

# 100 × RAMALLAH

imaginaries, otherness,  
and (de)colonization in  
antispaces of sumud

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# ABSTRACT

100 x Ramallah is an investigation of spatial (re-)imagineering of the city of Ramallah, Palestine since the demise of the Osmans and over the past century of Anglo-Zionist colonisation, and an exploration of what could follow. The line of evolution of successive Ramallite spacio-sensibilities transcribes the tensions of nonuniform yet cyclical tides of centralised hegemonic control and counter-resistance. By triangulating morphological and territorial shifts with socio-demographics and politico-economic orders this work argues through three hypotheses.

**First**, Ramallah's city-space is a product of an articulate colonial project whose discourse promotes narrow homogenised imaginaries of ethnicities and national identities, and therewith sterilised, surveilled and securitized spaces. These concepts have been inducing variations of both, co-optation and opposition. In the same line, neoliberal development discourses continue to infantilize target populations as passive recipients. Hence, these are decisively myopic to the fact that the latter are capable of engendering alternative imaginations, and in cases where these materialise into realities they are rejected and combated as anomalies. The result has been the (intentional?) creation of a mutated system of bureaucratic, incompatible administration that repeatedly fails to provide for basic socioeconomic needs, therewith shared development and stability. In effect, what has been unfolding in Palestine is de-development.

**Second**, the dialectic Marxist discourse contends urbanities as natural decodings of psycho-ecological processes. Understood from this perspective, the post-Oslo contestation and frustration in the city can be traced to the exasperation of social otherness beyond regular metropolitan symptoms, due to the acute increase in scales of uncertainty (diminishing securities), inequality and spatial non-dignity. Through mapping the behavioural trend of re-making of *sumud* (social resilience) it can be concluded that tensions are bound to be released through (mostly *ad hoc*) techniques and formations of citizen mobilisations. Identified factors and scholarship indicate an elevated possibility of violence; whether due to high levels of militarisation by the nation-state policing discourses or its vulnerability to natural misfortunes. The scales and impacts of clandestine sub-group activities in turn depends on several factors, one of which is the manner by which the city-space will be produced in the coming, critical decades.

**Third**, urban design, planning, and management are tools often advocated as bearers of welfare and rarely admitted as enablers of mental as well as corporeal crisis. These are professions that by nature capitalise on and catalyse political ideologies which include/exclude anticonformist visionaries in/from formal processes of socio-spatial production. Here Ramallah presents no exception to the neocolonial rule, where its planners (rightfully) blame the failure in forging egalitarian urbanism on racial subjugation and instability, yet fall short of constructively labouring applicable alternatives that account for uncertainty. In cities like Ramallah where subjective temporalities constantly produce new risk-strategies and population flows, static frameworks of indexed mechanisms and hierarchies are rendered obsolete. In combination with today's digitally-enabled

pseudo-concrete realities and heightened levels of privatization; Ramallah's resilience necessitates that it democratizes spatial production and therewith decolonize its spaces based on concepts of the civic right to flourishing. The future shape and degree of resilience/sumud depend on the ability of the (self-declared) Ramallites to spatialize (grant legitimacy to) their diversity, fluidity, and inter-relevance. To that end, an *Umdenkenprozess* about the role and range of fields of interventions of Ramallite urban visionaries is quintessential.

The outline of this work spreads over six chapters, starting with setting the parameters, territorial and temporal back-drop, and elaborates on the hypotheses. The second chapter focuses on tracing and understanding the spatial evolution of the city through cross-comparing those to political and socioeconomic elements; hence philosophically differentiating between projected (imagined, mental) and grounded (scientific, real) meanings, ideologies, and their economic, social and particularly spatial trails and implications. Chapter three expounds on the politico-economic factors fuelling Ramallah's spatial tendencies in the past two decades since the signature of the Oslo Accords in 1993. It simultaneously investigates the spacio-social relationalities and sensibilities legitimising and incubating these discourses. Chapters four and five proceed to map urban undertakings by both public and private parties (respectively); they feature the power and decision-making mandates and influence; modes of operation, structures and systematic variables; the most relevant projects and engagements; theoretical genealogies and comparative cases; foreseen sociospatial consequences, and; the underlying opportunities. Chapter 6 concludes this work with puzzling the findings of former chapters in variable imaginations of alternative urban realities that Ramallah could potentially produce. Through re-negotiating the existing colonial morphology and centralized, bureaucratic decision-making systems, this chapter explores opportunities for nurturing environmentally, economically and politically resilient, inclusive and progressive spaces of resistance and sociospatial decolonization. In the current critical moment for Palestine specifically and cities featuring anti-colonial revolutions generally; modes of spatial absorption, scaling, synthesis, and reimagineering of locational social ideologies and movements is essential for the quality of life and dignity.

Along the process arguments are based on scholarly review of a wide range of works from varying disciplines, both academic and otherwise. These were cross-analysed with empirical data collected through twenty qualitative interviews, eight focus groups, observations and quantitative indicators; collected through eight field-visits totalling thirty-two weeks and spanning over intervals of six months in average.

Aside the scientific motivations of this work, it desires to serve as a scholarly narrative that coalesces some facets of the momentary polemics, voiced aspirations and intellectual brainstorming about Ramallah. This five-year process has travelled through multitude of provocative and inspiring conversations, debates, and assemblies, and herewith aims at expounding on concepts of insurgent urbanism. The reflections outlined here do not claim premise to foreclosing or limiting differing understandings and interpretations; rather it calls attention to a selection of polychromic aspects requiring deeper investigation.