

Here Sary Zananiri, 2010

As a Palestinian of Jerusalemite extraction, who has never lived in Jerusalem, the name conjures images of inherited family stories. On my first trip, coinciding with Easter in 1998, I remember visiting the Holy Sepulchre and watching as the rites I'd heard of in stories told by my family unfolding under the watchful gaze of Israeli police. After a while, their initially jarring presence somehow blended with architecture of the church's forecourt and became fixtures, no different to a security camera on a city street in Australia where I grew up. Contemplating this in retrospect, it seems so apparent that the act of viewing a landscape is in the eye of the beholder.

In the same way that I had accepted and then blocked from view the Israeli police, so too are Israelis able to ignore the existence of Palestinians. For instance the West Bank Settlement of Gilo, who commissioned artists to paint a photo-realist mural on the Separation Wall that rewrites the landscape surrounding them despite the close proximity of neighbouring Palestinian towns. The landscape of Historical Palestine is as subjective as it is contested.

Hasager and de Main in *Between Here and Somewhere Else* play back and forth on the subjectivity of landscape, asking viewers to become participants by reviewing evidence of the lives imagined, lived or reflected through the materiality of the landscape itself. In Hasager's *On Site*, interviews with Israelis who live in areas that were once Palestinian villages are juxtaposed against voiceovers of Palestinian descendants talking about perceived lives that still hold strong of what existed pre 1948. While de Main's *Silwan Hoard – Abasi Family* takes pieces of the ruins of the Abasi family's demolished house in East Jerusalem, freezing and memorialising these fragments by casting them in bronze. By positing evidences collected in the manner of an anthropological study, interviews, oral histories, objects and images serve to interpret and reinterpret the biases involved reading those evidences and point to various political machinations and their contradicting narratives that determine where *here* is and ask who's *here* is this?

The notion of *here* is subjective at the best of times. *Here* is as much an imagined or perceived idea as it is a geographic locale. *Here* was, is or could be – *here* was our village, *here* is a ruin, *here* I could build/rebuild my home. *Here* is often intangible, despite it's physicality. What looks like rubble in space may evoke feelings of nostalgia or anger through dispossession to one person, but may appear a tabula rasa for another and *herein* lies the problem that *Between Here and Somewhere Else* attempts to address.

I remember on one of my trips to Palestine, crossing at Allenby Bridge and being interrogated, as generally happens to me. I was asked what I wanted to do *here* by an Israeli security official. I replied that I was interested in Palestinian architecture. He looked at me quizzically and replied with astonishment "but there is no Palestinian architecture here". It was both an earnest and spiteful comment at the same time and the possibility of something that contradicts genuine belief required immediate denial to maintain itself.

The issue of *here* does not simply pertain to Palestinians or Israelis subjective perspectives of the landscape, but also to foreign perspectives. Jerusalem and Historical Palestine are innately linked to Christianity and biblical narratives play out in Western

imaging of the landscape, especially since the invention of photography in the 19th Century. Post-World War II we see these religious narratives developed in Western media with the establishment of Israel as a state, into Muslim-Jewish conflict with Crusadic overtones in the comment that this is a centuries old conflict, despite several hundred years of relatively peaceful Ottoman rule.

De Main's new work *A Month in Ramallah – Al Quds / Guardian* consists of photo polymer prints of imagery taken from the Al Quds and Guardian newspapers, playing on the slippage between an inside and outside view of the conflict. In this respect the appropriation of such imagery really does play off the here and somewhere else despite coverage being of the same place. News items vary between local and global view, collapsing images of ruined buildings, people protesting or soldiers and police with images of Obama, Clinton or Blair into one another as representations of the same place.

Her research of Silwan similarly collapses a here and elsewhere through time. Contemporary Zionist politics are manifested in the form of the demolition of the Abasi family home and with this, the family's displacement. This is contrasted against the establishment of the 'City of David' archaeological dig and tourist site, an endeavour aimed at legitimising Zionist biblical claims.

Academia, in this case archaeology, is used by the City of David to legitimise claim to land with the effect of deleting Palestinian presence on the site. The *here* of now is thus deleted through dispossession.

In the same way, Hasager's *On Site*, the continuation of the project *Memories of Imagined Places*, while both distinct from one another, act as bookends for the exploration of place. In *Memories of Imagined Places* Hasager takes the starting point from discussions with Palestinian youth's on their villages of origin. Stories range from inherited family memories, to failed attempts to visit those villages. Reactions to those villages vary; with one participant discussing an underlying sense of ambiguity as to whether, if a right of return were possible, their own rootedness to current surrounds would outweigh a return to their ancestral home. *Here* becomes a schizophrenic experience pulling between an imagined place and the participant's daily reality in situation that is ultimately hypothetical.

On Site continues the investigation of *here* through a series of portraits of six former Palestinian villages. A voice over recounting her interactions with young Palestinians talking about their inherited memories of those villages is contrasted with interviews of Israelis now inhabiting these sites. The interviews with Israelis, who were approached casually in the streets, are matter of fact, and the discussions of *here* centre around a state sponsored need for demolition of Palestinian homes to avoid future claims of a right of return. Also evident is the ease with which Israeli interviewees discuss their surroundings, showing how they have developed their own links and communities laying roots in these former Palestinian villages since 1948.

The irony of juxtaposing de Main's investigations in Silwan against attitudes of Israeli residents of these former villages interviewed by Hasager is acute. Demolition and rebuilding of these sites by Israelis is seen not so much as a reclamation of land, but as a necessity to avoid a reversal of the political dynamics at play in Silwan.

By exploring the contradictions in how land and place are treated, de Main and Hasager are able to untangle and then re-weave strands of information in a process that flips this into the useful form of an exploratory study. This inquiry, which while firmly rooted in artistic endeavour, crosses between archaeology, anthropology, as well as social and political sciences by building up this evidence and information and presenting it within the format of an exhibition.

Sary Zananiri is a Melbourne-based Palestinian-Australian artist. He is currently completing a PhD in Fine Arts at Monash researching pre 1948 Western imaging of Jerusalem and its affects on the city's contemporary actuality. His current interest is responding to absent sites in the public realm and their recreation through documentation.