown to us by everyone there, that the settlers do not care in the slightest
what the outside world thinks. They are locked into the struggle on the ground and there is no outside.

At that moment, a settler started to film us from the other side of the street with his phone. Losing my temper, I walked towards him, holding my phone so as to film him (watch here). He retreated, giving me a moment of victory, only to return with a soldier (here) a few moments later. Nothing was said but the point was made: we were photographing on their suffrance. We left in short order
I went to Palestine because of my public support for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), the policy called for by Palestinian civil society since 2005 that has gained traction in academia in the past few years. I felt I needed to see for myself. My experience in the 48 (the 1948 border of Israel) was troubling. As a policy, BDS relies on what political theory calls a rational state actor. That actor would observe how the Israeli regime is losing credibility and friends due to the occupation and modify its position.

I did not witness such a state. Instead I witnessed celebrations of occupation and commitments to further expansion, together with a despair from internal opposition that any dialog with the regime was possible. Boycott is a beginning to the process of awakening but it is not going to be its end.

On my last day in Palestine, I went to Jerusalem’s Old City. I had fond, if somewhat Orientalist, memories of the quarter from my visit as a teenager with my grandmother. Visiting now is a very different experience. The Old City is in East Jerusalem, notionally under PA control. Israeli flags and troops are nonetheless visible everywhere. Entrance to the Western Wall is via checkpoint, while visitors have only a brief access period to al-Aqsa.

By chance, the day of my visit was Jerusalem Day, when Israel celebrates its occupation of the city in 1967. Large crowds of Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews moved through the Old City at a jog, chanting and wearing Israeli flags tied around their necks, reminding me of British football hooligans. As they moved down the street, six abreast, the only option was to get out of the way.
Tourists are largely confined to two main routes through the Old City and checkpoints prevent you from meandering. I arrived at the entrance to al-Aqsa, only to find it barricaded by Haredi. It seemed that they hoped to enter the mosque in numbers or, failing that, to prevent casual visitors from entering. There was more chanting and an air of tremendous self-confidence. These people knew that they were not going to be challenged by the state, or more exactly that the state was theirs.

In the Western Wall enclosure itself (above), soldiers in battledress with their weapons flirted with passers-by and gave visible form to the occupation. The enclosed wooden walkway is how non-Palestinians gain access to al-Aqsa, whose dome is just visible above the Wall. Other than such fleeting glimpses, the Palestinian city and its central glory, al-Aqsa, are invisible to tourists.

Standing in the line, wondering if I might still get through, I remembered a conversation with Habshe, a refugee and activist from Aida Camp. When I told him where I was going, he wistfully recalled that he had not been allowed to visit al-Aqsa since the Second Intifada of 2002. What was the better course, I wondered? To defy the Haredi picket or to refuse to enter under these conditions? Boycott, we wrote in 2015, is an ethical guideline, not a law, whose goal is creating a space for another set of social relations to emerge — ones that have justice, freedom and liberation at their heart.

With regret to not see the architectural wonder, I walked away from the line.

On Jerusalem's West side, all that tension can seem very distant. People talk of the 'green line,' as if it were not a bus ride away. A family friend spoke wistfully of the socialist dream in Israel and how it had withered. He spoke of how his grandchildren had sailing lessons, was that not the dream? I thought of Palestinians who had told me they had never seen the sea, how much they wished they could do so. How much 'unseeing' this dream requires. When does the dreamer realize his dream has become a nightmare? How to awaken and then stay woke?

To back up this subjective experience, it is noticeable that Israel's public championing of itself as 'the only democracy in the Middle East' does not tally with its 2016 ranking from Freedom House as 'partly free.' The regime scores only 7 out of 30 on legal environment and 14 out of 40 on political environment. Defenders will no doubt say this is biased.

What if I was to talk about the Israeli state's “tyranny and racism.” Or write about how in Jerusalem “occupation screams from every stone.” I’d be written off as anti-semitic (or a self-hating Jew), deluded, bewitched and so on. But these are comments I read on the bus while in Jerusalem in an editorial published in Ha'aretz for Jerusalem Day (the liberal Israeli newspaper that's no more extreme in its views than the New York Times or the London Guardian and is certainly a supporter of the state of Israel).
A ‘tell’ is the name for an archaeological mound created by an abandoned human occupation. In Tell es Sultan, just outside Jericho, the British architect Kathleen M. Kenyon excavated human settlements reaching back to 10,000 BCE. That’s the very beginning of the Holocene, meaning the ‘new recent’ epoch, the now concluded window in the Earth system in which stable climatic conditions allowed for settled agriculture and what we call civilization, living in cities.

Kenyon’s signature ‘stratigraphic’ style allows us to see the unfolding of human possibility from that early period, via the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages to the Romans. Her vertical method emphasizes visualizing these changes over time, rather than allowing for a horizontal exploration of how people lived in any one epoch. Everything changes. An urban civilization fell c. 2530 BCE. It was not restored until 1900 BCE.

We mostly do that now, live in cities. The trash, carbon dioxide and other pollutants created in that settlement have ushered in a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, meaning the ‘new human.’ Geologists debate exactly when it began. Some see it as being just another way to say the Holocene, so that this trench would also be its beginning.

The Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS), which is itself the largest scientific organization within the International Union of Geological Sciences, favors a more recent moment, about 1950 when nuclear fallout became measurable.
worldwide. The first nuclear device was detonated in the New Mexico desert in 1945 in land that looks much like the Jericho desert. That would be the global Nakba (catastrophe), followed by the local example in Palestine in 1948.

Kenyon’s dig began in 1952, looking at the beginning of the Holocene from the first moments of the Anthropocene. She reported that a permanent spring rose at Jericho and that the soil of the Jordan Valley is very fertile with irrigation, and the abundant water supply, coupled with the fertility of the soil and a sub-tropical climate, provided conditions very favourable to primitive agriculture.

The spring is gone now, as is the water, tapped by the regime upstream. It’s dry and dusty now, hard to visualize as a cradle of civilization. Not long ago, it was easy to do that.

In her book Digging Up Jericho, published in 1957, it turns out that Tell es Sultan bordered on a major Palestinian refugee camp known as ‘Ein-as-Sultan, which sheltered about 20,000 people until the 1967 war drove most of them away. The refugees worked on the dig, being paid about half what a British servant of the period would have received. They also dug into the tel themselves, using its clay soil for building bricks. In so doing, they accidentally discovered tomb sites that Kenyon’s vertical method would have ignored. It’s only from these tombs that we have a sense of how the people lived, not just when their cities rose and fell.

These were farmers, harvesting crops and keeping animals. They had rush mats laid over plaster floors in spacious dwellings. In 8350 BCE. We have not come so far since then. Their surviving art is in the form of evocative portrait skulls. The makers took a human skull, coated it with plaster to form a face and sometimes added ‘eyes’ in the form of cowrie shells. These should be the point at which any survey course of the history of art begins and I had never heard of them before--perhaps that’s my ignorance to be sure.

The city of the earliest time had a dramatic wall. It’s far too early to be Joshua’s wall of course but Kenyon and others interpreted it as a defensive structure because Anthropocene minds see war everywhere. Later archaeologists pointed out that the wall didn’t go all the way around the city and proposed that it was built to protect against flooding from the nearby wadi. Even then, the water got in sometimes as layers of silt reveal. Human history seems very brief here, a window between floods, a journey from a moment where the only risk was a winter storm to the present permanent counterinsurgency with its ‘see something, say something’ culture.

Of course, there’s no mention of the Palestinian involvement in the dig at the site today or that the objects it uncovered are mostly in Jordan. Like much of the rest of Palestine, it’s dressed up to allow tourist to say that they saw Biblical sites, in this case Jericho. And the 1936 British excavation during the Mandate period had claimed that the walls were confirmation of the Bible story. The big white tourist buses duly arrive and take a look at what they mistakenly believe to be the fallen walls of Jericho and leave.

Look up at the mountains above, which Kenyon called the mountains of Moab and Gilead, and you realize what a mote in the eye of geological time these little ripples have been. No occupation lasts forever, even the human occupation of the Earth.
K is for Key

At the entrance to Aida Camp in Bethlehem stands this gateway, topped with an outsize key, on which is written 'Not For Sale.' The people living in Aida are from twenty-seven villages between Hebron and Jerusalem and have been in exile since 1948. The camp was built to house 1200 people. There are now some five thousand living inside in what must be called the 'formal' camp and another five thousand outside the designated camp space. The distinction matters because within the camp, the United Nations takes care of some social services.

Habshe Yossef, an activist at the Aida Center, told me that he was 'proud to be a refugee,' meaning that he was not willing to accept his displacement as permanent. The symbol of the determination to return is the key. Many Palestinian families have kept the keys of buildings that they used to live in and own, even if those buildings no longer exist. The key is a commitment to return. I was uncomfortably aware that, as a person with Jewish parents, I have a 'right of return' to Israel—not that I would exercise it—while people like Habshe in Aida have never seen the Mediterranean Sea, an hour's drive away.

The implications of this commitment are not insignificant. It means that the 'two-state solution' would not satisfy these refugees. It would continue to keep them away from their homes, where they feel they belong. No normal social life is possible in Aida, for all its warmth and hospitality. The Wall divides even the refugee camp, as you can see here: it runs right through it. Camp residents can no longer tend crops that they used to grow on land that is now the other side of the wall. Although Jerusalem is just on the other side, students are opting not to attend the free public university there, and to pay fees at the Catholic university in Bethlehem instead to avoid
the daily violence of the checkpoints.

So a 'two-state solution' would mean for Aida refugees, not only not returning to their places of origin, but continuing to live like this, divided from even the resources of displaced life. It's not surprising to me that they don't see that as even being a choice. I have long supported a single, democratic, secular state (yes, even if, like whites in South Africa, Jewish residents have to learn to become minority) but it took my visit to Aida to see this as a human need, not a political abstraction.
On my first day, the first visit we made was to Aida Camp. And the first word we heard from Mohammed, a local activist, was 'land.' For those of us who live in cities, land is an abstraction, somewhere deep beneath the building in which we live, or disciplined into being a 'garden' in the suburbs. Technically, it becomes 'real estate,' with the word 'real' being derived from an obsolete way of saying 'royal.' Land is power. Even today, the billionaire running for president is a real estate tycoon, not a financier. Real estate is real power.

Land is something else. It's a very personal attachment, developed through taste and time. The land in Palestine--or at least in the 'West Bank'--is not forgiving. As you can see above, the red soil has to be separated from the omnipresent limestone. Any cultivation is achieved at high cost of human and animal labor.

The results can be so beautiful. Every day that we were in Palestine, the light would become miraculous at about 6.15pm and stay that way for about half an hour or forty five minutes. The sun sets to the West over the Mediterranean, creating an extraordinary luminosity.

Palestinians take pride in offering you their own olive oil, fruit grown on their land, herbs harvested in their neighborhood. These tastes and attachments are what return is about and why
another place will not do.

You might say that such taste is old-fashioned, a peasant-economy that has no place in the non-stop global commodity market. Or you might reflect that the disaster of environmental catastrophe ought to make us look again at how land creates meaning and taste, not just power. Your call.
M is for Monkey

We met this baby monkey in the office of the director of the Qalqilya Zoo, Sami Khader. Her story evokes daily life under the occupation for non-humans. The baby’s mother was in Nablus and the facility there was no longer able to care for her, thanks to the occupation. So Dr. Khader set out to bring her to Qalqilya. Everything went fine, except that he had to pass a checkpoint. The Israelis would not allow him to pass at the same checkpoint as the monkey. The required paperwork had to be sent to still a third checkpoint. Eventually, all three were reunited and the monkey entered the zoo.

But after this experience, whenever she got pregnant she would kill her offspring, like a simian Beloved, determined that her children should not go through the insanity of occupied life. Am I being anthropomorphic? Perhaps, perhaps not. Infanticide by female animals is rare, while being quite common among males. In one study of tamarin monkeys, mothers would sometimes kill their offspring if they lacked support to raise them. That’s a judgment call and perhaps the Qalqilya Zoo monkey made one too, a cross-species judgment. Who can say that she was wrong to do so?

Humans, however, were not willing to let her decide so the director’s office--and home--were now under the control of a capricious infant monkey. Draw your own conclusions.
O is for Occupation

There is no outside to the occupation in Palestine. This entire project is about it. For a newcomer, one of the most notable features is the difficulty of simply moving around. If your vehicle has a green license plate, like the one above, you are restricted to driving on designated roads in the 'West Bank' and you will be searched at any checkpoint going into the 48 or any mobile checkpoint in Area C. If you have an orange license plate, like the one on my rental car, you can travel where you want. When we went through checkpoints, if there was no Palestinian person in the car, we would be waved through.

Bus travel involves every passenger being checked. I went from Bethlehem to Jerusalem on the bus. At the checkpoint, our ID was checked twice by different soldiers, whose automatic weapons casually pointed at each passenger in turn. Others in our group had to get out of the bus and be checked outside. There was no apparent logic to these variations, designed perhaps to make sure that you don't know what to expect. The Bethlehem bus is extensively used by tourists and Christian pilgrims so it may have less intrusive security by local standards.

Inside the West Bank, although the settlements are illegal, the regime provides them with services, including public transportation that is available only to the settlers. Throughout Palestine you see their bus stops, always guarded by soldiers and surveillance equipment. I was only able to photograph this sandbagged turret at Gush Etzion because it was Friday--the
Jewish Shabbat—and there were no settlers traveling. The roundabout is the site of a big supermarket and has been the place of many attacks from both sides. Settlers and IDF soldiers also hitchhike at specific, protected locations like this. I didn't see any Palestinians trying to catch a ride.

People do try and cross the Wall into the 48 on foot. It's a hazardous enterprise. Habshe pointed out this place to me. It's possible to cross the Wall—which is a fence at this point—quite easily here. But snipers are watching and the result would be death. It is not for nothing that so many people compare this to the Berlin Wall.

All that is to say that the basic infrastructure of transport and all that is associated with it is grounded in its function of sustaining the occupation. To imagine the 'two state solution'--which I do not believe is now physically possible--is to imagine that all this can be dismantled or repurposed. The structures and concepts of occupation are spreading. In the United States, the separation wall has become the signature idea for Trump's campaign, while Britain voted for 'hard' borders with Europe. In Arizona, police ask drivers to prove residency status.
In this project, I’m not trying to speak ‘for’ or ‘about’ the Palestinians, who are so capable of doing that for themselves, as writers like Mahmoud Darwish, Elias Khouri and Omar Barghouti make clear in their different contexts. It’s important to say, though, that every aspect of what I learned was enabled by Palestinians, who generously tolerated my ignorance and incredulity at the blatant force of the occupation.

Every account of Palestine stresses how kind the people are. In my cynical New York way, I assumed there was some creative license here. Not at all. People are generous to a fault. As elsewhere in the Middle East, it’s impossible to enter a home without being offered food and drink. When that comes from people whose village has been destroyed dozens of times by the Israeli military, or from people living for decades in a refugee camp, it’s hard not to become emotional.

That culture of hospitality is connected to an everyday sense of belonging not to a state but to a place, or more exactly, to a particular piece of land. People want to offer you their olive oil from their trees, or herbs from their land. As you would expect, there are subtle and highly-prized variations in taste in the ways that have become commodified as ‘farm to table’ for urban hip-
sters. Such sustainable ways of life are being literally and metaphorically uprooted, as the regime destroys olive trees and forces Bedouin to leave their land and live in pre-fab camps.

In a short visit, I won't pretend to have gained deep insights into an ancient and transforming culture. David Graeber's account of his visit in 2015 is, as you would expect from a leading anthropologist, full of insights, so head over here. Nor do I want to pretend that this is utopia. I could not speak to many Palestinian women and to no Bedouin women. Differences of opinion arose in conversation about women's roles in the resistance.

I should also plead ignorance about religion, except to say that Western clichés about Islam did not prepare me for the fluid and complicated role of religion in everyday life. For an example, an activist told me in terms of frustration how stores in Israel offer discounted sales before the holy month of Ramadan, encouraging Palestinians to stock up but taking 'millions of shekels' out of the Palestinians' own economy.

What was obvious, though, is that people of very different levels of religious belief, and indeed religions, co-exist. Christians in Bethlehem are not oppressed. A family might have very different levels of religious observance. I should also say that wherever I went, Palestinians went out of their way to disavow anti-semitism or anti-Jewish feelings, making it clear that their differences were with the regime, not the people. In a part of the world where people do identify others visually, I am very recognizably of Jewish descent but I walked Palestinian streets by myself comfortably and without harassment.

I take this to suggest that--at least from the Palestinian side--the goal of a single, secular democratic state across the region would once have been possible, had there been any interest on the Israeli side. This possibility is now, sadly, remote. But the Palestinians have another quality that they call sumud, which might be translated as persistence. It's that sumud that has sustained resistance in the face of implacable opposition for so long. Just, ironically, as Jewish people maintained a sense of identity over centuries of their own oppression. Perhaps this has just begun.
Q is for Qalqilya Checkpoint

Qalqilya checkpoint is called Eyal, as if it were a person. The Palestinians who have to pass by it every day as they go to and from work in Israel are not so fortunate. Habshe Yossef, a Palestinian activist, said quietly that the workers are 'treated like animals.' Just one in a system of at least 500 permanent checkpoints, Eyal filters people from the Palestinian city where unemployment is said to be close to 30% thanks to the Separation Wall. Because the city was enclosed by the wall, many farmers were cut off from their land. Now they work, if they can, in Israel.

To pass, you need a Palestinian ID, a magnetic ID card and a work permit. The permit is valid only for three months at a time and renewing them is hard. To be sure of getting through in time for work, people will begin queuing again at 2 a.m. to be well-placed when the checkpoint opens at six. It processes one person at a time. Checkpoints will 'close' if there are too many people. Around four thousand will go through. As a result, a market exists for those waiting, selling food, drink and cigarettes.

Travelers like myself can pass quite easily through checkpoints, although the casual way that Israeli soldiers carry their guns, pointing them at you, means that it is far from a relaxing experience. Nonetheless, each time we crossed we made sure everyone in the car agreed on the same story as to what we had been doing and where. I did not go through a pedestrian checkpoint like Qalqilya. But I was never asked any questions, as a person who looks 'Jewish' and has an American passport. An African American member of our group was interro-
gated three times at Tel Aviv Airport on his way home.

For people living in the 'West Bank,' permanent checkpoints like this are only part of the problem. So-called mobile checkpoints are permanent structures that are only staffed sometimes, so you never know when planning a journey if you will be stopped there or not. In addition, there are 'flying' checkpoints that can appear anywhere at any time. We observed Israeli police carrying out ID checks outside the Maale Adumim settlement, preparing people for the proposed permanent annexation of that giant settlement.

Just as African American scholars like Orlando Patterson have insisted that the goal of slavery was not cheap labor but the 'permanent violent domination of the natally alienated,' so too do the checkpoints reinforce such a domination. The brevity of the work permits makes it clear that the regime does not want anyone for their specific labor--there will always be labor because so many live in poverty. The goal here is make those living in a place they consider to be home to understand themselves to be strangers, alienated from birth.
R is for Roofscape

If you want to know whether a building is owned by Israelis or Palestinians in the confused demarcations of the area system, look at the roof. Israeli roofs are simple, usually red tile. Palestinian roofs are places of work.

A typical roofscape, as here in Bethlehem, has a set of water tanks and satellite dishes. The water tanks might look familiar to New Yorkers, where they are often found on the roofs of older apartment buildings. Water is stored there to get around the issues of gravity associated with raising water and also offering users water pressure. In Palestine, the issue is simpler: storage. On regular occasions, which I experienced myself during my visit, buildings will be cut off from the water supply by Israel. It is a form of collective punishment, as in the widespread water cuts during Ramadan in 2016 (June-July), following a shooting in a Tel Aviv café.

In order to guard against simply running out of water, the tanks have been installed to collect it when it’s on. Palestinians are not permitted to collect rainwater--which must be allowed to run off so Israel can control it--or to drill for groundwater. If this seems unconscionable, it is not exceptional. Compare the cynical actions of the state of Michigan in Flint. The mostly African American population was switched to toxic water from the Flint River for two reasons. It saved some money (in the short term) and, by reducing the usage of Detroit’s water company, increased the pressure for the privatization of that service.

The other main function of the roof is to house satellite dishes. I didn’t see any TV myself so I
can’t report on it. But I did notice that during the European Champions League final, every Palestinian seemed to support Real Madrid. I asked why and it turned out that La Liga—the Spanish football championship—was available free in Palestine so locals had gravitated to supporting Spanish teams. I saw a lot of Ronaldo and Bale jerseys being worn during the constant kickabouts on every patch of vacant land and there were posters advertising the forthcoming European championships everywhere.

The roof visualizes one of the basic contradictions of the 21st century security state. Provision of basic services—water, sewage, electricity—is limited and used as a means of social control and segregation. Access to global media has been privatized and those companies pride themselves on being ‘always on.’ So despite how much physical movement can be limited and daily life made unpleasant, even the most monitored people and populations can have some degree of communication and information.
S is for Settlement

Perhaps the strongest impression that a visitor to Palestine receives is how many settlements there are in the 'West Bank.' No one should imagine that they all can be removed. As we were driving, we once went into a valley where there was no settlement. Surprised, I glanced at my watch. It was twenty-five seconds before the next settlement became visible.

Settlement landscape in Palestine is not hard to read because it is intended to dominate and intimidate. The settlements occupy hilltops to command a dominant viewpoint all around. The windows of the buildings face out to have as many eyes engaged in this monitoring as possible. They are close together for safety, built behind defensive walls on land cleared of trees. There's little left to tell you that the land was once farmed by Palestinians. Even the slow-growing olive trees have been cleared to make way for fast-growing pines.

The pines are cultivated for timber but they also serve to make the settlements look established. And they remove a resource from Palestinians. Locals told us that the Israelis had sedated and removed even the local wildlife, like deer and eagles. I have not been able to independently verify this account but the absence of wildlife was notable.

In this valley, though, one farmer has kept a foothold. Using Ottoman-era documents to demonstrate ownership, the family have been able to cling to their land. Their goat pen is visible at bottom left above and below.
Thousands more were not so 'lucky.' Their land is gone, appropriated or made useless. The Bedouin at al-Aqarib have similar documents that have not helped them. Land is, in the end, what this is all about.
Everywhere you look in Palestine, there's detritus—discarded packaging, demolished housing, unfinished settlements, abandoned cars, electrical components, trash and waste of all kinds. In Area C, most of the 'West Bank,' no one is authorized to pick up trash—the PA has no authority and the IDF could care less. In the refugee camps, the United Nations steps in.

I saw landfills of Israeli garbage in the 'West Bank' that periodically catch fire, near where Bedouins were farming. Elsewhere, trash piles up or people burn it, contributing to the omnipresent smog that is strikingly visible against the mountains as you approach from the coast.

It is not haphazard, this mess. As Mary Douglas taught us long ago, where there is dirt, there is system. The system here aims to reduce human value. More precisely, the separation system distinguishes between humans and non-humans, Palestinians being designated as non-human. Palestinians living in the 48 are called 'Arab Israelis,' clearly second-class citizens but distinct (in the regime's taxonomy) from those without any value in the territories.

There is a striking contrast in Palestine between the well-ordered and immaculately clean private spaces in people’s homes or in cafés, shops and restaurants and the unattended outdoor spaces, where trash necessarily accumulates.

Outside the Qalqilya checkpoint, coffee cups, soft drink bottles, bus tickets, and candy wrappers pile up, signs of lives lived in transit. As they sediment into the ground, the impermeable plastics and
metals will await some future archaeologist, one who will note with surprise the sudden collapse of a short-lived but apparently consumer-oriented society. They will puzzle over the fences and walls: what purpose could they have served? Perhaps a new legend, like that of Joshua and the walls of Jericho will have been created. It'll be a long wait for these new investigators, evolution takes place in deep time. The plastics, metals and rocks won't mind.
On my first afternoon in Bethlehem, we received word that a woman had been killed at a checkpoint twenty minutes away. Such death punctuated my stay at regular intervals. On the ninth day I was there, we drove past a vehicle near Sofar, in which a young Palestinian man had been shot dead by IDF. Perhaps the most shocking thing to me about the incident was how unshocked everyone else was. The Israeli soldiers we saw smiled at us. Habshe, a Palestinian organizer traveling with us was matter-of-fact about it. We should not euphemize: the occupation produces violence and death as its primary outcome.

Where there is violence, there is a message. The message is simple: 'You are nothing.' Violence against people who do not count for anything is not subject to the same process as violence between legal persons of the same standing. Under slavery, owners of so-called human property could punish or kill without investigation. There is now an exception: if there is a video. When Abed al-Fattah al-Sharif was shot in the head and killed while lying on the ground in Shahuda Street, the incident was filmed by Imad Abushamsiya, who I was privileged to meet, a gentle, kind person. A trial is in progress, but don't hold your breath for a conviction.

So too Frantz Fanon understood colonization to be a matter of the barracks and the police station. He
also understood that colonialism has its own psychopathologies, which is to say that if you colonize people by force, they will experience mental and psychic disturbance as a result. Sometimes that illness results in its own violence, hopelessly disproportionate to the force it is trying to resist. Fanon documented a case in which two Algerian boys stabbed their French playmate as their only available response to their oppression. Such stabbings have become endemic in Palestine since October 2015.

One of the specificities of the Palestinian situation seems to be that places have been constructed for such violence. The stabbing attacks and the shootings that respond to them have mostly taken place in the areas adjacent to checkpoints, as in the case mentioned above, places under intense surveillance where no attack by a Palestinian could result in anything other than death. Let’s be clear what this means: urban space has been set aside for the specific purpose of violence. So disturbing is this design that Palestinians have responded in kind. Who will be the Fanon of Palestine, analyzing the psychopathologies of occupation?

Often people talk as if such violence might make the occupation unsustainable. But as we have seen in the United States during the current police war on its people, the violence has a way of sustaining itself. Just as you think perhaps the wave of police shootings is over, another one takes place. Why does this happen? During the First World War, Freud noticed that war trauma caused people to repeat the experience in ways that resisted therapy. It is the war, or the occupation, that is the problem, not the person responding violently. That’s true for the Israeli soldiers and the Palestinian resistance alike, albeit in totally different ways. What it means is that no disciplinary code, no political agreement, no diplomacy can curtail the traumatic compulsion to repeat unless the occupation is ended.
W is for Water

It is widely predicted that water will be the scarce and contested resource in the 21st century that oil was in the 20th. In Palestine it already is. The tap water is drinkable but people don’t much, because it is so chlorinated. Drinkable water comes in plastic bottles that pile up everywhere. There is no recycling in Palestine, although it is common in the 48.

While Palestinians are limited in their use of water, the regime seems to delight in showing that it can use as much it wants. In addition to sequestering the Jordan river, expensive desalination plants are making usable water from the Mediterranean. The result is that you can see lush green garden centers in the desert, like the one above near the Dead Sea.

Settlement housing projects are underway in the area, advertised on roadside billboards. It’s not quite ‘if you lived here, you’d be home by now’ as these are remote desert locations. It’s more: ‘if you lived here, you’d pay half what you pay in Israel and get all kinds of government subsidy, plus further the occupation.’ That’s a winning combination for many Israelis and, it should be said, New Yorkers. As is typical in the global real estate boom, settlement houses are often owned by non-residents, often from Brooklyn, who support the occupation as a religious and financial project.

Meanwhile, the Bedouin at al-Araqib remain without water, electricity or other services. To even get to the village, you have to drive off-road through a gap that has been created in the crash barrier by the side of the official road. Water comes, when it does, from the well that has to be hauled up by hand and then carried around the encampment.
The population in Palestine is young and increasing rapidly. The need for water is growing accordingly, even as 2016 has been a spectacularly hot year across the Middle East, even by the climate-changed standard in which every year is the hottest ever. Unlike other 'environmental' concerns, the competition for water is much discussed because it is so fundamental. The vaunted regime achievement of 'making the desert bloom' is, after all, nothing more than the diversion of water. The alluvial land is very fertile: just add water. Bronze age structures to collect and divert water still stand in the desert, showing this is scarcely a new endeavor.

Nor is water shortage an exceptional issue for Palestine. From Flint, Michigan, to the townships of South Africa and even megacities like Sao Paolo, to say nothing of Los Angeles, even water is now a hierarchical resource.
The Palestinian scholar Rashid Khalidi has called Israel a “carceral state.” A metonym of this condition, and its complications, can be found at Qalqilya zoo. Qalqilya is almost entirely surrounded by the Separation Wall, as a result of its involvement in the first Intifada. Despite this embattled status, it has within it a zoo, one of the few functioning public leisure spaces I saw.

Like most zoos, its containment of animals is more than a little grim. A brown bear paced in his cage relentlessly, as if wanting the Palestinian visitors to see his confinement as their own. Most dramatic is the separate museum that contains a number of stuffed animals. They died in the Intifada, as in the case of the giraffe (above), who lay down in fear during gunfire, causing her to die from her own blood pressure.

It transpired that she was twelve months pregnant (out of 15) and so the zoo director, Sami Khader,
turned taxidermist to preserve them. Their spindly bodies are perhaps indicative of his emergent skills or maybe testify to the emaciated condition of the animals under siege. You might see them as martyrs, non-human victims of the occupation. Or as surrogates, waiting until Palestine is free to welcome other giraffes. It's a poignant story and there's a film being made called Waiting for Giraffes and a published book called The Zoo On the Road to Nablus.

But there were no visitors other than us to the museum, perhaps because there was an additional charge for admission. And then there's always the occupation. During the Intifada, the animals that did survive were forced to eat leaves from the trees and other local plants. At some point later, Dr. Sami (as he is known) decided to take animal food and other equipment from Israeli zoos. To do so is to break the boycott of Israel.

Is sustaining a public resource and keeping animals alive reasonable cause? Or is a boycott a boycott? Palestinians demonstrate time and again a long-term steadfast resistance to their own material and physical detriment. But can animals be expected to do so? There is no simple and painless answer to this dilemma, which is the condition of being under occupation.