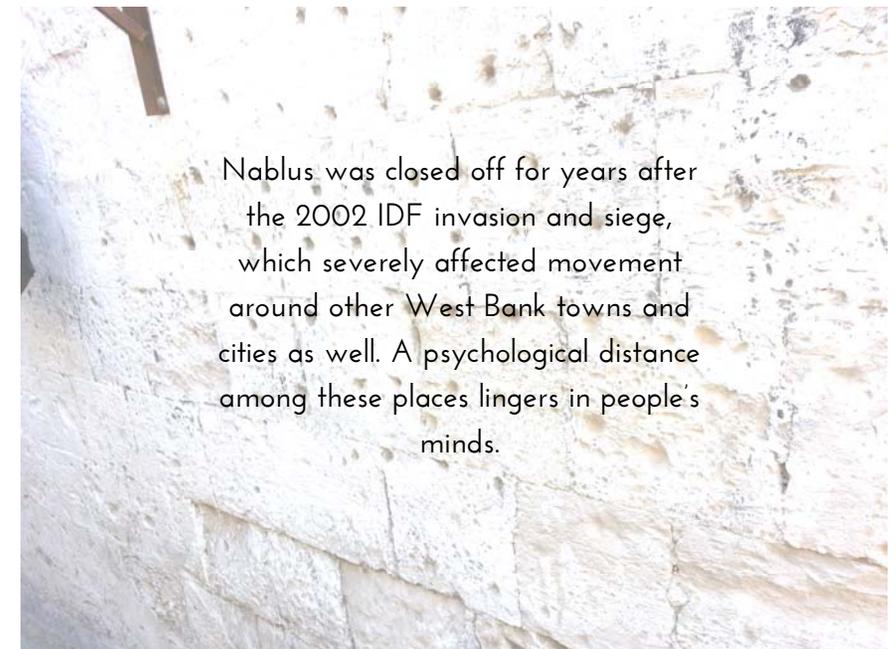


Human Geography in Nablus,

“Mountain of Fire”

by Melissa Morrone

Ten years ago, Saed's friend wrote an email newsletter about Nablus. The signoff was always, “The world is watching, yet has done nothing.”



Nablus was closed off for years after the 2002 IDF invasion and siege, which severely affected movement around other West Bank towns and cities as well. A psychological distance among these places lingers in people's minds.

Our second day of the delegation was spent in Nablus,



the second largest city in the West Bank.

Image Credits

Cover image: Al Karreoun Road, Vani Natarajan
Page 1: Street in Nablus, Grace Lile
Page 2: Wall with bullet holes, Grace Lile
Page 3: Library books, Grace Lile
Page 3: Nablus Library call numbers, Vani Natarajan
Page 4: Prisoner's notebook, Molly Fair
Pages 7/8: soap wrapper, Josh MacPhee
Page 9: Nablus dinner, Grace Lile
Page 11: Prisoners movement poster, Grace Lile
Back cover: Mural in Balata refugee camp, Vani Natarajan

Text by Melissa Morrone originally printed in the zine *Librarians and Archivists to Palestine* (Brooklyn, NY, 2013).

1

14

Our first visit was to the Nablus Public Library, where the spine labels are color-coded and the Dewey Decimal call numbers are written by hand. Donated theses from students at Najah University are on the shelves, in addition to a general collection for all ages. An audio-vision room, complete with media viewing stations and a camera tripod, was being readied for opening. The library hosts well-attended public programs in their garden (the Algerian author Wasini Al-A'raj was coming that evening).



Prisoners' issues are an important site for connecting movements and building global solidarity, he told us, to nods of recognition.

3

12

He talked about the longstanding local resistance to the occupation, and how being put into prison was often how people started organizing with each other.

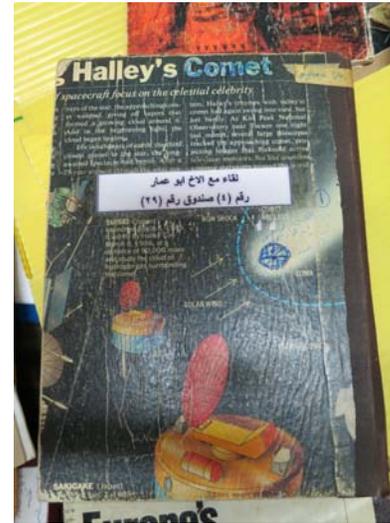


11



That evening, we met and ate a decadent meal of northern Palestinian specialties at Al-Yasmeen Hotel with poet, geographer, and activist Saed Abu Hijleh.

9



The library also includes a separate prison collection. 6000 notebooks and books came from two area prisons that were evicted in 1995, post-Oslo. (Now Ofer is the only prison this side of the Green Line. The rest are in '48.) The prisoners' books have been repaired with bandages, carton scraps, and whatever else was available inside, and some were given new and incongruous covers from magazine pages. The librarians told us that many former prisoners come and ask to see their old books.

4

Afterward, we went back into Nablus and got a walking tour with activist and lifelong Nablusi Beesan Ramadan. (She told me that she was visiting a family friend when the IDF invaded in 2002. They couldn't leave, and she spent about three weeks there in her pajamas.)

We passed Al-Maktaba al-Sha'biyyah (The People's Bookstore), which was packed with people waiting for Wasini Al-A'raj's afternoon appearance there. Beesan said that the store has been raided and closed many times for having prohibited books. In the old city, she pointed out the bullet holes still in the walls, the posters of martyrs still up.

6

Just outside of Nablus is the Balata refugee camp, where we would be sleeping that night in the Yafa Cultural Center. Almost 30,000 people live on one square kilometer of land. The camp has very narrow alleys between the residential buildings. No sun comes into people's homes, and everyone can hear everyone else's business. Before we got a brief tour, we had lunch and heard from Mahmoud, the head of the Balata health unit. He described the terrible living conditions there, the heart disease and depression, and the resistance. "Now you can find news about everywhere, straight from the source. But you have to choose to see it," he said.

Around 1200 people in Nablus were killed during the intifadas, including Saed's mother in 2002.

5 "Tell the world what you saw."

10

Nablus used to have many soap factories, but they were almost all closed and/or destroyed by the IDF on the accusation that people were making weapons there.



We were going to go to one of the two remaining soap factories, but it was closed that day. Instead we went into a shop and bought spices and olive oil soap. Then we had what is possibly the best knafeh in the world.

7

8