



BRILL

ASIAN DIASPORIC VISUAL CULTURES AND THE AMERICAS

3 (2017) 322-343



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Decolonial {R}evolution: Petrocracy and Geological Modernity from Detroit to Palestine and Back

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Abstract

This article explores what Grace Lee Boggs called {r}evolution—the horizontal construction of autonomous power from below by multiple subjects—in the context of anthropogenic climate change. This is a decolonial uprising from Haiti to Detroit against petrocracy, or the mutually reinforcing rule of fossil fuels and monotheism. I pursue a decolonial reading of the Holocene/Anthropocene geological epochs through an anarchaeological, visual, and discourse analysis of the excavations at Tell-es-Sultan, asserted to be the site of the biblical Jericho, to reconsider the “human.” The article interacts present-day, on-site conditions at the Palestinian refugee camp ‘Ein-as-Sultan with Kathleen Kenyon’s famous excavations (1952–1958), her discoveries and the museology associated with them, and the geopolitical and religious claims made for the site. I conclude by analyzing how “Detroit” is becoming the floating name for the non-continuous spaces of the displaced world, where displacement, drought, and counterinsurgency intermingle to deadly effect.

Keywords

Decolonial – revolution – climate change – Detroit – Palestine – anarchaeology – petrocracy – Anthropocene

Manifest

To decolonize is revolutionary. For Frantz Fanon, decolonizing creates a tabula rasa, erasing not just what it is to be colonized but what it is to be a

colonizer.¹ More than that, it ends whiteness by ending its claim to dominion over the Earth.² The historical moment of post-war decolonization in which Fanon wrote (1945–1994) did not fully accomplish that erasure. Decoloniality remains the horizon. Even as Africa was formally decolonized, the great acceleration in fossil fuel consumption was beginning, leading to the present Earth System crisis. This crisis has been produced by the intersection of racial capitalism with petrocracy, the mutually reinforcing rule of fossil fuels and monotheism. Learning from the experience of Detroit, activists James and Grace Lee Boggs accordingly modified their goal from a revolution that might capture state power to {r}evolution, by which they meant a transformative politics from below, containing an “evolution” in changed human relationships to each other, to non-human life, and to habitat away from petrocracy toward sustainable social relations.³ They specified that any revolutionary possibility “begins with a series of illuminations (...) A revolutionary period is one in which the only exit is a revolution (...) It initiates a new plateau, a new threshold on which human beings can continue to develop.”⁴ The earth system crisis known as the Anthropocene offers only such an exit, the {r}evolution. In turn, this entails a “political and moral development required to cope with the present stage of technological development” and to engage with the contradiction “between different concepts of what a human being is and how a human being should live.”⁵ To engage in {r}evolution today is to decolonize petrocracy. That work takes place at multiple levels, not least at that of the imagination. It is always in accord with the black radical tradition delineated by Cedric Robinson as “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality.”⁶ To preserve being, rather than accumulate capital, or reverence for some Supreme Being, implies

1 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (1961; repr., New York: Grove Press, 2000), 1.

2 W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk” (1920), repr., *The Monthly Review* 55 no. 6 (November 2003).

3 This piece develops the arguments in my essay “Below the Water: Black Lives Matter and Revolutionary Time,” *e-flux journal* 79 (February 2017), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94164/below-the-water-black-lives-matter-and-revolutionary-time>.

4 James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 18–19.

5 *Ibid.*, 19–20.

6 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 171.

specific kinds of struggle and consciousness that take on renewed urgency in this moment of systemic crisis.

Niches

What is the evolution in this {r}evolution? Too often, evolution is taken to mean the “survival of the fittest” as if it was a competition between—rather than within—species. This nineteenth-century social Darwinism is more about death than it is about life, retaining as it does the spectre of racism and racial hierarchy. In contemporary biology, what has become known as niche construction theory holds that organisms “construct important components of their local environment” themselves, from beaver dams to earthworm burrows and wasp nests.⁷ Significant aspects of inheritance are therefore “extragenetic,” or transmitted from one generation to another. Species do not simply “adapt” (as Darwin had it), they actively construct their environment.⁸ For non-human species, such construction is often mutual, like the mutual aid described by Kropotkin.⁹ Niche construction theory is derived from the work of the anti-racist biologist Richard Lewontin, who demonstrated that traditional “race” groupings are a minor part of genetic variability and criticized sociobiology.

While the genetics are highly specialized, niche construction theory has also been used in archaeology to explain human settlement, and most recently as a means of interpreting the Anthropocene as co-extensive with the Holocene. That is to say, as soon as humans began making “niches” by building permanent settlements and domesticating plants and animals, they had modified the planet. Such niche construction is not in and of itself destructive as long as it remains local. A reminder here that in August 2016, scientists in the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Stratigraphic Society named the crisis in the Earth System the Anthropocene, or the new human epoch. It is a measure of time, observable geologically as it is happening. Call it geological modernity. The new epoch is said to begin around 1950, when radioactive fallout from atomic weapons tests became measureable worldwide.¹⁰

7 F. John Odling-Smee, Kevin N. Laland, and Marcus W. Feldman, “Niche Construction,” *The American Naturalist* 147, no. 4 (April 1996): 641–648.

8 Ibid.

9 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (1902; repr., Boston: Extending Horizons, 1955).

10 See Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2016).

The preceding Holocene, the “new recent” epoch that began only 12,000 years ago, is now said to be complete. The geological “deep time,” without apparent beginning or end, utterly independent of human action, is over. From the perspective of measurable, stratigraphic indicators in the geological record, it may make sense to begin the Anthropocene very recently. From the perspective of collective being, it may not. The detonation of atomic weapons is both a new epoch and the culmination of long histories. As such, the Anthropocene demands not just new histories but new means of thinking about human and non-human history as such.

In the spirit of that endeavour, I will frame geological modernity from two specific “niches” at either end of the time span that is at once all of recorded human history and a geological instant. In what is now Palestine, humans began urban settlement at a site known as Tell-es-Sultan, close to Jericho. Its archaeology, museology, and the present-day colonization of the site interact in ways that both sustain petrocracy as the dominant regime in the Middle East and open new ways to imagine its decolonization. At the other end of petrocratic colonialism is Detroit, once the Motor City, now abandoned by the state and the site of decolonial micropolitics. Far from being random choices, Detroit and Palestine interact intensively in the present crisis, as we shall see, creating the archaeology of the traces of geological modernity. It is archaeological in its focus on “*displacements and transformations*.”¹¹ It becomes anarchaeology, after the model of Jacques Derrida’s “anarchive.”¹² That is, it is an anarchist archaeology: not archaeology as a discipline, but as a dismantling of totalizing systems. “Anarchism” here is less a specific form of political organizing than *an-arche*, being against power, meaning not just those in power now but all hierarchy, as Jacques Rancière has shown.¹³ Such hierarchy sustains white supremacy as the hierarchy within the human. “Anarchization” is required to make it possible to think of humans as a totality, a step that has yet to be achieved. It is not intended to refine disciplinary knowledges within the academy, but to disrupt the system of racial capitalism that has produced petrocracy. It is by extension “anarchronic,” interacting across geological

11 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (1969; repr., New York: Pantheon, 1972), 3–4.

12 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10. See also Allen Feldman, *Archives of the Invisible: Of War, Photopolitics, and Dead Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

13 Jacques Rancière, “Against an Ebbing Tide: An Interview with Jacques Rancière,” in *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, ed. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, 238–251 (London: Continuum, 2011).

modernity.¹⁴ Where archaeology is concerned with separating and delineating traces of past strata, an archaeology is intrigued by their intermixing. It delineates uneven temporalities by means of impurities, the interregnum, the interstitial, and the intersectional.

Petrocracy

The totalizing “logical” system that has demolished the balance of geological modernity is petrocracy, the mutually reinforcing rule of fossil fuels and monotheism. Petrocracy is first an autocratic state apparatus defined for and by the exploitation of fossil fuels, whose lineage can be traced back through the world-destroying projects of racial capitalism. Its presence today is self-evident: from Putin’s gas-driven regime in Russia to Rex Tillerson—the former CEO of Exxon-Mobil, now the Secretary of State in the United States—and, of course, the entire Middle East and Gulf region oil regimes. Petrocracy is palpable to its ruled populations worldwide in terms of unbreathable air. In London, air pollution levels for 2017 were exceeded by January 6, to say nothing of global cities like New Delhi and Beijing. There is a second, implicit meaning in petrocracy. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus says to Peter: “You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church” (*Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam*). The “rock” is more than fossil fuel, it is the formation of monotheism(s) in its support, whether Russian Orthodox, evangelical American Protestants, or certain modalities of Islam.

Petrocracy is what geographer Kathleen McKittrick has called a “plantation future,” or “a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city.”¹⁵ Fossil fuel capitalism is the future predicated by racial capitalism in the plantation period. Decolonial thinking, McKittrick insists, demands a new focus on life, rather than systems. It undoes what she calls “plantation logic,” such as racial hierarchies or “mythical-biological Darwinian” aspirations to the “fittest” that continue to support petrocratic rule.¹⁶ Decolonial {r}evolution has good reason to be “illogical,” or more exactly anti-“logical,” where logic means the violent extraction of value and energy from sugar to oil, sanctified by monotheism. The sugar

14 These terms are adapted from Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 93, 99.

15 Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Platform for Criticism* 17, no. 3 (November 2013): 2.

16 *Ibid.*, 10.

plantation was astonishingly destructive to its local habitat, just as extractive industries are today: the cane exhausted the soil, and the plantation owners used deforestation as a weapon against the enslaved to deny them hiding places. Those excluded from petrocracy are its dangerous classes—the vagrants and loiterers of globalization, named by Frantz Fanon as *les damnés de la terre* (“the damned of the earth”).¹⁷ In French, the term has an explicit Christian overtone, as the damned suffer in hell. Petrocracy has always been theological, from the colonial era—justified by chastisement of the heathen—to today’s alleged clash of civilizations. The racialized, the refugee, the Indigenous, and the marginalized are among those so damned, together with those who continue to be colonized. To produce {r}evolution is to decolonize petrocracy using anarchaeological analysis in order to produce niches in which it may be possible to continue to live.

Decolonizing

It may seem contradictory that such an archaeology would criticize the definition of the Anthropocene. It does so not in the bad faith of climate denial but as part of the {r}evolutionary project of creating change that might end these conditions. For the philosopher Clive Hamilton, who writes so extensively on the subject in conjunction with the Anthropocene Working Group that he appears to be their unofficial spokesperson, the Anthropocene is a “rupture” and can only be thought within “a systems way of thinking, with special focus on the non-linear dynamics of a system,” requiring a computer-generated model of the effects of petrocracy on the biosphere.¹⁸ Understanding the Anthropocene means working with “the coevolution of the geosphere and the biosphere, and now the techno-anthroposphere.”¹⁹ But as Bonneuil and Fressoz have pointed out, such a “systemic view of the planet as a self-regulated system [is] the legacy of a world-view born from the Second World War and the Cold War.”²⁰ In keeping with the “closed world” of such models, no “human” exists outside this techno-anthroposphere, which has the effect of flattening the causes of the

17 Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (1961; repr., Paris: La Découverte, 2002), commonly translated into English as *The Wretched of the Earth*. The title was adopted from the original French lyrics of “The Internationale” (1871).

18 Clive Hamilton, “The Anthropocene as Rupture,” *The Anthropocene Review* 3, no. 2 (2016): 94.

19 *Ibid.*, 95.

20 Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 58.

very rupture he is describing.²¹ By contrast, South African scholar Lesley Green describes how “[f]olding human history into itself, the technosphere extracts from sedimented political arrangements the labor of the bodies of *dévaluées*: bodies of color, bodies of women, bodies of the dispossessed.”²² In her view, to restore reciprocity will require the “decolonization of the technosphere.” Those inside this technosphere are not equivalent to “the” human but are the beneficiaries of exploited labour (both human and non-human), energy monopolies, and extractive processes. The decisive step of the required {r}evolution against petrocracy is this decolonization, such that the planet is no longer flattened into a set of exploitable resources.

An anachaeology of the Anthropocene can repurpose its existing archaeology to decolonial effect. Archaeologists Bruce Smith and Melinda Zeder have argued that the Anthropocene should be dated as beginning “when evidence for significant human capacity for ecosystem engineering or niche construction behaviors first appear in the archeological record on a global scale.”²³ That would site the Anthropocene about 11,700 BP (Before the Present), the date at which the Holocene is conventionally said to begin. The Holocene was revolutionary and so is the Anthropocene, whether they began simultaneously (in human terms) or with the tiniest of geological lags (11,650 years). What British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon termed “the revolutionary step” at the very beginning of the Holocene was “the discovery that wild grains could be cultivated (...) and wild animals herded.”²⁴ In this case, {r}evolution was settlement, benefiting from settled climate conditions of the Holocene, favourable to domestic agriculture. It enabled permanent human settlement for the first time, beginning the modification of multiple ecosystems into human habitats. The beginning of the long process of niche construction is not quantitative, it is qualitative.²⁵ Niche construction theory situates organisms and their habitats in dialectical relation. As philosopher Zev Trachtenberg puts it, “it is possible

21 See Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

22 Lesley Green, “The Changing of the Gods of Reason: Cecil John Rhodes, Karoo Fracking, and the Decolonizing of the Anthropocene,” *e-flux journal* 65 (May–August 2015): n.p., <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/the-changing-of-the-gods-of-reason>. All websites referenced here were accessed in April 2017.

23 Bruce D. Smith and Melinda A. Zeder, “The Onset of the Anthropocene,” *Anthropocene* 4 (2013): 8–13.

24 Kathleen Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho: The Results of the Jericho Excavations 1952–1956* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 29.

25 Zev Trachtenberg, “The Onset of the Anthropocene,” review of “The Onset of the Anthropocene” by Bruce D. Smith and Melinda A. Zeder, *Inhabiting the Anthropocene*

to view the human involvement in nature *dialectically*—as a process unfolding over time, stemming from the interactions between components which are thereby mutually transformed.”²⁶ That does not obviate the reality that this process has now altered the very basis of the Earth system. It argues against the short-term rhetoric of “crisis” in favor of a similarly long-term transformative response. In short, humans have made their own world but only partially under circumstances of their choosing. This dialectic can form a part of Grace Lee Boggs’ concept of “dialectical humanism” while also implying a non-human agency.²⁷ For Smith and Zeder, domestication is the evolutionary “lever” from which all other human manipulation of ecosystems is ultimately derived. This, then, is the anarchaeological, or supplemental, transformation that enables {r}evolution in a set of adaptive “niches” rather than as a total planetary monopoly.²⁸

Anarchaeology

There are “niches” where the Holocene and the Anthropocene necessarily interact and make themselves visible, making that overlap comprehensible and subject to interpretation. To do this work anarchaeologically, let’s look at the site of Kenyon’s best-known excavation at Tell es-Sultan, just outside modern Jericho. It is situated at the heart of petrocratic monotheism, at once a key site in the Holocene, a critical space of Anthropocene catastrophe, and an invented tradition within monotheism. Palestine is here, as elsewhere, exemplary of colonial praxis, rather than exceptional. It is a key “niche” of human development within both human and geological timeframes. Kenyon’s excavation took place from 1952 to 1958, when geologists say the Anthropocene began. This stratigraphically layered location (then in Jordan, now in the West Bank) contains a foundational Holocene settlement, making it clear that there has

(blog), 22 September 2014, <https://inhabitingtheanthropocene.com/2014/09/22/the-onset-of-the-anthropocene>.

26 Zev Trachtenberg, “Niche Construction,” review of “Niche Construction” by F. John Odling-Smee, Kevin N. Laland, and Marcus W. Feldman, *Inhabiting the Anthropocene* (blog), 7 July 2014, <https://inhabitingtheanthropocene.com/2014/07/07/niche-construction>.

27 For the history of “dialectical humanism,” see the set of references on the Boggs Center website at http://www.boggscenter.org/html/dialectical_humanism.html.

28 Because he believes in totality, Hamilton is dismissive of the archaeological approach, which he believes serves only to “deflate” the Anthropocene. He faults Smith and Zeder for speaking of ecosystems in the plural rather than his preferred singular Earth system (see “The Anthropocene As Rupture,” 98).

been urban civilization throughout the Holocene/Anthropocene. It is also a (falsely) presumed biblical location of key importance to present-day politics and the site of past and present Palestinian refugee camps. In short, it is not clear exactly what, when, or even where Tell es-Sultan is, when seen in decolonial perspective (fig. 1).

The tell (a mound indicating past human settlement) outside Jericho had long been identified as the site of the ancient city, but attention intensified in the twentieth century. German excavations uncovered structures and walls between 1907 and 1910.²⁹ Stereoscopic views distributed by Underwood and Underwood circulated around the English-speaking Atlantic world soon afterwards, as part of a set depicting sites where biblical events were held to have taken place. The viewer was instructed to look “through” the three-dimensional illusion and feel them as “the very realities which they represent.”³⁰ Thereby,



FIGURE 1 *A section of the excavation at Tell es-Sultan.*
PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR.

29 Edgar de Knevet, “The German Excavations at Jericho,” *The Expository Times* 21 no. 8 (1910): 353–356.

30 Jesse L. Hurlbut and Charles Foster Kent, *Palestine Through the Stereoscope* (Meadville, PA: Keystone View Company, 1914), xiv–xvi.

the land, said to be the “Fifth Gospel,” becomes the means by which to “make the Bible *real* to us,” meaning white Euro-Americans.³¹ A high view of the “Plain of the Jordan” was taken from what were said to be ruins of an aqueduct, described as “the ruins of ancient Jericho” (fig. 2).³² A Palestinian in a *burnous* and a child wearing a fez were posed on the rocks to give the scene some sense of scale. Viewed in the stereoscope, the plain recedes away sharply, with the river Jordan providing a third “layer” of depth in the background. The stereoscope card declares: “Vivid pictures of the past soar before our mental vision as we look out over this site of once proud cities.” What is photographed evokes a past known through the Bible, whose reality is proven by the material possibility of depicting the geographic space. It is (analogue) augmented reality—a photographed landscape augmented by biblical text and the faith necessary to connect them as colonial ideology.

The next slide in the set shows the ruins themselves, excavated by the German expedition, showing buildings and what is said to be the “city wall”



FIGURE 2 *Underwood & Underwood / Keystone View Company, “The Plain of the River Jordan—Southeast from the Ruins of Ancient Jericho,” circa 1890s*
PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT ON STEREO CARD, GELATIN SILVER, 9 CM × 18 CM.
STEREOSCOPIC SLIDE FROM THE SERIES *TRAVELING IN THE HOLY LAND THROUGH THE STEREOSCOPE* BY JESSE HURLBUT.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

demolished by Joshua. Two framing figures at different heights provide a sense of scale on either side of a trench that recedes dramatically into the three-dimensional space, framed by the steep mountains behind. In his guide to the stereoscopic views, Charles Foster Kent described them as the “veritable memorials of the ancient city.” He hoped that it would be possible to see the plain “once more watered and cultivated as the garden of the Lord and a new city arising in place of old wastes.”³³ The stereoscope anticipates and enacts the language of Zionism, when it claims Israel as the biblical legacy of the Jews, when it renames the West Bank as Judaea and Sumaria in imitation of the Bible, or when it refers to making the desert bloom as if it were a miracle. In fact, archaeologists have found water-trapping devices in the desert dating from the Bronze Age, showing that humans have known how to construct survival in this region for millennia—just add water.

The British archaeologist John Garstang extensively excavated the site from 1930 to 1936 in order to “prove” that it was the location of the biblical Jericho and its Joshua-demolished walls, in keeping with the Christianity of his funder Sir Charles Marston, a British industrialist.³⁴ Garstang declared that the walls on the site dated from circa 1400 BCE, and were toppled by Joshua. Not only was he wrong in his dating by over a millennium, but also there was no significant settlement at that time at all.³⁵ Nonetheless, archaeology of this kind contributed to the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 as the “historic” homeland of the Jews (and them alone). Using carbon dating, Kenyon’s subsequent expedition discovered that Tell es-Sultan was remarkably ancient, ~~which shows~~ that there is no material evidence at the site for the biblical account. Its wall and tower, seemingly confirming the Bible story, in fact date to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN) Period A (11,500–10,000 BP). Note the progressive ideology in the term “pre-pottery” that presumes pottery to be evidence of superior culture. Such elisions and assumptions abound. In academic accounts of the site, the gap between the conclusion of Kenyon’s excavation in 1958 and its resumption in 1997 by an Italian-Palestinian team is coyly alluded to as “due to political troubles,” meaning the 1967 occupation of the West Bank by Israel.³⁶

33 Hurlbut and Kent, *Palestine Through the Stereoscope*, 146.

34 John Garstang and J.B.E. Garstang, *The Story of Jericho*, 2nd ed. (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1948).

35 Felicity Cobbing, “John Garstang’s Excavation at Jericho: A Cautionary Tale,” *Strata: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 27 (2009): 63–77.

36 Lorenzo Nigro, “Tell es-Sultan 2015: A Pilot Project for Archaeology in Palestine,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79, no. 1 (2016): 4–5.

The Kenyon expedition dug using vertical stratigraphy, based on the geological method for analyzing rock formation. She cut five-by-five-foot holes to indicate how the site changed over time. The process depended on “exact excavation and recording of stratification.” However, layers needed to be analyzed relative to each other to identify “intrusions,” such as when debris fell from one layer to another. To render this process practicable, the sides of the square were kept very “clean,” meaning straight and vertical. They were recorded with photographs and rendered into drawings. This work required a high degree of trained supervision over the local workforce who did the actual digging. Surveyors, registrars, draughtsmen, photographers, and an anthropologist who worked on the skeletons all transformed the “facts” into a “final result.”³⁷ Nonetheless, this stratigraphy cannot tell you much about how people lived in any given era because it emphasized recording change over time. It prioritizes systems over people, as does the concept of the Earth system, but in contrast to the study of niche construction.

The site was bordered on the north side by a Palestinian refugee camp, known as ‘Ein as Sultan, where about 19,000 people had set up after the 1948 Nakba.³⁸ Lacking basic services of any kind, the Palestinians dug into the slope of the tell to make bricks. In so doing they uncovered intact tombs from the Middle Bronze Age. One of them came to Kenyon with a scarab they had discovered to attract her attention. Given that the refugees came from Jaffa and Gaza, as well as the countryside, it may be some among them had archaeological experience. Or perhaps they guessed that there might be valuable objects in the tell. At the least, they created a job market for themselves in a place where there was no other opportunity. Kenyon hired Palestinians to dig for about half what a British servant would have been paid at the time. She dug in the backyards and houses of the camp, where she claimed people were “complaisant to the complete blocking of their streets.”³⁹ Be that as it may, her photographs show the Palestinian workers deeply engaged with the excavation. In one shot, three Palestinians carefully extract a storage jar that still retains its stopper from the ground in the Middle Bronze Age site within the camp. In

37 Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho*, 34–36.

38 Details on the camp come from the “Ein as Sultan Camp Profile” (2012) by the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (http://vprofile.arij.org/jericho/pdfs/vprofile/%27Ein%20as%20Sultan_En_FINAL.pdf) and “Ein el-Sultan Camp” (2015) by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/ein_el-sultan_refugee_camp.pdf).

39 Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho*, 47–48. Wages were 2 British shillings a week, rising to 2 shillings, 6 pence for boys, 3–5 shillings for men (Kenyon, 41).

a striking moment—not discussed by Kenyon—a Palestinian stands contemplating a Bronze Age skeleton at his feet.

Certainly Tell es-Sultan is astonishing. It reveals a sophisticated agrarian society, capable of substantial architecture and engaged in vivid artwork, long before the celebrated civilizations of ancient Babylon and Egypt had begun. When I saw her photographs depicting a room with traces of rush matting, I had an odd moment of recognition. My parents had such rush mats in the 1970s and when you lifted them to clean, those traces were clearly visible. One of the most striking discoveries on the site was a series of portrait skulls, as they are known (fig. 3). These are human skulls embellished with plaster, and eyes made from cowrie shells to create recognizable portraits of people—meaning

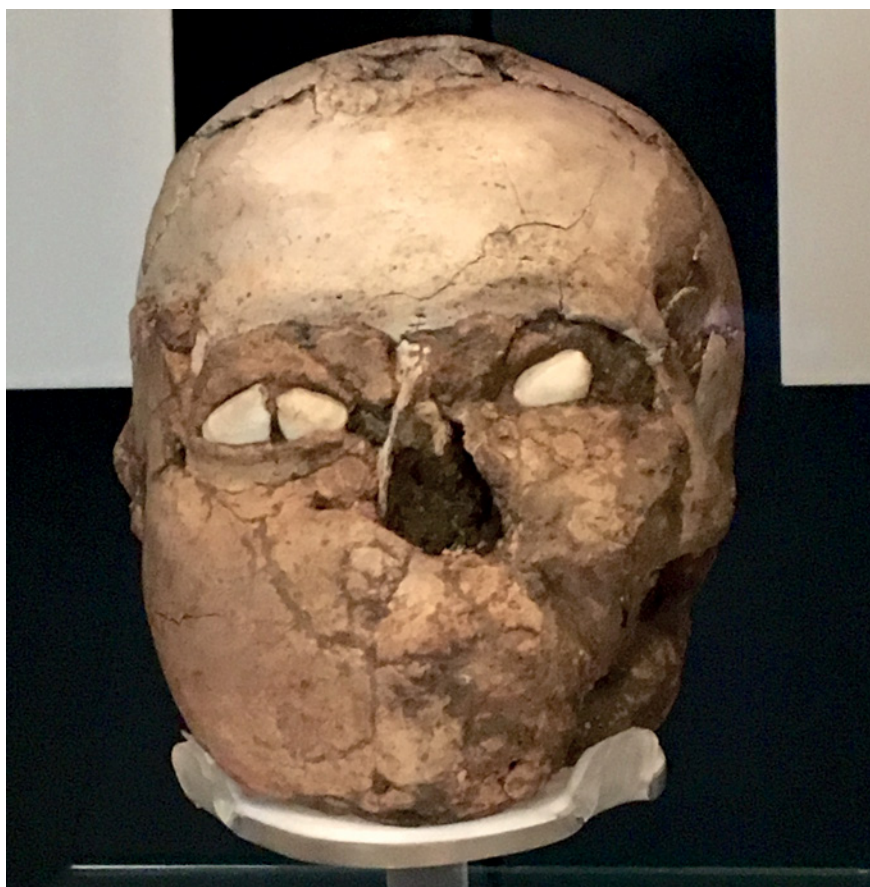


FIGURE 3 *Portrait skull known as The Jericho Skull, circa 8200–7500 BC, plastered human skull, displayed in the British Museum in October 2016.*

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR.

that it is clear they are people, specific people at that. Amongst the first realistic artworks that survive, they were entirely unknown to me prior to visiting the site. No survey art history text that I have seen includes this work, as it surely should. Instead, it is somewhat disparagingly termed as an “ancestor cult,” as if future archaeologists should find the heads at Mount Rushmore and take them to be evidence of a primitive and nascent culture, to say nothing of the Abrahamic religions of monotheism.

What do we call these people and the area where they lived? While archaeologists tend to refer to the region in the early period as the Levant, they do not hesitate to use the name Israelite. But who were these recognizable humans? Pre-World War II archaeologists called them Canaanites, following the biblical term. Not only is the specific area designated by Canaan unclear, it intersects with the so-called curse of Ham, father of Canaan. In the Bible, God condemned Ham for seeing his father’s nakedness. In the era of colonial slavery, this account was used to justify slavery by identifying Africans as the displaced and wandering descendants of Ham. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Canaanite has gone out of fashion as a name for the early people of the region. Kenyon calls the area of her work Palestine. Are they not, then, Palestinians? What does that mean? In the 2010 US Census, white people were defined as “the original peoples of Europe and the Middle East.” Who was more originary than these Palestinians, even if they are not the same as the Palestinians today? In the fantasmatic order of the nation-state, first possession gives the right to self-determination. Except where it does not, I would assert, which is almost always. Using the formula of imperial possession derived from the Roman law known as *terra nullius* (“nothing land”), Indigenous peoples are not counted as the first owners because they do not work the land. While we cannot be sure how the Palestinians at Tell es-Sultan cultivated the land—whether as a commons or in some form of hierarchy—work it they clearly did, and over long periods of time.

What appears once the fogs of imperial “law” are dispelled is the colonial hierarchy of the human. Hegel dismissed those who were to become the victims of nineteenth-century imperialism as being outside history, not quite human.⁴⁰ While the Marxists turned Hegel’s dialectic on its head, this part sometimes remained standing. Such peoples can have no right of self-determination because there is no “self” that history can recognize. It is a rhetorical sleight-of-hand that has had and continues to have profound consequences for *les damnés de la terre*. The damnation, like that of Canaan, is to non-possession of the self, whether as an individual or as a people.

40 Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 73–74.

The objects Kenyon discovered are far from invisible. One of the tombs she excavated is currently on display in recreated form in the British Museum, where the Palestinian contribution is not mentioned (fig. 4). A photograph of the tell throws 'Ein as Sultan into dark shade, while the exposed archaeological



FIGURE 4 *Middle Bronze Age tomb at Tell es-Sultan excavated by Kathleen Kenyon and reconstructed in the British Museum.*

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR.

site is in bright sunshine. No mention is made of the fact that most of Kenyon's discoveries are in Amman, Jordan. Without contextual information the displays are impossible to understand, leading the crowds at the British Museum to rush past on their way to the Egyptian rooms—unless we can explain them clearly from the archaeological point of view. What if the first urban civilization—not just in the Middle East but also in the world—was called Palestinian, and visibly displayed as such in a museum that attracted close to seven million visitors in 2015? “Palestine” would start to have a different set of values and meanings from its present abject state.

That is why the biblical statement that Judea and Samaria were “given” to the Israelites by God remains so important. The sacred time of monotheism creates an augmented indexicality of signs in the present-day “holyscape” (the landscape of what for some is the Holy Land) and events described in the Old and New Testaments.⁴¹ Present-day Israel occupies this space as a modern settler colonialism, creating an optic that displaces the Palestinians of Tell es-Sultan, past and present. Jericho is a hinge for that optic. There is a city *where* the Bible says there was one, only not *when* it says. So that will have to do. 380,000 people a year visit Tell es-Sultan to see what they think are the ruins of Jericho. Some Christian historians continue to make the case that they are.⁴² Indeed, sacred time is literally indexed across Palestine. Near Tell es-Sultan, a road sign indicates “Lot’s Wife,” meaning that a nearby column of rock is in fact the petrified body of the unlucky woman in the biblical story. Such signs, in English only, are clearly aimed at religious tourists who want to see a one-to-one correlation between what they see and what is written in the Bible. Sacred time is still colonial here, in that by seeing the territory as inscribed according to the biblical narrative, the claim that the West Bank can be called Judea and Samaria becomes indexical.

So much remains invisible due to this colonial gaze. An urban civilization fell here circa 2350 BCE and settlement did not return till circa 1900 BCE. Human domination of the Earth is not given, and once lost it may be hard to regain. Again, Kenyon interpreted the large wall on the site as a defensive structure (if not Joshua’s walls) because Anthropocene minds see war everywhere. Later archaeologists have pointed out that the wall didn’t go all the way around

41 See W.J.T. Mitchell, “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 193–223.

42 Bryant G. Wood, “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,” *Associates for Biblical Research*, 1 May 2008, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>.

the city and so it cannot be defensive. They proposed instead that it was built to protect against flooding from the nearby *wadi*.⁴³ Even then, the water got in sometimes, as layers of silt reveal. Human history seems very brief here, a window between threatened floods. While there is unlikely to be flooding at Jericho, Israel-Palestine is at considerable risk for coastal flooding due to a rise in sea level, which will lead to fresh water shortages. Palestinians living in the West Bank are already deprived of water, having access on average to around half the World Health Organization's minimum of 100 litres per day.⁴⁴ 'Ein as Sultan, the refugee camp on site, is a little better off, with access to 135 litres per day when there is water, but suffers severe water shortage in the summer (in comparison, US residents average 375 litres per day). It will not flood at 'Ein as Sultan now, because the area is in persistent drought due to climate change. Temperatures in the region are rising faster even than global averages, with summer temperatures reaching 129°F (53.9°C) in Kuwait and Iraq in 2016.⁴⁵

Around 3,500 Palestinians still live in the camp without access to sewage services, a resident physician, or dentist. Only 25 per cent of children attend school past the elementary level. Tell es-Sultan and 'Ein as Sultan fold the Anthropocene into the Holocene and vice versa, only for the archaeological and geopolitical realities alike to be erased in the glare of colonial reality. While modern Jericho is designated Area A, meaning that it is under the Palestinian National Authority, 'Ein as Sultan and the road to Jericho are Area C, meaning they are under Israeli military control. The camp is in Palestine but not of it. Where, then, is it? It is in the displaced, damned, and disavowed colonial present that Anthropocene petrocracy is busy building. As such, it is connected to other such locations, as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are well aware. In the Naqab (known in Israel as the Negev) desert, the IDF built a pretend Palestinian city as an "Urban Warfare Training Center," where they do training exercises. It is called Detroit.⁴⁶ It is a model of how to control autonomous resistance,

43 O. Bar-Yosef, "The Walls of Jericho: An Alternative Interpretation," *Current Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (1986): 157–162.

44 World Bank, "Report No. 47657-GZ: West Bank and Gaza Assessment of Restrictions on Palestinian Water Sector Development" (Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2009), v. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/775491468139782240/text/476570SR0P11511nsReport18Apr200911.txt>.

45 J. Lelieveld, P. Hadjinicolaou, and E. Kostopoulou, et al., "Climate Change and Impacts in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East," *Climatic Change* 114, nos. 3–4 (2012): 667–687, doi: 10.1007/s10584-012-0418-4.

46 See Josef Koudelka, *The Wall: Israeli and Palestinian Landscapes* (New York: Aperture, 2013), n.p. The image is visible at <http://pro.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2TYRYDX7YF2P>, which specifies that the camp is also known as al-Baladyia.

just as the IDF has in the past used theorists Deleuze and Guattari to think about nomadic counterinsurgency—the answer is prosaic: you go through the wall in pursuit of people, not through the door.

“Detroit” is one of the floating names for the non-continuous spaces of the displaced world, where displacement, drought, and counterinsurgency intermingle to deadly effect. “Detroit” is a formally demarcated space with hard and soft borders marked by earlier resistance or revolt that is experiencing degradation of the environment and service provision (water, electricity, sewage, light, roads, etc.). In the actual city of Detroit, where there is more abandoned land than in all of San Francisco, the overwhelmingly African American residents refer to the city limit as the “border,” recognizing that they are not quite in the United States. Close by is the city of Flint, Michigan, which has become notorious for its lead-poisoned water. The US Army also conducted counterinsurgency training exercises in Flint during June 2015, thinking that its abandoned and deteriorated urban environment creates an effective parallel to Iraq or Afghanistan. Helicopters and explosions shook residents, while buildings suffered damage from rotor wash in nearby Port Huron.⁴⁷

Burning

The effect of the Anthropocene is what the Moroccan artist Yto Barrada has called “the drive to leave.”⁴⁸ Barrada began her career as a political scientist researching checkpoints in the West Bank, where she found photography to be the best tool available. In 2000, she produced *Le Projet de Détroit*, a set of photographs of social life in Tangier, Morocco. It includes an aerial view of a street, in which a child carries a model three-masted sailing ship, perhaps even a slave ship. Spain is nine miles (14.5 kilometres) away across *le détroit* (“the Strait”), where so many Moroccans have died that Barrada calls it a cemetery. *Détroit* also has the archaic meaning of “despair” or “distress” in French

See also David Levi-Strauss, “Shooting The Holy Land,” https://www.goodreads.com/author_blog_posts/10204739-shooting-the-holy-land. Israeli artist Amir Yatziv made a video project about the camp called “Detroit” in 2009, documented at <http://www.amiryatziv.com/detroit.html>.

47 Ron Fonger, “Army Calls Ceasefire on Military Exercises that Rattled Flint,” (11 June 2015), http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2015/06/military_exercises_over_in_fli.html.

48 Yto Barrada, “Artist Project / A Life Full of Holes,” *Cabinet* 16 (Winter 2004–2005): n.p., <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/16/barrada.php>.

(compare in English “in dire straits”),⁴⁹ a despair made real because the border is sealed and it is so hard to cross. Strikingly the terms are also parallel in Arabic: *dayq* (strait) and *mutadayeq* (distress). Moroccans refer to migration as “burning,” because local papers are burned (*h’reg/he burned*) once Europe has been reached. Many of these workers without papers will end up in the “plastic sea” of El Ejido in Spain, where thousands of migrants work for a pittance in plastic greenhouses growing vegetables using micro-irrigation techniques developed in Israel.⁵⁰ Despite this, and a desalination plant, what amounts to Europe’s vegetable factory is draining the local aquifers. “Detroit” is, then, a colonized space narrowly but rigidly separated from the fantasy of better life, producing despair and death. And it is burning. Barrada’s Detroit project reminds us that Detroit/Détoit, present-day site of {r}evolutionary decolonial thought, was itself founded as a French colony on land that contained burial mounds from the Indigenous Hopewell culture of the Woodland period (circa 3000 BP). It burns regularly, as seemingly intractable arson plagues already diminished neighborhoods.⁵¹

In 2011, “he burned” took on an altogether different meaning. Tunisia rose up when Mohammed Bou’azizi, a fruit seller, burned himself after being insulted by police. Later that year, Bilal Berreni, a French graffiti artist of Tunisian descent known as Zoo Project, went to Tunis to make a series of works depicting the martyrs of the revolution and migrants at a camp called Couacha, near the Libyan border.⁵² In 2013, consistent with his goal to create revolutionary art, Bilal made a second visit to Detroit. His father said that for Zoo Project, Detroit “represented the failure of capitalism and believed that from that chaos something can be born.”⁵³ He went to explore the graffiti in the abandoned housing projects on Detroit’s east side. He got into a game of dice with some young

49 Littré cites Marmontel: “*Les détroits de l’adversité*,” <https://www.littre.org/definition/detroit>.

50 “Food as Geopolitical Subjugation: Welcome to Plastic City, Almeria!” *Naturphilosophie*, 29 April 2015, <http://www.naturphilosophie.co.uk/food-as-geopolitical-subjugation-welcome-to-plastic-city-almeria>.

51 Joel Kurth, “Detroit Pays High Price for Arson Onslaught,” *Detroit News*, 18 February 2015, <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/special-reports/2015/02/18/arson-fires-detroit-cost/22596529>.

52 “En Tunisie, Zoo Project dessine les visages de la révolution,” *Le Monde*, 6 March 2011, http://www.lemonde.fr/week-end/article/2011/06/03/en-tunisie-zoo-project-dessine-les-visages-de-la-revolution_1530378_1477893.html.

53 Brian Boucher, “French Street Artist’s 19-Year-Old Killer Sentenced to 60 Years,” *Artnet*, 8 January 2016, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/french-street-artist-killer-sentenced-404036>.

local people, who robbed and killed him for fifty dollars. Bilal's body remained unidentified for months. Bilal Berreni was right—"Detroit" is both the strait of {r}evolution and of despair. His case reminds me of the psychopathologies of colonialism identified by Fanon. It burns. The rebellion is ongoing. Can it become {r}evolution?

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