

Quarries of Wandering Form

by Judy Price

Quarries of Wandering Form explores the limestone quarries in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and makes visible the geopolitics and spatial dynamics of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). *White Oil II* (2017) is a subtle examination of the impact and workings of the occupation, where much of the material quarried is expropriated by Israeli authorities and used in settlements and exported as Israeli stone.

Filmed in a number of locations in the West Bank images are highly composed and imbued in the language of the static frame, the durational image and the aesthetics of delay. Price employed a collaborative approach in making the film, working with the owners, workers and security guards. Through the day-to-day lives of the participants, their personal histories and experiences bring to bear the myriad losses of land, economy, identity, history and community. By working in this way Price also seeks to bring the role of the artist, as filmmaker, activist and ethnographer under scrutiny.

The double screen film installation documents the industrial processes of extraction of the stone, environmental impact on the landscape: the machines and non-human elements and settlements. Ramzi Safid, a security guard, who spends five nights a week sleeping in a portakabin overlooking a quarry on the outskirts of Ramallah, before going to his day job as a plumber for the municipality, appears intermittently throughout the film and provides a narration and consistency. The single screen night scenes, by contrast, are more narrative and intimate, focusing on the social gathering of the Alshalaldaha Brothers and their associates who rent land to excavate the stone from a small quarry on the outskirts of Ramallah. The brothers and their associates are from Hebron in the South of the West Bank. They spend five nights a week camping out in a metal shipping container in the quarry as their journey home from Birzeit to Hebron through Jerusalem takes over three hours as a result of the checkpoints and the Separation Wall. In these night scenes the quarry becomes a dwelling with moments of resistance.

The installation is contrasted with a photograph of an olive tree, damaged by the pollution from the quarries. *Widow* (2017) makes visible the effects of quarrying on the landscape and symbolises a region which is suffocated by the occupation yet also resists and endures the violence against it.

White Oil is also included on a multimedia web platform *World of Matter* (WoM), <http://www.worldofmatter.net> that engages with the global ecologies of resource exploitation and circulation of natural resources. In this context sections of *White Oil* are show alongside other material that is not incorporated within the film including texts and maps.

Background

This project emerges from 5 years of extensive research by Judy Price from 2009 -2014 into the environmental, economic, geological and political aspects of the quarries. The issues at stake regarding the quarries and the wider geopolitical struggles that converge on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are extremely complex. Ownership of the quarries, distribution and expropriation of the stone often results in Israeli settlers, the Israel Occupying force and Israeli and Palestinian

entrepreneurs being highly reliant on each other rendering the Palestinian landscape a geographical and geological disaster.

The issues around participant observation and dialogical aesthetics were crucial for Price in the making of *White Oil* and working in a culture and place very different to her own (London, UK), and have helped her identify the underlying dynamics at stake when working with different social groups. Her research into the quarries draws on local and consensual knowledge engaging in the particularities of the quarries and the OPT, as well as situating her research within collective interaction. The responsibility and role of the artist in contested environments is not to give legitimacy to art through a co-opting of the social sphere but to become actively engaged with the issues at stake through the modalities and principles of art, always asking the question: what exactly is it that art uniquely brings to these struggles?¹ Thus an 'experimental-embodied practice' has been essential in encountering this landscape, wherein a certain openness to contingency and chance has provided one of the main methodologies through which knowledge has been generated.

In the context of making *White Oil*, this entailed a detailed examination of the multiple dynamics of the relations between filmmaker and co-participants, the intercessors of the film. It has required negotiating the space and territory of other human beings and recognising their openness and generosity in granting Price access to their intimate and personal worlds. Her 'ways of seeing' have been agitated where the political site of transformation is not posited elsewhere, in the repressed other, but in her embodied experience as a filmmaker, which finds its articulation in the film itself and a practice that she hopes- supports some sense of veracity rather than adherence to documentary or realist models of representation. For Price, making *White Oil* was never about attempting to show the 'whole picture' but rather the uncertainty and partiality of knowledge and the impossibility of ever being able to account for the reality of others and of lives that we can never really know. As Patty Lather's says 'where we do what we can while leaving place for what we cannot envision to emerge'.²

Seizing Locality

There are over 350 quarries in the West Bank. Termed the 'white oil' of Palestine, the stone excavated from the quarries is the only raw material available to support the Palestinian economy, with the stone represents approximately 4.5% of GDP and providing a livelihood for over 20,000 workers. However, 65% of the stone excavated is expropriated by Israel for the construction industry in Israel, and to build the illegal settlements in the West Bank with Israel also exports the stone internationally claiming it as their own product. Today almost every hillside is scarred by the brutal incision of the quarries and walking through the landscape this mutilation becomes disconcertedly visible to the naked eye. The land pillaged and defaced, its wound left open to reveal a 'geology of disaster'.

To understand how quarrying has become such an intrinsic part of Palestinian livelihood, we need to unfold the narratives around the stone and the underlying ideologies at work.

¹ Susanne Leeb, 'We are the Art, Whoever we are', in Libia Castro and Olafur Olafsson, *Under Deconstruction* (Sternberg Press, 2011), p. 2.

² Patty Lather, 'Against Empathy, Voice and Authenticity', p.21

Judicial

Throughout the twentieth century a number of bylaws were put in place regarding the use of limestone from the West Bank as the main material of construction in Jerusalem. After 1967, these bylaws included areas extending beyond the green line into the West Bank. However, the first stone bylaw was put in place in 1918 by Colonel Ronald Storrs, who had been appointed military governor of Jerusalem in 1917, on behalf of the British Mandate after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. For Storrs, like so many in Britain at the time, the return of the Jews to Palestine was considered an act of salvation and historic justice. Storrs later wrote that the Zionist project was ‘forming for England “a little loyal Jewish Ulster” in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism’.³

The 1918 stone bylaw implemented by Storrs in the Old City of Jerusalem declared that only local limestone could be used in the construction of new building extensions and roofing.⁴ For Storrs, the local limestone with its yellow hue embodied the Holy Land past dating back thousands of years and shaped a memory of biblical tradition. In 1937 he published his memoirs, *Orientalisms*, where he stated:

Jerusalem is literally a city built upon rock. From that rock, cutting soft but drying hard, has for three thousand years been quarried the clear white stone, weathering blue-grey or amber-yellow with time, whose solid walls, barrel vaulting and pointed arches have preserved through the centuries a hallowed and immemorial tradition.⁵

By attempting to reinforce an image of Orientalised locality the stone bylaw was initially only applied to the Old City, but it was later extended in 1936 to the whole municipality and surrounding area. In 1944 this regulation was modified so that only external walls and columns of houses and the facade of walls adjacent to a road needed to be ‘natural, square dressed stone’.⁶ With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 the regulations in Jerusalem were maintained but modified so that much thinner layers of sawn stone, 6 mm thick, were permitted.⁷

Symbolic and Military

Collective memory has been an important objective in Israeli national state building. Archaeology, architecture, history and education have been main players in activating collective memory towards a retrieval of the past and creation of a future. While archaeologists have sought Jewish history below the ground, architects have worked on the ground to define Israeliness ‘as a local native culture’ that has been taken over by the Palestinian latecomer.

³ Ronald Storrs, *Orientalisms* (I. Nicholson & Watson, 1939), p. 405. The relationship between geographical representation, national identity and global politics is explored in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin, 1991). See also Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.15.

⁴ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, pp. 28–30.

⁵ Ronald Storrs, *Orientalisms*, p. 44.

⁶ Jerusalem Town Planning Ordinance, 1936; Jerusalem outline town planning scheme [modification], 1944. See also the discussion in Arthur Kutcher, *The New Jerusalem, Planning and Politics* (Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 51–4 (Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 274).

⁷ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 30.

Stone has been a central component in the production of the historicist context of post-modern architecture in Israel and in particular Jerusalem, coinciding with the housing boom post-1967. In *Hollow Land*, the Israeli architect and scholar Eyal Weizman draws our attention to how architecture of this period was infatuated with 'place' and 'region', where the idea of 'dwelling' was pitched against 'housing' and 'home' in an increasingly alienated post-modern world.⁸

Following the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 a new urban master plan for Jerusalem was put in place to ensure the city's unification. The architects of this plan, Avia Hashimshoni, Yosef Scweid and Zion Hashimshoni, stated in 1968 that they must 'build the city in a manner that would prevent the possibility of it being repartitioned...'⁹ as well as take into account that the function and value of masonry construction must also be measured, 'not only according to architectural value that seeks to reveal a building's construction methods in its appearance, but according to cultural value that sees buildings as conveyors of emotional messages'.¹⁰

As a consequence, a unifying regulation was introduced stating that new construction on the periphery of Jerusalem (which was moving into the remote hilltops of the West Bank, becoming the origins of the settlements that we see today) required the use of stone cladding throughout the expanded municipal area.¹¹

On a symbolic level the stone has been appropriated to capture a sense of spirituality and holiness petrifying all construction in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas, from shopping malls to schools and community centres, synagogues and offices and residential houses with a sacred identity. In sales brochures the yellow hued limestone is portrayed as 'a precious stone, carved from the holy mountains of Jerusalem'. However, as Eyal Weizman makes clear in his book *Hollow Land*, 'when the city itself is perceived as holy, and when its boundaries are flexibly redrawn to suit ever-changing political aims, holiness inevitably becomes a planning issue.'¹² Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land* p.33

For the Jewish people the stone propels them into an emotional identification with the landscape cementing their presence, ownership and authenticity to the land. However, the ordeal of daily life for Palestinians under Occupation and the labour and fatigue of the Palestinian quarry workers that is the sheer physical force that pulls the stone from the earth is not accounted for in the Israeli narrative. The stateless Palestinian, the dispossessed, the exile, and the exploited subject as cheap labour with no civil rights, used for political calculation in the struggle for land, territory of which the stone and the quarries are part.

Today the West Bank covers approx. 5,860 sq km, compared to Norway which is 55 times larger than the West Bank covering approx 324,220 sq km. Palestinians make up approximately 83% of the population in the West Bank, and Israeli settlers approximately 17% percent.

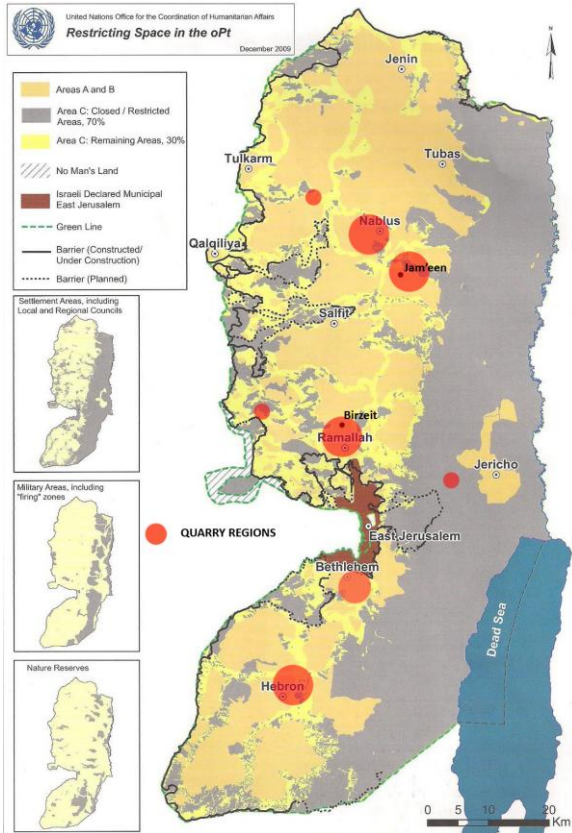
⁹ Hashimshoni, *Masterplan for the City of Jerusalem?* (Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 28).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p.31.

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The West Bank is divided into three areas known as Area A, B and C, these different 'Zones' impact on the degree to which Palestinian lives are oppressed and regulated and the extent to which they are able to engage with and use space in the West Bank.



- **Area A** which includes Palestinian cities is under military and civil control of the Palestinian Authority and is approximately 17 percent of the total area of the West Bank
- **Area B** contains the vast majority of Palestinian towns and is administered by the Palestinian Authority but controlled by the Israeli military and is approximately 20 percent of the total area
- **Area C** is under both military and administrative control by Israel and amounts to approximately 63 percent of the total area of the West Bank.

The yellow and grey on the map delineate space which is either out of bounds for Palestinians or severely restricted in how they can use it. They have to apply for permits to build homes, schools, playgrounds or business on and in most cases permits are denied.

The red circles on the map show the quarries. To exasperate this situation many of the quarries are poorly regulated and often located in close proximity to residential areas, where a high concentration of dust and particles can be found. In recent years there has been an increased level of asthma in the environs of the mining, particularly amongst children -with the quarries also destroying the carefully balanced ecology and biodiversity of the West Bank as well as damaging the little agricultural land that there is.

As an Occupying power Israel is prohibited by international law under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Hague Regulation 55, from expropriating and utilising the West Bank's natural resources. This is unless it is for the sole benefit of the Occupied population, the Palestinian people, as well as being liable to pay the Occupied territory a lease if it profits from its land. This has been totally ignored by Israel

Building and extending Jerusalem and the settlements in the West Bank has meant that the quarries have proliferated to meet Israel's desire for the stone, ripping apart the landscape of the West Bank, while constructing and maintaining a sense of continuity of Jewish presence within the landscape.

For Israel the West Bank has become an industrial park. Since the beginning of the second Intifada in the autumn of 2000, Palestinian labourers have been almost completely prohibited from entering Jerusalem and Israel.¹³ This has been achieved through the building of the Separation Wall (with cheap Palestinian labour).¹⁴ West Bank Palestinians who once provided Jerusalem and other areas of Israel with cheap and 'flexible' labour have been kept out of the city by the placement of industrial zones, such as the quarries, far from the new neighbourhoods to the periphery of the municipal area of Jerusalem which now extends into the West Bank.

Over the four decades since 1967, 'twelve remote and homogenous Jewish neighbourhoods', have been established in the occupied areas of the city of Jerusalem, enveloping and bisecting Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages annexed to the city.¹⁵ Three quarters of all Israelis have settled in the occupied areas since creating an expanded Jerusalem that is the Occupation. As Jeff Halper states, the 'metropolitan Jerusalem is the occupation'.¹⁶ Without the 1968 master plan and investment in the quarries by Israel, government building of metropolitan Jerusalem and the settlements with subsidised housing for Israeli Jews could have not taken place. The other crucial factor in the colonisation of the West Bank and annexed territories has been cultural, with the landscape transformed into a 'familiar home ground'.¹⁷ The stone from the quarries plays a role in naturalising the new construction projects and settlements so that they appear as an organic part of Jerusalem that extends like a serpent into the depths of the West Bank. The visual language of architecture sustains territorial claims and national narratives of belonging for Jews, circumnavigating and erasing the narratives of Palestinians, and leaving Palestine in crisis.

Text extract from: *White Oil*, Excavations and the Disappearance of the West Bank, Judy Price 2014

¹³ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*.

¹⁴ Since its construction, manual labour in Israel that was previously provided by Palestinians has been replaced by an influx of workers from Asia, who are given temporary work permits with very specific conditions attached.

¹⁵ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 24.

¹⁶ Jeff Halper, ICAD, Israeli Committee Against House Demolition.

¹⁷ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 26.