

## The only way is up? Ordinary topologies of Ramallah

### A. Abstract

This article seeks to conceptualise and value some of the quotidian geographies responsible for contemporary forms of urban change. The starting point for the argument is an attempt to account for recent urban change in the Palestinian city of Ramallah, particularly the proliferation of apartment buildings, using emerging work on verticality. It is argued that work on verticality focuses empirically on prominent cities and spaces of violent conflict, invokes the vertical as politically suspect and offers a theorisation of space that is topographical in nature. Consequently, accounts of verticality have produced narratives that obscure topological spatial relations. This paper seeks to make space for such topologies, which it is argued are crucial to producing urban and political life itself in many contexts. The concept of ordinary topologies is proposed as a means of attending to the complex and undervalued practices that are thought to be normal (but not static) and common within and across intensive or qualitative spatial-temporal relations. This approach is fleshed out through a discussion of changing topographic-topological landscapes in Ramallah. In particular, it is argued that the increasingly verticalized landscape of the city, embodied in rapidly proliferating apartment buildings, must be understood in relation to frequent journeys to other places and changing family relations.

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## A. Introduction

When I arrived in Ramallah in 2010, I was struck by the extent to which the landscape had changed since my previous visit in 2007. In particular, it seemed as if there was construction everywhere. Beitounya, al-Bireh and Ramallah (hereafter Ramallah), the three municipalities that collectively constitute the largest conurbation in the central West Bank, were full of newly built four, six and eight storey buildings. Some were for commercial use, but most were apartments. Such rapid growth was widely noted and commented upon, both locally and further afield in media such as the New York Times and The Globe and Mail (Luongo 2010, Reuters 2010, Martin 2011, Hass 2012). Figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics also reflect the recent and rapid growth of apartment buildings vis a vis houses. In 1997, there were 6.75 houses for every 1 apartment in the West Bank. By 2007, for every 1 house there were 1.24 apartment buildings (a ratio that increases to 1.46 in urban areas), due in part to an almost tenfold increase in total number of apartment buildings over the same time period (PCBS 1997, 2007). More critical analyses (Taraki 2008a, 2008b; Abourahme 2009) have drawn attention to the ways in which on-going Israeli Occupation practices have squeezed Palestinian life in the West Bank into smaller and largely urban spaces, which these authors term 'enclaves', 'bubbles' and/or 'bantustans'. As the lateral expansion of Palestinian cities has been blocked by Occupation practices including the continual growth of Israeli settlement-colonies, the only way to build is up.

Coinciding with this rapid vertical expansion of Ramallah, urban and political theorists have recently started to give much greater prominence to the vertical dimensions of life more generally (see Graham & Hewitt 2013 for an overview). Much of this work draws on Weizman's (2007) vertical perspective on power, sovereignty and space in Israel/Palestine. The intersection between this scholarly literature and what I saw in Ramallah suggested that verticality would prove a valuable conceptual lens for exploring contemporary urban political change in this central West Bank city. Verticality has been used to attend to empirical objects notable for their height or depth, providing a better theoretical understanding of the volumetric nature of particular spaces and exposing particular kinds of social and material inequalities embedded in and reproduced by vertical forms.

However, as I begun to conduct empirical research with Palestinians who had recently moved to apartments in the neighbourhood of Umm al-Shara'et<sup>1</sup>, it

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<sup>1</sup> Umm a-Shara'et is a neighbourhood in the al-Bireh municipality, which Taraki (2008: 15) describes as one of Ramallah's 'lower-middle class neighbourhoods... with little greenery, poor public services, and few amenities or public facilities'. The author conducted three months of participant observation in July and August 2010, and October 2012, renting two different apartments in Umm a-Shara'et (one in 2010, another in 2012) and meeting people through daily interactions such as shopping, taking public transport and eating in restaurants. The two apartments were in different streets and enabled the author to form a larger number of social connections through forms of everyday neighbouring (i.e. casual conversation, drinking coffee or tea together). During the first period of participant observation in 2010, in addition to casual conversations, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with adult males living in Umm a-Shara'et who the author had met during the course of daily life. These males all lived in different

quickly became clear that their material and intimate geographies exceeded a vertical or volumetric framing. By this, I am not referring to the series of other topographic spacings and histories that connect with the rapidly proliferating vertical apartments in Ramallah, where topography is understood as spatial relations that can be measured with conventional metrics for distance (e.g. kilometres). Rather, there were intensive relations – topologies - that were crucial to the everyday life of city dwellers, but became obscured by focusing on the vertical. While a vertical perspective draws attention to Ramallah's proliferating apartments and the changing volumetric profile of the city, I will argue that such an approach struggles to get to grips with other geographies, such as changing family relations, because these relations are not topographic, and therefore exceed volumetric framings of space. By adopting a volumetric (and hence necessarily topographic) approach that sidelines the topological spatialities of urban and political life, emerging debates around verticality remain blind to what Simone (2011: 403) terms 'urban life itself', the fleshy, passionate relations, knowledges and forms of practice through which cities are constructed. This is an important problem to grapple with, because as Simone (2004a: 16) notes elsewhere, in contexts (often labelled global South) where resources for urban development are limited, amplifying existing sensibilities, creativity and rationalities that use the city to generate well-being and links with(in) a large world may be the most effective means of making common cause with residents. Or put another way, critical urbanism and/or political geography may only be advanced in limited ways through existing deployments of the concepts of verticality and volume.

This essay therefore seeks to broaden emerging work on verticality by engaging with urban and political life itself, and arguing for a more topological rendering of these dynamics. I propose the concept of ordinary topologies, as a means of attending to some of the complex, quotidian practices through which the majority of urban dwellers co-constitute the cities in which they live (Simone & Rao 2011). This concept builds upon, and seeks to account for, a set of largely undervalued, 'normal' practices that have co-constituted the contemporary geography of Ramallah. In focusing on some of the intensive relations that co-constitute Ramallah, and advancing a topological understanding of urban and political space more generally, my goal is not to replace vertical analyses or displace the study of topographical spaces (Allen 2011a: 284; see also Secor 2013). Rather, I want to map the limits of topographical analyses, as a means of putting them into conversation and productive tension with topological perspectives (as has been done by recent feminist work on the global and the intimate, see Pratt & Rosner 2012). In what follows, I first review recent arguments around verticality in urban and political geography, before outlining

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buildings. Interviews were also conducted with municipal workers at the Ramallah Municipality, the al-Bireh Municipality and the Beitounia Municipality. Interviews were conducted and transcribed with the assistance of an interpreter/translator. The sample - adult males - reflects contextual gender norms, and hence these findings reflect a particular experience of living in Ramallah. However, the author hopes to broaden the sample in relation to gender and age in on-going research in the neighbourhood. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms, and in some cases key details about their lives are referred to in a deliberately vague manner to ensure confidentiality.

in detail what I mean by an ordinary topological perspective, and how it builds on emerging work on verticality. I then flesh out how such a perspective works in the context of my empirical research in Ramallah, particularly in relation to the time-spaces of apartments that first captured my attention in 2010, and shared taxis (*services*) and families that emerged during my research as important co-constituents of apartment spaces. In conclusion, I try to further clarify what difference an ordinary topological perspective makes to urban political analysis.

#### A. The vertical turn

As noted by Graham & Hewitt (2013), there has recently been increased interest in the vertical dimension of urban and political life amongst spatial theorists. My aim here is not to provide an overview of this emerging work, since Graham & Hewitt (2013) have already done so. Rather, I want to cut across and draw out what I think the key contributions of a vertical perspective are for understanding urban and political geographies. Theoretically, a vertical perspective encourages a focus on volume in place of a planar imagination. Graham & Hewitt (2013: 72-3) argue that the discourses and imaginaries that have dominated Anglophone critical urban research have tended to be flat. Vertical approaches seek to add – both literally and figuratively – another dimension to theories of urban and political space, one that is argued to be crucial to understanding such spaces (Elden 2013). Arguments for better theoretical understandings of space are interwoven with similar arguments for a better understanding of empirical phenomena that are above and below ground. These include colonialism (Weizman 2007), air-borne forms of militarisation (Adey 2010, Gregory 2011a, Williams 2010), Google Earth (Graham & Hewitt 2013), flyovers (Harris 2011, 2012) and tunnels (Elden 2013). Gregory (2011b) and Graham & Hewitt (2013) both argue that a vertical perspective not only moves attention away from the surface, but offers an effective means of engaging what are, if not entirely novel, certainly recently emerging spatial formations and practices. In addition to more complex theoretical understandings and greater attention to emerging empirical objects, a vertical perspective also promises to enrich political engagements by exposing and/or witnessing forms of social inequality (Harris 2011, Graham & Hewitt 2013). While such acts are now long standing traits of much critical urban and political analysis, studies of verticality are distinct in proposing a new set of (vertical) objects for political engagement.

Alongside these areas of explicit intervention, emerging work on verticality can also be characterised along (at least) three lines of implicit convergence. Empirically, much of this work, particularly by urban geographers, has been located in global cities or megacities, such as Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Mumbai and Lagos (Adey 2010), Dubai, London, Mumbai and Hong Kong (Graham & Hewitt 2013). Meanwhile, political geography analyses often cite Weizman's (2007) work on Palestine-Israel (Elden 2013), and focus on nation-states such as Iraq (Williams 2010) Afghanistan (Gregory 2011a, 2011b) and Pakistan (Williams 2010, Gregory 2011b) as sites of spectacular violence and conflict. Clearly, emerging work on verticalities is located in particular kinds of sites. These sites or locations of interest - prominent cities and spaces of violent conflict - may well reflect broader biases in where and how much urban and

political geography is situated (Robinson 2006, Sharp 2011). However, there is nothing inherent within the concept of verticality to suggest that it can only be used in such spaces. Indeed, one might anticipate a broadening of the areas of focus over time.

The second characteristic, which may well be linked to the choice of empirical/exemplar spaces, is that emerging work on verticality tends to render verticality politically suspect. Analyses of helicopter security (Adey 2010), military drones (Gregory 2011b), skyscrapers (Graham & Hewitt 2013) and flyovers built by and for social elites (Harris 2011), explore the ways in which verticality is the means through which so-called collateral damage, increasing social inequality and colonial occupation are enacted. Consequently, when this research is read collectively as a body of work, the vertical becomes a disreputable dimension of urban political life. However, it is worth noting once again that there is nothing inherently suspect about verticality, and future research may well foreground more progressive or hopeful verticalities.

The third characteristic is the topographic nature of emerging vertical analyses. A vertical is that which is at right angles to a horizontal plane. Consequently, a vertical approach focuses on space, whether in/as cities or nation-states, as volume (Elden 2013, Graham & Hewitt 2013). Volume is a geo-metric that quantitatively measures location and extension in (what becomes) topographic space. Unlike the empirical choice of site and suspicion as the common political affect of studies of verticality, this characteristic is necessary. In other words, space will always be thought about topographically when the vertical is used as a metric of space.

To reiterate, while existing sites for verticality research tell us little about quotidian lived realities beyond (and, indeed, within) megacities and spaces of military violence, it is possible to construct analyses which explore verticality in other spaces and 'from below' (as Harris' 2011 research points towards) with the same conceptual tools. Similarly, it is possible to envision research that explores particular vertical spaces as sites of progressive politics, which might be affirmed rather than criticised and/or feared. However, the third characteristic, the topographical nature of vertical approaches, points to a limit that cannot be overcome by extension of the existing theoretical frame. While providing a more fully volumetric analysis, verticality cannot engage with the intensive, 'qualitative' (Secor 2013) connections that enervate and flesh out a whole series of urban and political practices. Is this a problem? All concepts are limited in various ways and this certainly does not disqualify their use, but rather demands some sense of where they can be deployed most effectively. My concern is therefore not that more fully volumetric analyses are unable to incorporate more topological dimensions of urban and political life, (although claims for its usefulness might be slightly overextended at present). Rather, what worries me is that emerging work on verticalities may be actively obscuring studies of (equally) significant urban and political topologies.

This danger is illustrated most forcefully in relation to Weizman's (2007) book *Hollow Land*, which it is worth noting, has become a key referent for most work

on verticalities. *Hollow Land* provides an excellent analysis of Israel's architecture of occupation, which is precisely what it seeks to do. However, both the book and the concept only offer a partial understanding of Palestinian space in the Occupied Territories. Weizman's topographical analysis has a tendency to expunge Palestinians from the spaces within its purview by rhetorically hollowing out Palestinian spaces and landscapes of more intensive relations. For instance, it is significant that the politics of verticality maps 'the succession of episodes following the development of Israel's technologies of domination and Palestinian resistance to them' (Ibid.: 15). Here Palestinians are envisioned as reactive and/or passive subjects, left to resist (or flounder) in the face of Israel's technologies of domination. Israel makes history. Palestinians react to it. This type of conclusion emerges precisely from the topographical conception of space employed, which rightly foregrounds extensive forms of Israeli control and oppression, but struggles to engage with, and so writes out the lived experience of Palestinians. This is crucial, because it is through studying practices and lived experience that we encounter intensive relations (i.e. topological geographies) that constitute forms of resistance, getting by and a *Living Palestine* (Taraki 2006; see also Kelly 2008, Allen 2008, Hammami 2010, Harker 2012). While Weizman anticipates this kind of reading (see p. 5), through citation and repetition of his work, Palestine has nevertheless largely become a hollow land in scholarly work, devoid of other (non-topographical) spatial relations.

The bypass of these topologies in Weizman's (2007) work is symptomatic of a broader occlusion of the topological in emerging literatures around verticality. The inherently topographical approach employed makes it hard (if not impossible) for critical geographers, urbanists and political theorists to pay attention to a whole series of intensive relations that are crucially important in making viable or enervating everyday lived spaces. Simone (2011: 403) refers to this domain as 'urban life itself': 'the complicated, uneasy facets of city life... the thick and slippery materialities, the sweat and tears, the passions and calculations that make up urban life'. He argues that while megacity projects, which have captured the attention of so much emerging work on verticality, are important shapers of society and space, they do not tell 'the entire story' (Simone 2010: 61-2). This is particularly so in Southern contexts where intensive (i.e. topological) relations are often much more heavily relied upon for making an existence that, although often highly precarious, is nevertheless viable (ibid; see also Simone 2004a, b). Topographical perspectives cannot adequately account for these sorts of processes and relations. Additionally, the occlusion of the topological by the topographic becomes even more important if one believes that generating intensive relations (i.e. making connections and common cause) with urban and political majorities as a means of recognising and utilizing the resources at hand in what are otherwise resource poorer contexts, might well be the most politically effective strategy for 'critical' urban and political research (see Simone 2011). Hence, locating studies of verticality in sites of spectacular urbanisation and military violence compounds the limitations and occlusions I am pointing to. In response to these problems, in the next section I outline an ordinary topological approach to urban and political life.

### A. Ordinary topologies

The concept of ordinary topologies seeks to both extend and augment emerging work on urban and political topographies. This concept is not intended to supplant the verticality agenda by overriding studies of topographical space, but rather to work in productive tension with such studies to ensure a plurality of approaches to urban and political spatial formations more generally. In this section, I detail my conceptual understanding of the ordinary and topology, in order to develop an argument about what the concept of ordinary topologies might offer urban and political spatial analysis.

### B. *The ordinary*

The word ordinary is conventionally used to mean normal, commonplace and often associated with banality and everydayness, meanings that are retained in many academic uses of the word. Kelly (2008: 353) for instance notes that for West Bank Palestinians during the second intifada, the ordinary was 'rooted in the practical obligations of kinship, to provide for and support their families'. However, Kelly also notes that what is considered ordinary is dynamic, is defined in relation to what is extra-ordinary, and 'hangs uneasily between a description and an evaluation, the typical and the ideal, moving constantly between the "is" and the "ought"' (Ibid: 366). Consequently, the content of the ordinary (i.e. what is normal, everyday) is not given in advance and everywhere the same, but must instead be investigated and specified in particular geographic and historical contexts.

Geographic invocations of the ordinary have tended to stress the ordinary as what is common between things (rather than what is common or normal in a particular space-time). For instance, while Amin & Graham (1997) never define the ordinary in their paper on the 'ordinary city', their discussion of the multiplex city conjures the ordinary as that which is common between cities. The ordinary in their work also becomes something that is complex, as multiple urban processes coincide and jostle for position. This interpretation is repeated in Robinson's (2006) use and extension of the concept of 'ordinary cities'. As she forges a revived comparative urbanism, Robinson suggests all cities are ordinary (Ibid: 108), where ordinary is again what is common between cities - 'part of the same field of analysis' (Ibid: 108), and a figure for complexity - '[o]rdinary cities are diverse, complex and internally differentiated' (Ibid: 109). Lee's (2006: 414) reading of Amin & Graham (1997) similarly invokes the ordinary as that which is common and at the same time complex, in this case in relation to the economy. There are two further nuances to defining ordinary that become apparent in Lee's work. First the ordinary is that which, perhaps because of its common or banal nature, is overlooked. In Lee's (2006) terms, it is literally and figuratively not valued or undervalued. This understanding resonates with Robinson's (2006) work on ordinary cities, which is precisely concerned with valuing cities and urban processes that much existing urban theory has discounted or ignored. Both Lee and Robinson ascribe value to the ordinary as a figure for the sorts of practices and relations that make economies and/or cities actually work. Second, and closely linked, the ordinary is a domain of practice. This is something fleshed out in much more detail by Stewart (2007: 1) in her work on ordinary affects, in which she suggests that '[t]he ordinary is a shifting



assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life'. Practice in Stewart's work is the realm of (1) embodied habit ('[t]he ordinary can turn on you. Lodged in habits, conceits and the loving and deadly contacts of everyday sociality, it can catch you up in something bad. Or good' (Ibid: 106)); (2) sensation ('[t]he ordinary is a moving target. Not first something to make sense of, but a set of sensations that incite' (Ibid: 93)) and (3) an affective mode of attending to the world ('a sensory connection. A jump. And a world of affinities and impacts that take place in the moves of intensity across things that seem solid and dead' (Ibid: 127)). Thus practice is rooted in the material, affective and imaginative actions of bodies. Reading across these varied accounts, I use the ordinary to indicate complex and undervalued practices that are thought to be normal (but not static) and common within and across particular spaces. The concept of ordinary topologies, as the term suggests, sutures this understanding of ordinary to topological spaces.

### *B. Topology*

As both Allen (2011a) and Secor (2013) have recently noted, while far from novel, topology has become an increasingly popular, but not necessarily well-defined means of capturing particular kinds of spaces. Secor (2013: 4-5) suggests that:

[T]opology focuses on the qualitative properties of space (as opposed to the geometric). Topologically speaking, a space is not defined by the distances between points that characterize it when it is in a fixed state, but rather by the characteristics that it maintains in the process of distortion and transformation (bending, stretching, squeezing, but not breaking). Topology deals with surfaces and their properties, their boundedness, orientability, decomposition, and connectivity – that is, sets of properties that retain their relationships under processes of transformation.

Allen suggests topology describes a particular kind of relational space in which 'the gap between "here" and "there" is measured less by miles or kilometres and more by the social relationships, exchanges and interactions involved' (Allen 2011a: 284). If topological landscapes cannot be measured metrically (i.e. in terms of miles and kilometres), it is because topological relations are intensive (or what Secor refers to above as qualitative), rather than extensive.

[L]andscapes are not flattened by what circulates across them or by the lines of connection drawn, but are simply composed by the proximate and distanced relationships involved... On this understanding, the so called far-reaching powers of transnational corporations or actors like the state and global social movements are often best understood less as something extended across borders and networks and rather more as an arrangement which enables distant actors to make their presence felt, more or less directly, by dissolving, not traversing the gap between 'here and there'. (Ibid: 290)



Gregory (2004) provides an excellent example of one such topological 'arrangement', in his discussion of the ways in which Palestinians and Palestinian land are included in, and excluded from, Israel.

Israel has redistributed the splinters of Palestine into a series of abstract categories located in a purely topological imaginary. These redistributions – or “spacings,” since they have performative force – possess such consistency and systematicity that they amount to a concerted project to fold the sacralisation of the land of Israel – and particularly of “Judea” and “Samaria” – into the reduction of the Palestinian people to so many *homines sacri* (Gregory 2004: 135).

It is important to note, as Allen (2011a) emphasizes, that topological landscapes are *not* well understood as ontologically flat or horizontal. Such a volumetric conception of space misses the ways in which topological space stands outside metric capture altogether. This is not to say that topologies cannot be measured – as and through intensities – by other means (for example, through ethnographic research, see Stewart 2007, Simone 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, Jacobs 2012).

Allen (2011a, 2011b) argues that a topological approach is useful for showing how actors break down or dissolve topographical distances, and for tracing how power is spatially practiced through different registers. '[T]opology represents an opportunity for geographers to think again about how it is that events elsewhere seem to be folded or woven into the political fabric of daily life, or about how powerful actors, including non-humans, register their presence, despite their physical absence' (Allen 2011b: 318; see also Gregory 2004). To these two points, we might also add that a topological sensibility has been used to understand not only space, but also time, or more precisely the multiplicity of time-spaces (Crang & Travlou 2001). If urban space is always multiple (McFarlane 2011), then as Crang and Travlou (2001) detail in relation to Athens, and Secor (2013: 17) demonstrates with regards to Paris in the film *Midnight in Paris*, such spaces often embody multiple historical processes and eras too. Topology prompts consideration of what is relatively recent and distant temporally in relation to what is spatially near and far.

As Allen (2011a: 284) alludes to when describing 'a prosaic geography in which relations of presence and absence are routinely reconfigured', many topological relations might be thought about as ordinary. In placing ordinary before topology I want to draw attention to complex and undervalued topological practices. While Gregory's (2004) analysis of the Israeli Occupation, and Allen's (2011a) more general discussion of governments, corporations and prominent NGOs foreground forms of topological practice, these are arguably objects that well researched, albeit through other epistemological lenses. The ordinary in ordinary topologies therefore draws attention to topological relations that are less well researched because they are considered normal, and therefore not necessarily important in academic analyses of urban and political processes. Suturing ordinary to topology therefore points to particular kinds of topological relations within a broader field of topological enquiry (Secor 2013).

To summarize, the concept of ordinary topologies identifies complex and undervalued practices of what are thought to be normal (but not static) and common within and across intensive spatial-temporal relations. This concept provides a means of understanding urban and political processes that are otherwise hidden from sight by a focus on the volumetric and the extraordinary (whether violence or spectacle). Of particular interest in relation to my own work, ordinary topologies offer a way of engaging the quotidian practices through which many city dwellers engage urban change and uncertainty. This is particularly important in contexts where forms of uncertainty are accentuated, and thus intensive relations become highly important for making life viable (Simone 2004b). An ordinary topological approach, while different from existing work on verticality, also provides a broader understanding of how topographical processes function as part of more complex (topographical and topological) urban and political assemblages (McFarlane 2011). In other words, insights about urban and political topographies are not discarded, but rather extended by consideration of various ordinary topologies, as the discussion in the remainder of this paper will illustrate.

To fully elucidate what an understanding of ordinary topologies can bring to studies of urban and political space, in the next section I put it to work in the empirical context of Ramallah. This is a context of violent conflict, but as an ordinary topological approach shows, it is also a time-space in which much else happens besides. I begin by briefly describing the apartment buildings that captured my attention, and contextualizing them in a broader set of spatial-temporal relations. I then broaden this analysis to include *services* and families, which are crucial in the constitution of apartments and vertical life in this context.

#### **A. Ordinary topologies and apartments in Ramallah**

As noted in the introduction, apartment buildings have rapidly proliferated in cities across the West Bank. The neighbourhood of Umm al-Shara'et where I conducted empirical research has itself been described as 'a sprawling settlement housing a hodgepodge of badly kept apartment buildings' (Taraki 2008: 15; see also Hilal 2010). Typically four to six stories tall (although these restrictions are exceeded in places), apartments in this context usually have small windows, are made of reinforced concrete and stone, are dusty-white in colour and carry a number of large black water containers on the flat roofs. Individual apartment units can be rented or owner occupied. In Umm al-Shara'et, Hilal (2010: 150) notes that '[t]he percentage of families renting apartments rose from 28% in 1997 to 48% in 2004, while the percentage of property owners went down from 65% to 47% during the same period of time'. Most apartment occupants are families (74% in 2004, an increase of 32% since 1997; *Ibid*). Vertical life in Umm al-Shara'et is often novel for many of these families, who have moved from more horizontal dwelling spaces (i.e. houses) in other part of the West Bank, as I will discuss in more detail in the next two subsections. Hence, while these buildings are changing the scopic profile of the city, their verticality can also be framed in relation to lived experience. For instance, living seven storeys above ground level offers one resident an escape from the more crowded

areas of the city and the luxury of a cooler breeze, even there are no outside space to do things like camping, as one might in a village<sup>2</sup>. For another, the views are great, but the high cost of renting is a concern<sup>3</sup>. One resident told me he valued his apartment building because there were only seven other families living there, which ensured a relatively peaceful space<sup>4</sup>.

Muhammad, an employee in one of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) Ministry's, provides a particularly good example of how attending to lived experience of apartment residents brings into focus a broader array of geographies. Muhammad moved to Umm a-Shara'et in 2004 from Tulkarem after marrying a woman from Ramallah, and rented for four years before buying an apartment. His family in Tulkarem gave him the money for the down payment, which was fifty percent of the total cost. In this very banal way, his family relations enable him particular form of living in Ramallah. When I first met Muhammad in 2010 he was paying the other fifty percent via monthly instalments, paid directly to the original owner who was responsible for construction of the building. Muhammad was also divorced by 2010, and sleeping in his workplace in order to rent his apartment, possibly because he couldn't afford the monthly payments on his salary alone.

His experiences of living in an apartment were articulated through an explicit spatial comparison: living in a house, as he had done in Tulkarem. The latter was better, because of: 'Freedom. The yard around the house. Having a garden. There are fewer disturbances. You won't run into people who you don't know.'<sup>5</sup> The social differences embodied in the move from horizontal to vertical in this context were particularly significant, something he emphasized through discussion of the building's 'quality' [naw'aya].

Muhammad: [T]he owner doesn't sell to anyone. Before he sells, he asks about the new people. His brother [the building co-owner] hasn't rented any apartments yet. And if he's going to rent, he will follow the same procedure. He's very selective. On the upper floors there is an engineer, a lawyer, and a doctor. There is a legal consultant and there is a statistician. He's a manager. He [The owner] is very careful about people's quality. Most of them have one child only.

Interviewer: And do you know why that is?

M: To save the building, and to keep the quality of the people in the building.

I: Does the owner worry about sexual relationships between teenagers?

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<sup>5</sup> Interview conducted with Muhammad, Umm al-Shara'et, 13th July 2010.

M: No, it's not like that. He wants to keep the quality of the building. He wants it to be quiet, and a good quality of people living in the building. Educated people, so that the standard is maintained. There are engineers, lawyers... He doesn't want people who will disturb others, whose children will always be running up and down the stairs, and making trouble with the neighbours. He prefers a class of educated and cultured people. Doctors, lawyers...

Muhammad narrative describes the apartment building he lives in as a space of class-based social engineering. This process, which he refers to as maintaining quality, is rooted in an anxiety that emerges from new social geographies of dis/connection. Vertical living entangles forms of topographic proximity (i.e. living in close proximity - in terms of metric distance - to others) with the new forms of topological distance (i.e. those others are unknown and hence socially distant). This is in contrast to an elsewhere and elsewhere: in Muhammad's case, his experience of living in Tulkarem, where topographic proximity complemented topological proximity: in Tulkarem he was close, in both topographic and topological terms, to those he lived with (i.e. his family). While this observation might seem banal (i.e. ordinary), it nevertheless begins to demonstrate how topologies of family are important for understanding particular residents' experiences of Ramallah, something I will elaborate on later in the paper. This example also highlights how both topographical and topological relations constitute experiences of apartment living.

Despite his anxieties about 'quality' and his preference for living in a house, Muhammad nevertheless suggested that he would only move back to Tulkarem after 10 years or at the age of retirement, after (re)marrying and having children in Ramallah. In other words, while living in Ramallah - a new topographic-topological arrangement - provokes anxiety, it is nevertheless preferable for Muhammad. This is something that can be better understood by examining a broader set of changes in the West Bank.

As noted earlier, it is important to think about the various pasts that are folded into Ramallah's present(s), and the ways in which such temporal relations are always spatio-temporal relations. The enclavisation of Palestinian territory (Falah 2003, Gregory 2004, Weizman 2007) and the de-development of the Palestinian economy (Roy 1999, Farsakh 2005, Gordon 2008, Hever 2010) by Israeli Occupation Forces<sup>6</sup> since 1967 have been relatively well documented. Here I want to draw attention to the massive PA bureaucracy, of which Muhammad is a part. The PA was created in 1993 when the Oslo Accords were signed, and it continues to be the largest employer in the Occupied Territories. While many of the 'foot soldiers' of the PA are literally foot soldiers (i.e. security and police forces), it is also peopled by a host of bureaucrats, or employees [muwazath, pl. muwazzathin] - the commonly used local name for such positions. These subjects, present throughout Ottoman, British and Jordanian

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term Israeli Occupation Forces in this essay to refer not only to Israeli soldiers (IDF) and security personnel, but the entire social and material infrastructure that performs the Occupation, which includes architects, planners, policy makers, roads, utility provision and much more. See Weizman 2007.

regimes in the West Bank, acquired greater prominence post-Oslo not only through sheer increase in numbers, but also through spatial concentration in Ramallah where most of the new PA ministries were located. This concentration in Ramallah was itself a result of the Israeli colonisation of Jerusalem and the transformation of Ramallah into the de facto 'capital' of the post-Oslo Palestine (Weizman 2007, Hammami 2010).

Employees come from all parts of the West Bank and Gaza (although since 2000, mainly only the former). Undoubtedly in part due to Ramallah's long history as an 'open' city (Taraki and Giacaman 2006), the employees have been able to settle in many parts of the city, particularly areas such as Umm al-Shara'et where housing in the form of apartments is cheaper. As such, employees are both an example of, and metonym for, many recent migrants who have moved from other parts of the West Bank to Ramallah. Hilal's (2010: page) statistics show that the average educational attainment (bachelor degree) among the inhabitants of Umm al Shara'et has increased from 33% in 1997 to 49% in 2004, and the percentage of Umm al-Shara'et residents working in 'white collar' jobs increased from 33% in 1997 to 58% in 2004. These migrants are what Simone & Rao (2011) term an 'urban majority', where majority is not understood as statistical artifice, but rather as that which is in-between:

That which is in-between points to a majority of contemporary urban residents who are neither poor nor middle class. This does not mean that for some of those 'inbetweens' there are not large measures of either precarity or accumulation.

This is important to note because the proliferation of vertical life through apartment construction in Umm al-Shara'et illustrates an experience of verticality that isn't marked by the extreme socio-economic polarities Graham & Hewitt's (2013) argument talks up, even as the construction of apartments is clearly rooted in and routed through particular geographical concentrations of wealth<sup>7</sup>. While migration to Ramallah has increased demand for dwelling spaces, the construction of apartment buildings can also be traced, in part, to another effect of the Oslo Accords. The Accords encouraged an influx of affluent Palestinian returnees and foreign investors, particularly exiled/diasporic Palestinians, who sought to make money in this new and purportedly 'peaceful' state<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, the return of capital via Palestinians who have worked in the Gulf has also been a significant factor in funding apartment construction and purchase, as Ibrahim demonstrates in the next section. Thus the figure of the apartment is both a sign and symbol of Ramallah's rapid growth post-Oslo. More abstractly, we can narrate this change as one in which particular topographic dynamics (i.e. the movement of employees and other migrants to work and live

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<sup>7</sup> One particularly important phenomenon to note in this regard is the rapid growth of debt and indebtedness (Hass 2012), although much more research is necessary on this relatively recent problem. Omar Jabary Salamanca (pers. comm.) also reminds me that there are also a substantial number of 'blue collar' migrants (e.g. construction, hotels, restaurants) who have come from other parts of the West Bank to work in Ramallah, although they often live in surrounding villages where it is cheaper.

<sup>8</sup> Interview conducted with Hamza, a-Tireh, 8 August 2010.

in Ramallah) intersect with particular topological dynamics (i.e. the torsions of power through which the Palestinian Authority was created – see Gregory 2004) to co-construct the contemporary city of Ramallah. It is important to note that these dynamics are *spatio-temporal*, in this instance continually refolding the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 back into to the fabric of the city. The importance of migration in relation to apartments in Umm al-Shara'et, and the growth of Ramallah more broadly, requires consideration of other topologies and topographies

#### A. The *service* (shared taxi)

Migrants, mainly from other parts of the West Bank, constitute a considerable proportion of residents in Umm al-Shara'et. For these residents, 'living' in Ramallah involves a regular moving back and forth, or a state of being tensed between Umm al-Shara'et and elsewhere. Hence, the vertical of the apartment building is intimately linked with the figure of the *service*. *Services* are shared taxis - usually yellow ford transit vans - that seat between seven and nine passengers at any one time. They are a prosaic part of the West Bank landscape, enabling people to move within and between cities and villages in the West Bank on a daily basis<sup>9</sup>. As well as being a means of going to work in and around Ramallah, *services* transport many residents of Umm al-Shara'et between their apartments and their family homes in places such as Tulkarem, Jenin and Hebron on a weekly or fortnightly basis. *Services* thus complicate the broader story about the increase in vertical life in Ramallah, fusing the verticality of the apartment to the more horizontal mobility of residents. This topography is one that stretches beyond Ramallah in both space and time.

While the Oslo process created a large PA bureaucracy, during the years 1993-2000 between the signing of the Oslo Accords and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> intifada, many employees and other people working in Ramallah were able to commute from elsewhere in the West Bank. Even Jenin, the northern most city in the West Bank, is said to have been only one hour's drive from Ramallah during this period<sup>10</sup>. However since 2000, checkpoints, roadblocks and other barriers to movement have fragmented the West Bank (Gregory 2004, Weizman 2007), altering both the routes and times of journeys within and between different cities and districts (Harker 2009, Hammami 2010). Consequently, people working in Ramallah had to move nearer their places of work, itself a costly process, to ensure they maintained their means of generating an income. This was particularly important because the ability to earn became highly precarious during the 2<sup>nd</sup> intifada. The attack and re-occupation of Palestinian cities by the Israeli Occupation Forces brought with it curfews, movement restrictions and the construction of the Occupation Wall (Weizman 2007), all of which heavily restricted daily mobility and trade both within and beyond the putative borders of the West Bank.

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<sup>9</sup> Other means of transportation include coaches (to Jerusalem and Nablus), private taxis and private cars.

<sup>10</sup> Interview(s) conducted with Ahmad, Ramallah, 18th July 2010; Interview conducted with Rami, Umm al-Shara'et, 15th August 2010.

Within this overall geography of closure and fragmentation, there were nevertheless differences between Ramallah and other cities in the West Bank (Taraki & Giacaman 2006, Taraki 2008a, 2008b, Abourahme 2009). The siege of Ramallah 'ended' (in 2004) well before other cities in the West Bank enjoyed a cessation of Israeli attacks. Despite the presence of the Qalandia checkpoint, Ramallah was able to retain some of the long standing connections to Jerusalem that have otherwise been severed from the West Bank, and thus was able to exceed the Israeli imposed enclavisation of space in limited but important ways (Falah 2003, Hammami 2010). And foreign aid continued to support the Ramallah-based PA and NGOs (Hever 2010), ensuring that Ramallah, while not flourishing, still exhibited minimal signs of economic life while other cities experienced strangulation. Migration to the Ramallah conurbation and surrounding villages more than doubled during this period as people sought to move to the one place where finding work was still possible<sup>11</sup>. The population of Umm al-Shara'et grew 39% between 1997 and 2004 (Hilal 2010: 8).

However, the term moving house does not precisely capture what happens when many people buy or rent an apartment in Ramallah. Instead, the *service* better represents the intricacies of a literal back and forth existence for many residents of Umm al-Shara'et. Many individuals and nuclear families visit/return to relatives in their cities and villages 'of origin' on a weekly or biweekly basis, particularly since the gradual easing of mobility restrictions in the West Bank since 2007. Ibrahim, for example, grew up in a village in Salfit governorate, and subsequently moved to the Gulf to work as a teacher. After returning to the West Bank in 2003, he lived with his parents in Salfit and a brother living in Ramallah, before buying an apartment in Umm al-Shara'et in 2006. When I interviewed him in 2010<sup>12</sup>, he travelled to his village twice a week because of its proximity (in topographic terms) to Ramallah. While his mother has now died, his father also visited him in Umm al-Shara'et, and was about to stay for the month of Ramadan. Ibrahim had a very clear sense of what was gained by moving between Salfit and Ramallah. Not only were meat and fruits cheaper in the village, but he had also calculated that he would save three hundred shekels a month in living costs if he lived in his village, where things like internet are paid for communally. Despite this, he preferred life in Ramallah because of the amenities (i.e. sewage infrastructure) and opportunities to work, socialize, and relax that are not available in Salfit. His son, a university student, and his wife, also want to remain in the city. Therefore the money he earns in Ramallah is partially spent in Salfit, while food and goods that are cheaper in Salfit are returned to Ramallah.

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<sup>11</sup> More precisely, officially recorded migration to Ramallah, Al Bireh & Beitounia, increased from 8,247 people between 1998-2002 to 16,582 people between 2003-2007 (Figures provided by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, drawn from 2007 Population, Housing and Establishment Census). As noted later, these figures don't fully capture the extent of migration, since many migrants return to their places of origin when census data is recorded. A municipal worker at the Beitounia Municipality told me they use water meters to estimate population size, and by this method, estimate that 20,000 people have moved to Beitounia alone since 2000. Interview conducted with Dina, Beitounia, 15th August 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Interview conducted with Ibrahim, Umm al-Shara'et, 14th August 2010



A member of the Ramallah municipality uses the term 'hotel city' to describe this way of being a resident<sup>13</sup>. Talking with such residents, it was clear that in addition to material goods, ideas about urban life, including the value of green space and fresh air<sup>14</sup>, circulate between contexts without a clear beginning or end, transforming the ways in which people relate to and situate themselves in both Ramallah and other parts of the West Bank. The topography of movement, represented by the *service*, becomes a key resource for enabling urban life in Ramallah. In Ibrahim's case, this enabling was in terms of food and sewage infrastructure. An employee at the al-Bireh municipality told me that many people living in Umm al-Shara'et are still registered as living elsewhere, and thus pay their municipal taxes in these other places<sup>15</sup>. The municipalities of Ramallah, al-Bireh and Beitounia are left providing services, including refuse collection and schools, for people who don't officially exist in the statistical accounts of the city produced by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. While this municipal worker bemoaned the obligation to provide services for people who didn't pay for them, given the concentration of resources in Ramallah we can see this process as a both a means of reducing costs for residents (since taxes are cheaper elsewhere), and a limited but perhaps significant de facto spatial redistribution of income within the West Bank.

While Ramallah has undoubtedly become the social, political and economic capital of Palestine (Taraki 2008a, 2008b Abourahme 2009), the quotidian geographies of *services*, and the people, goods and ideas that they transport, demand a conceptualization of the city that can account for the intensive, qualitative relations that infuse and explain the movement of bodies and ideas. The terms 'enclave', 'Bantustan' and 'bubble' (Taraki 2008a, 2008b Abourahme 2009) capture the geopolitical and economic boundaries and borders that have sprung up around Ramallah (and other Palestinian cities) since 2000. However, such terms elide the complex networks weaving together Ramallah and its multiple constitutive outsides. A more fully volumetric perspective is positioned to capture some of these dynamics. The *service* illustrates the topographies that arise from the movement of certain elements (i.e. people, goods, ideas, money) between Ramallah and the rest of the West Bank and various other 'outsides' (e.g. Amman, Gulf States). Such an approach is attuned to what is not immediately spatially present within Ramallah, but nevertheless constitutes urban life there (Jacobs 2012). These topographies are also infused with a range of temporalities, from the long-term population growth in Ramallah, to the cyclical family visits and the still present punctual interruptions of Occupation checkpoints and movement restrictions. Forms of movement such as Ibrahim's – an ordinary topography in this context – demonstrate how an ordinary topological approach can advance accounts of urban and political topographies by moving beyond spectacular urbanisms and violence. However, the intensive relations that are also part of this constitutive spatio-temporal outside remain

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<sup>13</sup> Interview conducted with Yacob, Ramallah, 15th August 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Interview conducted with Ahmad, Ramallah, 18th July 2010; Interview conducted with Rami, Umm al-Shara'et, 15th August 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Interview conducted with Jalal, al Bireh, 5th August 2010

unaccounted for by a focus on the topographic alone, as discussion of the family makes clear.

#### A. The family

As both Muhammad and Ibrahim demonstrate, the movement of *services* and the back and forth of bodies, materials, money and ideas that they enable are often tied to (family) homes elsewhere. In Palestine, family is predominantly conceptualized and practiced as *'a'ila* (nuclear = father, mother and plural children) and *hamula* (extended or big family = countless cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews), but also extends to *qaraba* (closeness) and, as with a number of other Arab contexts, 'the vocabulary of kinship [is used] to establish social relationships and social worlds' (Johnson 2006: 77; see also Singerman 1996, Ghannem 2002). In Palestine, family has a very distinct domestic geography, as extended families often reside very close to one another<sup>16</sup>. Even though most people reside in nuclear family households, they are often surrounded by extended family members. Johnson (2006: 92-5), drawing on survey data specifically designed to investigate the persistence of such a 'kinship universe', suggests that 90% of people in the southern West Bank and 80% of people in Gaza live in apartments or attached dwellings that they share with extended family members. These numbers decrease to just over 50% in the central West Bank, where Ramallah is located. As such, families provide a very clear illustration of the ways in which intensive and extensive spatial relations are intertwined.

The normative context of strong extended family ties and extensive family cohabitation helps to explain both why prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> intifada many people working in Ramallah preferred to continue living among their extended family and commute, and why many Palestinians who have now moved to Ramallah still make weekly or biweekly trips to other parts of the West Bank. However, Johnson's statistics also point to the ways in which life in Ramallah has started to diverge from a norm of family cohabitation. Hilal (2010: 148) also remarks upon this difference:

Umm al-Shara'et was shaped through the migration of families and individuals seeking employment opportunities and relatively cheap accommodation, it was not formed through group migration. The geographical location of Umm al-Shara'et and its novel configuration were supplemented with different characteristics, creating a unique surrounding; the neighbourhood is free from kinship, collective memory filled with meaning, hierarchical family composition and obvious class structure. Alternatively, different forms of solidarity emerged. We could notice solidarity based on distant family ties surpassing the place and touching different sites.

Hilal's claim that the neighbourhood is free from kinship needs to be carefully interpreted. As he notes elsewhere, 'the number of families also increased [between 1997 and 2004] from 42% to 74% (compared with individuals living

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<sup>16</sup> The family as a more or less reiterative set of performances also has a distinct history in this context - see Harker 2012).

by themselves or groups of people living together)' (2010: 150). However, this is family as *a'ila*, which has become increasingly detached from family as *hamula*, the extended family. Moving away from place of birth has particularly impacted extended family relationships, as both Muhammad<sup>17</sup> and Ibrahim<sup>18</sup> noted.

While relationships between *a'ila* and *hamula* have changed for many residents of Umm al-Shara'et, moving to Ramallah does not constitute an absolute form of detachment from extended relations. Rather, as the back and forth of *services*, decisions about getting married and buying an apartment<sup>19</sup>, and daily telephone calls from a father in Hebron to remind a son in Umm al-Shara'et to observe the *Fajr* prayer<sup>20</sup> illustrate, intimate relations have become stretched over space and changed as they have done so. Family, at least for many migratory residents of Ramallah, has become topographically more extensive while becoming topologically less intensive.

This can have important consequences with regards to residents' ability to create viable lives in Umm al-Shara'et, as the Abu Ahmad family illustrates<sup>21</sup>. Luay grew up in a refugee camp in the Northern West Bank and met Haneen, who grew up in a city with a substantial Palestinian population in Israel, at university. After marriage, Haneen gave birth to a child while living with relatives in a large city outside Israel and Palestine. Shortly after this they returned to live in Umm al-Shara'et, after finding jobs in Ramallah and Jerusalem. They usually visit one set of parents approximately every two weeks<sup>22</sup>. While neither Luay nor Haneen enjoy seeing so little of their families, Haneen telephones her parents multiple times each day, and Luay has one immediate relative living in Ramallah, who is able to visit and help out.

Haneen's family also became a key resource in their efforts to continue to live in Umm al-Shara'et. Since Haneen has Israeli citizenship, her child is also entitled to citizenship, and more importantly, the monthly national insurance payment given to every child residing in Israel until the age of 18. However, their claim was initially rejected because the Israeli state said they were non-residents, a good example of the topological contortions Gregory (2004) describes which place Palestinian bodies outside Israel, even as they, and the spaces in which they live, are governed by (and thus included within) Israel. While deemed a non-resident, Haneen was simultaneously under what Luay described as 'citizenship investigation' by the Israeli state, because she didn't pay council tax in Israel, a payment that is used as a de facto indicator of residence. In order to claim national insurance for her child, Haneen therefore registered herself and her child as living at her parent's home address. The legal claim to be living with

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<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted with Muhammad, Umm al-Shara'et, 13th July 2010

<sup>18</sup> Interview conducted with Ibrahim, Umm al-Shara'et, 14th August 2010

<sup>19</sup> Interview conducted with Muhammad, Umm al-Shara'et, 13th July 2010

<sup>20</sup> Interview conducted with Tarek, Umm al-Shara'et, 5th August 2010. *Fajr* should be offered before sunrise.

<sup>21</sup> The following account is based on a series of conversations that were not recorded. Due to the circumstances, maintaining anonymity is particularly important, hence the deliberate omission of many specific details.

<sup>22</sup> Luay has a work permit that enables him to enter Jerusalem.

her parents positioned the body of Haneen and her child (but not Luay) in the topographic space of her parent's house 'in' Israel. This topography enabled Haneen to claim national insurance in one place while living in another, therefore folding Haneen's parent's house into Luay and Haneen's residence in Ramallah, and simultaneously undoing the topographical exception enacted the state of Israel. In this complex topographic-topological relation, it is precisely Haneen's family relations, an ordinary topology, which enabled their attempt to continue living in Umm a-Shara'et.

However, due to fears about the claim being checked by the Israeli state, or someone reporting their subterfuge, Luay and Haneen subsequently decided to move from Umm a-Shara'et to the contiguous neighbourhood of Kufr Aqab. This move involved considerable expense since their new flat in Kufr Aqab was unfurnished and therefore they had to buy large items including an oven and a washing machine. Crucially, however, despite being topographically contiguous with Ramallah, Kufr Aqab is considered to be within the ever expanding municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, and thus within Israel (Weizman 2007). This is despite the fact that it lies east of the Occupation Wall, and thus is largely separated from Jerusalem city centre. While this complex topography-topology enables the ongoing Israeli colonisation of Jerusalem, it also enables people who have West Bank IDs to live in Israel (at least for the purposes of council tax) while *at the same time* living in Ramallah. Schools in Kufr Aqab are funded by the Israeli state but teach the PA curriculum, and Kufr Aqab is said to be full of Jerusalemites. In such a context, the Abu Ahmad family are using the intersection of series of topographies (the Occupation Wall, the boundaries of Jerusalem) and topologies (the legal and social torsions that make Kufr Aqab both inside and outside Israel) to make a viable life that spans Ramallah and Jerusalem, in addition to connections they may have with other spaces.

This example again challenges the ways in which Ramallah is thought about as a bounded space. The material and emotional connections of many families in Umm al-Shara'et, point to a conceptualization that incorporates both topological and topographic relations that constitute a city whose boundaries are at once locatable yet indistinct (Jacobs and Cairns 2011). Within such a topographic-topological arrangement, topologies are vital for explaining the changing 'vertical' landscape of the city, and understanding complex urban and political change across the West Bank since the Oslo Accords. Whether by providing money for purchasing an apartment in the case of Muhammad, or enabling a legal claim of residents in the case of Haneen, the topologies of family are crucial resources for many migrants seeking to make viable lives 'in' Ramallah.

#### A. Conclusion

I have argued that while emerging accounts of verticality undoubtedly improve topographical renderings of political and urban space, they still risk ignoring what I have termed ordinary topologies, and consequently struggle to engage the complexity Amin & Graham (1997) invoke in their discussion of the multiplex city (see also Amin & Thrift 2002). In the case of Ramallah, an ordinary topological perspective offers a richer account of Palestinian space than the verticalities discussed in Weizman's analysis of what becomes a 'hollow land'. As

Gregory (2004) has demonstrated, it is vital to hold such topographies of Occupation in tension with various topological relations. However, even this approach gravitates towards the power of the Israeli Occupation (Allen 2011a), bypassing the less spectacular topologies of Palestinian life that I have focused on in this essay.

With regards to emerging work on verticality and volume, articulating urban and political life through ordinary topologies offers at least two opportunities. First, it moves beyond spectacular urbanisms to different empirical sites, such as smaller cities like Ramallah, and residential districts within those cities, such as Umm al-Shara'et, which have much to tell us about 'urban life itself' (Simone 2011). Second, such research foregrounds forms of verticality that are not necessarily politically suspect. Even as Ramallah's vertical growth is clearly linked to shrinking access to and control over territory due to the Israeli Occupation, the experiences of Palestinians living in apartments remained focused on the more ambiguous politics of living with and without others (both strangers and families) in urban space, as Muhammad's situation exemplifies.

With regards to recent work on topology, Allen (2011b: 318) challenges those working on such space-times to 'spell out what *difference* it makes to grasp them topologically' (emphasis in original). In this case, an ordinary topological perspective on Palestinian everyday life reveals a Ramallah beyond adjectives such as Bantustan, enclave and bubble (Taraki 2008a, 2008b, Abourahme 2009). It does not replace or displace such analyses. The carceral topography these terms point towards is an important aspect of both Ramallah's built form and many Palestinian experiences of living and working in the city. What the ordinary topologies of apartments, *services* and families foreground in addition to this, is what might be termed a living Palestine (Taraki 2006): the ways in which Ramallah has been constituted and constructed through the quotidian practices of Palestinians such as Muhammad, Ibrahim and Abu Ahmad family. This not only offers a better understanding of urban and political life (much of which is spent under Occupation) in this particular part of the West Bank, but also helps us to understand (and thus potentially support) the ways in which Palestinians are able to create viable urban political lives even under conditions that render those lives highly precarious.

More generally, the argument outlined in this paper pushes those with an interest in verticality beyond the task of creating more fully volumetric analyses, towards developing accounts that hold the topographical and topological in tension, and unpacking how particular intensive and extensive spatial-temporal relations do or do not intersect (see Pratt & Rosner 2012). Tracing ordinary topologies offers a fuller understanding of urban and political change, particularly the ways in which life is made viable in cities across the South where intensive relations are often vital to creating possibilities and potentials (Simone 2004b).

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