Alter-Nationality - 4 Aphorisms

Alter-Nationality - 4 Aphorisms is a title based on a talk and text that I was introduced to in 2015.[1] In *Alter-Rurality, 24 Aphorisms*, architect and professor Pieter Versteegh introduces his approach to challenge ways of looking at, thinking of and behaving in the rural.[2] He developed his thoughts as a cloud of aphorisms to make an attempt to knit a web of potentials for rurality as contemporary practice and wisdom and to challenge general rural perceptions from an urban perspective.

Versteegh's approach inspired me to revisit the term 'subcontracted nations' in a thought-provocative and playful manner. For now, I will call it 'alter-nationality'. We use the term 'alter-nation' in German and we have two etymological meanings for it: one is *der Wechsel*, meaning change, exchange, changing, switch, transition; the other is *die Abwechslung*, meaning variety, diversity, diversion and relief. In this attempt, I am not being nostalgic by visiting the Arab Development Society (ADS), an experimental model farm in the Jordan Valley, but I am rather interested in revisiting the potentials of something that started in the past and never came to a complete flourishing.

Arab Development Society
In 1945 a strategy was developed by Musa Alami[3] to improve lives in Palestinian villages with "the object of raising the social, economic and educational standards of Arab villages in Palestine."[4] The Arab League approved the plan "to strengthen the *fallah*, to rid them of debt and thereby save the lands from being lost to money-lenders and to fall into alien hands." A survey of 350 villages was conducted to define their needs in 1946–47. However, in 1948, the course of history in the region transformed the plans, leading to the need to not only "raise the standard of existing villages, but to create the very conditions of an ordered and settled life"[5] for 1.5 million refugees.

The ADS was founded as a vocational education centre and experimental model farm in Jericho, providing education to the Palestinian population after successfully digging for water in the Jordanian desert. Learning how to collectively farm the land and build a civil society was at the core of ADS. The incentive behind Alami's principles was the idea of a joint, collaborative, social action to transform Palestinian civil society. Alami jointly ran ADS with a board until his death in 1984. The educational vocational training centre that provided skills and education for several generations and thousands of Palestinians closed in the 1990s for

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[1] Green-Door, a Festival of Rural Architecture and Design, developed by Jo Lewis, http://www.greendoorwales.co.uk (last accessed 12 August 2017).

[2] "Rather, we may find new value for *repeasantation* by inscribing rurality as a prospective and innovative attitude and way of being into contemporary practices and wisdom. This is what 'repeasantation' may also be about. Can we 'seed' wisdom and 'labour' knowledge differently? Can we fertilise new grounds for human dwelling? Can we harvest new insights? In order to do so, we need to renew our understanding of the rural in order to build up representations of alter-rurality."
http://www.jointmaster.ch/file.cfm/document/afr2013f_dwell.pdf?contentid=2209, p. 8 (last accessed 12 August 2017).

[3] Social activist, lawyer, nationalist and politician (1897–1984). Alami founded an agricultural school and experimental farm in Jericho to provide training for the Palestinian refugee population. He acquired a concession of 5,000 acres (20 km^2) of desert from the Jordanian government. In 1945 he founded the Arab Development Society (ADS) to aid refugees in Jericho following the British withdrawal from Palestine. After he discovered water there he founded a large farm and school for refugee children. Alami raised funds for building villages for the refugees and founded an agricultural farm whose produce was exported. The farm was destroyed in the course of the Arab riots in Jericho against the British but with help from the World Bank and the Ford Foundation, Alami managed to rebuild it. According to David Gilmour, who interviewed Alami in February 1979, the farm and school were highly successful until the Six-Day War. Available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musa_Alami (last accessed 12 August 2017). Further reading: Geoffrey Warren Furlonge, *Palestine is My Country: the Story of Musa Alami,* (New York: Praeger,1969); David Ben Gurion, *My Talks with Arab Leaders* (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1972) and David Gilmour, *Dispossessed: The Ordeal of the Palestinians, 1917–1980* (London: Sphere Books, 1983) pp. 35–36. (David Gilmour interviewed Musa Alami in February 1979.)

[4] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953) p. 4.

[5] Ibid, p.12.

various reasons. ADS still exists[6] and remains as a dairy, date and fish farm, providing large parts of the West Bank with local products. Sixty-five people work on the farm and 21 families still live on the generous territory located next to the King Hussein Bridge in Jericho, West Bank, leading to Amman, Jordan.[7]

Using four aphorisms, I will make an attempt to introduce potential readings of the ADS in light of the 'subcontracted nations', altering ideas that "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[8] This 'horizontal comradeship' will be creatively explored in relation to the alter-nation, change and diversification.

4 Aphorisms
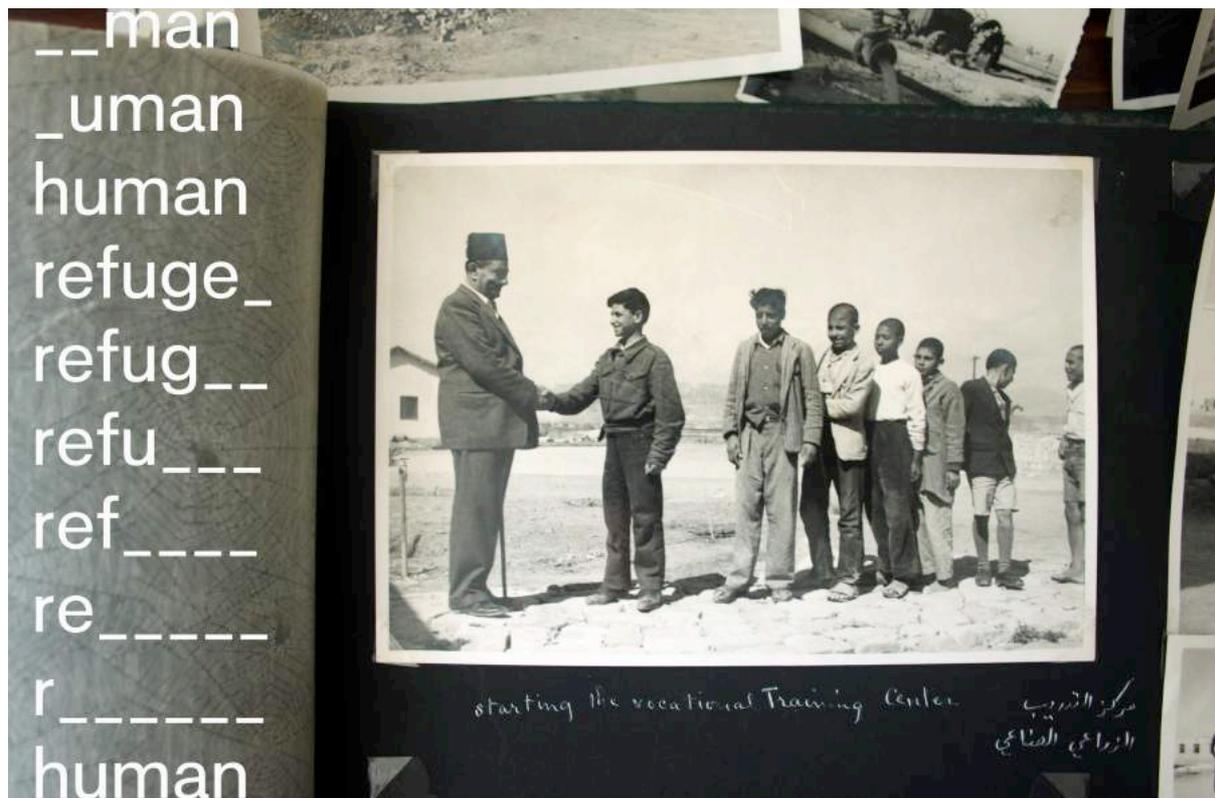
Image 1: From a photo album at Musa Alami's house at the ADS, Jericho, 2013.

1. "**Being a refugee is a temporary status, being a human is permanent. Humans are amazing**"

"Common Sans is a typeface that replaces the word *refugee* with the word *human*. Being a refugee is a temporary status, being a human is permanent. Humans are amazing. A stamp

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[6] https://www.facebook.com/Arab-Development-Society-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-263701797073592/ (last accessed 24 March 2019).
A research-based art project "Jericho-beyond the celestial and terrestrial" initiated by the Birzeit Museum 20011/12 led to an exploration of the city and surrounding of Jericho, a location in rapid transition. My artistic research led to the discovery of the ADS and a close engagement with employees as well as board members.
[7] Due to location, large parts of the ADS property fall onto Area C and are therefore unusable.
[8] See invitation to "Subcontracted Nation,"
http://www.qattanfoundation.org/sites/default/files/u2/subcontracted_nations_en_0.pdf (last accessed 24 September 2017).

on their passport should not let us believe otherwise."[9] The typeface was developed in 2015 as a response to the ongoing global migrant crisis.

The media reports that ADS was a great attempt to offer a solution to the refugee situation. "It was Musa's fate, as it was that of billions of other Palestinians, to be caught up in the titanic struggle between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism for control of Palestine. In fact, Al-Alami's greatest claim to fame and his ultimate fulfilment came in institutionalising help for thousands of the child victims of Israel's policy of 'ethnic cleansing'."[10] In another article, one finds an even more precise ascription of ADS: "The city [of Jericho] was under the rule of Jordan from 1949 until 1967; during that time the Palestinian nationalist Musa Alami founded an agricultural school and experimental farm there to provide training for the Palestinian refugee population."[11]

Indeed, ADS was founded previously under a different heading: a non-profit organisation with "the object of raising the social, economic and educational standards of the Arab villages in Palestine. Its purpose was to help increase the income of the cultivators (*fallaheen*) from their lands, by offering them the services of experts; improving the seed and stock: employing modern agricultural machinery, promoting new methods of farming; and by organising them into cooperative societies for the better planning of cultivation and for better marketing. It aimed to removing illiteracy from the villages, by opening schools for the children and night classes for the adults. […] It prepared a five-year plan of action for which a yearly fund of one million Palestine pounds […] was acquired."[12]
The newly established Arab League agreed in November 1945 to support ADS with an ongoing contribution, but besides Iraq, none of the five other member states contributed to this resolution.[13] The large-scale plans of ADS had to be altered due to insufficient funding. Land was bought for one model village after taking a survey of 350 villages. Ideas, such as sending boys and girls to the U.S. for a year of training, had to be dropped. Finally the Israeli invasion interfered with their plans and made the political circumstance the core developmental factor of Alami's vision. He focused from 1949 onwards on the idea of strengthening the Palestinian community based on current conditions.

Salim Tamari referred to possiblly unfair attacks of Alami's approach by the Palestinians in a talk in January 2012: "The ADS was a private initiative that became involved in the refugee employment and reconstruction amongst various other projects such as a cooperative movement led by Hasan Mustafa in Battir[14] and the UNRWA supported architectural project by Hassan Fathy of cheap mud adobe housing for the poor[15]. The ADS was part of the movement and was early on involved in the political struggle around the resettlement of refugees. Alami was probably unfairly accused of being part of the resettlement of refugee movement and not the movement for return. His project was attacked and burned by the Palestinians. The nature and kind of development projects represent movements foreseen by the elite on how to address poverty and economic development. They were circumvented by

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[9] http://www.commonsans.com/ (last accessed 24 September 2017).

[10] Andrew I. Killgore, "Musa Al-Alami: The Last Palestinian," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* November/December 1993, p. 49, http://www.washingtonreport.me/1993-november-december/musa-al-alami-the-last-palestinian.html (last accessed 12 August 2017)

[11] https://www.webcitation.org/5kx6t0Qc8 (last accessed 24 September 2017).

[12] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 4.

[13] "Representatives from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Yemen meet in Cairo to establish on 22 March 1945 the Arab League, a regional organization of Arab states. Formed to foster economic growth in the region, resolve disputes between its members, and coordinate political aims, members of the Arab League formed a council, with each state receiving one vote. When the State of Israel was created in 1948, the league countries jointly attacked but were repulsed by the Israelis. Two years later, Arab League nations signed a mutual defense treaty. Fifteen more Arab nations eventually joined the organization, which established a common market in 1965." http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/arab-league-formed (last accessed 24 September 2017).

[14] http://www.preparingforpeace.org/pdfpapers/s2-JawadBotmeh.pdf (last accessed 24 September 2017).

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hassan_Fathy (last accessed 24 September 2017).

the events that started in the mid-1970s, as radical cooperative movements such as medical and agricultural relief committees, which the Palestinians left developed in the middle of the occupation as alternative survival strategies."[16]

2. Who owns the land?

Visiting the ADS structure, one will find a board of experts advising its administration. Other than in cooperative ideas of ownership, there has existed from the beginning a divide of ownership and decision-making between landowners and workers. According to Salim Tamari, the dent that ADS made was problematic since it did not gain prototype status partly due to elitism against the project. As son of the former mayor of Jerusalem, Musa Alami was a notable person in the Palestinian national movement. His engagement was a seemingly radical reconstruction of relationship building from a person to the land. According to contemporary Palestinian reading, this experience failed partly due to controversy surrounding Alami, who was well integrated in Ottoman-Syrian society and studied law before World War I. He initially settled in Damascus and joined the Prince Faisal Movement early. He was related to the Husseini and the Hashemite families through marriage.

The ADS was never meant to run collectively nor under cooperative ownership. Upon a complete development of the land and the creation of an industrial centre, Alami envisaged trained ADS graduates to settle on land provided by the Society. Alami's radical educational strategies at the time focused on basic skill training to help the Palestinian future.
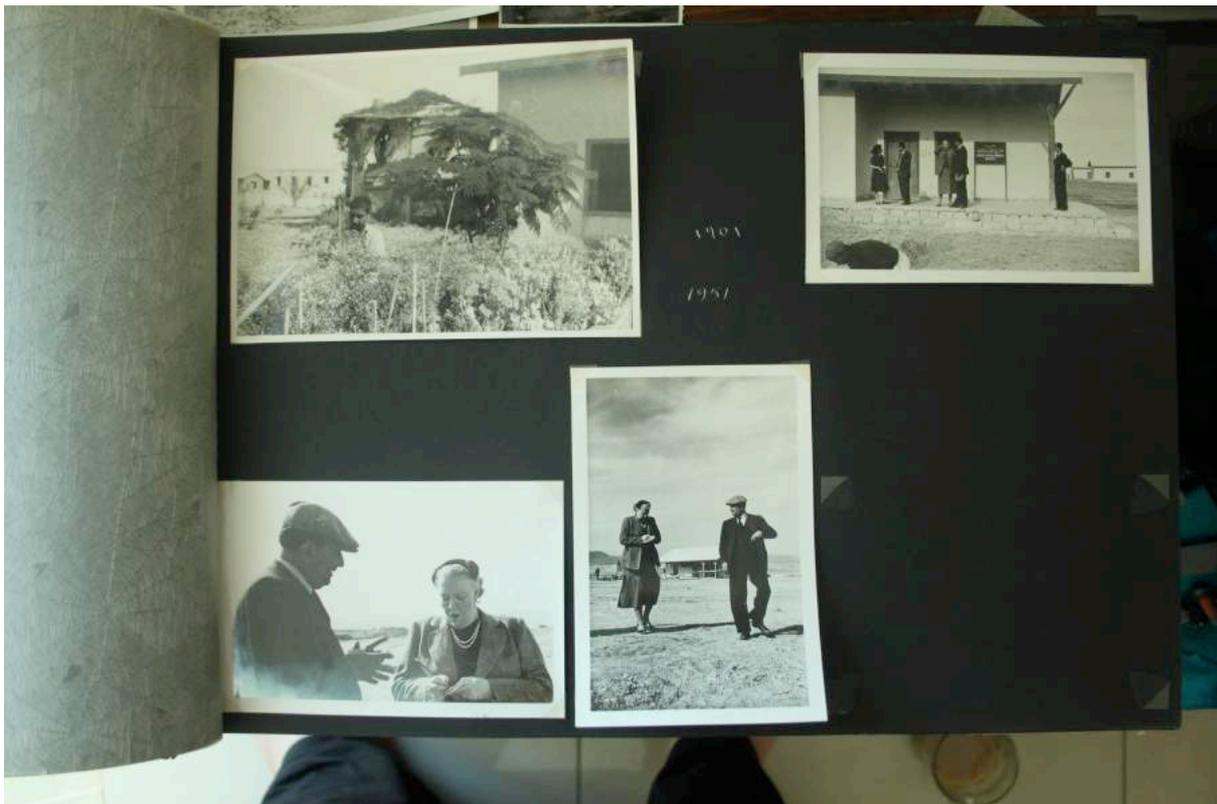
Image 2: From a photo album at Musa Alami's house at the ADS, Jericho, 2013.

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[16] On 5 January 2013, a talk was held at the International Art Academy Palestine in Ramallah by Salim Tamari, Director of the Institute of Palestine Studies and an adjunct professor at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, and Susanne Bosch, artist, as part of the Cities Exhibition curated by Yazid Anani and initiated by Vera Tamari.

3. "Be careful with each other, so we can be dangerous together."

Six weeks after admission

Image 3: From the publication *The Arab Development Society*, (2nd ed., October 1953, The Commercial Press, Jerusalem).

Beginning in 1952, the ADS became an educational setting for hundreds of boys, ages 11–19. Their common threads were being children or young adult war victims, orphans or displaced and unconsidered for international aid relief. Alami called them "a large juvenile lost generation and a danger to the moral and spiritual climate of all the Arab countries"[17] that needed taking care of.

Looking at the images, one can see boys marching, swimming, learning, working the land, eating, working on machines, exercising; always in groups, never alone. There were few women on the campus back then, giving a sense of a masculine educational setting.

In an ADS report from 1953, their daily routine was described as full of activities from 5am to 8pm: physical training and sports drills, as well as 1 1/2 hours of gardening or other workshop and agriculture activities highlight their rigorous education.

"The intention of the Society is not to produce white-collared young men seeking office jobs and lazing about in the towns. Our intention is to produce cultivators (*fallaheen*), who are better equipped with agricultural knowledge and experience, who know about machine farming and new methods of cultivation and who are also literate and educated so that they may follow up their studies in later life. As to craftsman and artisans, the country is now practically devoid of all skilled labour and artisans, and mechanics. Great numbers of the refugee artisans have migrated to different parts of the Arab world and elsewhere, in search for a living. It is highly desirable and imperative for the country that as many as possible of such people be trained. But we wish them to be better artisans than those of the past. We want to give them education, to train them to discipline into co-ordinated life; in short to make the men with an all-round knowledge who can use their hands and their brains to the best

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[17] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 23.

advantage."[18]

The pedagogy of this type can be found in many nation-building contexts such as Germany during its nationalistic period, later in the East German Democratic Republic (GDR) as well as Israel's educational approach like the Biramschule or Reali Schools founded by Arthur Biram.[19] In interviews, I learned that the ADS hired teachers with a German approach to pedagogy at the time. The German approach to physical education contrasted against the more individual-centred Scandinavian or American approach, nurturing strength, emphasising the intimate connection between gymnastics (disciplined training), self-defence and national self-determination. Biram speaks of moulding "an accomplished individual who is ready to serve the community that grants his or her freedom, and, ultimately, identity."[20] A sense of belonging to a group where members intimately connected was cultivated in an atmosphere of constant danger of being attacked by hostile Jews (or hostile Arabs for the newly establishing Israeli community). It was important to demonstrate strength and bravery in this environment. Physical confrontation was transferred from the individual to the group (as representative of their nation) and provided opportunities to exhibit the mutual responsibility of group members.

The ADS educational setting responded also to young peoples' separation from their families and parents and offered the creation of an alternative community. As such, the ADS pedagogy responded to a modern, secular education, including traditional content. Religious practice was left to the individuals.

"Unless so trained [in democratic methods], the refugee youth will surely become the prey of dark forces awaiting precisely such human material for their purposes. A substantial number of young boys and girls, trained [in the Centre] to live and think democratically and imbued with the spirit of service and co-operation, will act as a leaven to the hundreds of thousands of their generation."[21]

Besides the approach to be 'fit for the purpose' of building a new Palestinian society, I would like to shed light on denying the individual of a collective existence. Author Daniel Schreiber wrote about his GDR upbringing in a socialist ideology: "[…] Violence against children was structurally anchored in the GDR culture. And these structures—the jointly called morning allegiance to the state, the flag salutes to which the pupils had to sit in rank, the uniforms, the strategies of ideological indoctrination, and the collective leisure time largely detached from the families—all these structures had much to do with the system that preceded the GDR […] As a state, the GDR had an obsession with its 'image', not unlike its predecessor. It defined how the state was to appear outwards and it made every individual responsible for that […] In essence, this system was based on a targeted distribution of anxiety: the fear of not being like the others and the fear of losing even the few rights that one had, if not representing the desired opinion. The GDR state shared the fundamental problem of all major political systems that would assume that they would transform a horrible past into a bright future. Absurdly, they make sure that this horrible past does not leave us."[22] It is hard to say what impact this educational system had on the war-traumatised Palestinian boys, often coming from tribal rural peasant families. From today's perspective, I wonder about the impact of this structure of discipline and collective being.

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[18] Ibid, p. 25.
[19] "The Biramschule in Context: The 'German' Influence on Jewish Body Culture in Mandate Palestine" by Ofer Ashkenazi in *Deutsche(s) in Palästina und Israel, Alltag, Kultur, Politik*, Reihe: Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte (i. A. des Minerva Instituts für deutsche Geschichte der Universität Tel Aviv), ed. Jose Brunner, Bd. 41, 2013, Wallstein Verlag, pp. 17–39.
[20] Ibid.
[21] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 30.
[22] http://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2017-02-daniel-schreiber-zuhause-kindheit-schwul-mecklenburg-vorpommern/seite-2 (last accessed 20 October 2017).

Social scientist and cultural theoretician Klaus Theweleit looked at the-body-and-gender history of fascism in the 1970s. A fascistic image of the male implies the domination of the female parts in oneself. Female parts would be defined as soft, tender, passionate, vibrant and erotic feelings that need to be disciplined through ongoing collective physical exercise. Part of this domination is the use of a clean, disciplined and structured location, a kind of 'empty place' with no messy elements. Theweleit concludes that this type of nation-building is an attempt to mould masculine emotionality into a large external monument such as a nation state.[23] Alami visioned not only "to raise the standard of existing villages, but to create the very conditions of an ordered and settled life"[24] for refugees. If one could speak to him today, I would ask him about his sense of the individual to the collective from his aristocratic background and the pedagogical culture of those days.

Image 4: From a photo album taken at Musa Alami's house at the ADS, Jericho, 2012. Copyright Fredrik Schjander, Norway.

4. Deceptive harmlessness: Choose your tactic that supports your strategy

"Politics is not solely, or even primarily, about reasoned thinking and rational choices; it's an affair of fantasy and desire. People are rarely moved to action, support or even consent by realistic proposals; they are motivated by dreams of what could be."[25]

In his 1953 report, Alami was already highly criticising the experts' conclusions[26] that the majority of the Palestinian population would need to resettle possibly thousands of miles

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[23] Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien,* (Verlag Roter Stern / Stroemfeld Frankfurt am Main Basel, 1977).

[24] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 12.

[25] Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: New Press, 2007)

away from Palestine, in foreign countries such as the Sinai Peninsula, Syria, Iraq and Libya. He proposed to instead settle 250,000 disenfranchised Palestinians in the Jordan Valley.[27] He predicted in 1953 that "the Jordan Valley is certain to become in the next few years one of the most densely populated agricultural areas in this part of the Middle East because of the extremely rich potentials of the soil, the semi-tropical climate and its suitability as an out-of-season producing area."[28]

Looking at Alami's foresight, he could justify educating hundreds of modern agriculturists trained to work with the local climate and soil, animal and dairy farming and mechanics for construction, repair and servicing these large new communities. He also calculated the costs of settling these communities up in the valley, as this option was far cheaper than any other considered step. He argued against the experts claiming this was impossible or too expensive to achieve.

Alami was proven right. The Jordan Valley nowadays is a largely agri-industrial site as well as a location for large-scale urban settlements providing work and home—but for hundreds of Israeli families and companies. "Over 60 per cent of the West Bank is considered Area C, where Israel retains near exclusive control, including over law enforcement, planning and construction. 150,000 (approx.) Palestinians live in Area C in 542 communities, 281 of which are located entirely or mostly (50% or more of their built up area) in Area C. Some 325,000 Israeli settlers live in some 135 settlements and about 100 outposts in Area C, in contravention of international law; the settlements' municipal area (the area available for their expansion) is nine times larger than their current built-up area (B'Tselem). 70% of Area C is included within the boundaries of the regional councils of Israeli settlements (as distinct from the municipal boundaries) and therefore off-limits for Palestinian use and development. Palestinian construction in 29% of Area C is heavily restricted; less than 1% of Area C has been planned for Palestinian development. 5,000 Palestinians reside in 38 communities located in parts of Area C that have been designated as 'firing zones' for military training, increasing their vulnerabilities and risk of displacement. Over 70% of communities located entirely or mostly in Area C are not connected to the water network and rely on tankered water at vastly increased cost; water consumption in some of these communities is as low as 20 litres per capita per day, one-fifth of the WHO's recommendation. 24% of the Palestinian population in Area C are food insecure compared to 17% in the remainder of the West Bank."[29]

Edward Said commented on the Oslo strategy of designing fragmented areas A, B and C as a form of Israeli matrix of control, with no easy transfer between areas. Robert Serry, former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, explains in 2012 why Area C and the Jordan Valley are fundamental to the future of the Palestinian state. "Because it is the missing parts in Palestinian state-building. Palestinian institutions are sufficiently developed to support the functioning of a modern state. At the same time it is reaching its physical limits. The state-building project only took place on 40% of the West Bank; the rest still being Area C. . . . Cities are growing and bursting out and are in natural need to expand into the landscape, e.g. for relocating industries to an industrial park outside."

In 2017, Israel and Jordan began building a free trade zone in the Ta'anakh area in the Beit Shean Valley on the Jordanian site "to compete with China in cheap production projecting to

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[26] Experts of the Mandatory Palestine Administration as well as the United Nations; The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 58.
[27] "We estimate that when made cultivable, and using more methods of mixing agricultural farming, these lands by intensive cultivation and a certain amount of agriculture industry but economically absorbed about 200,000 persons if small industries also created they could absorb more like 250,000 persons." The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 59.
[28] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 50.
[29] http://www.itcoop-jer.org/sites/default/files/ocha_opt_area_c_factsheet_January_2013_english.pdf (last accessed 20 October 2017).

provide 13,000 jobs for Jordanians and Israelis."[30]

"The advantages for the two sides (mainly on our [the Israeli] side) of such a free trade zone are obvious: free low of workers, businessmen, goods, and raw materials and all sorts of benefits and regulatory concessions, such as an exemption from corporate taxation, customs duties, purchase taxes, VAT, income tax, building registration fees, land taxes, etc. The location is also ideal—approximately halfway between Haifa Port and Amman, not far from Irbid, the second largest city in Jordan. This facilitates easy access to Europe and the U.S. from the Israeli side, and to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Far East from the Jordanian side. The two greatest benefits, however, lie elsewhere. The first is that the factories will be able to obtain Jordanian, Israel and neutral (made in Jordan Gateway) certificates of origin. This will enable the Jordanians to conceal, if only slightly, their cooperation with the Zionist entity, and enable Israeli companies to export to countries previously uninterested in their output. The second great advantage is what is referred to in politically correct language as an 'attractive labour force'—in other words, Jordanian labour is cheaper than cheap. The Jordanian worker does not benefit from the labour laws that Israel has (minimum wage and so forth), and is paid something like three dinars (NIS 16) a day. Even if the Israeli enterprise multiples his wages to the huge sum of NIS 1,000 a month, it is very worthwhile for the employer, whether Israeli or foreign. It is also worthwhile for Jordan, by the way—[un]employment there is sky high."[31]

Alami saw the potential of the Jordan Valley as site for a new Palestinian community in 1953 and openly criticised international experts in his report for their resistance and interception. "We proved that the land is cultivable and fertile in spite of the salt that is in it. We proved that settling a family in the Jordan Valley costs less than officially estimated and at a standard much higher than in any Arab village in most of the Middle East countries."[32]

Image 5: The Jordan Valley. Image found at the ADS, Jericho, 2012.

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[30] http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-israel-jordan-begin-building-free-trade-zone-1001172104 (last accessed 20October 2017).
[31] Ibid.
[32] The Arab Development Society, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem: The Commercial Press, October 1953), p. 62.