SERVICING EVERYDAY LIFE

[Ayyam al-Balad] was an easy life, not hard like today’s. There was no electricity. Water was free. Farmers used to give people vegetables and fruits.

ABU SAID, REFUGEE FROM HAMMAMA, RAFAH, 12 JUNE 1999

We used to bring water from [wells]. We filled water in jars and put them on our heads. Every three women went together, or a woman alone. Water was different from now where you can use the tap, or light the lamp; it was different in the past.

IM ‘AMIIR, REFUGEE FROM YIBNA KHAN YUNIS, 15 JUNE 1999

In 1943, two histories of Gaza were published, both written by civil servants. The first was by ‘Arif al-‘Arif, a Jerusalem-born Mandate official who was a district officer in a number of locales, including Gaza. Tarikh Ghazza (The History of Gaza), was one of his many publications. The second history, Tarikh Ghazza: Naqd wa-Tahlil (The History of Gaza: Critique and Analysis), was written as a rebuttal to parts of al-‘Arif’s book. The author, Hilmi Abu Sha’ban, was certainly known in Gaza, but he was not a historical figure like al-‘Arif. Rather, Abu Sha’ban, who was a Gaza native and from a prominent local family, was a municipal clerk and a regular contributor to Palestine’s newspapers.1 Abu Sha’ban took issue with many parts of al-‘Arif’s account, seeming to suggest that al-‘Arif’s outsider perspective on Gaza hindered his ability to accurately represent it.
He prefaced his book by explaining why he felt compelled to write his critique:

Since this book is about the city in which I was born and under whose skies I grew up, and, desirous of the commitment that its greatest citizens have shown for preserving its history, I embarked on writing my notes about this book and criticizing some of the information in it—about which the author did not succeed in obtaining the truth. His excuse for this is clear, as he could not collect everything about the history of Gaza.2

Indicating that al-‘Arif’s efforts to “collect” the truths of Gaza’s history were “irreproachable,” even if his conclusions were not, Abu Sha’ban offered what he hoped was a “positive and constructive” criticism.

Abu Sha’ban criticized al-‘Arif for relying too much on “what he heard from people” and for letting his biases influence his history. Even as Abu Sha’ban criticized al-‘Arif for producing a located and partial history, in contrast to the objective and accurate account that he sought to offer, it seems clear that the problem with al-‘Arif’s version was not that he was located, but where he was located. Because he was not Gazan and interacted with the Gazans only as a government official, al-‘Arif misinterpreted “Gazan character,” which he described as “nervous and quick to anger.” Abu Sha’ban suggested that the source of this misinterpretation was al-‘Arif’s limited contact with the people of Gaza: “He did not mingle with all the people of Gaza, rather by reason of his position he knew a portion of them—those who had injustices to present to the authority, rights to demand, problems to solve, or needs to have met. What applies to someone in need, as it is said, does not apply to the rest of the Gazans.”3 Abu Sha’ban, a Gaza native who worked in local, not national, government, suggested throughout his commentary that he knew Gaza in a way that al-‘Arif never could.

The significance Abu Sha’ban attached to the difference of locality—both of person and position—highlights the importance of perspective in the formation of governing relations. Perspective both provides an analytic hook for making claims to and about government—demanding better services, contesting restrictions—and gives rise to particular senses of place. As Donna Haraway reminds us, all knowledge is situated, coming from “somewhere in particular.”4 By attending to these locations and to the “embodied
objectivities” they represent, it becomes possible to see how contestations among a multiplicity of partial visions help give shape to a shared experience of place. People’s perspectives are obviously derived in part through their social, political, and economic locations, and they are made robust by the details of everyday life.

Intimate connections with people and place are forged in significant part through regular practices of living, such as the gathering of water, the traveling through the landscape, the communicating across its space. It is these practices and the services which aided them that are my interest here. My focus is on the quotidian formations of place that emerge out of the everyday practices of government services.\textsuperscript{5} If crisis services were distinguished by their exceptionality, everyday services were marked precisely by their mundane quality. It was in the repeated enactment of these mundane services that place took shape. Services such as utilities, roads, and transportation helped shape the pathways of people’s lives, influencing daily routines, determining trajectories of movement. The similar, but not identical, use of such services by many people underscores both networks of connection and recognition that are forged in part in service use and the spaces for creativity and contestation that exist in these unremarkable experiences.\textsuperscript{6}

\textit{Jurisdiction, Locality, and Everyday Services}

For government, one expression of these contests over location was the persistent debates over jurisdiction. Questions about which branch of government should provide which services are part of any government. In Gaza these questions were complicated by the difficult conditions pertaining in the place and the lack of stability that characterized governmental practice. In the British Mandate, these struggles often took place between central government, municipalities, and the local public. In the Egyptian Administration, with the presence of international aid organizations and the United Nations, the jurisdictional questions became even more complicated. While efforts to avoid responsibility were often couched in terms of economy, and efforts to claim authority over service were often described as procedural imperatives, it is clear that the stakes of jurisdiction were tremendous.

Contests over jurisdiction also further illuminate the layers of government that Gazans experienced. During both the Mandate and the Administration,
government was highly centralized, and yet local bodies and personnel—
municipalities, village councils, mukhtars—were the sites of government with
which many Gazans had the most contact. In the Mandate, as an early report
on British administration in Palestine put it, local councils were to “serve as
the collective mouthpiece of the people towards the District Governors, and
as the means for carrying out the general requirements of the Administra-
tion.” To balance these two roles, Mandate officials attempted to remain
aloof from the details of municipal conflict, while at the same time exercising
control over the output of municipal councils. The central government re-
served for itself the right to oversee all decisions of local bodies as well as the
prerogative not to intervene.

Gazans frequently petitioned government with complaints about munici-
palities, generally to no avail. For example, in 1946 several Khan Yunis families
appealed to the chief secretary, asking for more representation on the local
elections committee: “We have one representative out of seven on the com-
mittee and he is ill. We are at a loss as to whom we should address our griev-
ance. Should we address ourselves to the Secretary of State or to His Majesty
the King or to God alone? We pray that an enquiry may be instituted to ensure
free and unbiased elections.” These families charged the mayor and the
district officer with conspiring against them and obstructing their ability to
contest elections. The government’s response, in which it declined to inter-
vene in the domain of municipal authority, was typical during the Mandate. In
the files I examined, I found no instance in which government intervened on
behalf of petitioning locals against a local council.

During the Administration, government was, if anything, even more cen-
tralized. Local councils and their employees were fully integrated into the
strip-wide governing structure. Being located more firmly within this struc-
ture, municipalities became a site for conflict, not only between government
and local communities or within those communities, but also within govern-
ment itself. Such conflict was evident in a 1960 complaint sent by the qa‘ima-
qam (administrative officer) to the governor-general about the Deir Belah
administrative governor. In this complaint, the qa‘imaqam, Said Abu Sharkh,
reminded the governor-general that “the councils are under your supervision”
and that “the purpose of these administrative organizations was to have each
area work according to its jurisdiction to benefit the public good in terms of

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quiet and order.” Abu Sharkh charged the Deir Belah governor with interfering in the council’s work and with forcing council members and employees to spend the town’s money without going through proper procedure. He detailed several specific complaints and asked that the governor-general “ensure proper behavior and appropriate jurisdiction division.”

If the space of municipal autonomy was somewhat decreased, though, the presence of UNRWA added another layer to the governing dynamic and offered another space for contestation over government action. So too did the legislative council that was established in the second half of Egyptian rule in Gaza. The legislative council, initially headed by the governor-general and later turned over to more fully Palestinian representation (Haidar Abdul Shafi was its chair), was empowered to debate and propose legislation, though the governor-general retained veto power. UNRWA, while making no claim to govern Gaza, was as important an administrative actor as the

Figure 8. Report of Deir Belah village council meeting. Source: Israel State Archives.
Administration. The apparently fixed division of jurisdiction—UNRWA responsible for services to refugees, the Administration to natives—was in fact not without challenge on the ground. The Administration often sought UNRWA funding for public projects undertaken outside of refugee camps, arguing that those projects would benefit refugees. A great deal of the correspondence between the two parties is taken up with such questions: who would pay for (or pay for what percentage of) what.13

This multiplicity in the faces of government as well as the conflicts over jurisdiction was part of a governing dynamic in which it was difficult to get things done and often impossible to plan ahead. Even as these uncertainties created numerous problems, they were also productive for a practice of tactical government that depended on a dynamic of abeyance. Jurisdictional tussles demanded that attention be paid, not to the issue of government’s legitimacy, but to the question of which part of government should be providing which services. The way in which layered government worked in Gaza, where the central government was both reluctant to be involved in local matters and unwilling to devolve significant powers to these bodies, meant that the location of authority was not always obvious to service recipients. Even under these conditions, there were cracks in this abeyance, moments people connected problems with service provision precisely to fundamental questions about the character of government, its relation to the place and population, and its legitimacy. These moments underscore the tenuous nature of governing practices in Gaza. Even where they worked, it was never assured that they would continue to do so.

**Water Services and the Boundaries of Government**

In the previous chapter I described services that were taken on by government because of a crisis of need, reflecting an inability of the population to care for themselves independently. Water, on the other hand, came to be a service through the transformation of relations of people and government to place. Whereas in crisis servicing the presumption was always that if the crisis abated so would the services, everyday services were intended to be permanent, even if in practice they rarely were. There was a shift in definitions of place and its capacities such that water distribution came to be perceived as necessarily lying within government’s jurisdiction. This trans-
formation was also connected to changes in notions of government and service themselves. As rationalization and standardization became increasingly important to government, social mechanisms for collecting and distributing water appeared increasingly inadequate.

For much of the Mandate, rural areas lay beyond the reach of water and other utility services. The practices that sustained life in a nonserviced environment were both a means of coping with difficult conditions and a productive mechanism in shaping social life. Sitting in his cramped and crowded living room in the Shati refugee camp, Abu Ayub described to me what life was like in Yibna before 1948. In the absence of government services, water gathering was women’s work:

There was no street cleaning, no water pipes, no services like this in the balad [village]. . . . People used to go to the grove where there was a pump for water. . . . A woman would put a crock on her head bring water in it. . . . They’d go to fill it in the morning and in the afternoon they fill it again. All of the water was brought on the head in the balad. There was no water at home, except in cities. . . . The life in the balad was like this. It was different from now. Now there are people who clean the streets, there is a water tap, and the water is checked.∞∂

This account of a rural life pursued mostly without government-provided services demonstrates the difference of life in the villages both from city living and from post-1948 conditions.∞∑ People who lived in larger towns recalled the expansion of services into these areas over the course of the Mandate.

On a visit to the Jabalya refugee camp in the north of the Gaza Strip I spoke with a woman about utilities in Majdal (now Ashkelon). She recalled, “Electricity entered the town a short time before we left al-Majdal. At first they [the municipality] put in lampposts . . . which ran with kerosene. There was a man who lit them every day at sunset. A short time before we left al-Majdal, they brought electricity to the houses.” Then I asked about water services: “Were there faucets in the houses?” “In our time,” she told me, “there were. At first they brought water to the municipal wells, and then I remember that the water reached the houses. They laid water pipes to the houses.”∞∏ Service expansion in steps seems to have been typical of Gaza-area towns.

In people’s recollections, this transformation to servicing does not appear
as a simple account of progress. People were cognizant of the ways in which services can produce new obligations and constraints even as they can make life easier. These new relations contributed to shaping the “character” of the place of Gaza both by reconfiguring understandings about the capacity of that place (its natural resources and its population) and by transforming that population’s relationship with those resources. Place and public were formed in “minor” government practices such as water provision in several ways: in part by cohering differently located people into a horizontal group of service recipients; in part by concentrating resources in governmental hands, thereby delimiting both present and future distribution; and in part by distinguishing as well as connecting national and local government, thereby linking place not only to its public, but to its local government.∞π

PROVISIONAL HISTORIES: NEED, DEMAND, AND DEVELOPMENT

The dueling local histories of Hilmi Abu Sha’ban and ‘Arif al-‘Arif both discuss Gaza’s water services. Their sometimes seemingly minor disagreements about the facts of this service in Gaza City divulge an even more fundamental disagreement about the stakes of government-provided water. Both Abu Sha’ban and al-‘Arif indicate that there had long since been a municipal well that supplied water for some of the people of the city. Further, they agreed that the Mandate was a period of considerable expansion in government water service. They concur as well that this expansion was a definitive sign of progress and service improvement. They disagree, however, about the nature of the progress and about who the primary beneficiary of this improvement was.

Al-‘Arif’s account begins from the perspective that water necessarily had to be provided as a government service and, therefore, that the expansion of the service network was evidence of better government. Abu Sha’ban, on the other hand, suggested that the private mechanisms of water procurement had in the past been a perfectly adequate means of fulfilling people’s needs. He too saw the expansion of the service network as vital, but its importance lay in its contribution to the rationalization of government. The expansion of municipal water services, according to Abu Sha’ban, aided in the production of more efficient government, increase of municipal revenue, and greater control over health conditions in the city. Rather than highlighting the role of service expansion in increasing the capacity of place, Abu Sha’ban focused
on how it enhanced the capacity of government. Water services, from this perspective, produced government as much as they fulfilled needs.

These services also transformed people’s relationship with place. Al-`Arif described how “Gazans brought up water [from the municipal well] in buckets and carried it away in leather waterskins,” until 1926, when the municipality put in a motor, after which point the water was drawn into a municipal reservoir. If waterskins were a symbol of the social life of water gathering, the municipal reservoir was a symbol of its bureaucratization. Over the course of the Mandate, additional wells were dug. Al-`Arif suggested that even these were not enough, and he described “the strong thirst” which had faced the city in recent years. Abu Sha’ban disputed this characterization, saying that in Gaza “any small child could dig a well in the sand on the beach and drink sweet water from it.” Abu Sha’ban further commented, “It appears to me that the author is ignorant of the history of water in Gaza and the reasons for digging the wells which he mentions.”

According to his view, the expansion of water services was not primarily about meeting the “basic needs” of Gazans, but rather about increasing the capacity and efficiency of government. For this reason, Abu Sha’ban’s correction of al-`Arif’s account focused on the bureaucratization of water services—a bureaucratization which he saw as all to the good. Whereas at the beginning of the Mandate there was only “a basic network of water pipes” and the subscribers to the municipal water supply numbered only in the hundreds, after the “elected Municipal council” decided, in 1928, to compel participation by forcing all Gazans to pay water fees whether they used public water or not, the water network was able to expand dramatically. Abu Sha’ban said of this endeavor,

This step was necessary to make people participate, to protect public health, and to gather the drinking water in a reservoir that is under the supervision of the council and the oversight of the department of health. The people became interested in subscribing to the water and the overwhelming majority now consume their water through municipal pipes. Waterskins and the like have disappeared. The Municipal council has fulfilled its role and has expanded the pipe network and safeguarded their presence in the city streets. Revenue from water has increased from hundreds to thousands of pounds.
According to Abu Sha’ban, it was the greater participation in water services that created the need for new government wells.

In addition, new building in Gaza created new service needs. The Gaza development scheme, which created the new neighborhood of Rimal, required new wells to service the area. As noted in chapter 5, as of 1932 water was still lacking, awaiting approval of a new water supply scheme: “This scheme is, however, temporarily in abeyance while the finances of the Municipality are being examined with a view to enabling the Council to contract a loan for the purpose.” Given the Mandate government’s concerns about taking on municipal financial obligations, the reason for such careful examination seems clear. The project was no doubt caught up in the variety of tensions and conflicts between central government and the municipality. Given also that the stability of municipal finances depended, in part, on the capacity and willingness of the population to pay its bills in a timely manner and on the capacity and willingness of the municipality to enforce regulations, government’s concerns about each of these parties may have also slowed down the project. The water scheme was approved in December 1932, when Barclay’s Bank—“without a Government guarantee”—agreed to make a loan to the municipality. Even when government services expanded, then, private means were not entirely left behind.

Neither Abu Sha’ban nor al-’Arif addressed any of these issues. Their “debate” about the water project focused on the quality of water produced by the well dug in 1933 with money from the loan. Al-’Arif described the well as “salty and not good for drinking,” an assertion to which Abu Sha’ban strongly objected. He argued that, as district officer, al-’Arif had to know that the Health Department had tested the water and found it acceptable for drinking. Rather than describing the water as salty, Abu Sha’ban suggested, it should be said that it was “less sweet” than another well. In fact, a government report from 1936 did describe the water as “at present adequate and good in quality, slightly saline, but containing some fine sand.” In these two accounts the complicated politics and economics of water expansion in Gaza seem reduced to a “technical” problem of water quality. So, ironically perhaps, even as both Abu Sha’ban and al-’Arif sought to write a complete history of Gaza, each produced a “developmentally” inflected account that obscured some of the tactical operations of Gaza’s water provisioning.
The expansion of municipal authority and scope through the compulsory participation in public water services was part of a more general process of binding people and government. This binding created bidirectional obligation, responsibility, and demand. Whereas in the past most people had obtained water—no doubt often for free—from their own or their neighbors’ wells, they were now obligated to pay for the privilege of using municipal water. At the same time, the municipality was now obligated to supply the piping that would enable water distribution and to ensure that its wells had enough water to meet the needs of the whole Gazan population. The expansion of service and obligation created new opportunities for challenge to government and new sites of interaction between the public and the government. At the same time, the expansion of water services reduced certain kinds of social interactions, as the walk to a nearby well disappeared from daily pathways, and the water well ceased to be a gathering spot for women. These reconfigurations were not simply the inevitable result of development but were produced in the tactical operations of government.

Politics of Service: Providing Water and Protecting the Local

The tactical conditions of Gaza’s water services were brought to the surface by conflicts engendered by the 1936 general strike, which was supposed to include a cessation of local government services. This strike highlighted the mutual obligation and dependence of Gazans, the municipality, and the Mandate government, and the problems sometimes engendered therein. Although the transfer of water provision to public responsibility, a transfer which provoked both obligation and entitlement, seems to have been largely complete by this point, tension and conflict over the contours of this responsibility had not ceased, nor would they. Debates in the Gaza City Council over its participation in the strike evidence these tensions. While the municipality had provisionally halted all service provision at the start of the strike, as recorded in the Registers of Council Decisions, the council was divided about whether this was an appropriate course of action. The mayor expressed concern about both the harm to the public and the danger from government that continued participation in these strike activities might cause. He argued that ongoing municipal stoppage of “cleaning, lighting, and
water provision for city residents will lead to sickness as a result.” In the mayor’s view, ceding governmental responsibility for these services would create numerous problems.

“There will be a danger,” he suggested, “of residents leaving their cities or of the government—per its authority according to the Municipalities Law—taking over the administration of the municipalities.” The threat was that the central government might be provoked out of its usual oversight approach to municipal management and into an active position as surrogate local authority. For the mayor, this threat was itself sufficient reason to ease the strike. His concern about government interference reflected more than an ordinary interest in local autonomy; it suggested a conviction that this government was incapable, above all during such stressful times, of properly providing for local needs, both practical and political. Municipal autonomy was always extremely limited during the Mandate, but the political conflicts between foreign policy and local demands, heightened during periods of outright rebellion as in 1936–39, made preservation of even that limited autonomy appear highly important.

At the same time, the tension between government and municipality was not the only form of national-local conflict. There was also an inherent conflict between national(ist) political demands and the local needs which the mayor articulated. In the council debates, other members argued on behalf of nationalism that the council had to promote national unity and support the cause and therefore the strike. Ultimately, the mayor’s position prevailed, and the council decided that because “the people of Gaza are dying of thirst and are suffering from illnesses,” the municipality was obliged to resume its provision of basic services. This instance not only showcases an instance of the disassociation that civil servants often used to make sense of their work, but also highlights the work involved in arriving at such compartmentalization. While the Gaza City Council, and civil servants generally, may indeed have felt that their work in governing was different from work for government, it took an active effort to manage the contradictory positions in which they often found themselves.

This service question was also a potential crisis for government. It was precisely at those moments when the stakes of service had to be confronted head-on that the dynamic of abeyance was most fragile. Where people were
forced to consider what it would mean—for themselves, for the nation, for the future—to either participate or not in the daily work of government, they had to contend also with the legitimacy of government. In this case, the potential crisis of legitimacy was averted by a politics of location. In its own efforts to resolve its awkward position between competing national demands, the council invoked and measured the needs and demands of the local public against these competing obligations. The municipality presented itself as the bulwark between Gaza and the threat of government intervention. At the same time, even as the decision was presented as a form of resistance to government, it also had the effect of contributing to the persistence of government—by keeping services working—and of averting the potential crisis of abeyance—by separating the daily work of governing from questions about the legitimacy of the governing regime.

**Ordinary Incapacities, Service Obligations**

Even after the end of the rebellion and the return of water services to more ordinary terrain, struggle over the style of service provision continued to shape the relationship of government and local public. Government remained a participant in this local dynamic, but a relatively aloof one. When local conflicts did not threaten the stability of the governmental process, it proceeded as observer of these affairs. In the triadic relations among government, municipality, and Gazans, circuits of complaint and redress were central. In one instance in 1941 of Gazan complaint to government about municipal practice, a group of almost sixty residents of Rimal, the “new Gaza” neighborhood for whom, in part, the well had been dug in 1933, submitted a petition to the chief secretary objecting to a municipal plan to install water meters in their quarter of the city—a petition preserved in the “municipal government” files of the chief secretariat. This conflict, relatively late in the Mandate-era transformation of water services, illuminates the significance of this transformation. Not simply compelled to participate in municipal water, as Abu Sha’ban described, the residents of Rimal were dependent upon it.

Their new homes were built with water faucets and, presumably, without private wells. If disconnected from the municipal system, there was no private network upon which people could depend. The new municipal plan entailed this very threat; the municipality had announced its intention to
discontinue water service to anyone who did not agree to install a meter.\textsuperscript{34} The installation of meters marked a significant change from the previous system for assessing water fees, one whereby people were charged flat fees depending on the type and value of their buildings. Under the meter system, people would pay for their usage, regardless of their rent or whether their building was their home or business. The petitioners complained that their quarter was being unfairly singled out for meters (the other quarters of the city did not have them) and argued that the new system was unfair to the poor, who would now be charged at the same rate as the wealthy. Given this injustice, the petitioners asked government to step in and reverse the municipal action. In keeping with the general practice of staying out of municipal governance if it did not threaten national government, central authorities declined to intervene.

This petition, and the seemingly inevitable response, open a window on the transformations in the place of Gaza over the course of the Mandate. The concentration of the mechanisms of water collection and distribution in the hands of government meant that the resources of Gaza could be accessed only through the offices of government. Water use was no longer a private affair, or an act of beneficence by the wealthy to the poor (as one woman I spoke with remembered her father’s provision of water to others in the village), but rather was a public responsibility.\textsuperscript{35} Provision of services like water binds government (local and national, institution and process) and place (both land and population) in new ways, both delimiting action and creating new spaces and styles of interaction and challenge.

Expansion of government service is not simply a means through which government gains greater control over the lives of individuals. If Abu Sha’ban was correct that water service expansion was a means of increasing governmental capacity, its effects were just as much to increase governmental obligation and responsibility, and therefore to uncover and produce new incapacities. Servicing is a complex process that increases both opportunity and obligation for all the parties—government, public, nation, locality—that are formed in its practice. Both the social and the physical landscapes of Gaza were transformed in the shift to water services, as social gathering around a well was displaced in the change to faucets and as piping and motors appeared on the scene in Gaza.
These seemingly clear transformations from one kind of place to another and from one kind of present to another were made possible by the relative stability in water servicing. Unlike the crisis services discussed in the previous chapter, water services were defined as permanent, presumably not to be withdrawn as circumstances changed. Despite this apparent stability, however, water services and the transformations they engendered could be as easily threatened as any other governmental domain by the dramas of Gaza’s history.

**Service Boundaries in the New Gaza Strip**

The tenuous ordinariness of everyday servicing was made even more precarious by the transformations of 1948. While during the Mandate everyday servicing was punctured at intervals by the explicit demands of politics, and tactical government was made evident only occasionally, during the Administration the domains in which tactics were not dominant and in which politics were not pressing were much more circumscribed. The compression of territory and the vast influx of refugees created enormous burdens for government, for servicing, and for place. It dramatically altered the physical and social landscape of Gaza. The capacities of the land to provide were stretched by the demands of its new population. The capacities of government were, if anything, more overextended.

Servicing under Egyptian rule was always a cooperative and often conflictual affair, with responsibility shared or divided between the Administration and UNRWA. The transformation of water services that began under the Mandate continued during the Administration, but the disruptions of 1948 ensured that it was not a simply linear development. While service in municipalities proper were not disrupted, the enormous refugee population strained their capacities. The pressures of service provision are particularly evident in the camps. This division by place—where the services provided to municipalities and villages were much greater than those available in camps—was distinct from other jurisdictional divisions we have seen that were made according to type (native or refugee) within the client population. Whereas in food services native Gazans suffered from their lack of refugee status, in water servicing it was refugee spaces that were more deprived.

In the camps, at least in the first years after 1948, everyday utilities were
barely existent. Not only were there no pipes and power lines connecting these supposedly temporary places to existing networks, but there was political resistance to their incorporation, which, it was felt, might signal an acceptance of permanent displacement. The 1953 Report by the Department of Refugee Supervision, Government Assistance, and Social Affairs indicated that there was one faucet for every three hundred people in the camps and that the water was turned on at intervals.≥π And camp regulations issued by the same department in 1961 included the provision that the “installation of water taps (privately for the shelters)” was strictly prohibited.≥∫ One retired teacher recalled the problems that sometimes arose because of the limited water distribution in the camps: “unrwa was in charge of the water problem in coordination with the government. Sometimes disputes or quarrels occurred between women who were going to bring water. Water time was limited, not the whole day. It was one hour a day, and this caused problems among women.”≥Ω Procuring water was still women’s work, it seems, but more difficult, more divisive work than before.

The question of jurisdiction—what agencies should provide what services to whom—was particularly challenging in relation to refugee camps. While service provision during both the Mandate and the Administration was
pursued without an explicit claim to sovereignty over the territories serviced, such services did indeed entrench government. When it came to servicing refugee camps, there was an added layer of concern. Not only did the Egyptian Administration not want to claim sovereignty over Gaza, it did not want to seem to suggest or accept the idea that refugees were permanently Gazan or that the Gaza Strip itself was not temporary. Providing everyday services to refugee camps posed the risk of doing exactly that.

After 1967, the politics of servicing produced a clash between Gaza City’s mayor and the Israeli occupying forces, leading to the former’s dismissal. According to reports at the time, “The Israelis said the order was intended to integrate Gaza refugees into the town and make them tax-paying citizens. Four other refugee camps have been annexed to other Gaza Strip towns.”

Ann Mosely Lesch comments, “Refugees feared that integrating the camp into the town would cause them to lose their special legal status as refugees and undermine their right to return to their homes inside Israel. Thus Shawwa’s (the mayor’s) refusal to obey the Israeli command received popular support.” That the order came from an occupying army made the political importance of such a refusal evident.

The status of camp services during the Egyptian Administration is a little less clear. Some retired municipal employees I spoke with in Gaza recalled that there were municipal services in camps in the latter years of the Administration. Abu Jamal recalled that, in 1960, the Gaza municipality extended services to Shati camp:

At first, the issue was political, and they did not extend the services to the refugee camps, and they [the refugees] depended on drinking water from pumps inside the camp. Then [in 1960] the municipality extended the water network to them. . . . and then [later] the services of sewage, road paving, and electricity were provided for the camps so that they could live in dignity, and to stop the spread of diseases among them.

When I asked about UNRWA’s connection to this refugee servicing, Abu Jamal indicated that “there was cooperation. UNRWA helped the municipality pay for the oil for the motors that pumped water in return for extending the water network to the refugees.” Khaled ‘Emad, who started work in the electricity department in 1960, insisted that the municipality provided services to Shati
“from the very beginning” of his career. He remembered the two spaces as completely tied together in servicing: “There were not water wells for the refugees and wells for the Gazans. UNRWA contributed in health and cleaning, but the municipality presented electricity and water as well as health.”

The only archival document I have found on this issue seems to indicate that there were not—or at least not many—such services in the camp. This document, a police report on an open meeting (nadwa) held in June 1966 in Shati camp and attended by the governor-general, the mayor of Gaza, and a large number of camp residents, records refugee requests precisely for such services. At the meeting, the residents asked the Administration, among other things, to provide street lighting and drinking water for the camp, pave the camp roads, dispense rations to camp residents because UNRWA rations were not sufficient, and increase the police presence in the camps. In response, the governor-general promised to meet “some of these requests,” and he “explained the difficulty in fulfilling others.” Which requests were met, the report does not specify. Matters are made no more clear by the mayor’s comments. He told the people of Shati camp to conserve their resources because “the municipality had cut off all the assistance it had provided.” He further stated that he had asked UNRWA authorities two months prior to provide drinking water and electricity to the camp, but that he had still not received a response. Since the report does not specify what assistance the municipality was no longer providing or what the politics of this cessation were, one cannot say with certainty what the camp’s service status was. Whatever the actual facts of the matter, the question of service jurisdiction highlighted the limits of the Egyptian Administration’s capacity to fulfill its promise to liberate Palestine, creating potential problems for the effectiveness of deferral as a mode of abeyance.

“WE WERE SERIOUS IN OUR JOB”: THE WATER DEPARTMENT AND MUNICIPAL SERVICE PRACTICE

It was the edges of service jurisdictions that created the most obvious tensions in government. Inside service, this work could acquire an ordinariness, tenuous to be sure, that was important not only for getting work done, but also for contributing to formations of place. Abu Jamal, now an activist on behalf of retired civil servants, used to work in the Gaza City water department. He was very proud of both his career and his postretirement ac-
tivities, and he talked to me at length about them in conversations at the offices of the Retired Civil Servants Association. His first job, which he got in 1957, was as a water meter reader, though he was quickly promoted to a clerk’s position. His account of municipal water services during the Administration highlights both the particular role of the municipality as a service provider and the significance of everyday services in shaping the relation between Gazans and government and between population and place. It was during the Administration, Abu Jamal told me, that “the municipality succeeded in connecting water to every house. Water was available to everyone.” Water service provision—and everyday services in general—comprised a venue for an intimate connection between people and government. And water services contributed to constituting a place in very concrete ways.

Water services tied the place of Gaza together, both literally, as the network of pipes connected each home and building to each other one, and figuratively, as patterns of water usage were replicated across town. Whenever a Gazan turned on the water faucet in her home she reinforced these literal and figurative ties. At the same time, these services also connected the places in Gaza to the municipality in an equivalent fashion. Each home was charged for water according to the same system; each pipe was laid with the same technique. Abu Jamal described the procedure as follows:

People who wanted to build a house and wanted water used to come to me and submit an application. The application is transferred to the organizational department, whose employees go to measure the building and ask the people to pay the fees for building the house. After the fees are paid, the application is transferred to the engineers in the water department to determine the diameter of the tube for the house and the placement of the waterline that would be connected to the house. The owner of the house pays the fees, and we give him a water meter, and then the technicians of the water department go and connect the water to his house, and the same thing happens with the department of electricity. . . . We determined the fees according to the engineer’s measurements, the greater the distance [of the house to the main waterline], the higher the fee, the shorter the line, the lower the fee.

The ordinary regularity of this procedure may appear remarkable in a place where no aspect of life was untouched by the crises of Palestinian experience,
where government was always uncertain and anxious about how to proceed. That even under such conditions everyday practices can sometimes be regular is important to keep in mind. How people work with these procedures, how they interact with civil servants and with the services they provide, can be seen, as Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard suggest about ordinary practices, as a “practical science of the singular.”

Not only the use of services, but the work itself constituted such a practical science. Abu Jamal described his typical workday, from the 8 am start of the day to its close at 2 pm. His description illuminates both regular practice and moments of tension, an ordinary flow and mechanisms that permitted a release of pressure. This is indeed a picture of a “subtle combinatory set, of types of operations and registers, that stages and activates a making-do”.

We came to work at 8 in the morning and arranged the citizens’ transactions according to date or turn—we put the new transactions in a category and the transactions that were scheduled we arranged according to their date. Of course, every citizen knew his turn—when water would reach his house. . . . At noon, we prayed the noon prayers in a mosque for the employees in the same department. There was also a breakfast break from 9 to 9:30. One ate a sandwich and drank a cup of tea. We spent the time working and receiving the demands of the citizens. Because water is in demand and its problems are so many, we were under pressure. There were water problems especially in summer, for example, water was cut off at someone’s house or the amount of water decreased or he had salty water, etc. We conveyed the citizens’ complaints to the authorities and asked them to respond. This work took all our time, unless there was a holiday for the employee, so he can let his body have some rest the same as any other employee in any state. This was basically our daily work.

The breaks in the day and the periodic breaks from work itself were crucial to managing the tensions of even an ordinary service. A petition or complaint might provide such a break for a citizen, but civil servants required the built-in getaways that their schedules allowed. The different ways of making-do that come together in any service encounter may be clashing. Abu Jamal, for instance, felt confident that water services were well provided and that
complaints were dealt with efficiently; members of the public may not have agreed. What felt like a moment of relief for a civil servant may have been perceived as shirking of responsibility by a citizen. What felt like a reasonable request by a citizen may have been seen as an aggressive overreaching by a civil servant. The negotiations and conflicts that are an inevitable part of any service provision gave shape to its pluralized experience.

“UNRWA is responsible for water”: 
FIGHTING THE WATER-PIPE PROJECT IN NUSEIRAT

As much tension as might arise within service, such tension was even sharper at its boundaries. We have seen how questions of whether and how to provide everyday services troubled the Administration; they concerned UNRWA as well. An instance of suggested service expansion in the Nuseirat refugee camp and of local opposition to this expansion sheds further light on the complications of service provision. In camps not adjacent to municipalities, such as Nuseirat and the other “mid-camps,” there was no question that UNRWA, at differing levels of concert with the Administration, would remain principally in charge of water provision. Thus, the conflict over the proposed expansion involved UNRWA directly, and to the extent that political concerns were raised, they centered around the politics of international service obligation. No less than municipal expansion, this proposed service change may have been perceived as a threat to refugee status and to refugees’ convictions that their life in the camps was temporary. In making the place more comfortable, more like a home, such service expansion may have threatened to undermine the delicate balance between coping with reality and hoping for more that sustained refugee lives.

Embedded in a larger file of mabahith (CID) investigation papers, a series of documents from April 1967 report on a proposed plan to pipe water directly into refugee homes in Nuseirat camp and detail the crisis this plan engendered. The immediate question under investigation was whether a local UNRWA employee named ‘Ali Harb had destroyed water pumps in Block c of the camp in an effort to force people living there to accept the project, which he had designed. The mabahith director contended, on the basis of the report of a police officer stationed in the camp, that people had refused the project because they could not afford to pay the ten-pound fee.
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Harb was collecting; and furthermore that he had therefore destroyed the pumps, leaving “one pump for all of the residents—more than 1,000 souls—while the other three are broken.” Statements on Harb’s actions were taken from the residents of Block c. Most people questioned professed no knowledge of Harb destroying pumps, but some did raise strong objections to the piped water project. It is these objections which most interest me here.

The varied responses to this project highlight the extent to which people had, by 1967, become accustomed to their conditions in the camp as well as their continuing conviction that these conditions were unjust. Refugees, who had been uprooted from their previous communities, habits, and practices, reshaped these formations in their new conditions and through new services. Expectations of life in the camp did not include piped water, and they did not include paying for the water services that were provided, in this case public water pumps. The refugees were willing to challenge those who threatened this fragile service arrangement. This service practice both helped shape the place of the refugee camp—as the diverse population that made up the camp was bound together in similar living conditions and in a similar structural relationship vis-à-vis UNRWA and the Administration—and confirmed its status as temporary. To suggest that there was a shared experience of place and a bond among its residents is not to deny internal division and conflict. On the contrary, the water crisis in Nuseirat evidences both the existence of a community of service recipients and divisiveness within that community about the practice and future of such provision.

One of the mabahith charges against ‘Ali Harb was that he tried to alter conditions on the ground and thereby force people to “adapt” to a new circumstance under which they would pay for piped water. The mabahith director viewed this project as part of an UNRWA plan to bring the “Palestine problem” to an end. The camp residents’ objections were framed in more local terms. One of the principal objections to ‘Ali Harb’s water project was that people were going to be forced to pay for something that UNRWA was supposed to provide. As the policeman put it in his report, “He wants to sell water pipes to the people, even though this is UNRWA’s responsibility.” The diversity of response among the camp residents suggests that some people were willing to transform their relationship with UNRWA if it meant better living conditions, but that most were reluctant to make any change. At a
meeting with the governor-general, the majority of camp residents rejected the idea.

In investigating the crisis, mabahith personnel took statements from four camp residents. They were divided on the wisdom of the project, and each for different reasons: one person agreed to pay if the majority would; another refused because he thought that pumps were sufficient and that in any case his house was too far for the pipes to reach; a third had never heard of the project, but was willing to pay because water from pipes was better than pump water; and the fourth also had not heard about the project, but he rejected the idea on the grounds that UNRWA supplied water for the camp.\textsuperscript{56} The person who was willing to pay if a majority had agreed argued that the opposition came from people's inability to pay the fees and that "everyone would agree if it was at UNRWA's expense."\textsuperscript{57} The principle of UNRWA responsibility seemed as important to people as immediate financial concerns, as this relationship was reiterated in several of the statements. The relationship also functioned as a community bond, bringing all the camp residents together in a common service relationship. To both implement the project and have UNRWA pay for it might have been a compromise position. It would have affirmed international obligation for refugee services (and therefore their unique status) while at the same time providing greater comforts in refugee lives, thereby settling their conditions somewhat.

In the end, a compromise was ordered, but a different one. Because of the many complaints, the Deir Belah administrative governor finally instructed that piped water be brought in, but that those residents who could not pay for it should be permitted to continue to use the pumps.\textsuperscript{58} In distinction from the Mandate, when the compelling of all municipal residents to participate in the water network played a part in the formation of community, in Nuseirat in 1967 the residents won their freedom from such obligation at the expense of their horizontal connection. The decision to exempt people from accepting piped water would no doubt divide the camp along lines of who was able to pay, thereby creating a new marker of wealth in the water faucet. This decision might also have created divisions among camp residents between those who rejected the new service as a "settlement" of their condition and those who either saw no threat in this creature comfort or who simply felt their immediate needs outweighed a possible future implication. In the
event, the occupation of Gaza by Israel in June 1967 transformed the entire social and political dynamic of the Strip, limiting the effects of this crisis.

Service Connections: Getting Around and Keeping in Touch

Water services transformed daily habits of living and shaped the relations of people and government by bringing different provisioning practices into the places where people live. Transportation and communications services produced similar effects by enabling and promoting people’s connections beyond their local places of residence. These services are no less “everyday services” than water provisioning, but they attend to different aspects of this everyday life. Whether public works projects like road building and paving, services like trains and buses, or communication mechanisms like mail and telephones, connection services both shape community and transform definitions of locality and place. While water services are immediately connected to the natural resources and physical layout of a place, connection services transform the relationships of places to each other.

As in almost every aspect of life, variations in profession, in class, and in gender had considerable influence on the use people made of roads and transportation services. In Gaza during the Mandate private cars were an uncommon luxury. One person told me that “there were five or six cars in all of Gaza—in comparison with the situation now, where there are one or two cars in every house. People used primitive means of transportation—carts and such.” For travel between towns, most people relied on the private companies that offered car or bus service. And, it should be remembered, most people did not leave their villages frequently. This was especially the case for women. As Im Tariq recalled, “I stayed in al-Majdal, and we did not go out unless there was an urgent need for doing so. Sometimes, for example, one wanted to visit a patient in a hospital in Gaza.” For those who did have more regular cause to travel, what they tend to remember now is the lack of boundaries between the areas in Palestine. As Hamdi Qasim, who grew up in Majdal, recalled, “We used to go to Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, etc. I used to go for a change of air. If I did not like Jaffa, I could go to Haifa, Tel-Aviv, or Jerusalem. If I did not like Jerusalem, I could go to Nazareth or Safad. I used to go wherever I wanted. It was allowed.” The basic capacity to move—such a marked contrast with people’s lives now—gave people’s memories of Mandate travel a distinctly rosy glow.
At the time, however, road conditions were a subject of considerable contention. Both government files and the Palestinian press were filled with complaints about the state of Gaza-area roads. Reflecting the constituency for these services, these complaints came mostly from car companies, chambers of commerce, and local elites. These were the people who needed the roads most immediately, though a shutdown in commercial traffic would obviously have broad effects. A letter to the high commissioner from representatives of some of Gaza’s wealthiest families championed the “fellah” (peasant) as the true beneficiary of the Gaza-Jaffa road (an obvious rhetorical ploy, but not wholly without merit): “The policy of Your Excellency has always been the revival of the fellah and the improvement of agriculture in the country. . . . the greatest help that you may render to the inhabitants of Gaza District, who are wholly peasants, is through the construction of this road.”

The fact that these roads connected places to each other meant that they were never simply local. Gaza’s merchants might have a local interest in having good roads into town, but the clientele for these roads was always multiple.

The fact that a variety of persons—Arabs, Jews, government, the army—made use of the roads made them subject to further tussles over jurisdiction. Who, for instance, should be responsible for repairing a road heavily trafficked by army trucks, but about which “no definite proofs could be produced to hold the Army responsible for exceptional damage to the roads?” Should a road running through Majdal be considered an “arterial road,” that is, one “which carries through traffic through a municipal area as distinct from local traffic, and therefore be partially supported by the central government, as the Gaza district commissioner argued, or was it more properly considered a “feeder road” and a municipal responsibility, as the Public Works Department decided? The fact that the roads were not entirely local directed people’s attention to perceived inequalities in treatment, making it harder to keep people’s attention from concomitantly considering the meaning of such inequalities. “Had Gaza been Jewish,” wrote the newspaper Filastin about the bad state of its roads, “His Majesty’s government would [not] dare to delay the correction of such a problem.” Distraction in the service of abeyance had a somewhat more difficult time in this domain.

Contestations over construction on the Gaza-Beersheba road in 1936–37 highlight the stakes of such public works projects. Large stretches of the
Gaza-Beersheba road were not asphalted, with the result that in poor weather it frequently had to be closed. Letters and telegrams to the high commissioner from Beersheba’s transportation companies and notables de-cry the hardships caused by these closures, which

isolate Beersheba from big towns such as Jaffa and Gaza which are very frequently visited by the inhabitants of this District. . . . Your excellency, no doubt, cares very much for the welfare and happiness of the populations and we are confident that you will order those concerned to arrange as early as possible for the road in question to be metalled so that this District would not, during your time, be deprived of the facilities accorded to other towns in the country.⁶⁶

In their pleas for action, the transport companies described themselves as nearly bankrupt. The state of these roads aroused interest beyond the immediate locality; the Arab Chamber of Commerce in Jerusalem specifically linked the road to the government’s interest in economic development, arguing.

For centuries, Gaza has kept commercial and various other relations with Khan Yunes and Beersheba but while this part of the country is being developed by the plantation of citrus trees and while this relation is being continually increased through the transport from one place to another of cereals and other crops, we see that Government has overlooked the question of the road between these towns and failed to assist in the further development of this area. . . . It has been the practice of the Government when small Jewish settlements are established in the country to embark on the construction of roads for the purpose of connecting these settlements together and for that reason it is the duty of Government to pay special attention to such a large area which includes Gaza, Khan Yunes and Beersheba.⁶⁷

While government’s initial responses to these petitions were to regret the financial stringencies which rendered major work impossible, eventually, and owing to the difficult economic and political conditions in the country, repairs to the road were authorized as a “relief measure,” a reminder that the boundary between everyday and crisis services was not always clear. Regarding this work as relief meant that it need not commit government to future
expenditures. Indeed, only a year later it was once again saying that “having regard to the present financial circumstances of the Government, it appears improbable that it will be practicable to allocate in the near future a sum of this magnitude for the permanent improvement of the road.”

In addition to the barrage of petitions, the Palestinian press kept up a steady drumbeat of complaint about road conditions. Alongside complaints about land sales to Jews, this was one of the most frequent topics about Gaza in the press. In the pages of al-Dira’ both local and national governments were criticized for insufficient provision of connection services. Local authorities were generally charged with negligence or personal corruption, while government was charged with bias and duplicity. Government, the articles implicitly argued, was using an appearance of incapacity as a tactic in its efforts to support the Jewish community at the expense of the Arab. For example, in January 1935, the paper complained that the government only paved roads used by Jews. Noting that the Gaza-Jaffa road was paved only as far as the last Jewish settlement, after which point it was merely covered with stones, the article asked bitterly, “Will we only get a road when we give all our land to the Jews? This is very shameful in the history of your government, that it cooperates with the Jews to pave the roads, but we don’t get anything but stones.”

Again and again, articles in the paper began by exclaiming, “Oh, public works department,” and then proceeding to detail how the department was callously neglecting its service obligations to Arabs. An article in May 1935 reflected on the frequency of complaint:

It could be said that all the residents of Palestine have heard the complaints of the residents of Gaza, and the owners of cars and buses, about the bad road. The local newspapers have published their demands that the road, which connects a number of Arab villages with Gaza and Jaffa, be paved quickly. Does the reader know what was the result? Government responded to the people’s demand, but when?

After tens of cars and trucks were ruined. . . . We thanked government for this work, even though it was late in coming. Then later, we learned that this work is going to be “only a small payment” to make people be quiet . . . [it will extend only] a small distance past the existing asphalt—which goes as far as the last Jewish settlement. As for the holes which
damage cars and trucks on their way to Majdal, these will remain. Not much time was allotted to us before we had to return to complaining and asking the government to pave the road.\textsuperscript{71}

The paper was compelled to make this complaint, the article seems to suggest, because of its role as the mouthpiece of the people of Palestine. Still, the press, produced and largely consumed by an educated class, no doubt disproportionately addressed the concerns of this class as well.\textsuperscript{72} At the same time, the press, playing the role of muckrakers, could be the vanguard of awareness, not only reflecting, but also shaping concerns and complaints. Newspaper discussions of transport-related services are an instance as much of the \textit{constitution} of concern about these services as \textit{expressions} of it. If “all the residents of Palestine have heard the complaints of the residents of Gaza” this was because the press had served as a venue for the voicing of this complaint. In this manner, the press not only offered comment about services, but participated in producing habits of complaint and resistance in regard to these services.

In all the complaints about road conditions, whether in petitions or in the press, there was a clear understanding that places were defined in part through their relationship with other places. To deny connection, to isolate a place, was also to diminish it. Services too were often understood in relational terms—compared to other times, places, and classes. For Palestinians, the obvious comparison was to the services provided to Jewish settlers. Government was consistently chastised not simply for not providing these services to Palestinians, but for not providing them \textit{equally} with the services that were provided Jewish communities. From the Palestinian perspective governmental incapacity to provide everyday services was a result of will as much as of circumstance. The tactical government which limited government intervention had, from this perspective, a strategic purpose. Incapacity was not simply a condition of Gaza, it was a tactic used to shape Gaza. This attention to the politics of government services is a reminder that the conflict in Palestine was of such significance that it could not always be dissipated through distraction.\textsuperscript{73}
As in all other realms of service, the nakba forced profound changes in the area of connection services. The abrupt formation of a border between the Gaza Strip and the rest of pre-1948 Palestine bisected roads, severed telephone communications, and cut off the railroad. As an Egyptian officer noted in a July 1949 memo, “The absence of civilian telephone and telegraph lines in the Gaza-Rafah area causes considerable exhaustion among the people because all business transactions for this area . . . require travel to Egypt or El-Arish in order to send a telegram or make a telephone call. Further, going to El-Arish requires getting a permit to enter the Egyptian train and an exit permit [from Gaza].” As the officer further noted, the lack of such service was a political rather than a technical problem: “The telephone and telegraph lines exist, and so do the civil servants needed to operate them.”

Not only was Gaza, in 1949, still a military area, but the broader system of which Gaza’s telecommunications had been a part—the Palestinian system—had been disrupted. Gaza needed to be reconstituted within an Egyptian service network in order for these connection services to operate. This reconstitution took time, but it did happen, and travel and communications among Gazans and between Gaza and Egypt were restored. This section explores conflicts over this (re)connection of Gaza and Egypt, illuminating how the provision of connection services among newly defined points of service participated in shaping these places of service. In this process, Gaza as a place was both re-placed (within a new regional context that rendered Cairo more present than Jerusalem) and re-figured (as a place of crowding, difficulty, and inconvenience).

In 1959, in an effort to win support for increasing transportation between Gaza and Egypt, the governor-general sent the Egyptian defense minister a copy of an article that had appeared in al-Tahrir, a local Gaza newspaper. This article, by Zuheir Rayyis, described the difficult transportation conditions and asked that something be done to improve them. As Rayyis noted, the only existing means of transportation between Gaza and Cairo was a train, which he dubbed “the train of troubles” (qitar al-mata‘ib) because of its unpleasant conditions: it was hot, dusty, shaky, and extremely slow. The time
had come, he argued, that bus transport should be considered “not a tourist necessity only, but a national and public service necessity.”

The importance of having good transportation services to Egypt was directly linked to the transformations in Gaza’s spatial relations. The cutting off of Gaza in 1948 not only required a reconstitution of connection services as a practical matter, but also generated new habits of connection with other spaces. Gaza as a local place became part of a different regional place, demanding a new set of spatial relations and new patterns of movement and connection. In these circumstances, even “the train of troubles” was an “artery of life”—as Rayyis said the train was also known—that “connects Gaza with the beating heart of Arabism and brings to us everyday our brothers and honored visitors.” No longer could Jerusalem serve as a center for Gaza; now Cairo had to be the “heart of Arabism” for Gazans.

Rayyis noted that the governor-general had expended considerable efforts trying to get bus service going; al-Tahrir had itself reported on his numerous communications with various Egyptian ministries. To assist the governor-general, Rayyis addressed the Transportation Ministry directly, saying, “A bus line is the easiest, fastest, most comfortable means of connection, which will not cost anything other than opposing some of the deadly and boring rules of routine.” One of the issues surrounding the establishment of such a bus line was who would get the concession. The governor-general supported granting a Gazan company the special permission that was required for a non-Egyptian company to work the route to Cairo. The Egyptian transportation minister rejected this suggestion, simply saying, “We don’t see a point to establishing a new company to have permission to go inside the borders of Egypt.” The Gazan company that wanted the concession, not surprisingly, saw a great deal of point to this arrangement and argued that, because of the difficulties associated with the route and the limited income potential, no Egyptian company wanted the concession. It reminded the authorities that an Egyptian company had briefly worked on the route and had ceased operations when it found itself with a deficit of thirty thousand Egyptian pounds.

This incident calls attention to the ways in which Gaza remained a place apart during the Egyptian Administration. While it was often governed in a manner similar to Egypt, with certain evident parallels in policy, it was never governed as if it was Egypt. Evidence of whether this newspaper article helped the governor-general’s case is not included in the file. What is cer-
tainly clear from the exchange is that incapacity in this instance was not simply a result of conditions in Gaza, but was directly linked to political and economic considerations. Egyptian authorities were reluctant to grant foreign operators permission to work in Egypt, even if those foreigners were the Gazans they were supposed to be helping. They may also have been worried about financial repercussions if the company was not profitable, as it would have been Egypt, through the office of the Administration, that would have had to carry the burden if the company was unable to pay its fees. The train may have created troubles for Gazans, but from the Egyptian government’s perspective, a bus line seemed potentially even more troublesome.

If travel to Egypt was troublesome, though, transportation problems were exacerbated within the Gaza Strip, where travel among its locales was a daily necessity. During the Mandate many people did not travel much, and “everyone was in his own balad and busy with his own work.” During the Administration, fewer people had the luxury of staying at home and tending to their own affairs. Without land to work, people who lived in camps and small towns needed to leave their places of residence and travel to work (if they could find it) in Gaza City. That there was deep frustration with inadequate transportation within the strip is reflected in many mabahith reports. A 1963 report from Jabalya camp in the northern part of the Strip stated,

Recently there has been a transportation crisis. People who wanted to travel to Gaza were held up at the taxi-stand because the bus company didn’t send enough vehicles to Jabalya camp. In the past it used to send four buses for the Gaza-Jabalya line, whereas now it only sends one or two buses. This is not enough to transport all the passengers and is creating a transportation crisis. When a bus arrives you see the people running and pushing each other, and around 100 people end up on the bus. There is not a single traffic cop at the taxi-stand to order the movement of cars—especially in the morning. People complain to government and to the company about these actions and the failure of the company to transport the passengers. Further, the company only sends the old and dirty cars for the Jabalya line, which wouldn’t be used on any other line. There is no system for sending cars for the Jabalya line. Implicit within this report of transportation crisis was anxiety about the threat of disorder the crisis was provoking. Policing and servicing had to
work together to ensure that public order was maintained. (See chapter 7 for a discussion of how political concerns and control entered the community service domain.) This incident also suggests the importance of regulating movement within, not merely beyond, the borders of Gaza. This crisis of government servicing was, in the first instance, a problem of private business conduct. But it seems clear that actual provision of this service by a private company did not undermine anyone’s sense that transportation servicing was government’s responsibility. The ability of government to fulfill this obligation was sorely strained by the new character of the Gaza Strip.

One reason it was so difficult to provide adequate transportation for people traveling between Jabalya and Gaza was that there were simply too many people. The space of Gaza had been vastly overcrowded by the nakba, and conditions only became more crowded over the years. As a refugee camp, Jabalya was incapable of supporting or sustaining its population, conditions which forced a large percentage to travel to Gaza City on a daily basis. At the same time, this inadequate transportation was not an accident. Despite its need, Jabalya appears to have been unable to make a claim on the company, which sent “the old and dirty vehicles” to this overcrowded, dirty place. The bus company seemed to make use of Jabalya’s incapacities to create its own service incapacities. It is not difficult to imagine the decision making that would have led the company to reserve its better vehicles for better-off places and to be more concerned that there was enough transportation for people who were better placed to complain if it was inadequate. Still, even if their complaints did not have the same weight as those of citizens in Gaza, the refugees of Jabalya continued to press their claims. If the refugees in Nuseirat were reluctant to accept a water-service expansion in part because of concerns about becoming too settled, the Jabalya incident indicates that refugees were willing to challenge discomforts that appeared to be gratuitous. If the private company could not be counted on to provide clean, adequate transport, as apparently it could not, government intervention was required.

The claim of Administration responsibility was explicitly made in a petition sent to the governor-general a few years later, also coming from Jabalya. In 1966, a group of about fifty civil servants living in and around Jabalya petitioned the governor-general, asking that the local car company be replaced, since it had “failed in its mission” to transport passengers. The
mabahith report about this problem and the petition itself noted that “this company has not fulfilled its duties toward civil servants in the proper manner.” With adequate transportation, Jabalya could be easily tied to Gaza, whereas without such services it seemed immeasurably farther away. Barring replacement of the company, the petition suggested that “a special bus, or more, be designated to transport civil servants from Jabalya camp to their places of work in Gaza—for a monthly fee.” In this case, civil servants appealed to their particular needs as government employees—and to government’s particular needs for them: “The scarcity of transportation is causing them [civil servants] not to fulfill their work obligations in the proper manner, because it is causing them to be late to work.” The petition evoked, therefore, the possibility of a cycle of inefficiency whereby inadequate transportation would cause civil servants to fail in their duties, thereby ensuring that Gazans would be improperly serviced. This complaint linked everyday transportation services to larger service questions of duty, obligation, and responsibility and explicitly located the responsibility for fulfillment of these service demands with government.82

These particular service crises highlight some of the ways in which everyday servicing was distinct from the crisis services discussed in the previous chapter. In everyday services the sense of service was sufficiently expansive to incorporate even seemingly private commercial activity within its domain. The entire episode occurred within service—a marked distinction from the practices in relation to food or even water. Here service was transformed from an intermittent response to crisis to a general condition of being in the Gaza Strip. And if service was expansive here, it was also productive. Relations among the various parts of Gaza, and the character of these places themselves, were produced in part in the details of service delivery.

Conclusion

The singular work of everyday servicing—provision and receipt, debate and delivery, complaint and correction—was fundamental to the pluralized production of place. In the repetition of daily acts of servicing—turning on a faucet, getting on a bus—the dense network of relations that constitute a place was produced and reproduced. These everyday services, minute though their apparent focus might be, were also far-reaching. Their significance lay
not only in their effect on Gazans, but also in their impact on government. The diversity of perspectives on, and locations in relation to, everyday services was crucial to this formation. As people expressed their views, staked their individual claims, articulated their own understandings, they gave shape to the networks that formed Gaza and its government.

Government services helped produce government authority, though the multiplicity of governing bodies, practices, and participants often rendered the nature of that authorization opaque. Municipalities may have seen themselves as staking a claim for local authority in the face of a potentially hostile national government, but their effective operations also promoted the stability of central administration. Individuals might have objected to specific service conditions, but the form of their objections often worked to consolidate governing practices. The tenacity of government never meant that government entirely controlled or directed these dynamic relations. Gaza may have been formed in and by government, but this form was often unexpected and frequently reconfigured. Given the loss that is at the heart of the Gazan (and Palestinian) experience of place, it is difficult to imagine how this might have been otherwise.