

Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency

Alessandro Petti

Sandi Hilal

Eyal Weizman

Architecture after Revolution

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DECOLONIZING ARCHITECTURE ART RESIDENCY

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Decolonizing Architecture



The watchtower in Oush Grab.
Photo: Francesco Mattuzzi, 2008

Our studio, in the town of Beit Sahour, is located near the edge of the desert. From the roof terrace, looking southwest one sees the still ungentrified Old Town with its competing church spires, minarets, commercial billboards for shampoos and mobile phones, and political graffiti for various Palestinian communist parties. Looking north, the hill of Abu Ghneim, once covered by a forest, has been transformed into Har Homa, the nearest of the hilltop colonies separating Jerusalem from Bethlehem. Invisible, in the valley behind the hill, is the separation wall being built by Israel since 2003. Looking east, one can see the sharp line-of-water divide; beyond that, the fields abruptly stop and the uninterrupted monochrome of the desert begins. It is a relief not to have to look at any colony in this direction, but the desert has its dangers too. Here is where the military lurks in training and fire zones, and it is from here that it storms our towns in full armor.

One unusually cold early morning in April 2006, the people of Beit Sahour witnessed, as some of us did, the evacuation of the military outpost of Oush Grab (in English, the “crow’s nest”). The army withdrawal seemed to have been the last act in an ongoing struggle of local and international activists against the oppressive presence of the base. Some years previously, on a legendary day, protesters broke into the military base and called for its immediate removal. The soldiers, taken completely by surprise, did nothing but watch. Though the base remained, by 2006 continued strong opposition to its presence by the local community and the concurrent re-organization of military geography had pushed the army to abandon it. The morning after the evacuation the base was overrun with people from around Bethlehem. Relief gave way to cathartic release. Using iron bars, young people smashed windows, walls, and doors. Others tried to salvage and take away whatever they could—doors, electric plugs, furniture, even the steel reinforcement bars in the water tower that stood at the middle of the outpost, leading to its partial collapse. The commotion was incredible, but nobody got hurt.



Oush Grab.
Francesco Mattuzzi, 2008

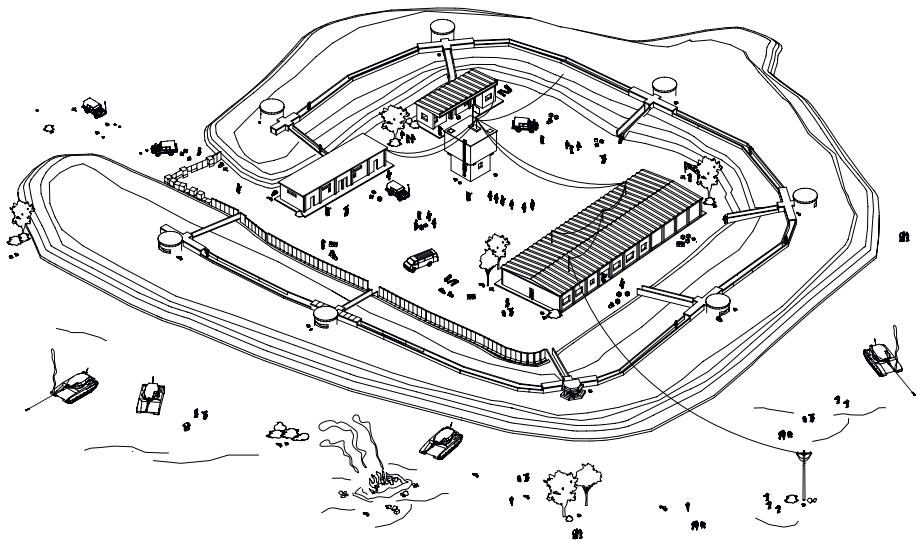


Oush Grab: days after the evacuation.
Photo: IMEMC—International Middle East Media Center, 2006

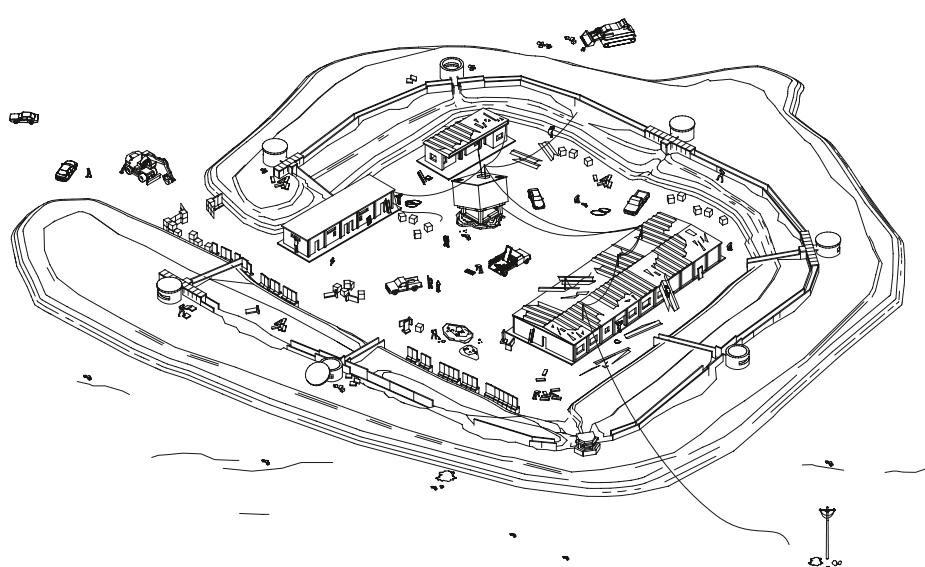


Oush Grab location at the entrance of Beit Sahour.
Google map

This was the end of the long life of the site as a military outpost. The distinct topography of the hill—and its location at the edge of a town and the start of the desert—had made it suitable for this role. Before it was an Israeli military outpost, it was manned by the Jordan Legion and previously by British troops during the 1936–39 Arab Revolt. Some people suggested that Oush Grab was an Ottoman outpost before that—though we found no maps to verify this—and even that it was also used by a Roman legion. But besides some canals and scattered archaeological remains consistent with a Byzantine-era farm, we found no proof of this either. During the time of the Second Intifada the sound of gunfire was constantly heard as soldiers practiced shooting, sometimes on the residential buildings surrounding the base. Floodlit during the night, with searchlights constantly scanning the area around it, the base seemed to have been caught in an endless artificial day.



Oush Grab before the evacuation.
DAAR



Oush Grab after the evacuation.
DAAR

The evacuation of the outpost was surely only a tactical move, a reorganization of the military matrix of control. We celebrated it for what it was—this location is the only direction in which Bethlehem, otherwise enclosed from the northwest by the wall and from the southwest by the bypass road N60, could expand.

No one was under any illusion that this might have been the first stage of decolonization. Still, “something” had taken place—a military base had been evacuated and people had access to it. This moment of evacuation—“nothing” in the grand scheme of things—captured our imagination as it had defied the logic of impossibility and the seemingly hard geography that is prevalent in occupied Palestine, on both sides of the Green Line.



palestinian built fabric

israeli settlements

the wall

Oush Grab. The site of Oush Grab is important for the eastwards expansion of Bethlehem and transport links with the surrounding areas. The Bethlehem region is strangulated from the north-west by the wall, and from the south-west by the bypass road N. 60. The only available direction for the city to grow is eastwards via

Oush Grab. According to an agreement between the local municipality and Arafat, if ever evacuated (as it was), the military base of Oush Grab would be used for civilian purposes rather than as a Palestinian base. Oush Grab is at present one of the only open public spaces in the Bethlehem area.

Access and Re-appropriation

People experienced the first moment of access to the military outpost differently. For some, it was a moment of spontaneous transgression. Entering the watchtowers overlooking Beit Sahour, we had the feeling we had accessed the control room in a panopticon prison, sharing for an instant the perspective of the oppressor. Inside the tower, we discovered graffiti (of the kind more commonly found in toilets) written by a soldier musing about the beauty of the sunrise and the atmosphere of the city in the early morning. The access to the military base provided a new point of observation over the city itself. Its evacuation offered local people the opportunity to see their own city from this direction for the first time. For many, it was a strange feeling, similar to that of looking at a recording of oneself and discovering unknown aspects.

Occupying such spaces brought back past experiences. Sandi recalled the time of the First Intifada, when people in Beit Sahour refused to pay taxes to the colonial authorities (a revolt known as the White Intifada): “One night, the army entered my house and confiscated furniture, the television, phones, and, among other things, my precious little radio transmitter. Oush Grab at that time was used as a prison but also as a storage for confiscated goods. [...] Entering the base twenty years later, I thought I might find my beloved radio.”

Having access to the evacuated military base we experienced the most radical condition of architecture—the very moment that power has been unplugged: the old uses are gone, and new uses not yet defined.

Later we heard Palestinian government officials and some NGO people advocating the view that to avoid further “vandalism” in such situations, all evacuated spaces must be defended by a Palestinian police force. If such a thing exists at all, it should certainly seek to protect Palestinians from daily abuse and not impose order where disorder is called for. It would be a mistake to lose such precious moments in spite (and perhaps because) of their indeterminate consequences.



The view from the watchtower in Oush Grab.

Photo: Francesco Mattuzzi, 2008

Only after such initial encounters can collective thinking about the future of this place begin. In 2007, we started to organize “tours” of Oush Grab, planting olive trees and using the watchtowers for bird-watching. This series of events encouraged the Beit Sahour municipality to continue the transformation of the site into a public park with places for picnics, playgrounds for children, a restaurant, a bar, and an open garden for events. Oush Grab is at present the only open public space in the Bethlehem area.

There is another point that must be made before we continue. Our collaboration is grounded in a joint sense of political commitment, friendship, and intellectual curiosity. It is obvious that our backgrounds are different and our identities complex and multiple—even with only the three of us in one room “there was already quite a crowd”¹ (and there are always peers, colleagues, and friends around). We do not think of ourselves as representing anyone, least of all other people that have the same passports as ours. We are fully aware of, and experience everyday the system of separations and control that have been built around us. We don’t pretend that they do not exist, but we also don’t allow them to limit our imagination. If one day you happen to travel together with us through this bizarre country, you might see how there is, by definition, always one of us with the wrong document in the car when crossing checkpoints. This country is designed for the purpose of separating us.

Beit Sahour

We owe much to this magical town. It makes our fantasies easier. For one thing it is not Ramallah—whose syndrome is the exciting and debilitating “hallucination of normality”²—and it’s not even the ecumenical Bethlehem, which draws vast amounts of world attention. Southeast of Bethlehem, it is the last stop before the desert. The town was left alone to develop a special chapter in the history of the Palestinian struggle. Its recent history—which spans our lives—is intertwined with the ideal

of borderless solidarity and a secular, democratic, inclusive, non-armed struggle. Since the first years of the First Intifada—with the hardening of identities it brought about—Beit Sahour was the place of a popular resistance, the White Intifada, a campaign of non-armed civil disobedience. The violent repression of the White Intifada also led to the organization of the collective cultivation of empty plots within the town—urban agriculture as a form of resistance. Back in those days, the term “joint” was used to describe the kind of struggle being waged. Beit Sahour was one of the few places where internationals, Palestinians, and Israeli Jews would struggle together against the occupation and colonialism.³ Today the term “common” is perhaps the more apt to describe the struggle because it does not assume that preexisting, distinct identities are coming together. We need common platforms for a common struggle against a system of inequality and control. These might also become the common political platforms of the future. We will come back to this, particularly in the last chapter. As such, Beit Sahour has also become an inspiration, a place of radical pedagogical experiments. Indeed, during the First Intifada, when schools were closed by a military order, self-organized neighborhood committees established a network of alternative education study groups within homes and car garages, where the reading list included Ghassan Kanafani, Mao, Hanna Mina, Sahar Khalifeh, Trotsky, Naji al-Ali, Karl Marx, and Emile Habibi.

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

² <http://ramallahsyndrome.blogspot.de/>.

³ For example, such struggles took place under the aegis of the International Solidarity Movement, which was founded in 2001, just a few hundred meters from our studio; the Alternative Information Center (AIC), a non-governmental organization established in 1984 by members of the Revolutionary Communist League (previously Matzpen); the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command; and continue today, through Badil, a community-based organization for the defense and promotion of the rights of Palestinian refugees.

Decolonization

If one insists, as we do, on colonization as the frame of reference for understanding the political reality in Palestine, one should naturally accept that decolonization is necessary. What we have thus far proposed in Palestine could also pose a challenge on a larger scale. We think that decolonization might be the appropriate term for challenging the frame—generally limited to the confines of the borders set up by colonial powers—according to which the series of revolts which took place in the wider region unfolded. The general conceptual question nonetheless remains: what is decolonization today?

Revisiting the term required maintaining a distance from two dominant frames: “revolution” and “solution.” Whereas the former depends on a definitive moment, the latter is bound by a fixed end state, and neither designates a long-term process of transformation. The current political language that utilizes the term “solution” in relation to the Palestinian conflict and its respective borders is similarly aimed at a fixed reality. “Decolonization,” however, is not bound as a concept, nor is it bound in space or in time: it is an ongoing practice of deactivation and reorientation understood both in its presence and its endlessness. In the context of Palestine, it is not bound within the 1967 occupied territories. Decolonization, in our understanding, seeks to unleash a process of open-ended transformation toward visions of equality and justice. The return of refugees, which we interpret as entailing the right to move and settle within the complete borders of Israel-Palestine, as chapter one will make clear, is a fundamental stage in decolonization.

Over the past few years, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben has been generous in engaging us in conversations about how the concept of “profanation” would be a productive way of thinking through the process of decolonization. In his famous eponymous book on the subject, Agamben proposed “profanation” as the strategy of “restoring things to their common use.” The domain of the sacred, according to him, has

not disappeared with secularization but has rather been reproduced in modern political formations. In his book, Agamben points out that “to profane does not simply mean to abolish or cancel separations, but to learn to make new uses of them.”⁴ Might decolonization then be the counter-apparatus to restore to common use what the colonial order has separated and divided? Decolonization as an act of profanation is playful, child-like, and a necessary contrast against actions disposed towards the diverse manifestations of the contemporary sacred—from the militarized security institutions of “Israeli liberal democracy” to the rabbinical theodicy of some of its colonists, from the militant Islamism of Hamas to the quasi-secular authoritarian rule of Fatah in the West Bank.

Destruction

Whatever trajectory the conflict over Palestine takes, the possibility of the further partial—or complete—evacuation of Israeli colonies and military bases must be considered. Zones of Palestine that have been or will be liberated from direct Israeli presence have provided a crucial laboratory for studying the multiple ways in which we could imagine the reuse, re-inhabitation, or recycling of Israel’s colonial architecture. The handing over of colonial buildings and infrastructure is always a dilemma for the user, for it is torn between two contradictory desires: destruction and reuse. The popular impulse for destruction seeks to spatially articulate “liberation” from an architecture understood as a political straitjacket, an instrument of domination and control. If architecture is a weapon in a military arsenal that implements the power relations of colonialist ideologies, then architecture must burn. Frantz Fanon, pondering the possible corruption of governments after decolonization, warned during the Algerian liberation struggle, that if not destroyed, the physical and territorial reorganization of the colonial world may once again “mark out the lines on which a colonized society

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

will be organized.” For Fanon, decolonization is always a violent event. “To destroy the colonial world means nothing less than demolishing the colonist’s city, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory.”⁵

The impulse of destruction seeks to turn time backward. It seeks to reverse development to its virgin nature, a *tabula rasa* on which a set of new beginnings might be articulated. However, time and its processes of transformation can never be simply reversed: rather than the desired Romantic ruralization of developed areas, destruction generates desolation and environmental damage that may last for decades. In 2005, Israel evacuated the Gaza settlements and destroyed three thousand homes, creating not the promised *tabula rasa* for a new beginning, but rather a million and a half tons of toxic rubble that poisoned the ground and the water.

Reuse

The other impulse, to reuse, seeks to impose political continuity and order under a new system of control. It is thus not surprising that post-colonial governments have tended to reuse the infrastructure set up by colonial regimes for their own emergent practical needs of administration. The evacuated infrastructure and built structures were often also seen as the legacy of “modernization” and as an economic and organizational resource. Throughout the histories of decolonization, the possibility of reusing existing structures in the very same ways they were used under colonial regimes has proven too tempting to resist. Such repossession tends to reproduce colonial power relations in space: colonial villas are inhabited by new financial elites and palaces by political ones, while the evacuated military and police installations of colonial armies, as well as their prisons, are reused by the governments that replaced them, recreating similar spatial hierarchies.

In this sense, past processes of decolonization have never truly done away with the power of colonial domination. The reuse of Israeli colonial architecture could establish a sense of continuity rather than rupture and change. That is, reusing the evacuated structures of Israel’s domination in the same way as the occupiers did—the settlements as Palestinian suburbs and the military bases for Palestinian security needs—would mean reproducing their inherent alienation and violence: the settlement’s system of fences and surveillance technologies would inevitably enable their seamless transformation into gated communities for the Palestinian elite.

Subversion

There is, however, a third option: a subversion of the originally intended use, repurposing it for other ends. We know that evacuated colonial architecture doesn’t necessarily reproduce the functions for which it was designed. There are examples of other uses, both planned and spontaneous, that have invaded the built environment of evacuated colonial architecture, subverted its programs, and liberated its potential. Even the most horrifying structures of domination can yield themselves to new forms of life. Looking at the fractured remains of a plantation house, the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott pondered the decay of an institution once powerful, and wondered about “the rot that remains when the men are gone,”⁶ but he also opened ways to negotiate, inhabit, and thus transform the colonial structures that have generated deep deformations of space and geography. Colonial remnants and ruins are not only the dead matter of past power, but could be thought of as material for re-appropriations and strategic activation within the politics of the present. The question is how people might live with and in ruins, or, as we put it in chapter three, “within the house of the enemy.”

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

⁶ Derek Walcott, “Ruins of a Great House” in *Collected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1987).

There are examples of other planned and spontaneous uses. Some examples relate to the most horrific of histories. At least two former World War II concentration camps have been the location of major re-adaptation. The prisoner-of-war camp Fossoli in Carpi, northern Italy, was used as a concentration camp for Jews who were imprisoned there before their deportation to the death camps in Eastern Europe. Two years after the end of the war the priest Zeno Saltini opened an orphanage there, which was in operation until 1952. The walls and barbed wire were pulled down, and the barracks were transformed into living quarters, a school, workshops. Trees, gardens, and vegetables were planted. The camp watchtower was transformed into a church.

Another interesting case in which a camp was transformed was that of Staro Sajmište in Belgrade. Built as a fairground in 1936 it had a series of national pavilions built around a central tower. The area had fallen into Nazi hands at the start of World War II. The visual order of the exhibition suited the new logic of surveillance and control. After the war, the site was occupied by artists and Roma people. The circular layout of the camp has thus been interpreted in radically different fashions three times: as a display mechanism, a site of incarceration and murder, and then a site of renewed communal life. Now the residents of Staro Sajmište (those who inhabited and, to a certain extent, protected the site) are under the threat of eviction as the Belgrade municipality seeks to build another form of exhibition—this time commemorating the Shoah.

Within the context of decolonization, one might look to Gandhi's principle of non-violent non-cooperation. His principle had an important architectural dimension. He suggested reusing structures saturated with violence after the violence could be "removed." In Delhi, after the Viceroy's House was evacuated, Gandhi wanted to turn it into a hospital. But Nehru insisted on turning the building into the President's Palace, thereby reproducing colonial hierarchies.

Al-Muqata in Ramallah is an interesting example of the potential and the trap of reusing colonial and military structures. The military compound was built by the British military as part of the larger campaign to suppress the Arab Revolt of 1936–39. From 1948 to 1967, it was used as a military base and prison by the Jordan Legion and for the same purposes by the Israeli army after 1967. Its history as a site of incarceration was, however, interrupted for a few months when the buildings were evacuated as part of the Oslo peace process. In this period of uncertainty, it was visited by thousands. People that had been arrested or tortured had the opportunity to share with friends and relatives the very site of psychological trauma. The architecture of the site had become a tool for narration. Nothing was really planned. Instead, these spontaneous visits transformed ex-prisoners into the guides of a non-museum of horror. However, this period did not last for long. After a while the Palestinian Authority took over and transformed the site into a presidential compound and a prison. Ironically, it was here that Yassir Arafat was held prisoner in a single room during the last months of his life, as if the old function of a prison could not be exorcized.

The Morning After

The millennium started with the failed “peace negotiations,” with the Second Intifada, with targeted assassinations, arrests, barriers, a growing sense of strangulation. These repressive acts were made more heinous by the cruel convictions of the post-9/11 period. This was the background of our ongoing discussions. Our previous work had been engaged in spatial research and theory with the conflict over Palestine as our main site of investigation.¹ Over the years, the three of us began talking about shifting the mode of our engagement, combining research and practice, i.e., about ways of using practice to provoke politics to reveal itself and act upon it. Instead of critical distance we sought critical proximity. Our wish was to inhabit the subject of our study, to enter, so to speak, into our respective books as characters,

¹ See Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Senza Stato una Nazione* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2003); Rafi Segal, David Tarkover and Eyal Weizman, eds., *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture* (London and New York: Verso, 2003); Alessandro Petti, *Arcipelaghi e enclave. Architettura dell'ordinamento spaziale contemporaneo* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007); Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land. Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

to become part of the constellation of forces that shapes our environment.

Although our form of research and practice is collective, relational, and active, it would be wrong to think of it as “activist.” We do not work in an ameliorative manner; we have never proposed the kind of informal architecture we see worldwide promoted as a solution to alleviate poverty; we do not use photography to reveal injustice or protest it. Rather we have sought to establish a different balance between withdrawal and engagement, action in the world and research, fiction and proposal. Our work should neither be interpreted as an attempt to articulate an architectural utopia nor as a political instrument for “denouncing” or “mobilizing public opinion.” Our practice is not reactive to dominant forms of power; instead, it has a different temporality.

In a place like Palestine the risk is in becoming dependent on the frenetic rush of mainstream reporting.

We envision our practice instead as an attempt to produce a space from which it is possible to operate in the here and now but with radical long-term transformative visions. Architectural proposals are a form of fiction. Their effects could be the opening of the imagination. We want to find a place for architecture to act in the world and not in the service of a pre-existing agenda. Our architecture has materialized in both built and political space, and in the cultural collective imagination of actors—in meetings and presentations, in legal challenges, in negotiations...

We established our practice as a combination of an architectural studio and a residency program. DAAR, or Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, aims to use spatial practice as a form of political intervention. There are not many precedents for the idea of an architectural residency, but there were many young practitioners from the region and many internationals that were eager to take part.

DAAR's program has gathered together architects, artists, activists, urbanists, filmmakers, and curators—all of whom wanted to work collectively on the subjects of politics and architecture. The residency has various modes of operation: it combines discursive and spatial intervention, collective learning, public meetings, and legal challenges.

The work of the studio/residency was further based on a network of local affiliations and the historical archives we have gathered in the years of our research. It was the necessity

and the specificity of the situation that led us to assume that a viable approach is to be found not in the professional language of architecture and planning, but in inaugurating a collaborative “arena of speculation” that incorporates varied cultural and political perspectives.

The residency was established with the aim of engaging with a complex set of architectural problems centered on one of the most difficult dilemmas of political practice: how to act both propositionally and critically in an environment in which the political force fields, as complex as they may be, are so dramatically skewed. Are interventions at all possible? How could spatial practice within the here and now of the conflict over Palestine negotiate the existence of institutions and of their legal and spatial realities? How can we find an “autonomy of practice” that is both critical and transformative?

To engage in architecture in a zone of occupations and oppression is to engage in a less-than-ideal world. This has not only to do with the violence that contaminates every aspect of our life, but with determining the point in time from which speculation could begin. Conflicts create a sense of postponement. Architecture tends to await the post-conflict stage, or to imagine it, at least. But ours is an endless struggle, and, still, people and groups have different perceptions of what the desired post-conflict state might be—a desired state of affairs or a desired State? Political ideologies are not defined by present practices but by the kind of end state desired. Are you a one-, two-, or three-state solutionist? A partitionist? A federalist? The one/two/three-state or Middle Eastern confederation solutions are equally entrapped in their respective “top-down” expert perspectives, each with its own self-

referential logic, system of government, and mediation. The only state we know is a state of conflict and struggle.

Thinking politics through architecture helps us enter the problem from another direction. Our architecture is not about determining a utopia of ultimate satisfaction, but simply starting from what exists—the present state of affairs and its material manifestation, from the rubble “unceasingly piled before our feet.” Our way of work seeks to find and utilize cracks and loopholes within existing colonial systems of separation and control. As such, it deals with the stuff of what might be called “real existing colonialism” and the trash it leaves behind. These include built structures, infrastructure, land ownership, and legal systems alike. Each of these elements enforces separations of a different nature and by different means.

We seek to reuse and profane rather than reject the material conditions of real existing colonialism. We seek to decolonize a system rather than establish a State. Our project mobilizes architecture and individual buildings in our vicinity as optical devices and as tactical tools within the unfolding struggle for Palestine.

At the time of writing these lines, the world is a very different place than it was in 2007 when we established our studio. It was the end of the Second Intifada—although we didn't know it yet. Today, it seems as if the third is about to start. By the end of 2010, a series of revolts had begun to reshape our larger region. Many believed that the influence of the revolutionary events in the Arab world never made it to Palestine, while others insisted that the revolution started here. Indeed, some demonstrators in North Africa understood their actions quite literally as “Intifada.” But these revolts against

military-presidents-for-life—some more hopeful than others—were not confined to the political process and they exercised a hypnotizing power on viewers and participants alike. Events in Cairo, Manama, Tunis, Istanbul, and Tehran have transformed the meaning of the term decolonization.

While previous revolutions might have been understood as decolonization, they did not succeed in liberating the people from cultural and military hegemony. Decolonization today is about taking public squares—which, notably, have mostly been traffic roundabouts. In effect, these roundabouts have been turned into a form of symbolic public ground. But in Arab cities, the term “public” is associated with the state and its repressive mechanisms; that is to say, the “public” was never owned by the people. It was these places throughout the region that became the vortex of new common forums of political action. It was only when protestors in Tahrir

began cleaning up the square that they finally took real communal use of it—and of the future of Egypt—as uncertain, contradictory, and full of dangers as that may be. In the wake of these events it seemed as if roundabouts everywhere were about to erupt.

In this book we have avoided thinking about acts of revolt and concentrated on what we called “the morning after.” Here you will not find any descriptions of popular uprising, armed resistance, or political negotiations though these are, of course, integral and necessary parts of any radical political transformation. Instead, we present you with a series of projects that try to imagine a longer future. Indeed, could it be that the lack of future speculation contributed to the fact that other forces often “hijacked” these revolutions?

The work presented in this book is thus an invitation to undertake an urgent architectural and political thought experiment: let’s think about the contemporary conditions of the world from the perspective of Palestine; let’s think of today’s struggles, not from the point of view of revolution, but from that of a continued struggle for decolonization.

In our projects we use buildings as optics from which to investigate and probe the political, legal, and social force fields, here and there, near and far—the military base in front of our studio, the refugee camps at the edge of our town, the idyllic village of Battir, the Parliament in Jerusalem that straddles the line of Israeli control, the ruins on the beach of Jaffa, the destroyed villages of the Nakba and the colonies of the West Bank.

This book has neither a single author nor a unified narrative; it is made of architectural investigations on different scales, locations, with different intensities and speeds. By extracting a selection of our projects, it attempts to elaborate on several key concepts informing the overall program of DAAR. The projects in this book should be understood as a set of architectural fables—speculating about the seemingly impossible, the actual transformation of the structures of domination. It is thus also, and fundamentally so, an invitation to rethink the problem of political subjectivity not from the point of view of a Western conception of a liberal citizen but rather from the point of view of the displaced and extraterritorial refugee.

Returns

Since the Nakba, starting in 1947, the condition of Palestinian refugees has been defined by two limiting concepts: *extraterritoriality* and *return*.

These terms traditionally refer to conditions in the present and in the future respectively. The former concerns the endless present of homelessness. The latter relates to a nostalgic utopia. In reality, however, extraterritoriality is an extended “temporary” condition of precarity, marginalization, and exclusion while the notion of return is often abused and traded in the context of futile political negotiations.

Because we think that continuing to articulate the problem in these terms is a dead end, it has become necessary to invert this temporal order. The term decolonization is the necessary third aspect of this triangle because it will allow us to articulate this temporal inversion, and think about *present return* and *future extraterritoriality*, unlocking the transformative potential therein.

Return and decolonization are entangled concepts—we cannot think about return without decolonization, just as we cannot think about decolonization without return.

As committed as we are to the full implementation of the right of return, we do not believe that return can offer a solution to the condition of refugeehood by simply reversing the trajectory of time; rather its potential is for a much more radical kind of transformation. However well-meaning the intentions of comrades and colleagues are, it would be best to stop pathologizing refugees as if they were a disease to be cured by return. Rather than marginalizing refugees as a residual issue in contemporary politics, we think they must be put at the center of any political vision for radical change in our region.

Return is, after all, both a matter of a political or a legal right—one that should not be compromised in diplomatic negotiations—and also a ghost—a category that organizes the lives of refugees in the present. In order to help explain the multiple layers of the term, we propose to use its plural, returns. The concept of returns grounds the right of return in daily material practices. Traditionally, the return is understood as a coming back to one's places of origin and one's property. However, during the sixty-five years of exile, conditions have changed not only in the cities, towns, and villages that were cleansed but also in the places of refuge, where a new political culture has gradually started to articulate itself.

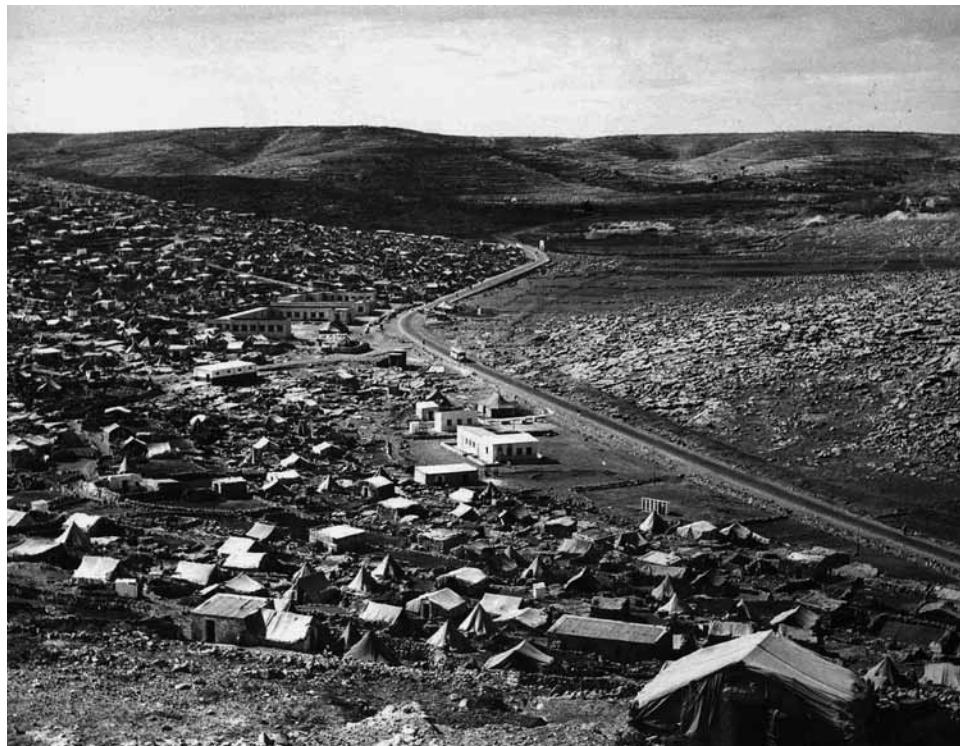


Miska before the destruction.

Royal Air Force, 1944

The return poses both a challenge and a promise that are far in excess of the mere reversal of time. It is the most necessary move in the implementation of decolonization because the notion of returns demands the complete reorganization of modes of property ownership and the relation between multiple polities and territory.

Indeed, in order to unpack the potentials embodied in returns we must first turn to the refugee camp.



Dheisheh Camp after the Nakba.

The al-Feniq Photography Archive, 1952



Superimposition of the original structures of Miska in white, from 1948 on the current situation, 2010.

The layouts of the camps involve an intersection of military and medical principles within a spatial regime of multiple separations and regimentations. When constructed in the early years after 1948, they were organized as a dense fabric of districts, blocks, and undifferentiated shelters. Without the possibility of expanding beyond the boundaries of the zone allocated to the management of the UN, the initial layout of grids of roads and the standardized units of shelter became a dense conglomeration of built structures and ad-hoc extensions, a shifting maze of alleyways that seems to be under constant transformation, mutation, and adjustment.



The built fabric of Dheisheh.
Photo: Vincenzo Castella, 2010

The internal layouts of many camps contain invisible folds of geographies that often reflect an imagined spatiality of displacement, recreating the refugees' places of origin. Places like Jaffa, Zakaria, and Safad are socially and materially reconstituted in camps such as Balata, Fawwar, and al-Arroub. In this respect the refugee camps have become the footholds of Palestinian memory, evidence of the formative act of ruination and dispossession, a twisted mirror image of a lost geography.

While they may appear like rather chaotic physical environments, refugee camps rely on complex assemblages of spatial arrangements, infrastructure, means of communication, and legal and organizational procedures. They are global spaces and sites of intense political battles for influence between the agencies of the host states (or the host non-states in the

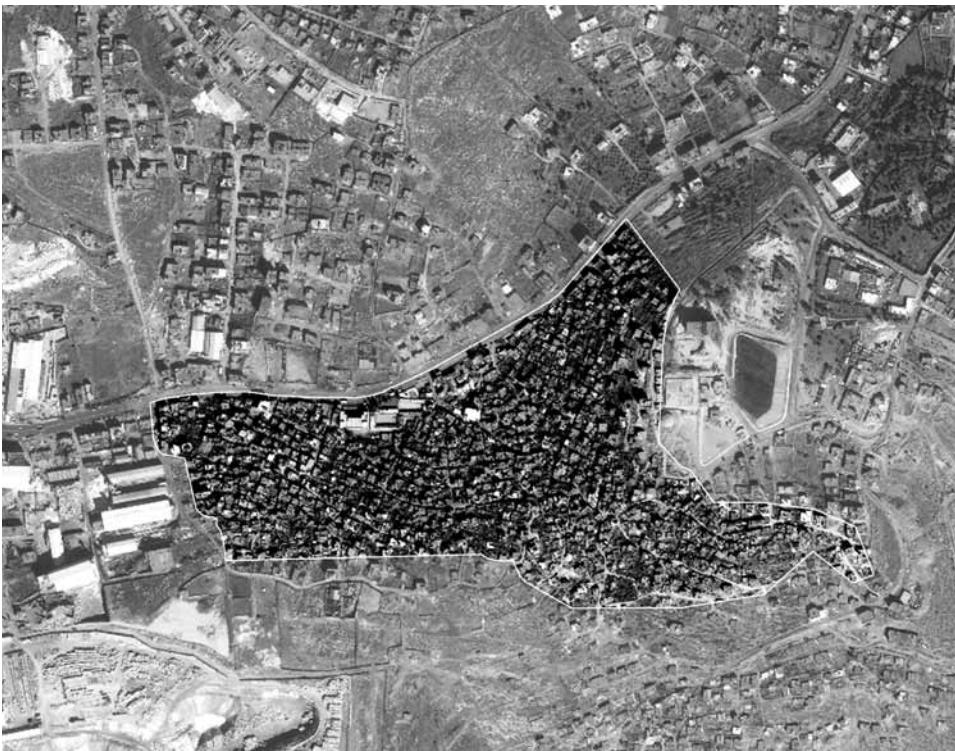


The site of the destroyed
village of Miska, 2010.

case of Gaza and the West Bank), international organizations and NGOs, donors, religious relief organizations, and the committees representing the refugees.

What makes refugee life a potentially powerful agent of decolonization is that the ongoing desire for return is the strongest possible challenge to the sovereign power of the state.

For Israel, the Arab states, and even eventually a Palestinian one, could be accepted as manageable enemies. It is only the refugees who have a moral and historical claim against the state established in 1948 on the ruins of their society.



The Refugee Camp
of Dheisheh, 2010.

As such, Israel's colonial order regards the refugee as an existential challenge to its very foundations.

Indeed the figure of the refugee is closely associated with a sequence of intertwined figures of destruction and ruination. The refugee is the justification for an "irresolvable" conflict along simple territorial lines. The homelessness of the refugee and the provisional nature of the camps also make temporary and questionable the existence of the Israeli state.

These figures of destruction thus invert the relation between refugees and protection. For Israel the refugee is not the one

in need of protection but the one to be protected against. When refugee camps are attacked we need to see this action as part of a “war on refugees”—a type of violence distinct from counter-insurgency and urban warfare, and one that aims not only to cripple resistance and pacify the camp, but also to undo the refugee as a political category.

As such, the refugees’ condition of exile cannot be dealt with only through the existing political categories, but demands the conception of an extraterritorial political space. Refugee life is thus suspended between these two ungrounded sites, always doubled.

Thinking about the question of the returns of refugees necessitates the adoption of a stereoscopic vision that navigates the complex terrain between two places—the extraterritorial space of exile and the out-of-reach village of origin.

The camp and the place of origin are two islands. The demolished villages, towns, and refugee camps are extraterritorial spaces not fully integrated into the territories that surround them. The ruins and the lands themselves are legally defined as absentee property and the camps as self-administrative zones supported by the United Nations.

The Village of Miska

The first of the two sites related to the stereoscopic condition of refugeeness is the destroyed village of origin. The remnants of the village of Miska, next to the Palestinian town of Tirah, are a material archive for the spatial practices of refugee life.

Miska is one of about four hundred Palestinian villages demolished by the Zionist forces during the 1947-48 war and thereafter. On April 20, 1948, the paramilitary Haganah occupied the village and expelled its inhabitants. In 1953, fearing the refugees’ return, Israel destroyed the core of the village. To cover this up, state authorities planted a small forest of eucalyptus trees in and amongst the ruins. This was part of an Israeli policy to use the planning designation of “natural reserves” to expropriate village lands. Environmental protection was invoked as a justification for actions whose true purpose was to conceal state crimes. Paradoxically, rather than erase, today these trees clearly mark out the extent of the village.¹

By the end of April 1948, only one family was able to stay in the area of the village. At present there are close to four hundred descendants of this family living as “internally displaced persons” in nearby Tirah. The exiled population are scattered throughout refugee camps and cities in the West Bank and Jordan.

The land of Miska is managed by the Israeli Land Administration (ILA) which further rents it for the cultivation of fruit trees to the Jewish settlements of Sde Warburg, Mishmeret, and the Kibbutz of Ramat Ha-Kovesh. The only significant visible remains of the village are the ruins of a mosque and, until 2007, a school.

It is within and around these structures that in 2002 refugees started to organize social and religious events. Ismat Shubeita, one of the organizers of these events told us: “We celebrated weddings, birthdays, ate together, then

¹ The perverse logic according to which destroyed villages are transformed into nature reserves is exposed every year during the celebration of Israel’s “Independence Day” in which Israelis flock to parks for barbecue parties that are held over the ruins of Palestinian villages.

marked the outlines of the demolished buildings around the school and posted signs bearing the names of children who once attended it.”

In 2005, the Israeli authorities fenced the school in, declaring the area a “security zone.” In response, the community, along with Israeli activists, continued to use the area and appropriated the fence for exhibitions.

In 2007, the authorities demolished the school to discourage such use. Yet the community did not give up. Instead, the village became the starting point of the annual March of al-Awda (the March of Return) to commemorate the Nakba.

Dheisheh Refugee Camp

The second of the two entangled conditions is embodied by the refugee camp of Dheisheh. The camp was established in 1949 on less than half a kilometer square on the main road just south of Bethlehem. The land was leased by UNRWA (the United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency) from the government of Jordan to house refugees from forty-five different villages.

Since then, the population of the camp has grown to some ten thousand refugees without its area ever expanding. During the First Intifada the camp was amongst the most important sites of resistance. Not only were the refugees able to hinder the movement of troops and settlers by sporadically closing and continuously threatening the main Bethlehem to Hebron artery; the camp also became the cultural and operational headquarters for resistance groups such as Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The fence around the camp operated both ways—it controlled and

limited the exit of Palestinians from the camp, but, crucially, it also reinforced the out-of-bounds nature of the camp and made Israeli incursion more difficult.

At the beginning of the Oslo peace process, the fence was removed and only the revolving gate at the entrance of the camp was kept as a memorial for the ongoing struggle. From the robust headquarters of resistance—which only a few years earlier had been the organizational hub of militant action and civil disobedience—a network of NGOs have taken hold.

Wherever one turns one’s head in Dheisheh today one sees an NGO headquarters. There are about thirty of them in this small area—probably the highest density of NGOs per square meter in the world. This transformation follows the history of Palestinian resistance: most of the leaders of the First Intifada in 1987 are now NGO heads.

Dheisheh is perceived by refugees in other camps throughout the West Bank as a political inspiration. Normally, the cultural-political ideology of camp life interprets all forms of material improvement and transformation in the physical fabric of refugee camps as part of a process of “normalization” that undoes the exceptional status of the camp.

In the case of Dheisheh, however, any new constructions of collective institutions in the camp are articulated not as acts of permanent settlement that would contradict the desire to return; rather, paradoxically, the more established these institutions become, the more they turn into vehicles of decolonization that can connect present struggles to a history of displacement and a future of returns. Another paradox is that the more attempts were made to use the neutral humanitarian spaces of the camps to exclude refugees from

political life, the more they gave rise to the most radical forms of politics. In Dheisheh, refugees build not “instead of” but rather “in order” for camps to provide political spaces, spaces where political claims can be voiced and political struggles pursued. It is in this way that the camp continuously develops and rearticulates the self-conception of refugeehood in a way that maintains its vanguard political status. Rather than enacting normalization these constructions became potential agents of decolonization.

When asked if improving the physical conditions in the Dheisheh camp and establishing a network of NGOs there have not jeopardized the right of return, Abu Khalil, one of the leaders of the Dheisheh popular committee, said, “[t]he stronger we are, the more we can fight for the right of return. If we need to fight for our daily bread, we cannot not even begin to think about the return.”

Present Returns

Al-Feniq is a multi-story social and cultural center created at the edge of the Dheisheh camp. It was built as part of a British military compound before being used by the Jordanian and eventually the Israeli armies.

When the Israeli army partially withdrew from the urban areas following the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority planned to adapt part of the compound into a prison, thus continuing the colonial history of the site. However, at this point, the refugee community—which did not want to see the prison in their camp—took over the location and within a few months had built the foundation of a cultural center instead.

Both the appropriation of this site and the transformation of its prospective use from a prison into a cultural center provided clear evidence of the visionary and active power of the refugee community. Today the al-Feniq center has a range of multifunctional spaces for hosting myriad activities: the Edward Said library, a large hall for weddings, a women’s gym, a community health and business advice centre and guesthouse facilities.

Thus, when Naji Odah, one of the founders of al-Feniq, was asked if building the center was a form of settling in the camp, he replied, “I’m ready to demolish it and go back home; or even better, I’d like to rebuild al-Feniq in my village of origin.”

As such al-Feniq could be considered a bridge between the site of origin and the site of exile.

The tension between the political desire to return and the inclination to remain in a familiar environment is also evident in an exchange that occurred recently in Dheisheh. One afternoon, Abu Khalil dropped in on a ladies’ coffee gathering. Suhair, one of the women, jokingly asked, “Abu Khalil, when will we return home?” He joked back, “We don’t have enough transportation to take you all home at once, do we?” Suhair persisted, “but we’ve already bought the bus, which could take us all home,” pointing out the fact the refugee centre of Ibdaah had bought a bus which it calls “the bus of return.” Shyly, a woman named Basma, asked, “Can we bring Dheisheh camp with us?”

Basma’s question became our brief. The exchange had demonstrated to us the tension between the desire to return and the sense of belonging to the present life and culture in the camp.



Miska: a circular probe on
the site of origin.



Dheisheh: a circular probe on
the site of exile.



Stereoscopic vision: a solid void in Miska.

DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

We realized that any intervention at the site of origins would need to be mirrored by an intervention in the site of exile. Thus, these entangled proposals have become part of a single architectural project.

We marked out two circles of equal dimensions in both the destroyed village of Miska and the camp of Dheisheh, and considered them as probes representing the nature of the site of origin and the site of exile respectively.

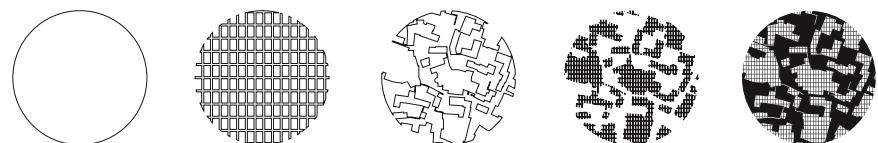
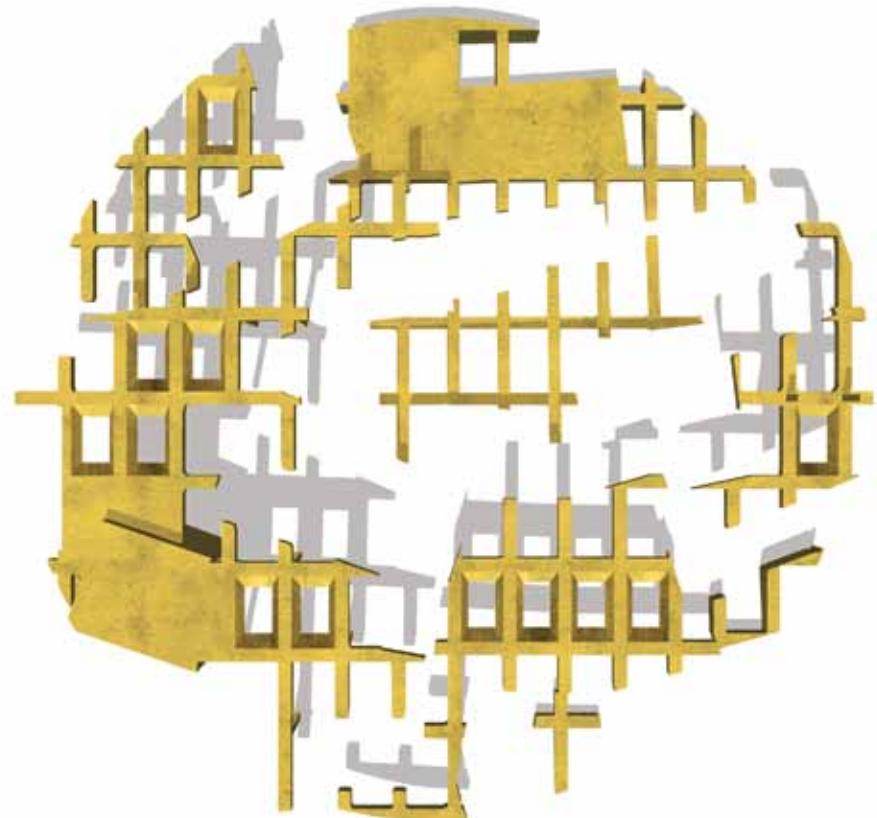
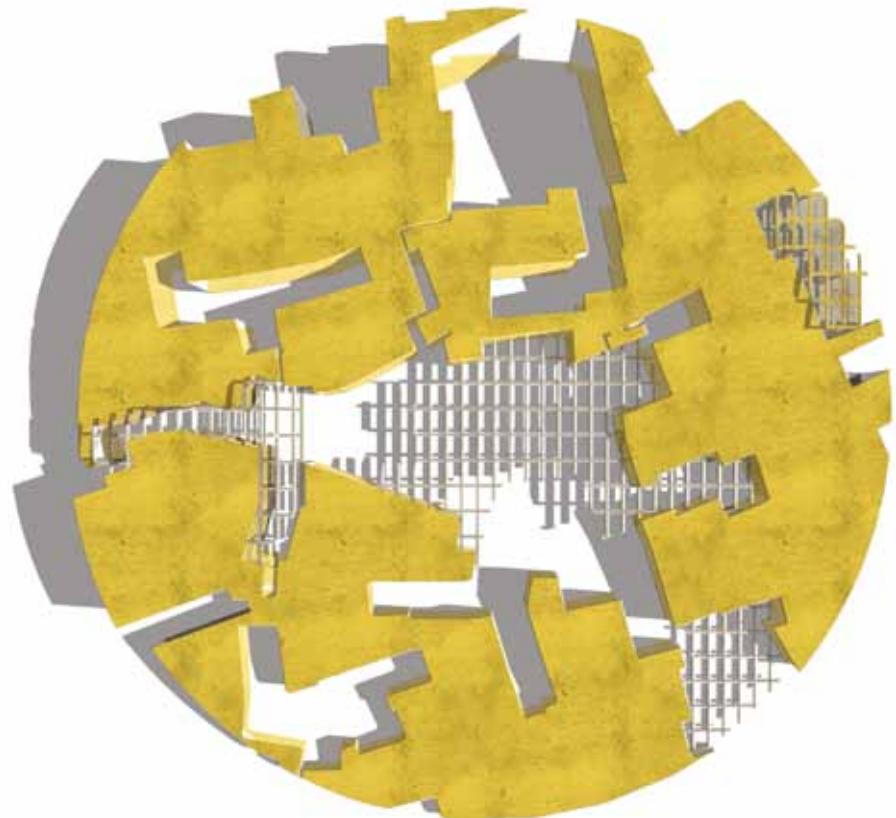


Stereoscopic vision: an open space in Dheisheh.

DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

Inverting solid and void, we exchanged the contents of these two circles, proposing an open space in Dheisheh and a solid building in Miska.

On the ruins of Miska, we proposed an urban core for a city yet to come. We modeled this core on the al-Feniq program, effectively enacting Basma's request. Upon returns, the refugees would continue building upon the culture they have developed in exile.



Inverting solid and void: the location of houses in the village become open spaces within the probe.



The open spaces mirror the layout of the houses in the camps.



Al-Feniq as envisioned in Miska.

DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

Within the area marked out by the circle, the places where houses once stood will turn into voids, and the open spaces between the houses will turn into solid mass, inhabited by multiple common programs.

The reason for this inversion is that, after sixty-five years of exile, the memory of a single house is now equally shared by hundreds of individuals. Traditional categories of ownership become extraneous to the situation. Owned by so many potential claimants, a single house, or its lands, could be sold and the profit divided, of course, but many refugees would rather keep these sites. Challenging categorization, these spaces could no longer be considered (strictly speaking) either private or public. In this respect, the veritable revolution of return is fundamentally a revolution in relation to property.

In the density of Dheisheh, parts of the camp are un-built, and a square thus gradually opens to create a common civic space in what was otherwise perceived as an apparatus of relief providing nothing more than a multiplicity of shelters.

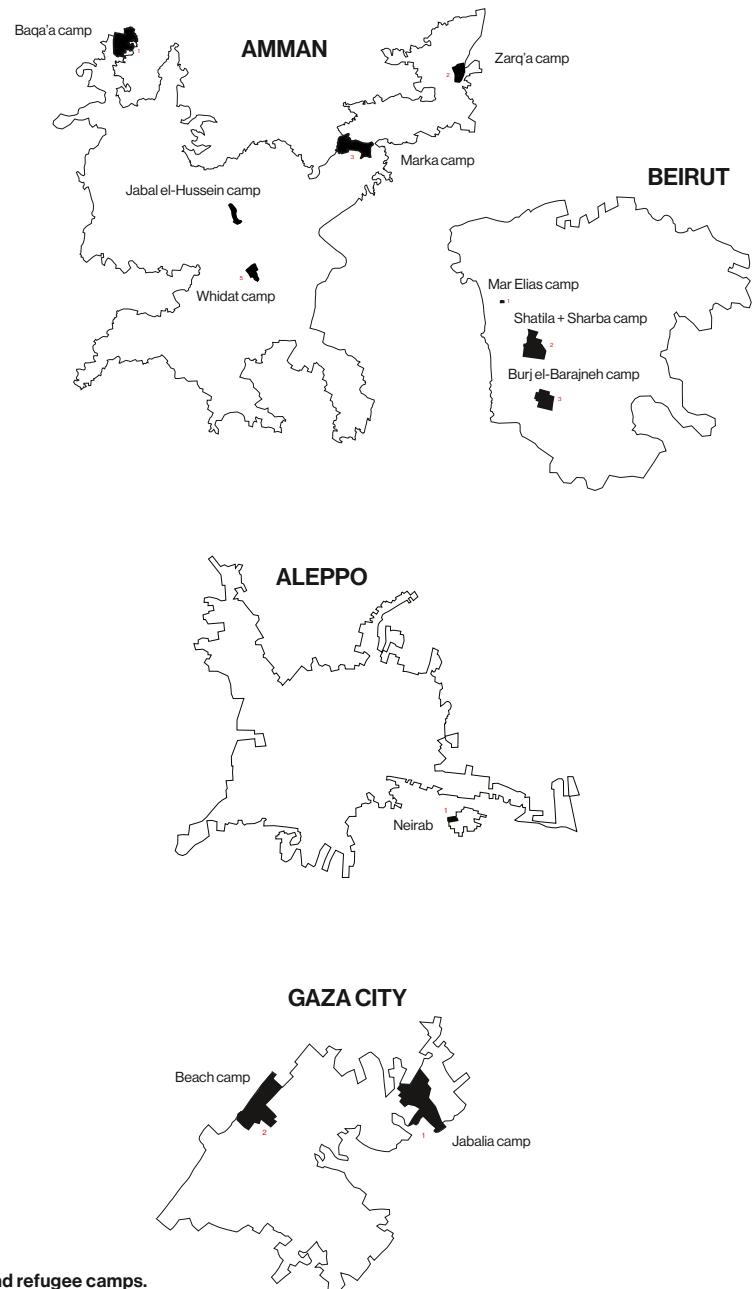


As the core of Miska gets built,
parts of the camp are un-built in Dheisheh.
DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

Future Extraterritoriality

In this way, returns will have a simultaneous material effect in both the sites of origin and the sites of displacement. The result might be a reciprocal extraterritoriality that connects the two sites into a single dislocated site.

The right of return is thus the quintessential aspect of decolonization because the right of return is the right to mobility, to the capacity to move freely across the region and live in more than one space at once. The right of return is the right to the urban, to a condition of heterogeneity and multiplicity that may already distinguish the sites of origin. Furthermore, the right of return challenges the structure of property rights and means that new forms of co-habitation will need to be developed. But the returns of Palestinian refugees will not only demand a radical change in and to Israel/Palestine, they will also affect the transformation of cities across the entire region. There are two and a half million refugees across the region already undergoing revolts and massive transformations, mainly on the outskirts of the now burning conurbations of Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut, and Amman. The emergence of refugees as a diffused polity might help us to rethink today's struggles not from the point of view of national liberation, but from that of a continued profanation and decolonization of state borders.



Arab cities and refugee camps.
DAAR/Bert Ruelers

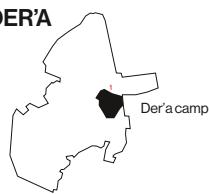


Rafah camp



RAFAH

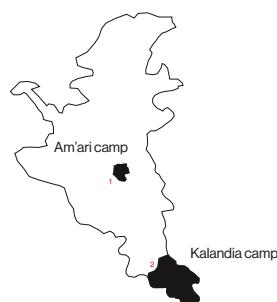
DER'A



KHAN JOUNIS



RAMALLAH



Ruins Under Construction

with Gabriel Cuéllar¹

In the autumn of 1976, three Israeli architects slogged through the rubble of al-Manshiyya's beach—previously the northernmost neighborhood of Jaffa, and now the southern edge of Tel Aviv—scouting for a suitable site on which to erect a museum commemorating Etzel, the nationalist Zionist paramilitary group that occupied and partially demolished Jaffa in 1948. Stumbling across several ruins that day, one assemblage formed by the wreckage of three houses caught their attention. The team later wrote that they were struck by the ruins' particular “power of survival,” despite having been “crumbled over the years by the sea breezes.” Their interpretation of the ruins as a product of natural deterioration was the first chapter of an architectural chronicle that aimed to radically re-narrate the history of the three houses and, through them, the very history of Jaffa.

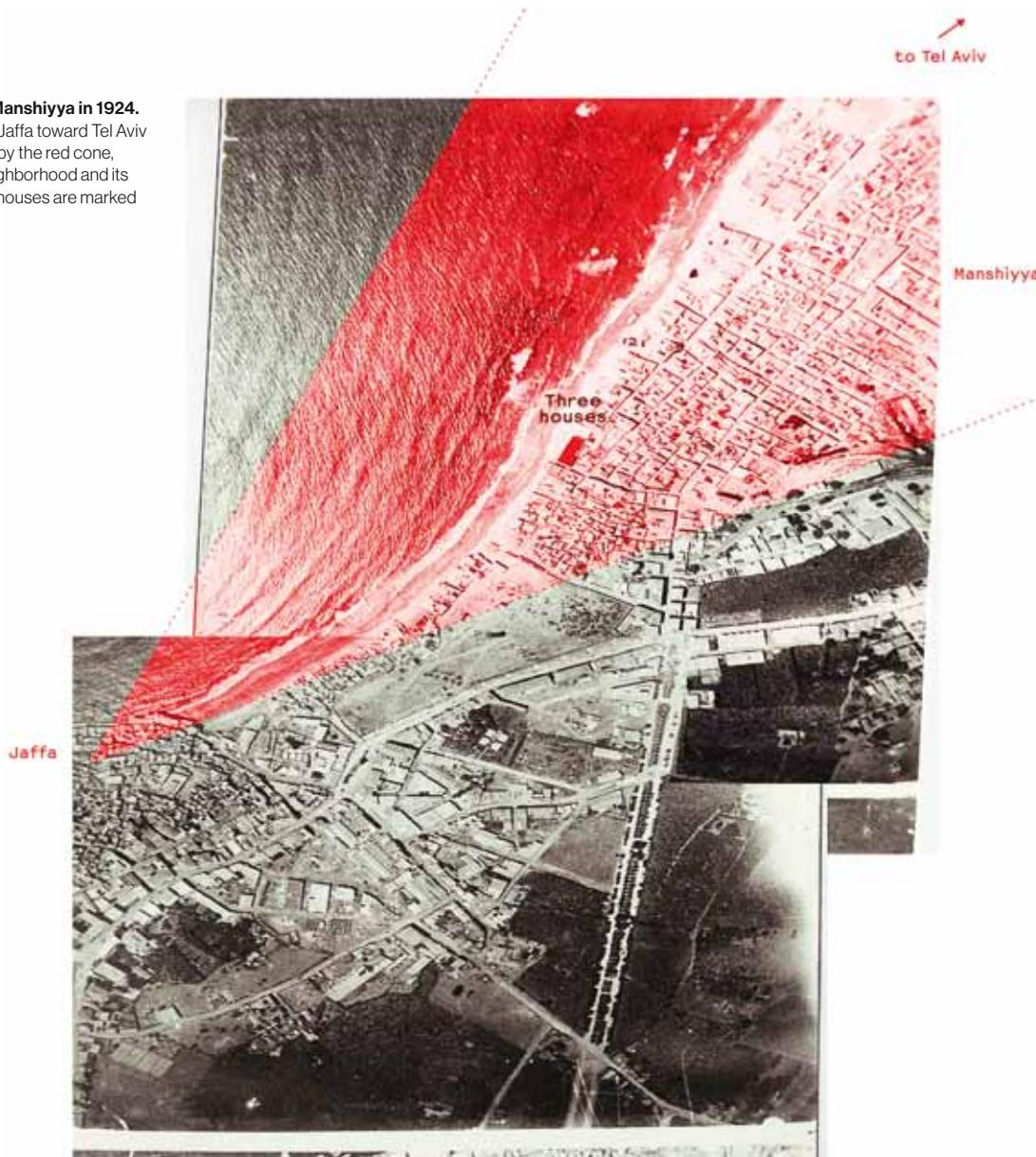
The museum they built appears to be an innocent vestige carefully set into Tel Aviv's beachside park. Historical photographs, maps, and films that show the site over time, however, make manifest another story, a counter-narrative to the one represented by the building that was completed some six years after their trek on the beach.

An investigation of Jaffa through its appearance in photographs exposes an archive of traces that offers an alternative account to the city's commonly recognized history. Rather than the material excavation typical of biblical archaeology in Palestine, this project unearths the details, the grains and pixels captured in media representations. It is in this media

¹ Gabriel Cuéllar developed this project during the studio that we taught at the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam (2011-2012). It was the last year of this institution and this might account for the risk it took by inviting us. A larger body of work was developed in collaboration with Lieven De Cauter and students Sanne van den Breemer, Patricia Fernandes, Zhongqi Ren, Sai Shu, and Rizki M. Supratman. This study is also our contribution to the Return to Jaffa-Tel Aviv project commissioned by Badil, the Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, and Zochrot, a non-profit organization that aims to promote awareness of the Nakba.

Aerial view of Jaffa and al-Manshiyya in 1924.

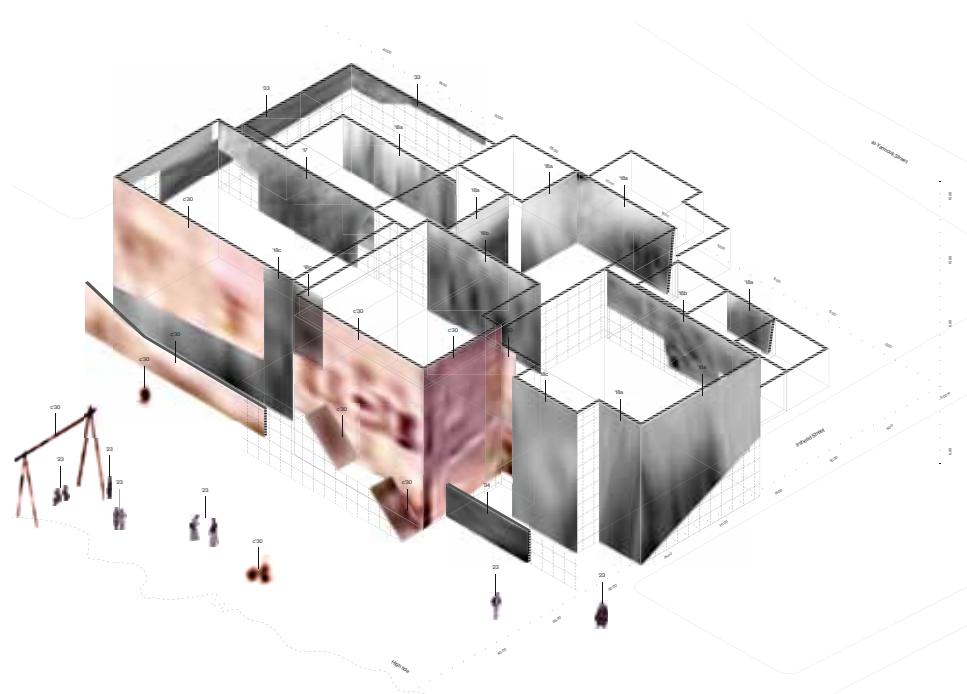
The field of view looking from Jaffa toward Tel Aviv in the northeast, represented by the red cone, includes the al-Manshiyya neighborhood and its beachside houses. The three houses are marked by a solid red rectangle.



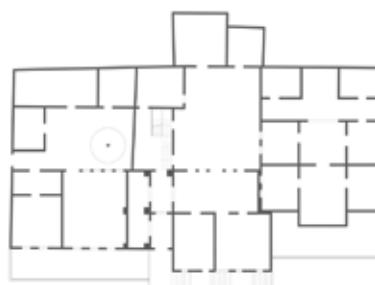
reality that the physical history of al-Manshiyya, defined by a slow but unswerving course toward erasure, can be uncovered. The narration of the neighborhood's destruction is made possible by circumstances that are unexpectedly ordinary: since the end of the nineteenth century, Jaffa, more than anywhere else in Palestine, has been captured by the lenses of travelers, administrators, amateur photographers, and filmmakers time and time again.

A popular photographic vantage point emerged in Jaffa in the late 1920s. As the Jewish colony of Tel Aviv expanded north of the city, photographers began scaling the hill on which the old city of Jaffa was constructed in order to capture the burgeoning panorama of the twin cities. That perspective included Jaffa's northernmost neighborhood, al-Manshiyya, which is unfailingly present in the foreground of photographs taken from the hill. For this reason, most early portrayals of Tel Aviv are also—indirectly—portraits of al-Manshiyya and, consequently, of the three beachfront houses. Their consistent appearance in the focal periphery of photographs taken over the course of nearly a century allows the biography of the neighborhood to be reconstructed.

1917–1950 al-Manshiyya's Beach Market



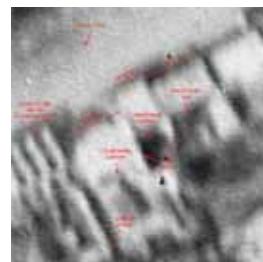
The row of visual fragments at the bottom of each archive entry has been cut out from the corresponding photograph. Fragments from multiple images have been composed together in order to three-dimensionally reconstruct the isometric images that follow. Six key moments in the three houses' transformation have been visualized using this method.



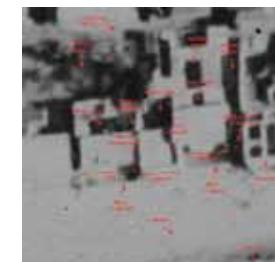
Floor plan

In the first half of the twentieth century, there were lively scenes along the section of beach directly in front of the three houses. In the 1930s, a number of wooden swings are seen installed on a sliver of beach at high tide. Another image shows vendors of grilled meat and ice cream. These vivid beach episodes came to a halt in 1948 when the Tel Aviv City Council forcibly evicted the Palestinians still living in al-Manshiyya after the Nakba and completely razed the city blocks closest to Tel Aviv. Nevertheless, the vast majority of al-Manshiyya urban fabric was left intact.

year: 1917
author: Bavarian Flight
Division 304b
source: Bayerisches
Hauptstaatsarchiv



year: 1918
author: Bavarian Flight
Division 304b
source: Bayerisches
Hauptstaatsarchiv

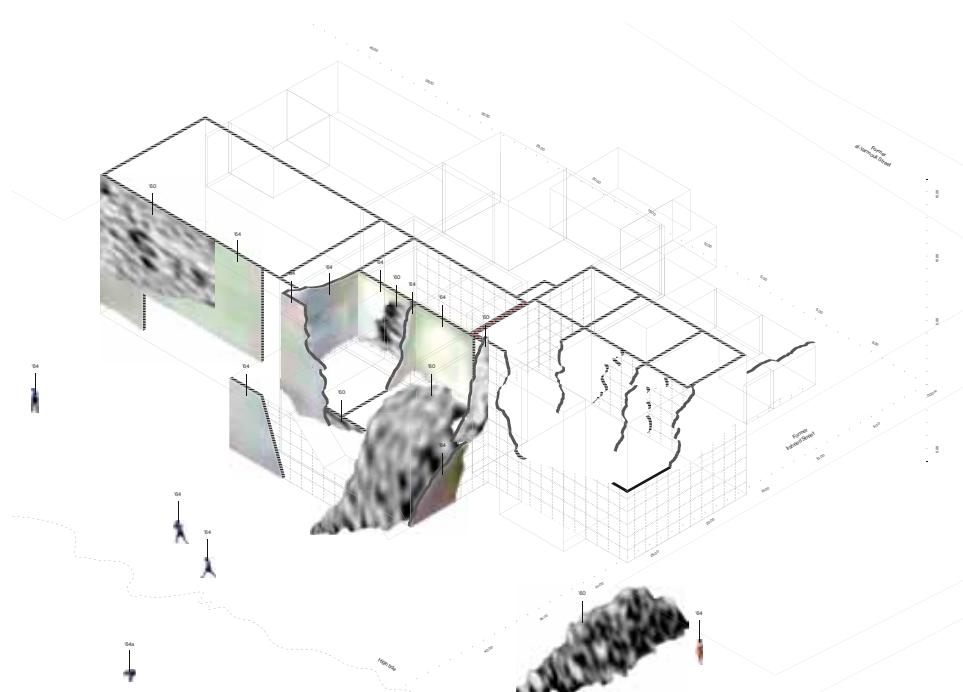


year: 1930
author: —
source: Jewish Museum Vienna



The isolated photographic fragments at the bottom of this image have been extracted in order to compose the 3D reconstruction of the houses in the image below. This methodology applies in all following stages.

1950–1959 Population Exchange



Floor plan

In the years immediately following the establishment of Israel, al-Manshiyya was largely abandoned and any residents who survived the ethnic cleansing of 1948 were expelled to neighborhoods distant from Tel Aviv. Starting in the late 1950s, the deserted houses were divided up and illegally acquired to serve as housing stock for newly arriving Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.

year: 1934
author: Dr. Hans Scheurer
source: PikiWiki Israel website



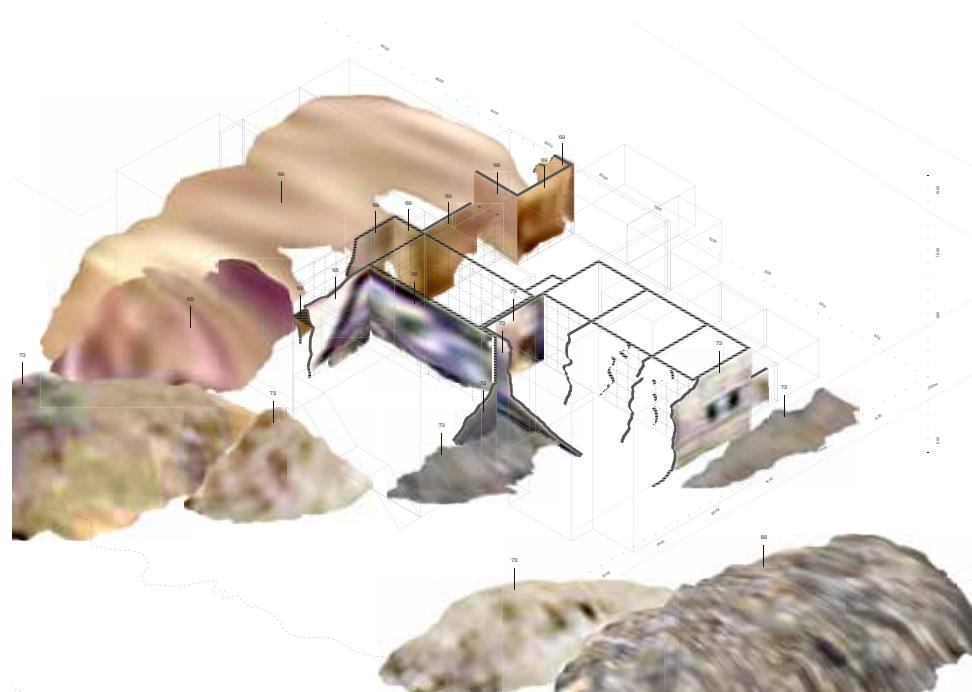
year: ca. 1960
author: —
source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/mil_leliri/6022138801/



year: ca. 1964
author: Perry Family
source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BNcsmhZNwc>



1959–1973 Rubble Landscape



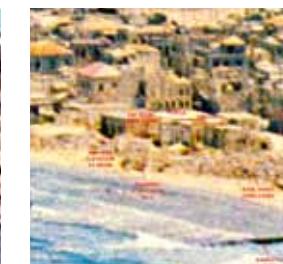
Floor plan

As stronger migrant communities left the neighborhood, al-Manshiyya remained the home of the underprivileged. The municipality condemned the neighborhood as a slum and steadily demolished it house by house, evicting the remaining residents but leaving the rubble in place. A great volume of building debris was created as a result. The plight of those evicted from the neighborhood—now mainly Sephardi Jews—was represented in the 1973 Israeli musical *Kazablan*. Among the few survivors of the protracted demolition campaign, the three houses were now virtually swimming in the rubble of their neighbors.

year: 1965
author: —
source: Skyscraper City internet forum



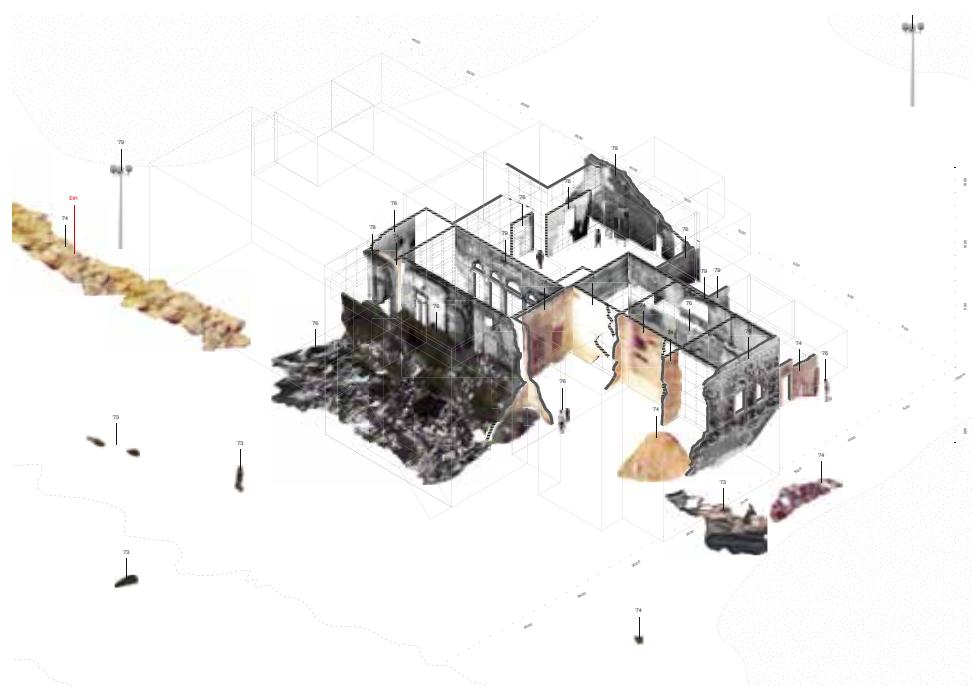
year: ca. 1968
author: —
source: Waymarking internet forum



year: ca. 1969
author: —
source: Televizia internet forum



1973–2012 Military Archaeology



Floor plan

By the mid-1970s, as homes continued to be destroyed, the rubble was piling ever higher. Eventually, the beach-level ground floors of the remaining houses were engulfed in more than four meters of granulated remains of the razed neighboring structures. It was during this period that the three architects began to design the Etzel Museum. When they visited the site, they were greeted by an Eastern European family who had been inhabiting the ruins. Shortly thereafter, that family was evicted and the ruins of the three houses were fenced off. The architects then proceeded to draw the master plan for the now leveled al-Manshiyya neighborhood. A hand sketch prepared by the lead architect Amnon Niv depicted Tel Aviv's modern towers on the horizon against the neatly flattened wreckage of al-Manshiyya in the foreground. In this vast modern scene, there was only one house left to draw, the Etzel Museum.

year: 1974
author: Menahem Golan, director
source: Kazablan DVD film

year: 1974
author: Piva Paolo
source: courtesy of the photographer

year: 1975
author: State of Israel
source: Israel Antiquities Authority



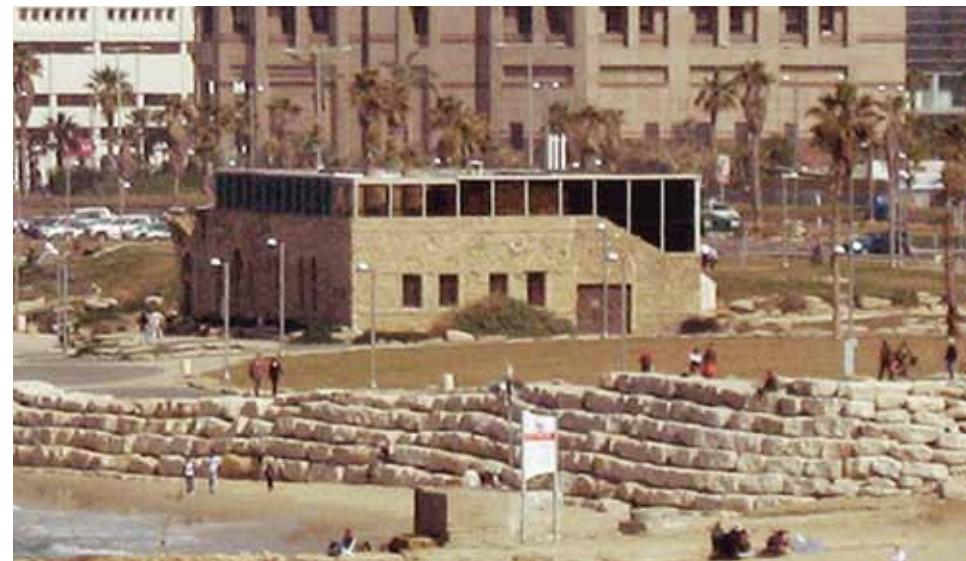
1982–2013 The Etzel Museum



Floor plan



The ruins of the three al-Manshiyya houses
transformed into the Etzel Museum, 1974 (above)
and 2011 (below).



When the Etzel Museum opened in 1983, its three architects, in unison with the Israeli Antiquities Authority and military Museum Unit, claimed against all available evidence that the ruins constituted a single house constructed in 1900 under the charge of a Russian Zionist. Considering Jaffa's characteristic density, it is remarkable that the architects insisted that these ruins, in the company of numerous other ruins at the time, represented the remains of one, independent building. Their narrative, and indeed the Museum as built, negates the city of Jaffa and its history. In order to construct the museum and despite having pledged to do their "best to respect the remains," the architects had to destroy many of the ruined walls that remained there. Manifesting their egregious historical account in architectural form, a modern glass box was built over low concrete walls veneered with historic stonework, "schematically completing the building to what it was." The so-called preservation of the ruins brought disparate building fragments together, conjuring the image of a single, officially "well-preserved" Zionist house. Considering the Israeli Antiquities Authority's principal goal—to "preserve all elements in situ"—here one sees architecture exposing the inherent schizophrenia of colonialism.

Through the prism of the media archaeology of al-Manshiyya ruins, an instance of Tel Aviv's underlying negation is exposed. At the same time, Jaffa's shared history, embodied in its ruins, media, and heritage as a Mediterranean city, comes to the fore and creates a foundation for a politics of the city to come. Once the cultural capital of Palestine and a cosmopolitan port inhabited by many cultural and linguistic groups, Jaffa is indeed the emblematic case of return. Whereas return is most often discussed as a right of individuals and as entailing the restitution of private property—that is, as a return to the four hundred destroyed villages—Palestinian cities thus far have played a marginal role in its narrative.

The history of al-Manshiyya, a modern district built in the first half of the twentieth century, demonstrates that the return must be considered in urban terms. Its ruins are not only the material presence of lost and destroyed private properties, but also the record and traces of what can be common, a rich and layered immaterial city life. Return, therefore, could be both a return to and a return of. A return to the Mediterranean city of Jaffa is potentially the return of a culture shared between returnees and present inhabitants—a return to mobility and thus also to a form of city lost across the Mediterranean.

How to Re-inhabit the House of Your Enemy?



DAAR/Diego Segatto

In the summer of 2005, the Israeli Army left the ground of the Gaza strip and relocated the occupation to the airspace up above—and, of course, around its walls and gates. It left behind the bulldozed rubble of more than 3,000 buildings. These were mainly single-family homes, but also public buildings, schools, military installations as well as industrial and agricultural facilities built for the benefit of the twenty-one settlements and the scores of military bases that protected them. Prior to the withdrawal, and ignorant of the impending destruction, a number of local and international interested parties considered several alternative scenarios for the possible reuse of buildings in the settlements. The imminent evacuation had opened up a unique arena of speculation, in which, between April 2004, when the plans for evacuations were made firm, and August 2005, when they were carried out, interested parties grappled with questions that would normally be relegated to the domain of architecture and planning.

Although the evacuation was conceived and undertaken as a unilateral Israeli operation, the fate of settlement buildings was debated by the US, the EU, the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), along with a variety of NGOs, think tanks, and some of the world's wealthiest Arab property developers.

These various groups convened with the Palestinian Ministry of Planning for intense meetings. On the other side, Israeli discussions focused on the potential symbolic effect of Israeli architecture under Palestinian control. Representing the attitudes of the right-wing faction of the Likud Party, Benjamin Netanyahu—who later resigned his office of Finance Minister in protest against the evacuation—demanded that all settlement homes be destroyed. Purportedly, this was in order to avoid the broadcast of what he felt were ideologically destructive images: Arabs living in the homes of Jews and synagogues turning into mosques. The Palestinians, he said, “will dance on our rooftops.”

His rhetoric conjured up images of a murderous Palestinian mob storming the gates of settlements, looting and reoccupying the homes of “decent” settlers. This “apocalyptic scenario,” he feared, would become the symbolic image for a reversal—and thus imply the reversibility—of a Zionist project previously characterized by the seizure, destruction, and, in some cases, reoccupation of Palestinian dwellings that became highly prized real estate among an “orientalized” Israeli bourgeoisie. Images broadcast internationally of the evacuated settlements taken over by Palestinians might have triggered barely-repressed middle-class anxieties at the root of the suburban project itself: the internally ordered, well-serviced outposts of the “first world” collapsing in the face of a “barbaric” surge of the “third world” erupting, so to speak, from the outside.

The US administration, on the other hand, was firmly opposed to the destruction of the settlements. Handing over homes, public buildings, agricultural, and industrial assets was seen by President Bush and Condoleezza Rice as more than mere economic stimulus. What could better befit the American agenda of “civilizing the Middle East” into a liberal society with broad middle-class values than having Palestinians live in American-style single-family homes? In response to US demands, the Israeli government announced that it would reconsider its decision to demolish settlement homes.

Mohamed Alabbar, a flamboyant Arab businessman, arrived in Israel six months prior to the evacuation, met with Shimon Peres and briefly with Ariel Sharon, and promptly offered to buy all the homes and other real estate assets in the settlements of Gush Katif for \$56 million. Alabbar is the chairman of Emaar Properties, a gigantic real estate company registered in the United Arab Emirates. The company has been a central player in the frantic development of Dubai, specializing in the rapid construction of themed onshore tourist and residential projects. He imagined the settlement block of Katif as the site of a possible tourist enclave.

This resulted in bizarre, grotesque plans for Dubai-style, high-rise hotel complexes. Settler homes would become a part of a set of tourist villages on what was now dubbed “the best beach resort of the Mediterranean”; if the project had come to fruition, such complexes would no doubt have become extraterritorial enclaves set against the deep poverty surrounding them. These fantasies fortunately never got very far. But together with other proposals for wholesale privatization they would have robbed Palestinians of the evacuated land to which they were entitled, and which they desperately needed, as a public.

It was therefore no wonder that Palestinians responded angrily when they were asked to pay for the remaining structures, and, considering Israel's price-offer, to over-pay for something they had never asked for. Is not paying for the colonies equivalent, in some respects, to the executed having to pay for the bullet that kills him? Palestinian Minister Saeb Erekat stated that the Palestinians were not interested in purchasing the infrastructure and told Israel simply to "dismantle the houses and take them away." Jihad Alwazir, permanent secretary of the Palestinian Ministry of Planning, claimed that "the settlements are an alien body that was forced on the Palestinians," and that if it were up to him, he would "have a big bonfire ... where every Palestinian should come with a hammer and bang on a building."

Power Unplugged

Our project began where the above scenario failed, starting with a similar question, but from a different perspective: how could Israel's colonial architecture be reused, recycled, or re-inhabited at the moment it is unplugged from the military/political power that charged it?

The proposals discussed by international organizations and property developers entailed either the complete destruction of the existing architecture, or its reinscription into continued or renewed colonialist functions and hierarchies. As discussed in the introduction, both these paths for us ultimately fail to live up to the conditions and task of decolonization. Hence, in seeking a third option, our project imagined that a new set of collective functions would inhabit the abandoned military structures and the evacuated houses of the colonists.

We began to ask ourselves what new institutions and activities could model the evacuated space and what physical transformations these spaces would require. The guiding principle remains the same: not to eliminate the power of the occupation's built spaces, but rather to redirect its destructive potential towards the fulfilment of other aims. We believe that if the geography of occupation is to be liberated, its potential must be turned against itself. Because the reuse of the colonial architecture is a more general cultural/political issue, we do not seek to present a single, unified architectural solution, but rather what we call "fragments of possibility."

The project was organized around a series of consultations. Each Saturday, we hosted a meeting of representatives of various organizations and individuals to discuss these issues, seeking to determine to what extent the evacuated structures might be adaptable to accommodating new uses. Among the guests were members of a variety of NGOs, private organizations, public institutions, refugee associations, culture and art institutions, private landowners, architects, planners, writers, journalists and academics.¹

The idea was to set up an arena of speculation in which different actors could simulate and evaluate a set of scenarios for possible transformation. Their genuine participation was the crucial factor and the only element that could guarantee the implementation of these projects—if they were ever to be realized.

"Why are you wasting your time and our time by thinking about the future of the colonial architecture? Occupation will never end and settlements will expand even more in the future."

¹ Some of these meetings were video-recorded and can be watched at <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/scenarios/>.

In most of our meetings with local NGOs, municipalities, or universities these were the words used to question the scenarios of decolonization we posed. These are certainly legitimate questions. Being born under occupation, you quickly learn that planning your own future is prohibited. It was only when we began organizing these discussions around architectural models displaying the re-use of the colonies that the possibilities began to become apparent. The discussion then shifted from “if it will happen” to “how it will happen,” from geopolitical scenarios to architectural transformations of houses, windows, and doors....When the process of imagination starts it is difficult to stop it.

Thereafter, when we presented our plans and models, the initial reaction of our discussants was a smile. In the beginning, we feared we were being ridiculed. Were our plans too far-fetched and outlandish in this environment of permanent impossibility? It is also true that models are reduced worlds “under control” and that they often make people smile. But the smile might equally be interpreted as the first moment of decolonization of the mind. Rather than a single, unified proposal of urban planning covering the entirety of Palestine, DAAR presented a series of detailed transformations on an architectural scale. The project site would be chosen as a laboratory to explore different modes of reusing colonial architecture. The first was a colony called P’sagot, on Jabel Tawil, next to Ramallah.

Jabel Tawil (P’sagot)

There is a large satellite photograph hanging in the entrance hall of the al-Bireh municipality (the town adjacent to Ramallah and near the settlement of P’sagot). When we first visited, on this map there were two white cutouts masking two areas: the place where P’sagot now stands and the refugee camp of al-Amari, at the city’s southern fringe. Both are zones extraterritorial to municipal control. The municipality could not access the first for physical reasons; and chose to avoid the second as planning for it would be considered an act of normalization of the politically charged status of Palestinian refugees. These cutouts were an inversion of the white spots that colonial cartographers used to draw over native territory. When we returned two years later, the map was still hanging in the hall but the municipality had removed the two white masks, integrating both types of extraterritorial space into the urban and cognitive geography of el-Bireh. With the masks now removed, P’sagot came into full view.

Located on a hill some 900 meters above sea level, the colony P’sagot visually dominates the entire area around it. Until 1967, it was used as an open space for recreation. The hills of Jerusalem and Ramallah were popular with families from the Gulf, especially Kuwaitis, who traveled here to escape the summer heat. In 1964, the municipality of al-Quds, under Jordanian control, bought the land in preparation for its development into a tourist resort. The work started in early 1967 with the construction of an access road, which is the only remaining trace of this project.



Ungrounding, the roads and private plots around the houses are covered by a new surface of soil, Jabel Tawil (P'sagot) and Ramallah el-Bireh.

Based on a photograph by Milutin Labudovic
for Peace Now, 2002.

Some fourteen years later, in July 1981, at the initiative of the Likud Party, the colony of P'sagot was inaugurated as "compensation" to right-wing Israelis for the evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula. The area once designated for tourist accommodation was the first to be occupied by settler housing. The first houses set on the hill of Jabel Tawil were prefabricated structures wheeled over from Yamit, a settlement that had been evacuated in the north of the Sinai. P'sagot is at present a religious settlement inhabited by 1,700 people, mainly American Jews and a minority of recent Russian and French Jews. We interviewed Jewish residents of the settlement, many of whom arrived from the US to settle the occupied territories. Here is a short excerpt:

When we came here, some twenty years ago, this place was a no man's land. Then we started adding new houses.

DAAR: As an act against any territorial compromise?

There were sixty families, which in two months grew to a hundred and twenty families. There were a lot of empty houses, empty caravans too. People were scared to come. You had to come through Ramallah, not the bypass road.

DAAR: So you would prefer to go through Ramallah?

Yes.

DAAR: Just to demonstrate presence?

To demonstrate that this is our land. I come from America, and Americans in America are American. If Mexicans come to America and they want to live in America, they have to act like Americans. They cannot just tell you what to do...

DAAR: I am not sure who you are referring to, you just said yourself that you come from America.

Because I am Jewish.

DAAR: But the Palestinians were already here, no?

Yes, but this is our land. If they want to stay here, I do not mind; they can live here, they can stay here, they can be here, they can work for us, we could work for them. But they cannot decide for me what's going to be here, because we are here. [. . .]

DAAR: Did they move the original houses from the Sinai?

Yes, they are prefabricated houses. They are the property of the settlement now, but people can rent them.

DAAR: So one day by political decision all of the P'sagot settlement will be moved somewhere else?

I hope not. We lived in these houses after we first arrived. They are still used for newcomers until they build new houses. Here is very cheap because it's no man's land. In Jerusalem it is much more expensive.

DAAR: How much is the rent?

A caravan is 550 NIS (€110) a month.

DAAR: Do you think that the government wants to evacuate you? Yes, for sure.

DAAR: How do you know?

From the radio.

DAAR: How are you organizing yourself in response to the threat of evacuation?

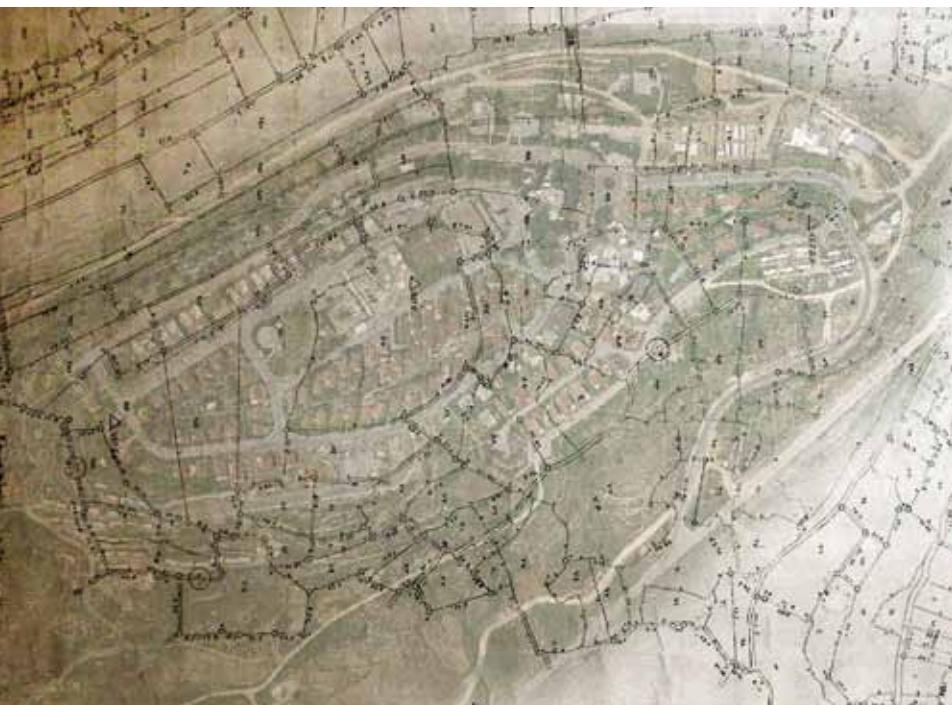
We are not organizing at all. I think people will not even fight here, most of them will just go.

DAAR: And what do you think Palestinians should do with the settlement?

I don't want to leave it like this... I don't want even to talk about it...

DAAR: Would you prefer to have it destroyed?

Yes... I believe that we came on a mission...for the good of the Jews and to get as much land as we can... so what will happen is decided by somebody up there... I don't listen to the radio... What is the difference if I know... Should I start packing? What am I going to do?

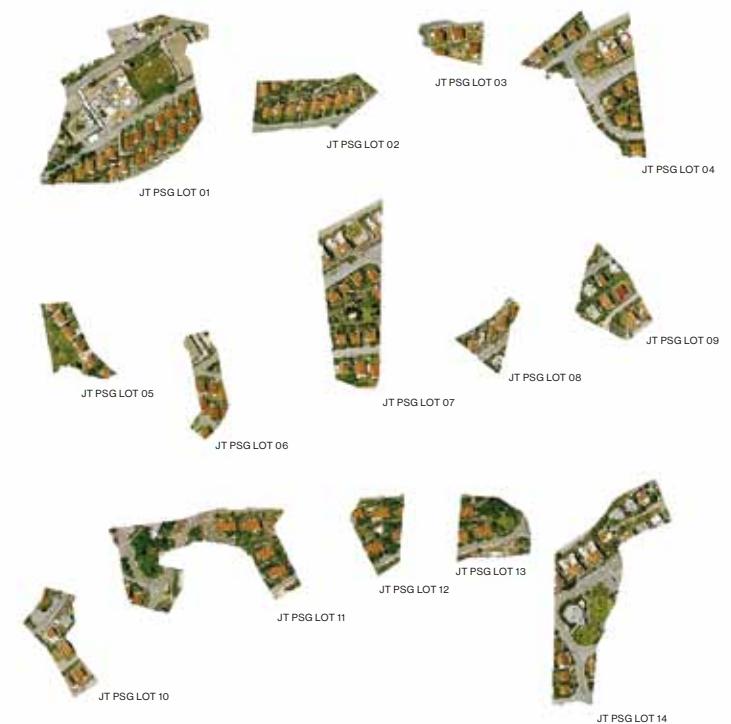


Superimposition of land ownership map from 1954 on a satellite image of P'sagot. DAAR

Deparcelization

A crucial issue in this project is land ownership. In the course of our analysis, we made use of both documentary resources and interviews to identify some of the landowners within the areas of the colonies.

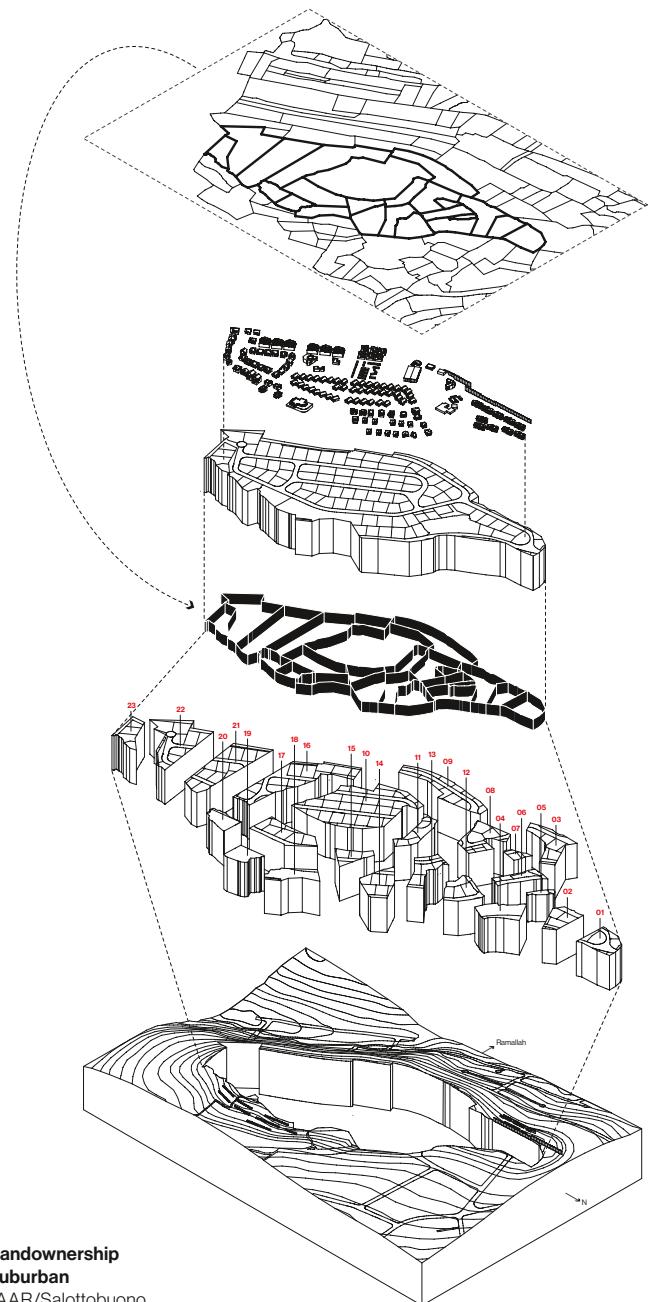
The buildings of the colony of P'sagot, like those of many such colonies, are built upon land that either belonged to Palestinian families, i.e., private land, or on public land that was used by Palestinians for recreation purposes or for the fulfilment of their public needs.



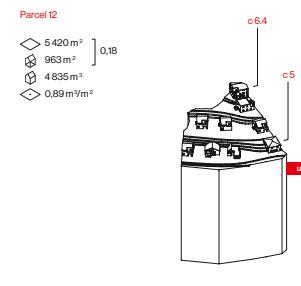
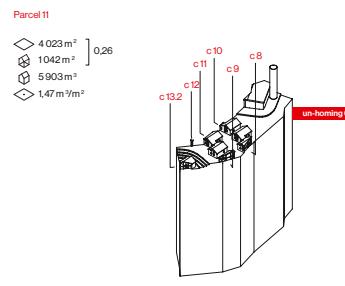
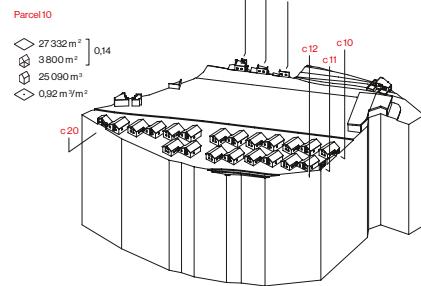
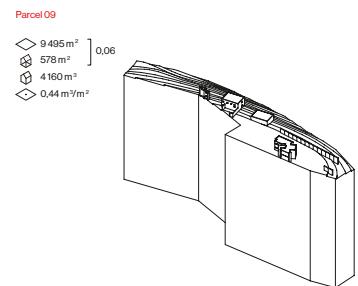
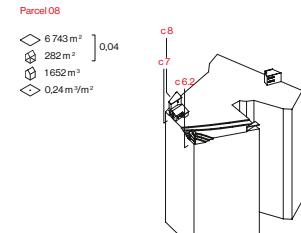
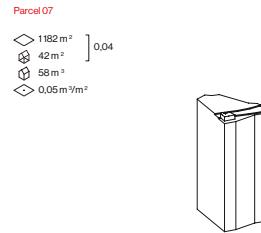
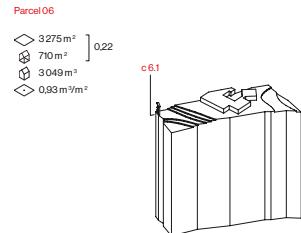
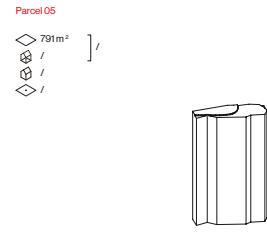
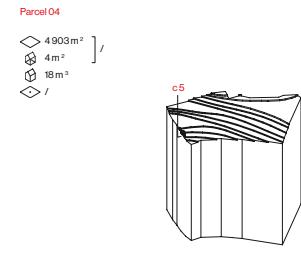
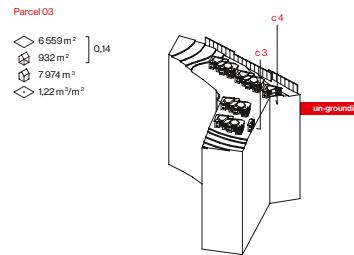
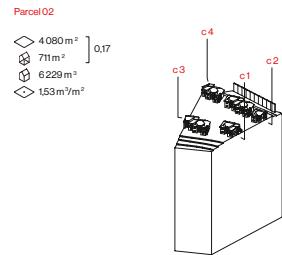
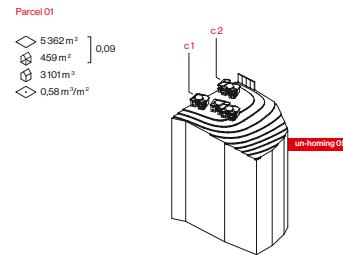
Our investigation traced some of the Palestinian landowners to the United States, Australia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq; and of course, some were closer at hand in Palestine, sometimes fenced off just a few hundred meters away from their own land. Their private and family histories are the intertwined histories of Palestine and its displaced communities, forced out by colonization and drawn away by economic and professional opportunities overseas.

Much of the core of the colony belonged to one of various kinds of Palestinian collective land types, which was the reason that it was easy for Israel to expropriate it as “state land.” The rest, about a half of the area of P’sagot, belonged to private owners. These private fields gradually fell into Israeli control using other expropriation devices. We felt that the fate of private lands should be decided by their owners. It was thus rather within the communal lands that we proposed various types of collective uses.

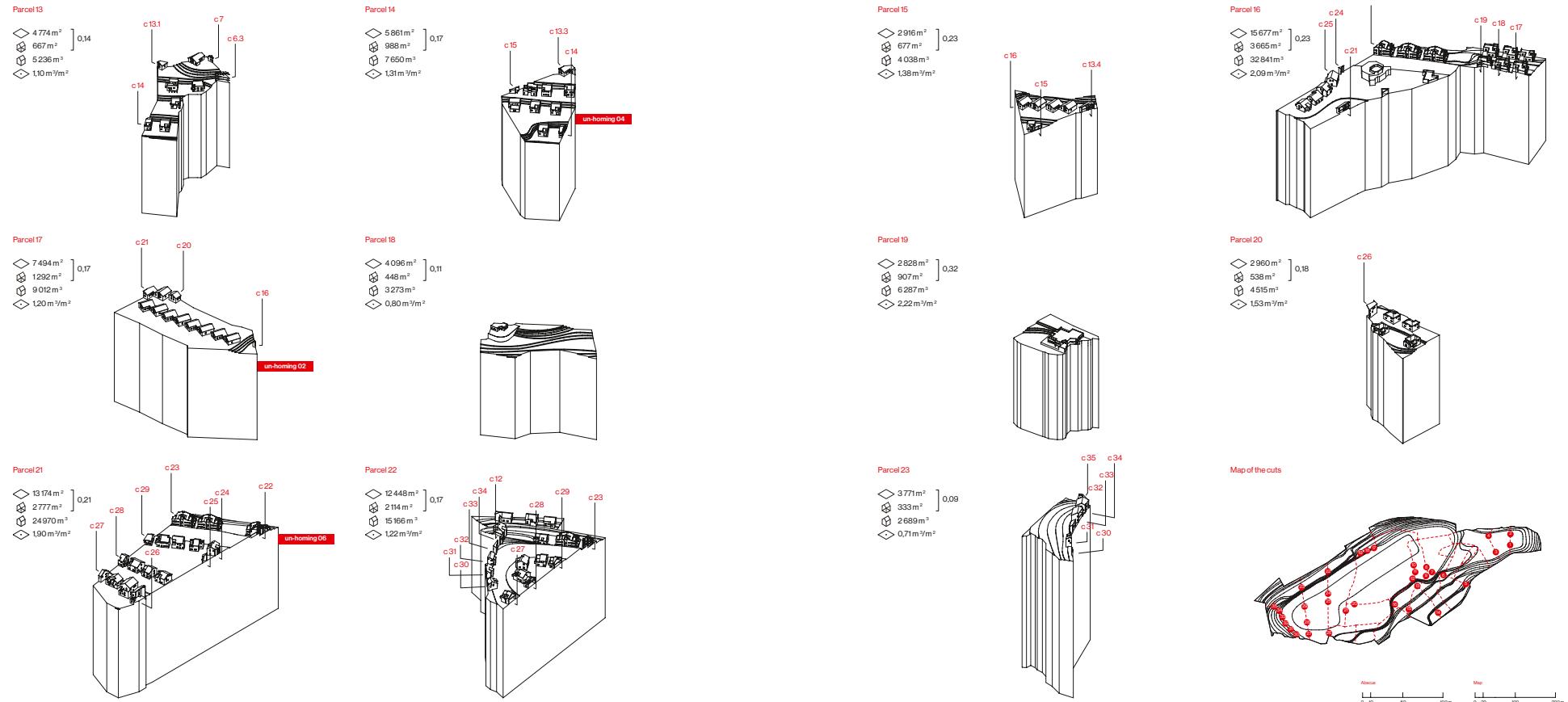
We discovered a map dating from 1954 that shows the original parceling of Jabel Tawil. We superimposed the 1954 map onto the plan of the colony. The Palestinian demarcation lines cut arbitrary paths through the suburban fabric of the settlements, sometimes literally through the structures themselves, creating a new relationship between the houses and their parcels, between internal and external spaces, and between public and private spaces.



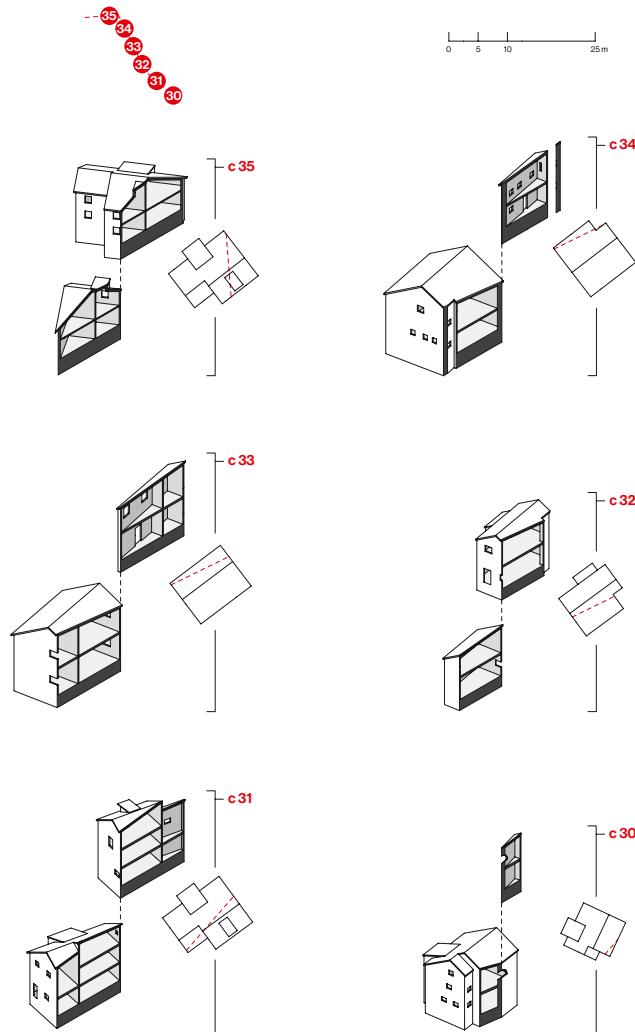
Deparcelization: the 1954 landownership division cuts through the suburban fabric of the settlement. DAAR/Salottobuono



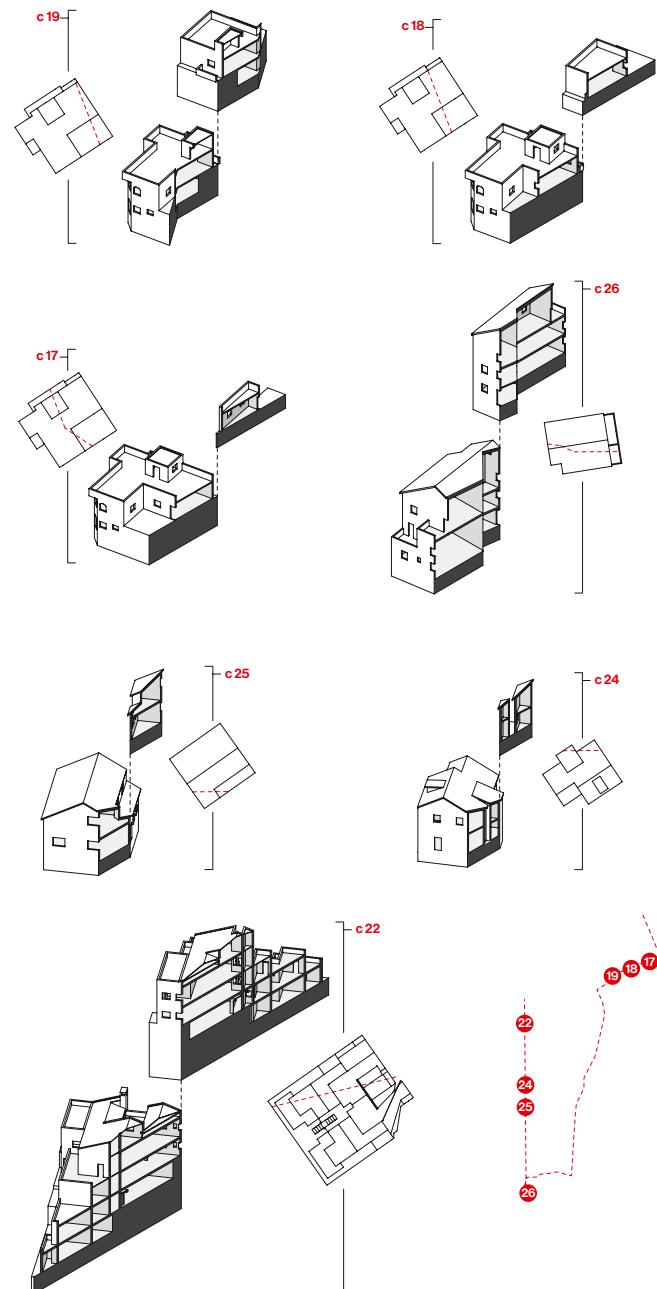
Architecture after Revolution

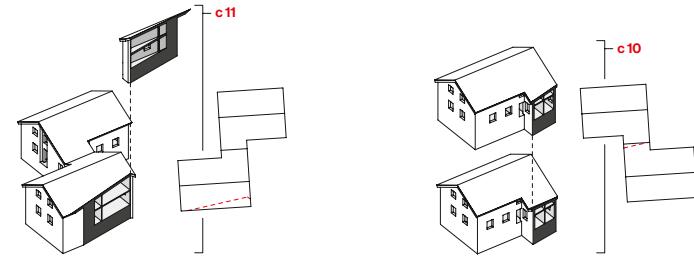
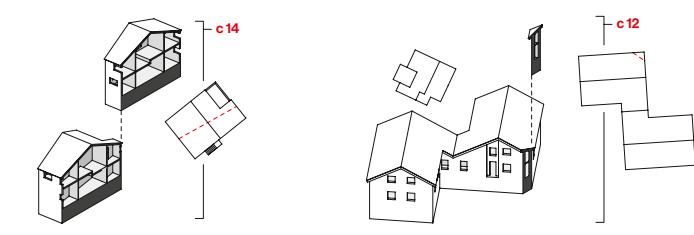
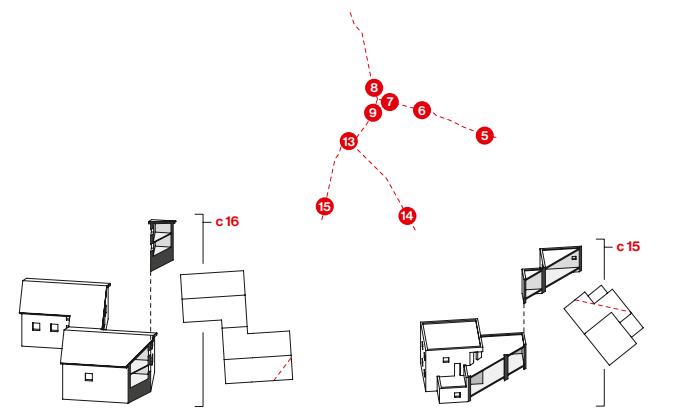
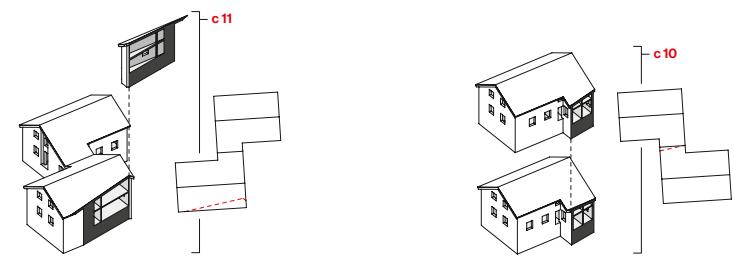
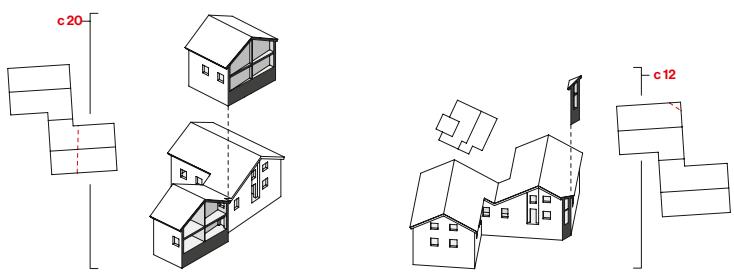
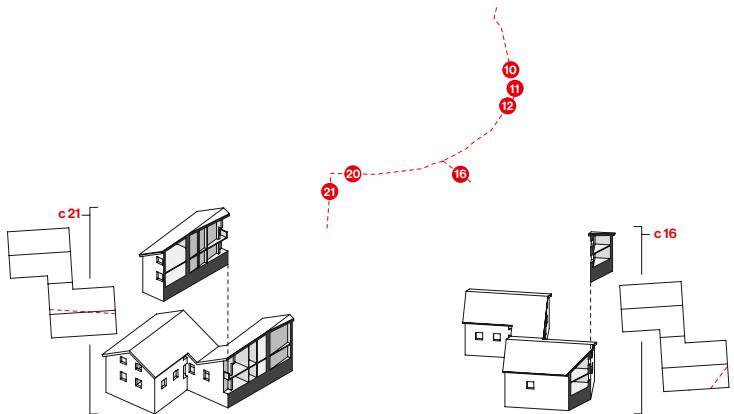


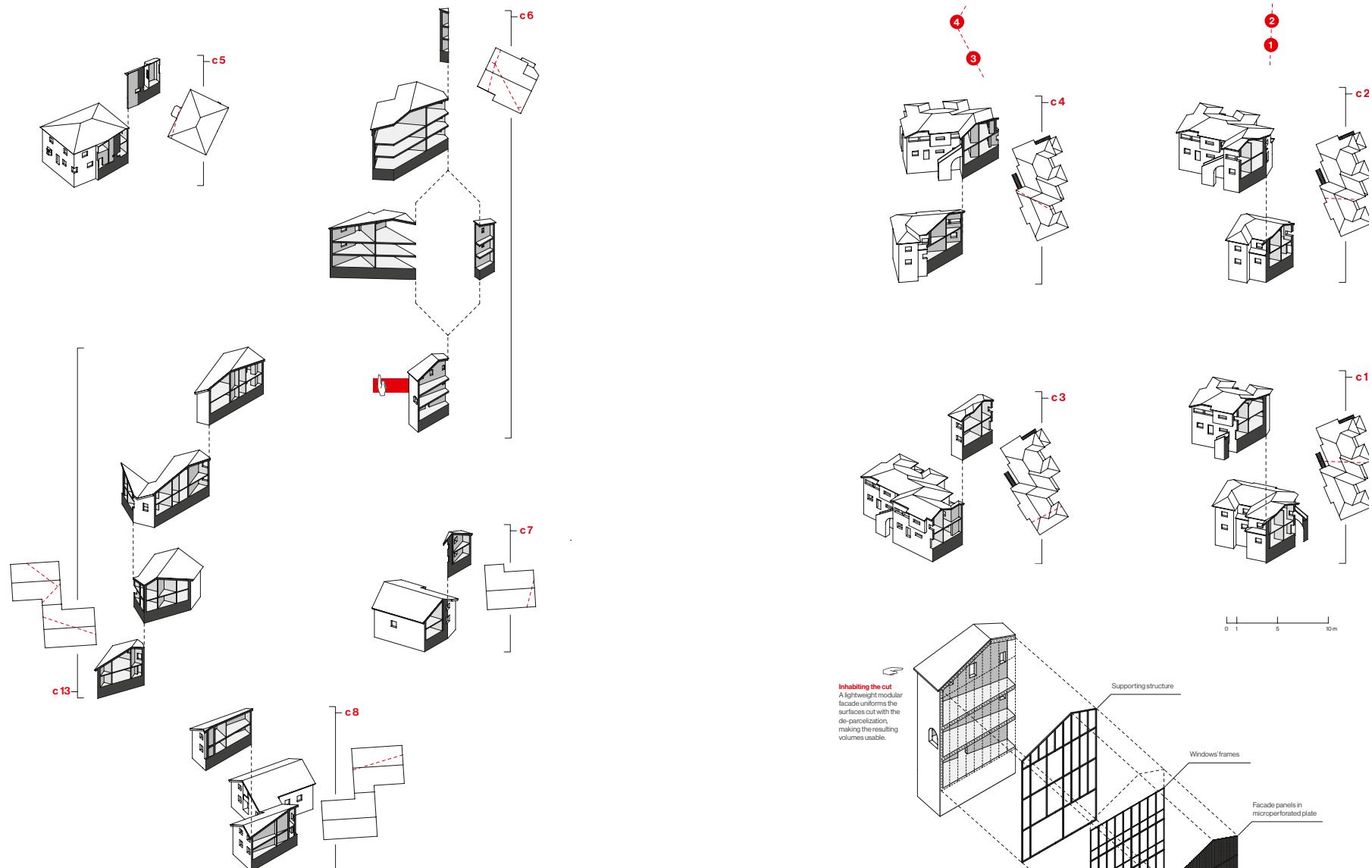
Chapter III



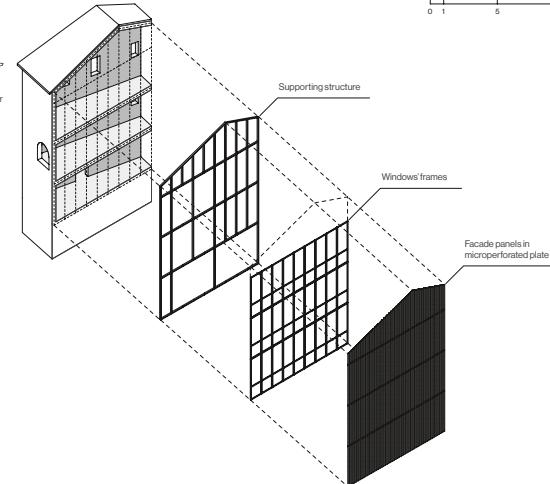
Deparcelization: the 1954 landownership division cuts through the suburban fabric of the settlement. DAAR/Salottobuono





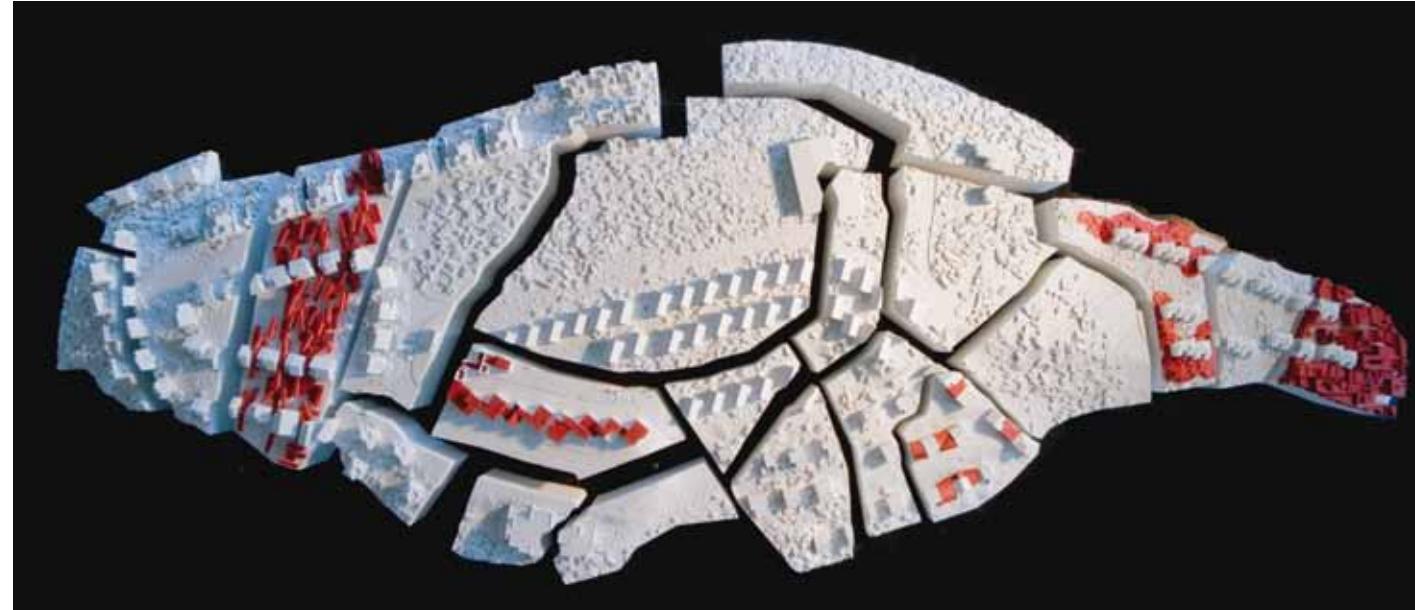


Inhabiting the cut
A light and modular facade informs the surfaces cut with the de-parcelization, making the resulting volumes usable.





Deparcelization: interventions, in red,
are articulated within parcels that are public.
DAAR/ Situ Studio





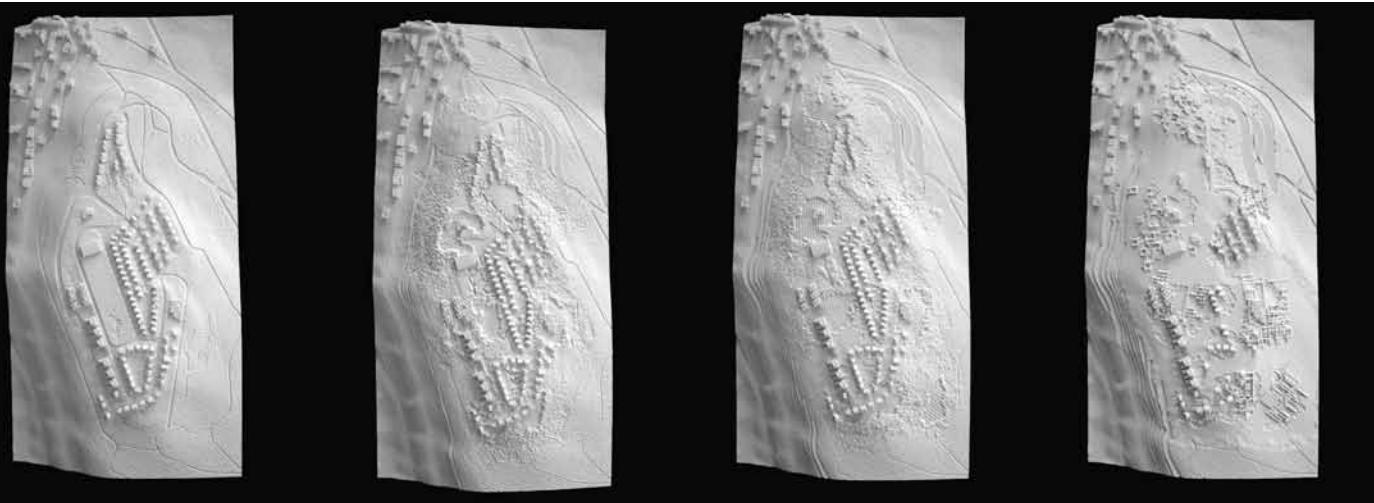
Deparcelization: the old private property lines of parcelization and the colonial buildings are reused for the creation of a third common space, that is neither private nor public. DAAR/ Situ Studio

Ungrounding: the Urbanism of the First Ten Centimeters

Settlements are suburban when considered in relation to the Jewish geography of the Occupied Territories. They are gated bedroom communities fed by a growing matrix of roads and other infrastructure—but they could be understood as potentially urban when viewed in relation to the Palestinian cities alongside which they were built. The surface of the suburb is marked by its various uses. It is inscribed extensively with the signs of the petty-bourgeois lifestyle that maintains it: an excess of roads and parking lots, private gardens, fences, sidewalks, and tropical plants. The pattern of streets in the settlements/suburbs is a folded linear structure. By designating drive/walk/no-walk areas, channeling movement, and designating the different degrees of private and public space, the first ten centimeters of the urban ground surface embody most of its operational logic and also its ideology. This surface is the primary site of our intervention. Under the category of “ungrounding,” we suggested a radical transformation of the first ten centimeters of ground.

It is the logic of the surface that we seek to deactivate in order to dismantle the structures that define the internal organization of the suburb and transform its private, public, and communal functions.

Ungrounding is achieved by the dismantling of the existent surface—roads, sidewalks, private gardens—which are then replaced with a new surface layer. The pervasive system of concentric roads and spaces for parking will be eroded, removed, or buried. The barriers and fences that once demarcated the edges of the private lots of the single-family homes will be removed, and thus the land becomes encommoned. Built structures will be suspended like pavilions on a single, unified new surface. Likewise, the re-grounding of the surface is a central part of an attempt to reconfigure a new figure-ground relation. Possible connections between individual buildings will be reconceived. Connections, for example, could be undertaken across a field in which movement is not prescribed by the linear folds of the roads and the sidewalks.



Ungrounding.
DAAR/Situ Studio

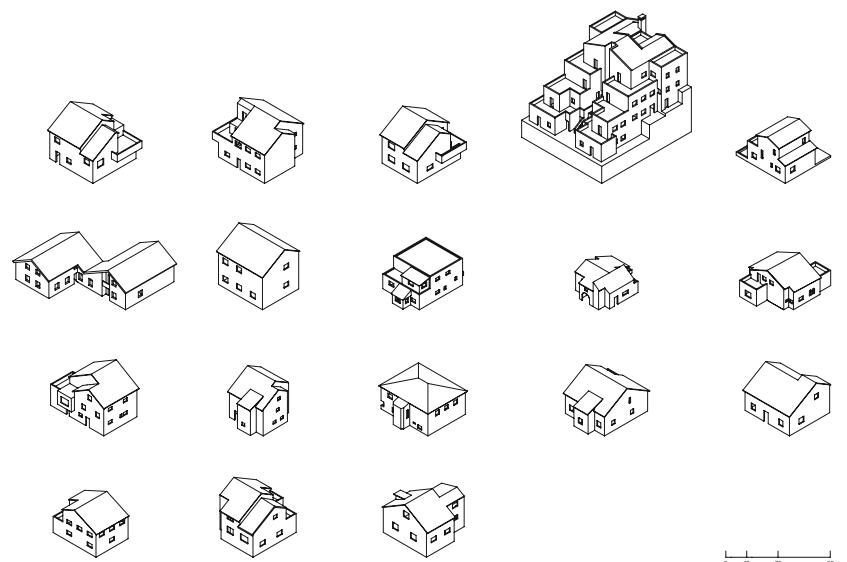
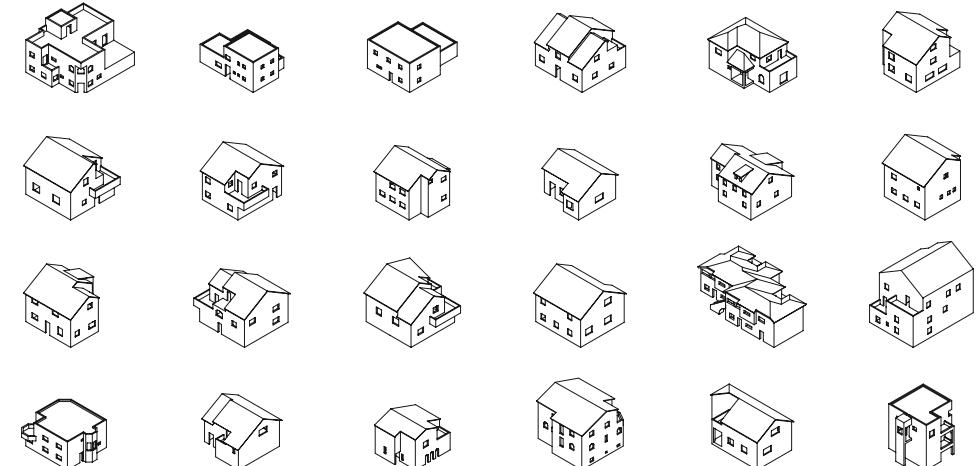
Controlled material decay could become part of the process of “place making” and destruction could become part of a design process that would lead to new uses. With ungrounding, it is clear that the destruction of the surface by actively uprooting its elements and also by accelerating the decay of other surface elements would create the ground for new forms of use.

Unhoming

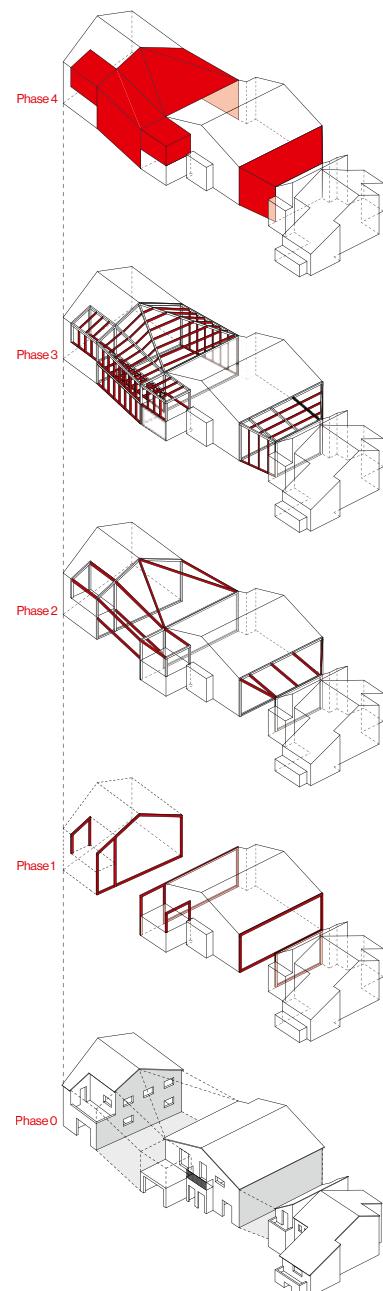
At the molecular level of the occupation is the single-family house on a small plot of land. Investigating ways to transform this repetitive semi-generic structure may open up ways to transform the entire geography of occupation. What are its limits of transformability? Can a single-family home become the nucleus of new types of collective institutions?

Which structural parts should be retained, and what are the possible ways of connecting together groups of houses? The problem is also how to transform a series of small-scale, single-family houses into unified clusters of communal space.

The problem of “unhoming” is not only a technical question of transformation. A lingering question throughout the project has been how to inhabit the home of one’s enemy. Within the multiple cultures of Palestine succeeding each other over the decades, rarely has anyone ever been the “first” or “original” inhabitant, but rather each is always a subsequent. To inhabit the land is always to inhabit it in relation to one’s present-day enemies or to an (imagined or real) ancient civilization. This is a condition that turns the habitation of old cities, archaeological sites, battlefields, and destroyed villages into culturally complex acts of “co-habitation.”



Typologies of homes in Psagot.
DAAR/Salottobuono, 2008



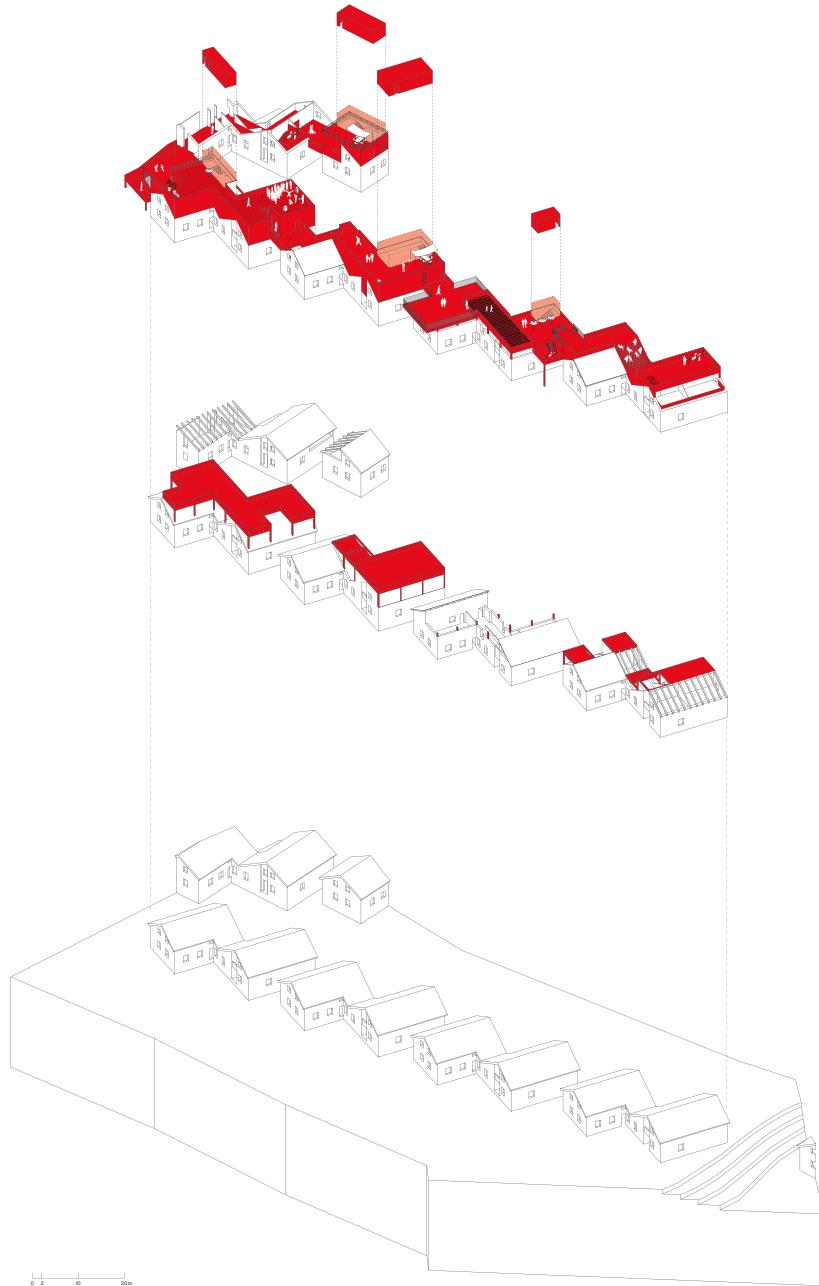
Unhoming.
DAAR/Salottobuono, 2008

A Laboratory of Transformations

Through our work in the Occupied Territories, we began to realize that the project may form a possible laboratory for architectural actions whose reach may go beyond the local specificity of our immediate environment. It may also form the beginning of a way to think through the future of the suburban settlements, many of which are in dire crisis, in other places worldwide. The ritual destruction, reuse, redivivus, or détournement of the single-family house may suggest a possible repertoire of action for the larger transformation of other types of secluded suburban spaces.

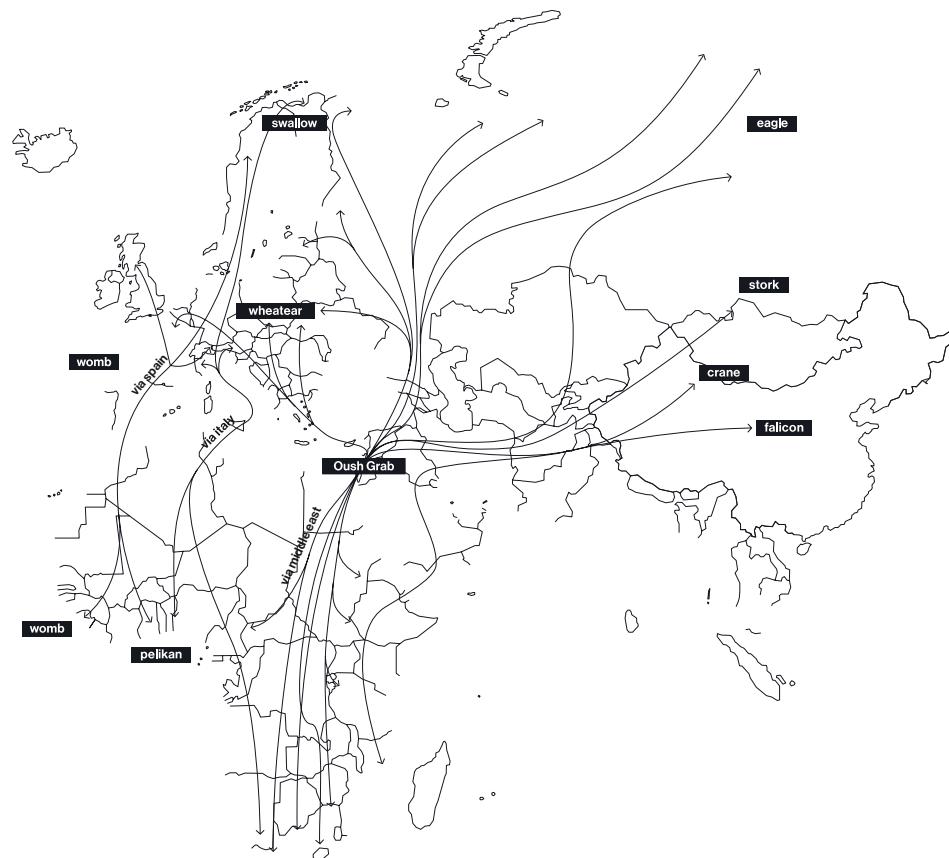


Unhoming.
DAAR/Salottobuono/Situ Studio



Unroofing.
DAAR/Salottobuono

Return to Nature



Path of migratory birds. DAAR

More than 500 million birds, between Northeastern Europe and East Africa, navigate the skies over the Syrian-African Rift—the Jordan Valley as it crosses Palestine—during their autumn and spring migrations. These large flocks of birds have their regular points of orientation, and the former military base of Oush Grab overlooking Bethlehem is located along the narrow bottleneck of this path.

It is a high hill with a unique morphology, created by both nature and man. The top of the hill is surrounded by a giant



The “crater of the volcano”
a military ghost town. DAAR

earth mound, piled increasingly higher by soldiers during the Second Intifada, a fact that gave the base its volcanic shape. Twice a year, for a few weeks each autumn and spring, tens of thousands of birds land on the hilltop. Around them, a temporary micro-ecology of small predators and other wildlife forms. It is a breathtaking and terrifying scene.

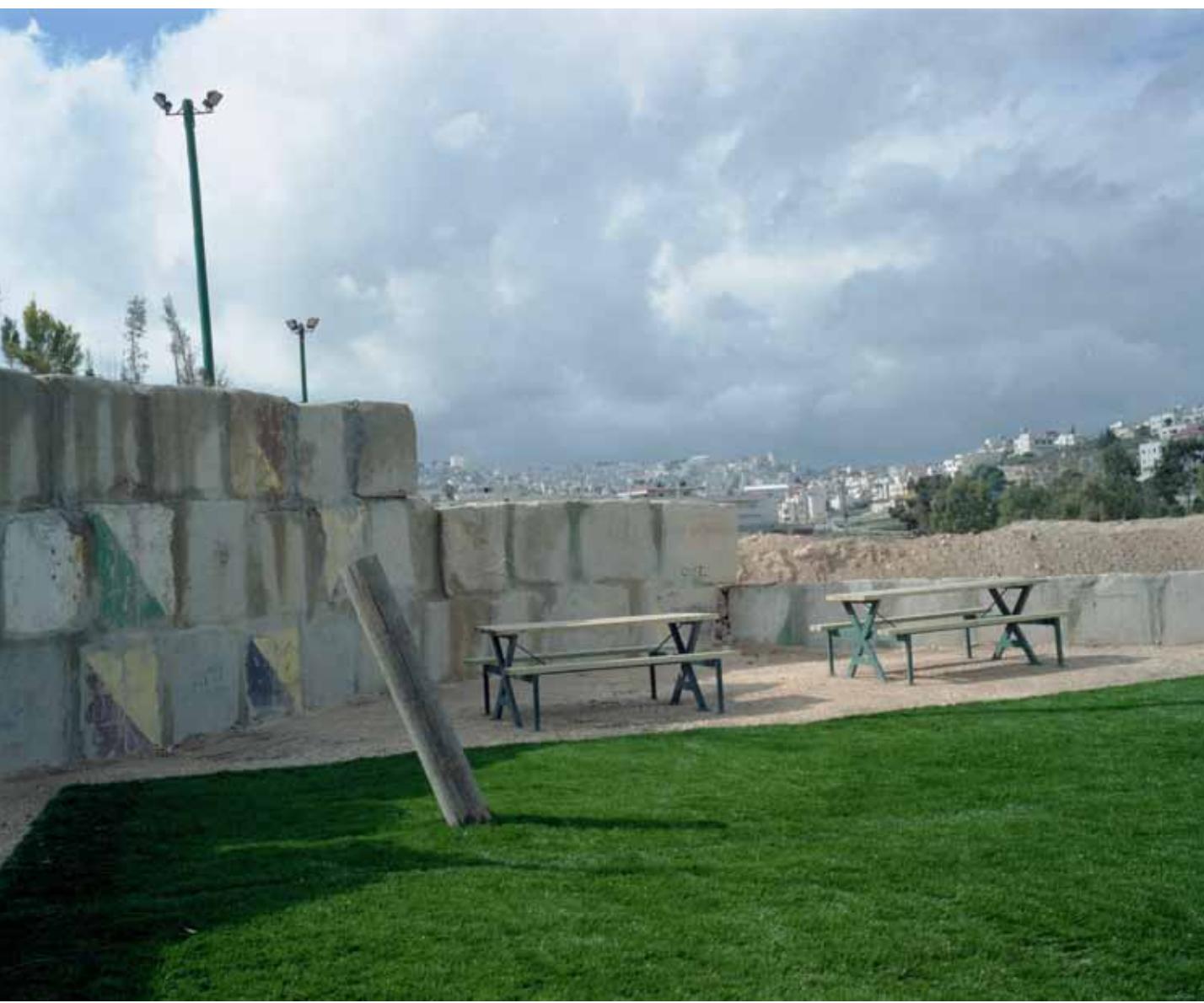
On February 14, 2008, an unusually large flock of migratory birds moved over Beit Sahour. Imad Al Atrash, director of the Palestine Wildlife Society, arrived in Oush Grab early that morning in order to witness this spectacular event and document the more than thirty species that pass through Palestine annually, including storks, starlings, and nightingales. Excited by the sight, Imad instinctively climbed on to the rooftop of one of the military watchtowers (more like a tiny, squat bunker) and planted his bird-watching binocular tripod. In doing so, he turned the direction of the military gaze, surveying the Palestinian surroundings, to the borderless skies above.

When Imad leaped onto the abandoned watchtower, quickly followed by his students, he did not change the architecture of the place, but rather re-oriented it. This irreverent act, made out of commitment to the practical demands of bird-watching and in a manner oblivious to any symbolic meaning, did not transform the watchtower into a museum nor did it undo its military history, but rather brought new life to it.



Imad Al Atrash atop
the watchtower. DAAR

Watchtowers are omnipresent control devices throughout Palestine. They are menacing presences of stored violence. Architect Sharon Rotbard claimed that the tower and stockade have been in the DNA of Israeli architecture since the establishment of the early Jewish colonies in the 1930s. Moreover, they are always associated with buffer zones, creating no man's lands around them, “sterilized” areas free of human presence. Paradoxically, after years of existence, these spaces have become perfect environments for wildlife. The fortifications in Oush Grab, designed to keep “the enemy” outside, created an untouched space inside. It was this status that made the occupied hilltop singular within the natural environment. Shortly after the military evacuation, Oush Grab became host to various new forms of wildlife.



Oush Grab.
Francesco Mattuzzi, 2008

It also had become a sort of experimental testing ground. Gaining access to the military structures was a fundamental step in opening up, for a population under occupation, endless possibilities for new uses, for reinvention. The large terrace, previously used as a tank ramp, was transformed by the Municipality into a football field and children's playground. The shooting zone became a picnic area with a large fountain at the center. The prefabricated walls used for erecting checkpoints were converted into retaining walls for a playground, and abandoned wooden planks were used to build a climbing tower. In the end, Oush Grab became the liveliest outdoor space in the Bethlehem area.

Despite its initial success, or perhaps because of it, in 2008 on May 15—that is, on Nakba Day, which corresponds to “Israeli Independence Day”—forty colonists invaded Oush Grab and proclaimed the establishment of a new Jewish settlement named Shdema. Their aim was to transform the military outpost into a new colony. The location of the hilltop—and the existing fortification—would be suitable, they believed, for their regimented and securitized way of life.

They were accompanied by soldiers who, just a few days earlier, had declared the area a “closed military zone.”

Despite the military order, Palestinians and international activists, including residents of DAAR, did not stop organizing events in the area. On June 6, we played a common game that transformed the watchtower at the top of the hill into a hub. More than fifty people participated. When the soldiers arrived, they seemed both surprised and confused. One spoke into a military radio, trying to describe the scene to his commander, hoping to receive some instructions on how to deal with the situation. At the end of the long radio exchange, they simply left the area and it remains unclear why they did not intervene to enforce the military order.

On June 13, in collaboration with the Municipality of Beit Sahour, we invited associations to join exploratory walks in the evacuated area and make plans for its future. The day after, a group of colonists returned to the site, but they quickly left, perhaps disturbed by a “loud” party organized by the municipality on one side of the hill. Palestinian organizations and activists continued to hold events, tours, conferences, and parties until July 25, when a larger group of settlers accompanied by heavily armed soldiers arrived on site. This time, the soldiers expelled all Palestinians and international activists, allowing only the colonists to stay.

On July 30, a graffiti battle began. The colonists started planting and painting Israeli flags on the abandoned military barracks. The day after, Palestinians and international supporters arrived at the site and painted over the settlers’ graffiti. The next day the settlers came back. But we also returned. It went on for days until, on August 6, a joint prayer with Palestinians and international supporters was held on the site.

Oush Grab.
Battle of graffiti, DAAR









Colonists arrived and hoisted the Israeli flag on the partially collapsed water tower. Together with the soldiers, they physically pushed the participants out and a number of activists were injured. A priest was spat upon after being dragged along the ground by a settler. That day, we realized that we were dealing with one of the most active and violent settler groups, known as “the Women in Green.” Members of this group see themselves as fervent defenders of the values of the “civilized West” against “Arab invaders.” They seem to have conjured up a hybrid beast in which the American Wild West Frontier meets the American Wild West Bank, and like their imagined ancestors, they love guns. Their graffiti expresses hatred for Arabs, international activists, and Islam (they probably do not know that the majority of Palestinians in Beit Sahour are actually Christian), but in particular, they loathe “leftist Tel-Avivians,” who they view as responsible for “selling” the country to the Arabs. They see themselves as being on the front line in a “clash of civilizations.” In a tragicomic moment, after several pushes and insults, an American anarchist and an American colonist discovered that they had once been neighbors in Brooklyn.

Throughout the summer of 2009, local NGOs, among which the Alternative Information Center, the Siraj Center for Holy Land Studies, and the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between Peoples, continued to organize public lectures and events. On September 9, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad inaugurated what would be called the Oush Grab Public Park.

It was during this period that the Palestinian front for resisting settler aggression divided into two camps. On one side, the Municipality of Beit Sahour believed that the best way to counter the occupation was to keep a low profile, negotiate with the Israel Civil Administration, and aspire to protection

and financial support from USAID, while slowly creating “facts on the ground.” On the other side, the left-leaning NGOs propagated the idea that negotiating with Israel would be futile—as has been demonstrated time and again—and therefore, called for a popular resistance to openly confront the occupying settlers. The mayor of Beit Sahour invited DAAR to design parts of the park on the side of the hill, suggesting a large fountain, a restaurant, a playground, and so on. But we had wanted to engage with the core of the problem, at the top of the hill. Without changing this, the transformation of the entire area would remain incomplete. Yet at the same time, as architects we wanted our proposal to enable the kind of transformations the mayor had envisaged.

On October 16, dozens of Israeli colonists stormed the hilltop where Palestinians and international supporters had been organizing lessons on migratory bird-watching. Conflict ensued. Israeli police detained six people.

A few weeks later, a group of colonists returned to the site to vandalize the public park, spray-painting stars of David on the walls.

On February 10, 2010, Israeli soldiers and police entered the park compound with two bulldozers, uprooting the remains of the military fortification that were being used as retaining walls and destroying different elements in the park. The entire area around the former outpost was then declared a closed military zone and the top of the hill was fenced in again. A new watchtower was set up, of the kind which, in classic panopticon tradition, makes it impossible for external observers to verify whether or not it is occupied.

In response, the next morning, some 150 activists, both Palestinians and internationals, gathered to plant hundreds

of olive trees around the hill in order to prevent further expropriations.

Ten days later, hundreds of Palestinians and international supporters gathered at Oush Grab to protest the military closure order. About seven Israeli army jeeps arrived, threatening to run over the demonstrators. After barking orders in Hebrew, one soldier threw tear gas and a sound bomb, momentarily dispersing part of the crowd.



Oush Grab.
Hans Haake, 2011

At the time of writing, the future of Oush Grab remains uncertain. It appears that in the winter of 2013 a permit has been given to establish the settlement of Shdema. If this happens, it would be the last link closing the chain of colonies surrounding and strangling Bethlehem. Some even speculate that it might become a military base again. What we know for certain is that despite its relative autonomy in shaping its own recent history, the future of this small hill at the entrance of Beit Sahour is both singularly crucial within and exemplary of the manifold conflicts of decolonization.



Return to nature.
DAAR/Sara Pellegrini



Return to nature.
DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

Migration

One day, an irritated Imad asked: “You’re architects, right? So instead of wasting your time planting trees, bringing people around, organizing events, why don’t you produce an architectural project for Oush Grab?!”

Accepting his challenge, our architectural proposal for the reuse of this site became an intervention in the political struggle for the hilltop.

Due to its revolving-door occupation, it became of prime importance to render the buildings inhospitable for human activities. Rather than renovate and convert the base to give it another function, the intention was to accelerate the process of its destruction and disintegration. Thus, ours has

become an architectural project of obsolescence in which the top of the hill, with its military barracks, would no longer be used by humans but instead “returned to nature.”

The first stage involves the perforation of all the external walls of the buildings on the summit with a series of equally spaced holes. Our colleagues from the Palestine Wildlife Society expect that birds will inhabit these holes. We also proposed to transform the landscape by opening up the fortified rampart enclosure in order to allow access and drainage. This transformation of the rampart will partially bury the buildings in the rubble of their own fortifications, reorganizing the relationship between buildings and landscape. Eventually, the buildings and the artificial landscape will stand at the center of a park where nature will be allowed to gradually take over the buildings.



Return to nature.
DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

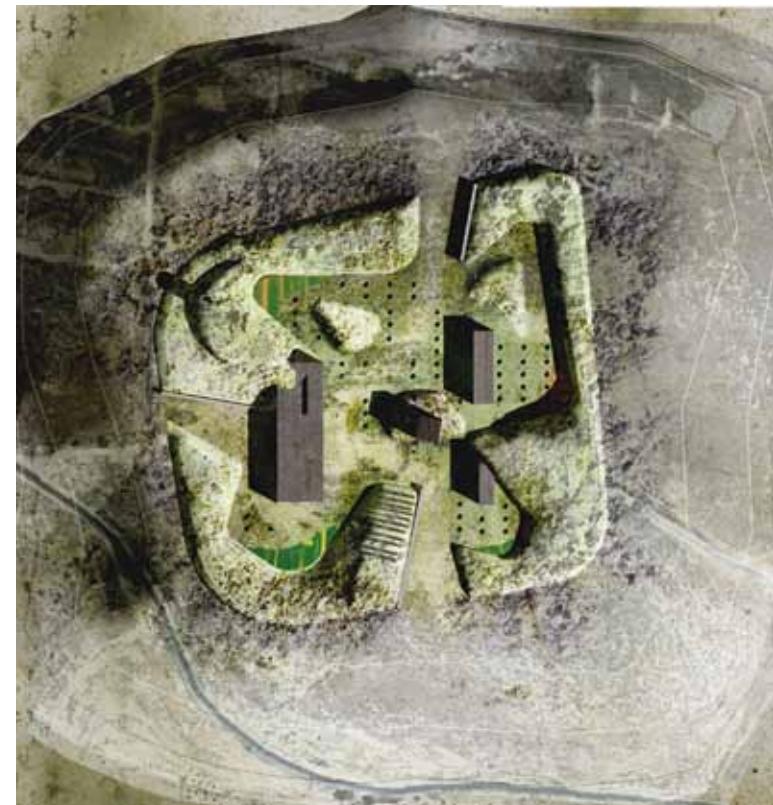


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DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

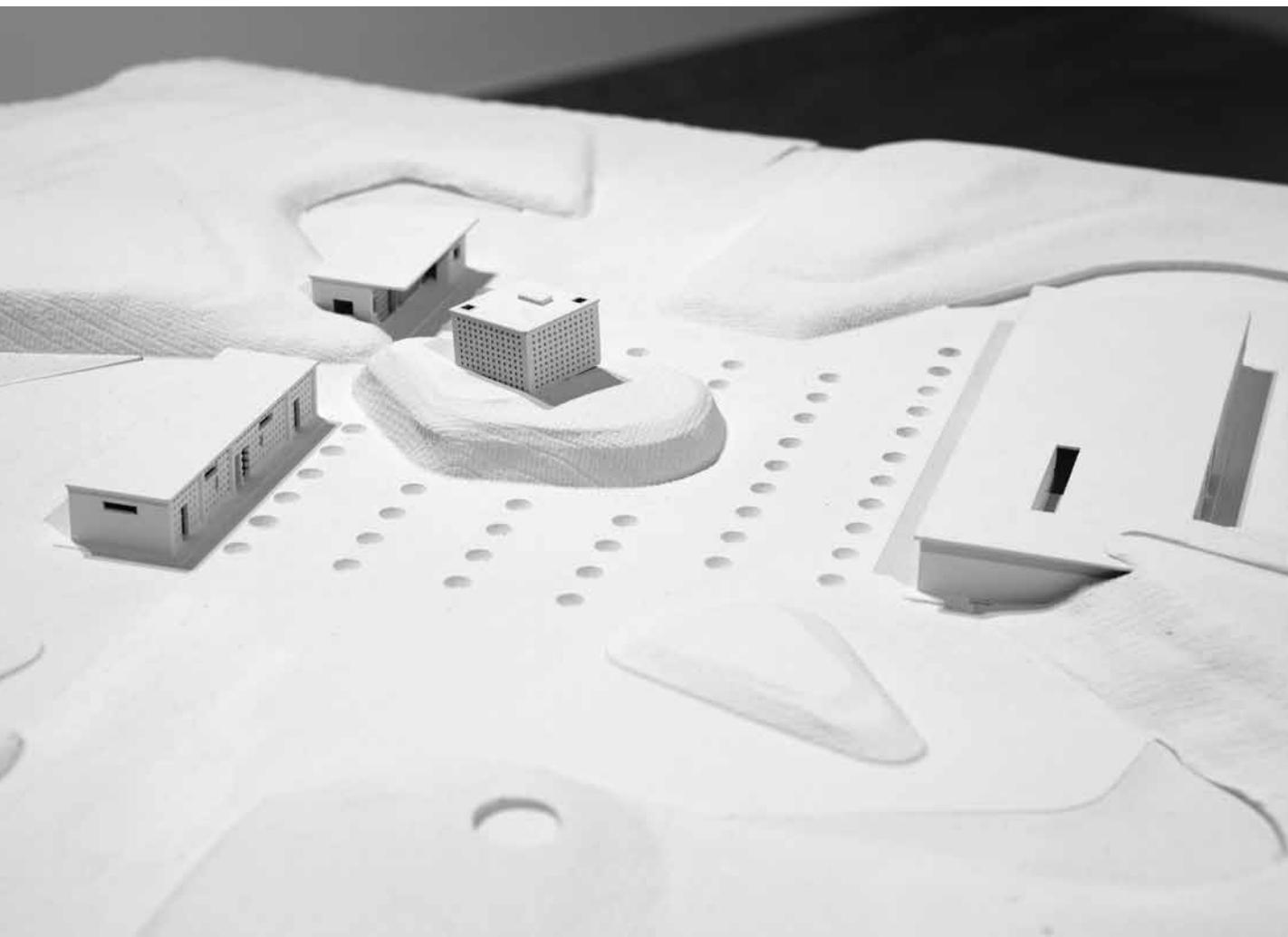


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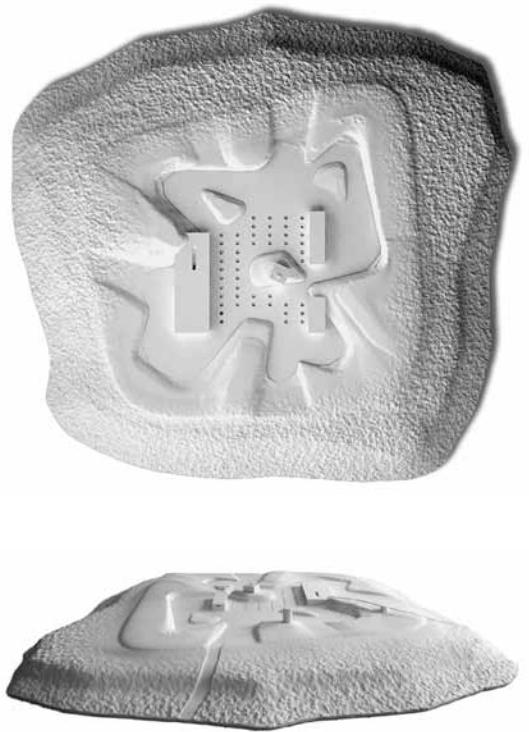
Return to Nature.
DAAR/Sara Pellegrini



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Return to nature.
DAAR/Situ Studio





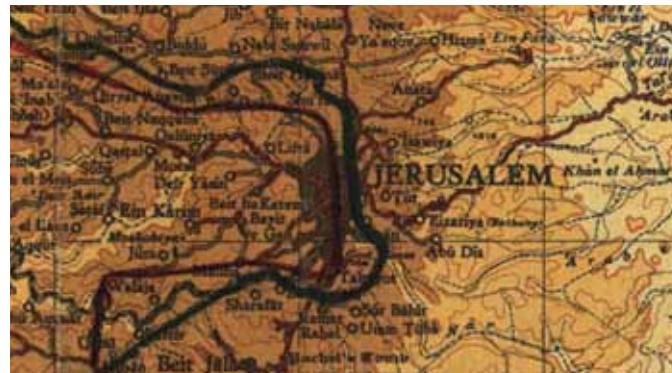
Return to nature.
DAAR/Sara Pellegrini

A Common Assembly

with Nicola Perugini

The various historical plans for partitioning Palestine—from the Peel Commission Report in 1937 to the Oslo Accords in 1993—not only divided the land into a non-contiguous patchwork of territories, but also gave rise to a new spatial condition. Between the divided territories another space has unintentionally emerged, and its expanse was a product of the map drafting process—it was the very width of the partition lines themselves. Each partition line reflected the geo-political circumstances as well as the cartographic techniques of the time. The width of each line was dictated by the sharpness of the drafting instrument, the scale of the map, and the kind of surface on which it was drawn. Legally and mathematically a line has no thickness: it is a one-dimensional trajectory. In this case, however, abstract law and mathematics yielded a three-dimensional object when they encountered materiality.

When historian and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti famously asked “who owns the ‘width of the line?’” he was referring to the 1949 cease-fire lines between Israel and Jordan. The lines, he wrote, had been drawn on a 1:20,000 scale map by the two military commanders—Moshe Dayan and Abdullah al-Tal. Meeting in an abandoned house in the frontier neighborhood of Musrara in Jerusalem, they laid out a map on the floor. Each drew a line using a different colored grease pencil: Dayan used green, and al-Tal, red. The thickness and softness of the colored pencils resulted in lines that were, generally, three to four millimeters wide. But because the floor under the map was uneven (or perhaps Dayan and al-Tal were a little careless), in some areas of Jerusalem the width of the line became wider.

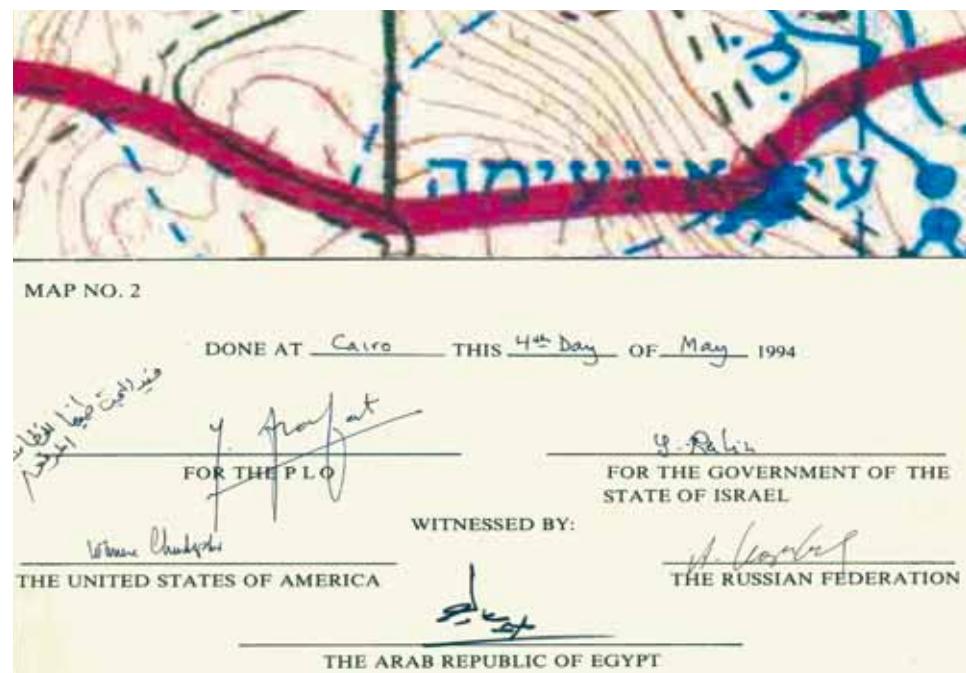


Detail of the 1949 armistice line, showing the green and red lines in variable widths as they go through Jerusalem.

This ambiguous legal space—a few millimeters wide on the map and more than a hundred meters wide in real space—was a consequence of the materialization of the lawmaking drawing process. In the most densely built-up area of Jerusalem, the lines were so wide they covered entire neighborhoods. In the following years, the physical extent of the width of the lines became the subject of debate (which carries on to this day). It also resulted in border transgressions and skirmishes.

Several decades later, in the early 1990s, the cartographic work undertaken during the Oslo “negotiations” was conducted digitally—on computer screens—but the maps, signed by Yitzak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, were printed in hard copy. Separation lines were now drawn throughout and across the West Bank, carving it up into the infamous areas A, B, and C, in which Palestinians had different levels of limited control. These separation lines were drawn around every town and village.

Because the documents signed were printed hard copies in which the lines were just over a millimeter wide, in real space the line acquired a width of about five meters.



A detail of the map attached to the 1994 Cairo agreement (part of the Oslo Accord) next to the signatures of the parties.



The Red Castle and the Lawless Line, the width of the line crossing the “Red Castle” in Battir.
DAAR/Amina Bech

When the Oslo negotiations collapsed the lines remained an open legal problem. Without legal definition, or a mechanism to resolve legal issues in the years that followed, a series of challenges brought back the question: “Who owns the thickness of the line?” Paradoxically, the question challenged the very partition these lines enacted.

These thin slivers of extraterritorial space are ubiquitous throughout the West Bank; they run at the margins of almost every town and village. As we walked along these lines—along the periphery of olive groves and orchards, roads, fences, terraces, houses, public buildings, kindergartens, a football stadium, a mosque, a large recently built castle, and even the building of the Palestinian Legislative Council—we thought that with Israel and the Palestinian Authority—Israel’s powerless collaborator—each exercising control over a side of the line, the thickness of the line could itself be seen as “all that remains” of Palestine, a common, extraterritorial zone, containing a sample of all the types of spaces. Walking along the lines, we encountered a series of legal conflicts that exemplified the “borderline” disorder of the area.



Battir: the thickness of the line.
DAAR/Amina Bech



The Line and the Castle

The suggestion that the thickness of the line generated a legally undefined zone emerged as a legal question at the end of 2009 in the small village of Battir, west of Bethlehem. A right-wing Israeli NGO called Regavim, established with the aim of protecting nothing less than the “human rights of Israeli settlers,” submitted a petition to the Israeli courts for the demolition of a large private Palestinian house. Built by a US-based Palestinian in a breathtakingly eclectic style and locally known as the “Red Castle” (referring more to the hair color of the owner than to the tone of the cladding, which is effectively white), Regavim claimed that it was partially “invading” Area C—the area fully controlled by Israel, and where Palestinian construction is prohibited. Regavim, it should be noted, is an effective political parody. It appropriates, mimics, and turns around the human rights discourse that its members claim is often successfully used by left-leaning groups against Israel’s settlement practices.

The owner of the castle and the local village council commissioned surveys that identified the exact position of the line. But to their surprise the line ran right through the living room and bathrooms, dividing the house into two parts—or, in fact, into three. The eastern part was in Area B, the western part was in Area C, and a strip of the house—the thickness of the line—had some undefined extraterritorial status. The house was not demolished but this sliver of architectural-scale extraterritorial space has haunted us ever since.

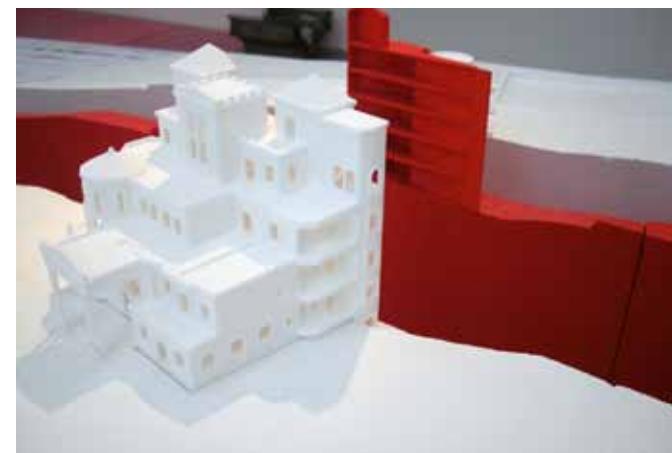


The Red Castle and the Lawless Line.

DAAR/Alessandra Gola

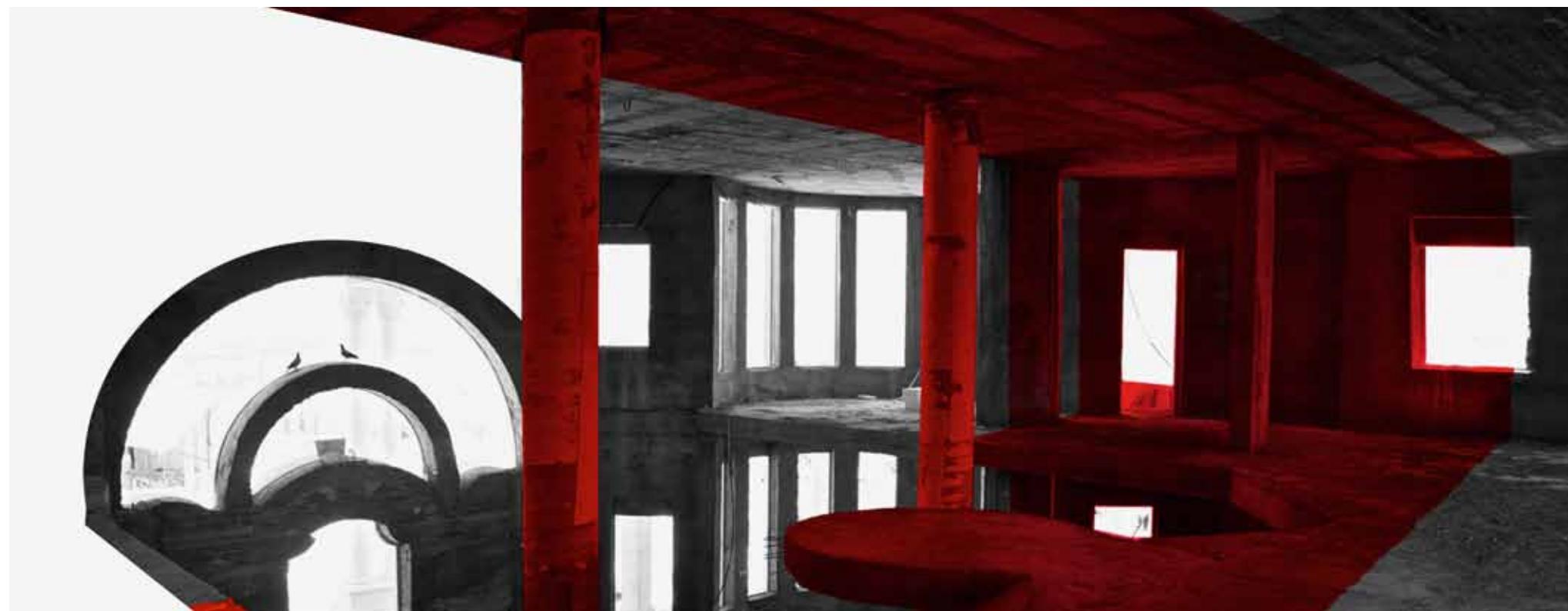


The Red Castle and the Lawless Line. The small white part of the house closest to the viewer is within Area C. DAAR





The Red Castle and the Lawless Line.
The line crossing the interior.
DAAR/Amina Bech



The Line and the Mosque

We walked north. In the village of Burin, southwest of Nablus, the line between Areas B and C crossed a section of the majestic Salman al-Farisi mosque, built in 2008. 80 percent of the mosque was in Area C, with the remaining twenty percent included in the thickness of the line and in Area B. At the beginning of 2010, under the pressure of Jewish settlers who live in nearby settlements (and who have previously attempted to burn the mosque), the Israeli Civil Administration sent to the local village council a demolition order which is still pending as an ongoing threat.



The width of the line REDCAT.
Los Angeles, DAAR

The Line and the Village

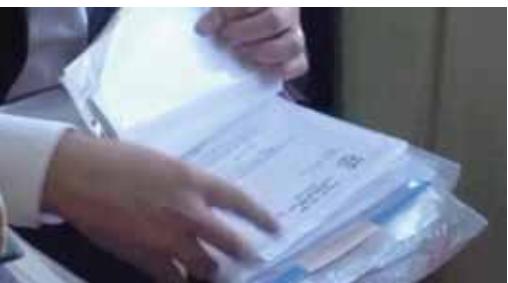
We walked southwest to the village of Neve Shalom (Wahat Al-Salam), an experiment in cohabitation, inhabited by both Palestinians and Israeli Jews. The village is situated where the Green Line of 1949 splits into two, enclosing a no man's land. This zone was occupied in 1967. One of the lines crosses right through Neve Shalom. In 2003, one of Neve Shalom's founding members, Eitan Kramer, was arrested by the Israeli Border Police and accused of transporting a Palestinian worker from the West Bank to the village (something that he

did regularly, but that had become illegal a few months earlier). Kramer was charged and appeared in court. Realizing that Neve Shalom was situated within the no man's land, he argued for the inapplicability of the law. The court accepted his claim, and he was acquitted, demonstrating the ongoing ambiguity that state institutions still have towards the extra-territorial spaces of and between the lines.

The Line and the House

Back in the northern part of occupied Jerusalem, near the village of Akab, we found another house traversed by yet another line: this time it was the border of the Jerusalem municipality, unilaterally expanded two weeks after the occupation of the West Bank in June 1967.

It was then again Moshe Dayan that oversaw the drafting of a new line of separation. His intention was to expand the Jerusalem municipality under Israeli control by including as much agricultural and open landscape as possible in order to build Jewish neighborhoods; and he was careful to include as few Palestinian built-up areas as possible in order to keep a Jewish majority within the gerrymandered border. The consequence was that this separation line severed the historical connection between the Old City and the Arab villages surrounding it. From 1967 until the beginning of the Oslo Process, the border was simply a line on the map. Its effect was rather juridical: the people living east of it were under the military's civil administration and the people living west of it became residents of Jerusalem. However, during the Oslo Process, Jerusalem was effectively cut away from the majority of Palestinians—a reality that was aggravated in 2003 when the wall was erected, brutally turning this lawless line into a menacing concrete presence.



Ghiath Nasser looking through the Bardan files.
DAAR/Amina Bech



Ghiath Nasser demonstrating to DAAR the complexity and multiplicity of lines around this house. He is pointing to the result of a different survey, showing another possible path of the same line.
DAAR/Amina Bech

The house of the Bardans, a Palestinian couple, was traversed by this line. As residents of Jerusalem, the couple were given temporary Israeli IDs, which, under the logic of Israeli colonization, provide more access to public welfare and a greater freedom of movement. But the state wanted to excise the couple altogether, along with many other Palestinians, from the city. The Labor Court of Jerusalem was tasked with arbitrating this issue and commissioned a surveyor to draw the exact location of the line in relation to the house. The result: 51.2 percent of the property was outside of the Jerusalem jurisdiction area, which left 48.8 percent of the property inside it.

The court assigned no thickness to the line. Furthermore, the Israeli National Insurance Institute claimed that since most of the house was outside Israeli territory, the Bardans were not entitled to be residents of Israel.

Through their lawyer Ghiath Nasser, the couple tried to explain that most of the hours the family spent at home were spent in the bedroom, which was, together with the entrance to the house, in Jerusalem. The state disagreed, however, arguing that the configuration of rooms could be easily changed to suit the purpose of their claim. At this point, the concept of the “thickness of the line” was brought up by Nasser. The couple claimed that the entire house was in fact literally within the boundary of Jerusalem. The Bardans lost the case, demonstrating the fact that when it is in its interest, Israel can render a conclusive decision in relation to the line.



The construction site/ruin of the Palestinian Legislative Council building.
DAAR/Livia Minoja

The Line and the Parliament

Undoubtedly the most challenging situation we encountered along multiple partition lines was that of the Palestinian Legislative Council building—known colloquially as the “Palestinian Parliament,” located in Abu Dis, just outside the 1967 unilaterally declared borders of the city, or so we thought.

The building was both a construction site and a ruin: it was destroyed neither by military violence nor by natural deterioration but by the failure of the politics of the “peace process.”

The project to build a parliament began in 1996, during the euphoria of the Oslo Accords. The choice of the location of the building was the product of political maneuvering.



In blue, the Jerusalem municipal line established unilaterally in 1967 by Israel; in black, the route of the wall, and, in red, the Oslo lines. The Old City is on the left and the plan of the parliament is at the center of the drawing. Video still.
DAAR/Cressida Kozienski

The Palestinian leadership had wanted to locate the building as close as possible to the Al-Aqsa mosque—so that it would be seen as a mere a stepping stone towards the ultimate establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State. Meanwhile, Israel—in its insistence that no Palestinian institutions would be built in Jerusalem—pushed the Parliament outside the unilaterally declared borders of the city.

Abu Dis, once a village, now the closest town to Jerusalem’s Old City, was chosen for a good reason. The Palestinians positioned the building as close as possible to the Old City in such a way that one of its edges abutted the borderline itself.

However, in 2010, Khalil Tafakji, a Palestinian cartographer of the Orient House in Jerusalem and a member of the Palestinian negotiation team, described to DAAR a project of cartographic subversion: “If we were to build a Parliament, it had to be in this area. Half of the Parliament will be inside Jerusalem—we call it Al Quds... People thought that the Parliament was built in Abu Dis, not in Jerusalem... [but by building across the line] we wanted to break Israel’s taboo that it is forbidden to speak about Jerusalem.”

Situating the building over the line was to stake a Palestinian claim to Jerusalem.

Three years after the collapse of the Oslo Accords, with the eruption of the Second Intifada and the construction of the wall just a few meters from the building, all this complexity was lost in the fray. The building, in its entirety, was left outside the concrete borders of Jerusalem. The construction work on the Parliament halted in 2003 at the same time the wall was being put up.

A Parliament in Exile

The Palestinian Legislative Council in Abu Dis is the last iteration of Palestinian experiments with parliamentary democracy. But its establishment overshadowed the Palestinian National Council, also known as the parliament-in-exile—which is the only Palestinian assembly aspiring to represent all Palestinians whether in Israel, occupied Palestine, or in exile.

Parliaments-in-exile were a form of political representation exercised throughout the years of exile of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), when parliamentary gatherings sought to account for a scattered and extraterritorial polity, a polity in conflict, without the possibility of arranging for a census on the basis of which proportional representation could be organized, and without the possibility of physically congregating in Palestine.

These parliaments-in-exile assembled, more or less, about once every two years. Before the 1967 occupation, the meetings were not held in exile, of course, and the first session met in Jerusalem in May 1964 with representatives from Palestinian communities in Jordan, West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Iraq, Egypt, Qatar, Libya, and Algeria.

After the occupation, sessions were held in Cairo (1968–1977), Damascus (1979–1981), Algiers (1983, 1988), Amman (1984), and after the Oslo accords in Gaza (1996 and 1998), and in Ramallah (2009). The locations of these councils marked the geopolitical transformations of the region, the history of the Palestinian struggle, and the dispersal of its organizational centers.



The Palestinian National Council in Cairo 1977.
DAAR/Cressida Kocienski

These robust and sometimes controversial parliaments-in-exile survived precisely because their gatherings had no fixed seats. Territorialized they would have become easy prey to Israeli politics.

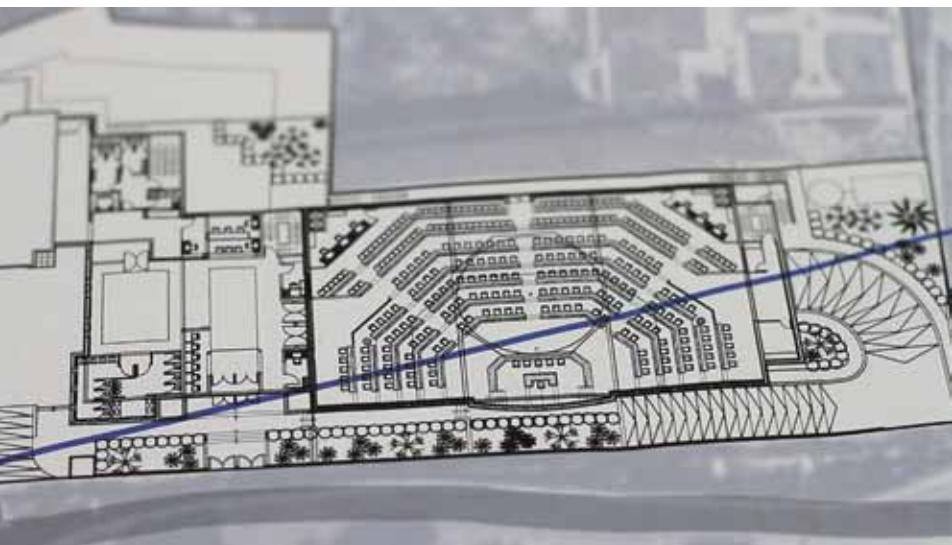
However, the National Council is a PLO body and the PLO has come into much disrepute since the failure of the Oslo peace process, losing its leadership role in the Palestinian struggle. The extraterritorial aspirations and modes of operation of the parliament-in-exile, nevertheless, could be adopted as a starting point for generating a new form of gathering that DAAR refers to as a “Common Assembly.” Taking DAAR through the precise location of the line in the interior of the parliament building, Khalil Tafakji explained that the building is partly within the Israeli-controlled area and partly within the Palestinian-controlled area—with a narrow strip, as wide as the borderline itself, potentially in a legal limbo. This extraterritorial zone corresponds to the types of space across which Palestinians are dispersed, with the thickness of the line acquiring a strong symbolic power—representing those in exile and, thus, excluded from participation in political decisions within Palestine.

Most Palestinians are living as refugees outside Palestine in different states throughout the region. In some of these states they are effectively excluded from political representation. Many Palestinians have never had the chance to vote. Those within Palestine are forcibly separated into several distinct locations—Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. This fragmentation has been one of the most effective means of controlling and dominating Palestinians.

It is within the very thickness of the line that we have found an echo suggesting the possibility of a Common Assembly, a term we use to maintain a distance (spatially and politically)



Khalil Tafakji pointing to the location
of the line through the building.
DAAR/Cressida Kocienski



from a parliament, and, likewise, to identify a space that could host and embody decolonization.

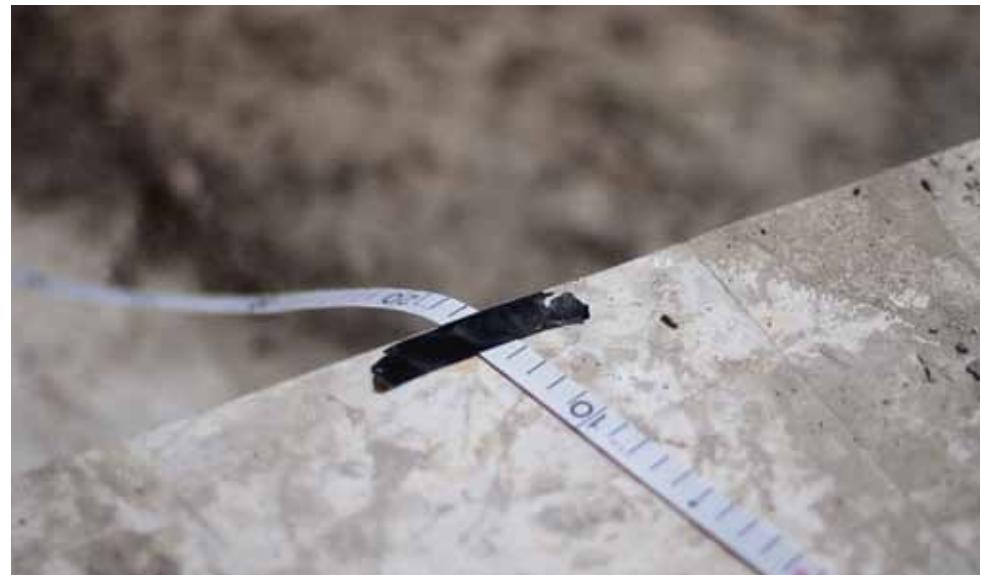
Rather than the parliament of representative democracies, the Common Assembly might rather refer to claims to imminent democracy that have emerged across the streets and roundabouts of the Middle East.

In Tahrir, the cleaning of the square (as many commentators have suggested) is what turned it from being a “public” space—the space of the regime—into an effective political common. As a gesture recalling this move we have ourselves engaged with an act of cleaning. With this gesture we sought to both continue but also challenge the cartographic subversion undertaken by the builders of the Parliament.

Carefully measuring and tracing the line that Khalil Tafakji had drawn inside the building, we swept and polished it clean (as much as we could), producing a 1:1 scale architectural drawing right through a thick layer of ten-year-old dirt and bird droppings. Like these droppings, the thickness of the line is the legal flotsam of the illegal process of Israeli domination. But, paradoxically, it is in this very apparatus of division that DAAR finds the place to start thinking about decolonization.

The cleaning of the line through the Palestinian Legislative Council building.
DAAR/Cressida Kocienski







The line through the Palestinian
Legislative Council building.
DAAR/Carina Ottino

Al-Mashà (المشاع) or The Return to the Common

The space of the common differs from both public and private space. Public and private spaces entail institutionalized relations between people and things, regulated by the state: public property is maintained by the state and private property is guaranteed by it. Sometimes this form of government operates by maintaining the distinction between public and private spaces, and sometimes by blurring them. The endless privatization of public space is mirrored by the incessant intrusion of public agents into the private domain, both constituting useful techniques of government control.

Before the establishment of Israel in 1948 there existed in Palestine a variety of common lands—agricultural, religious, nomadic, etc. This diversity existed not only as a set of legal categories of communal ownership but more importantly as forms of communal use and communal life. Upon seizing control of Palestine, the newly established state of Israel flattened all these layers of

collectivity into a single category, “state land”—expropriating them in the name of “the public” and taking control over them as the sovereign. Israel was willing to sometimes acknowledge and tolerate Palestinian presence on private land owned by individuals and families, but not on the public lands that were in collective use. Today 90 percent of the land in Israel and about half of the land in the West Bank is defined as “state land”—thus defined as public, but in relation to the only public that is acknowledged as legitimate—the Jewish-Israeli one. Because it was on public land that the settlements were established, the contours of public land became the blueprint for colonization. Colonization thus not only brought about the expropriation of land, but imposed changes on the forms of communal life in Palestine—making it a life with little or no public space.

While the common, expropriated as an exclusionary public space, was constitutive of colonial practice, its annexation also acted to curtail any Palestinian collective aspirations. Until the Oslo process in the beginning of the 1990s, Palestinian cities in the West Bank were directly managed by the Israeli military. They aimed at transforming Palestinian cities into dormitory towns with very little open, collective space. Furthermore, the military’s Civil Administration actively inhibited public institutions from developing. Private clubs, cinemas, schools, and universities were put under close scrutiny or forcibly shut. The military required any association of more than three persons to have a permit. But this difficulty in establishing and maintaining institutions persisted even after the Oslo Accords of 1993. The main reason was the setting up of borders for Palestinian “self-administered areas.”

These borders were drawn tightly around the built-up area of the Palestinian cities and villages, leaving little extra land for private or public use. The structure of land ownership within Palestinian cities meant that very little land was not privately owned and municipalities have had difficulty accessing lands.

One of the only kinds of common land that survived in Palestine in the face of colonial domination is called Al-Mashà. It derives from customary practices and refers to land collectively owned by different farmers.

Israeli authorities, suspicious of this form of ownership that hovers between private and public, have declared Al-Mashà as state land and have taken control of it. Yet surprisingly Al-Mashà still exists today, protected by persistent practice, not by law. Al-Mashà can only exist where people have agreed to cultivate together. As long as a

piece of Al-Mashà land is cultivated, the state finds it more difficult to expropriate it.

The notion of Al-Mashà could help reimagine the notion of the common today. Could this form of common use be expanded by redefining the meaning of cultivation, moving it from agriculture to other forms of human activity? Cultivation (from Latin *colere*) after all is about taking care of life; the cultivation of life is concerned as much with forms of living as with life itself.

But how to liberate the common from the control of authoritarian regimes, neo-colonialism and consumer societies? How to reactivate common uses beyond the interests of public state control? We cannot escape into self-secluded utopian communities (we should have learned this from the exclusivist egalitarian dimension of the kibbutzim),

or into a messianic promise of an imminent moral political regime (as found in religious and Marxist theologies of salvation). We are doomed to re-use, re-invent, re-write, re-turn, re-imagine, de-activate, de-parcel, en-common, the present colonial condition.

One of the ways by which we sought to demonstrate a possible re-activation of the concept of Al-Mashà is architecturally—not as a return to pre-colonial landforms, but as a starting point for a set of new propositions and re-activations of common uses.

Some projects in this book sought to determine the extent to which the evacuated colonial structures could accommodate new uses and demonstrate the various ways in which they can be transformed; the ways private single-family homes and military bases can be turned into architectural clusters for common use. We asked: what new institutions and activities could inhabit

spaces that are to be evacuated, and those already evacuated? Colonies and military bases sitting on collective land thus offered us an opportunity for re-activating common spaces.

Al-Mashà can be re-invented in the cracks of the very line of colonial divisions and separations. It is in the heart of these unlegislated spaces that a sense of communalism beyond state institutions can be re-imagined. It is by re-using these present political ruins—parliaments and borders—that a common extraterritorial assembly may emerge.

Al-Mashà was productive in pointing to ways of engaging architecturally and politically with the demolished cities and villages in the areas that became Israel in 1948 and with their mirror image, the refugee camps. The camp and the places from which refugees were forced out are two extraterritorial islands, neither of them fully integrated

into the larger territories in which they are located. In both, the notions of public and private space are ineffective in mediating and articulating life. The houses in the camp cannot be legally owned, but they exist, and the lands in the destroyed towns, neighborhoods and villages destroyed in or after 1948 are legally classified by Israel as “absentee property.” Both the living camp and the destroyed village are in a legal and political state of endless suspense. What connects them is the common history of the Nakba. Al-Mashà in this context is a form of use rather than a static designation of land ownership—it is not a definition of a type of property or a type of land but rather of a mode of critical practice that attempts to return to the common those things which have been confiscated and made exclusive. In this respect, thinking the revolution of returns is necessarily thinking a revolution in relation to property. This is why this book explored the condition of refugee-hood

not as problem that needs to be resolved but rather as an opportunity to re-construct the idea of a common city today. Returns is an opportunity to re-conceptualize urbanism—returns is the only possible practice that can turn the city into a common, a common city.

The Making of DAAR

Acknowledgments are texts that shed light on a process of making; they allow the reader to look behind the curtains. We hope the following notes will not only pay tribute to friends and collaborators, but also unveil the modus operandi of DAAR, describing the ubiquitous network of a collective intelligence that formed around it. We are aware that our acknowledgments have continued to grow in length—and this, of course, reflects the growing complexity of the infrastructure of support for today's knowledge production.

DAAR is the result of a delicate equilibrium between locals and internationals and between artists and architects. Artists in the team allowed us to see architecture with different eyes, and the presence of the architects made the artistic contributions more grounded in collective work. In this sense, DAAR may also be seen as an archive of ideas. We ensure that the work produced is built on previous collective efforts and achievements. Thus, one of the main aims of this book is to create an operative field for architecture.

Our encounter with Nicola Perugini proved to be priceless; without his input, DAAR would not be what it is today. His energy, enthusiasm, and unending intellectual curiosity constituted a fundamental component of our work during these last years. As noted, he co-authored the last chapter of this book.

Yazeed Anani was our closest collaborator and friend in the early years of establishing DAAR. He offered an unparalleled critically-engaged relationship and the involvement of his young Palestinian architecture students from Birzeit University made the work and the influence of DAAR more effective.

Diego Segatto and Sara Pellegrini translated the ideas and discussions into powerful visualizations and gave us human and intellectual support.

Brave New Alps is an art collective with which DAAR has been in constant exchange. In the summer of 2008, they were among the first DAAR residents who, together with Jesse Long and Anne Gough, made creative and courageous interventions in Oush Grab. Brave New Alps are also the graphic and web designers of www.decolonizing.ps, without which most of DAAR's work would not have been known outside of Palestine.

We wish to express our deepest gratitude to Steve Fagin, who assisted us in the conceptualization and organization during the early days and, most importantly, helped us obtain our first substantial grant from HaudenschildGarage, a remarkable institution operating in support of the arts, based in San Diego and run by the indefatigable and generous Eloisa Haudenschild. Steve helped conceive the first pilot project that allowed us to establish a collaborative, flexible, project-based structure with the least possible bureaucracy. Another special thanks goes to the Delfina Foundation which chose DAAR as their residency partner in Palestine and, particularly, to Delfina Entrecanales for her ongoing engagement and encouragement and to Aaron Cezar for his amazing support. Furthermore, the Foundation for Art Initiatives has been an ideal partner in shaping our practice. Discussions with its board of directors and with Antoine Schweitzer revealed our shared preoccupations and problems, and helped plan strategic moves that would help make DAAR an anomalous "institution." What we decided to establish was neither another NGO (there are so many in Palestine) nor another professional practice (we did not want to limit ourselves to the commercial necessities of architecture, but wanted rather to be free to choose our commissions and clients). We also decided to work in partnership with existing Palestinian organizations. For this reason, in August 2007, we established a research unit at ARIJ, the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem. With their encouragement we began expanding our first

architectural pilot project into a manual of decolonization. In this way, we abstracted a detailed architectural approach to the reuse of Israeli colonial architecture by Palestinians. In just a few months, the project grew; the increasing number of local and international actors involved led us to re-think our structure and move to a larger building that could host a studio and residency space, close to the home of Sandi and Alessandro. We launched the studio with a program in which guests, friends, and ourselves delivered seminars, drawing large audiences from across the region. Speakers included, among others, Sari Hanafi, Rasha Salti, Adi Ophir, Yazid Anani, Tom Keenan, Munir Fashi, Ariella Azoulay, Stefano Boeri, Lieven De Cauter, Senan Abdelkader, Teddy Cruz, Salwa Makdadi, Reem Fadda, Omar Yusuf, Ines Weizman, Armin Linke, Ursula Biemann, Vincenzo Castella, Nasser Abourahme, Salvatore Porcaro, Lorenzo Romito, Cédric Parizot, and Irit Rogoff.

During these first months, we organized several meetings with a number of associations, research institutions, local communities, and researchers—so many that it would be impossible to list them all by name. Among these, we are greatly indebted to the Alternative Information Center, the Women's Shelter Association, the Alternative Tourist Group, Save the Children, Riwaq and the Palestine Wildlife Society for their ideas, critiques and visions.

Art exhibitions have played a unique role in shaping DAAR's experience. They are not just sites of display, but also places of experimental production. Together with public presentations and political and community-based work in Palestine, they provide crucial moments which allow our projects to come to life. They also create the tremendous opportunity to use the materials generated for exhibitions in other contexts.



Jabel Tawil/P'sagot Project.

Michael Baers, 2011

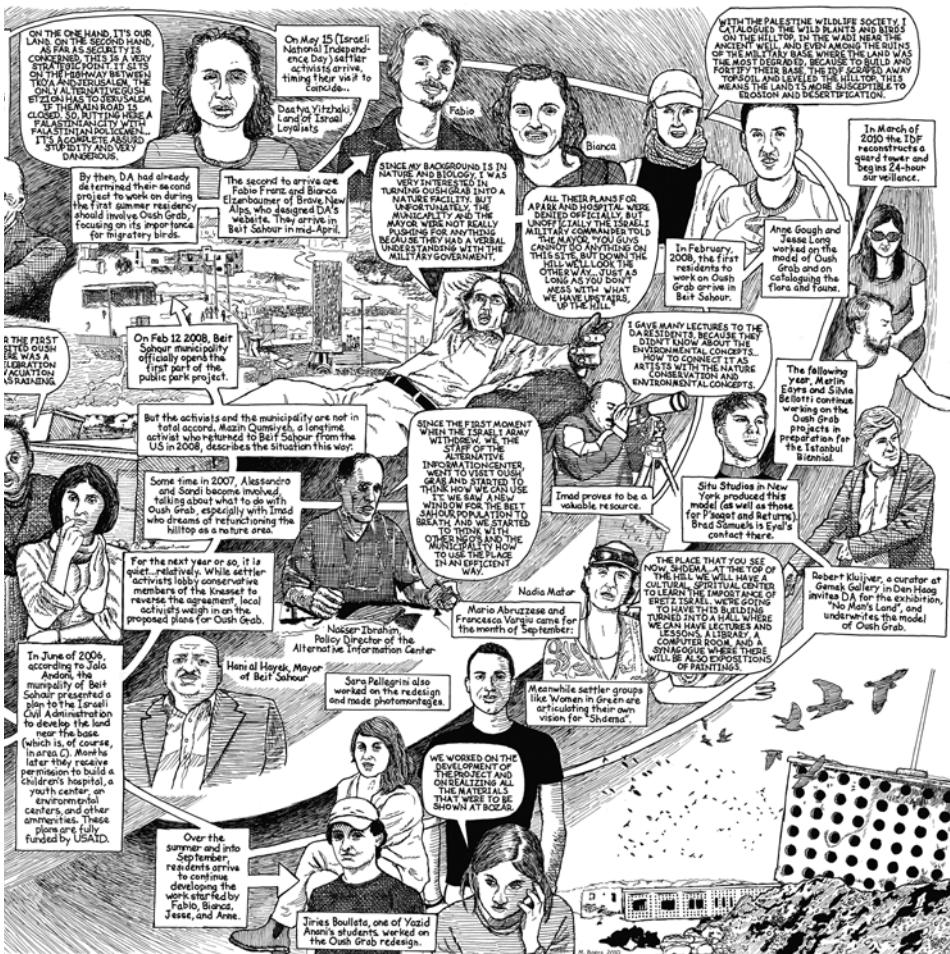
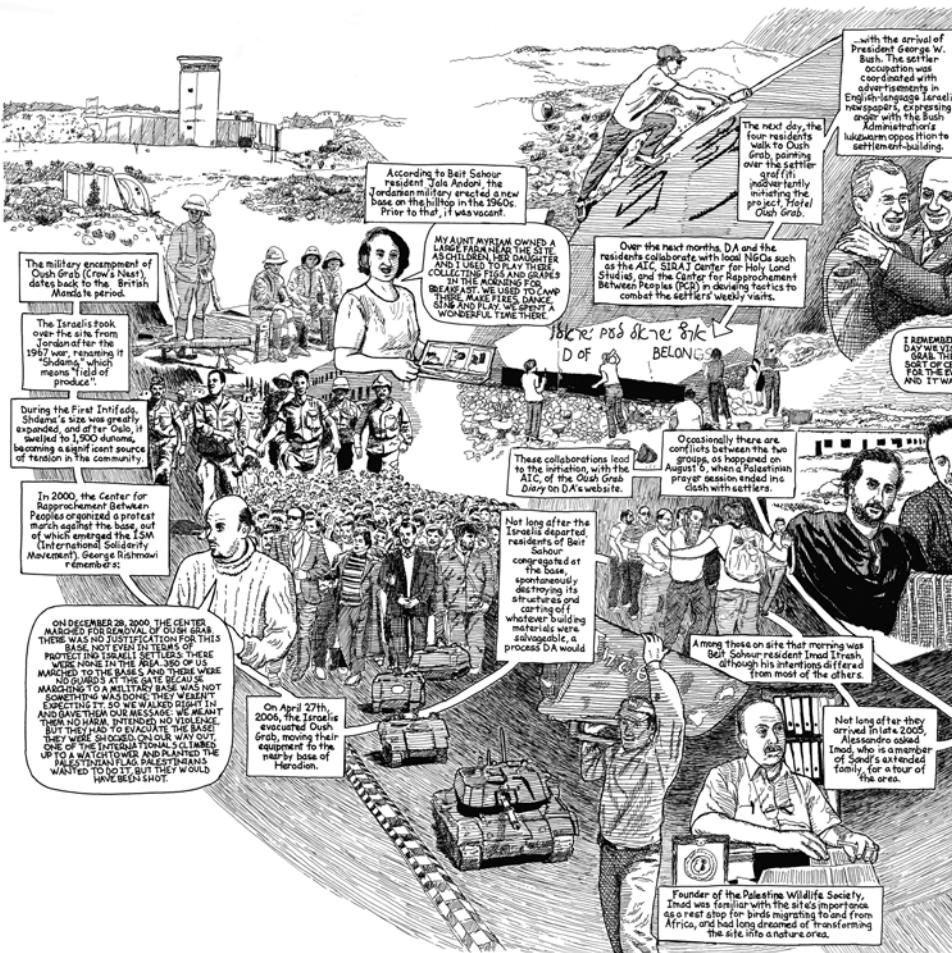


The shape of DAAR's artistic practice has formed over years of intellectual dialog with extraordinary art curators with similar urgencies and approaches: Rasha Salti, Galit Eliat, Reem Fadda, Salwa Makdadi, Christine Tohme and WHW (What, How, & for Whom). DAAR's first large exhibition was produced in conversation with our dear friend and persuasive critic, the philosopher Lieven De Cauter. He was almost "forced" by the architectural curator of Bozar, Iwan Streuven, to accept an unusual role for him, that of guest curator of our first show. This triggered our ongoing exchange on art and activism. No words can express the gratitude and joy for the wonderful moments we spent in conversation with you, Lieven. For the Brussels show, we would like to thank Fabienne Verstraeten, organizer of the Masarat Festival and, aside from the architects who worked on individual projects (we will thank them below), we would like to express our appreciation for the video material archive of the Gaza evacuation: to Mohammed G., and Nadav Harel, and especially Roberto Sartor for putting everything together; to Allegra Martin for the editing of the "Archives of the Archives;" to Rianne Van Doevert for starting the "Oush Grab Diary" and to George Rishmawi and the Center for Rapprochement between People in Beit Sahour for allowing us to use the images of the evacuation of Oush Grab contained within this book. A special thanks for the financial support for the creation of models goes to Robert Kluijver. The Brussels exhibition was readapted and upgraded on the occasion of the 11th International Architecture Exhibition Biennale of Venice, COAC in Barcelona, ngbk in Berlin, and for the 4th International Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam curated by Philipp Misselwitz and Can Altay.

We thank Pietro Onofri for reproducing detailed architectural drawings otherwise inaccessible to the public. Without his initial work, no speculations could have ever been made. We are also grateful to the team that redesigned the colonies: Rana Shakaa, Amina Pilav, and Barbara Modolo. The work on the manual of decolonization was produced in collaboration with Michele Marchetti and Giovanni Piovene, who spent six hot weeks in Palestine in the summer of 2008.

Imad Al Atrash, director of the Palestine Wildlife Society, was our source of inspiration for the non-conventional re-use of military bases and colonies. He was the source of the idea to transform the abandoned military base of Oush Grab into a bird sanctuary. Imad, thank you for the direction and suggestions given to our participants and students over the course of the last few years. Likewise, we are grateful to the Beit Sahour municipality, which used some of our suggestions for transforming the side of the hill into a public park, a move that remains to this day our first "realized" project—and one in which we enjoy endless picnics. We express our gratitude, if we may do so, to the activist group formed to resist settler aggressions and to our team of architects, Mario Abruzzese, Jiries Boullata, Sara Pellegrini, and Francesca Vargiu, who worked on the design for the hilltop—not yet implemented. Sara's oneiric photomontages have caught the attention of many, and her visualizations have made our work more clear.

Armin Linke has generously accompanied DAAR's efforts since its inception. We would like to thank him, along with Francesco Mattuzzi and Renato Rinaldi, for the production of the stereoscopic video installation that has been presented in various biennales and festivals, and for our many conversations.



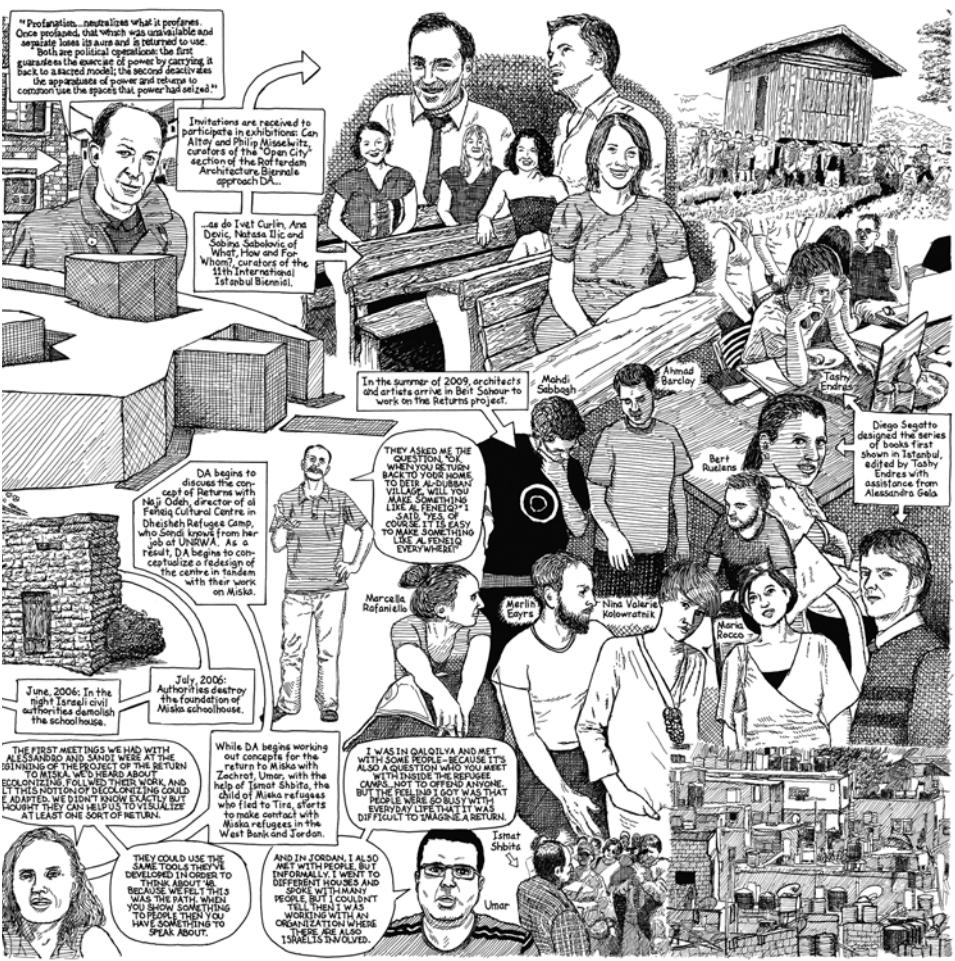
Our second summer program saw our residents grow in number, allowing for the possibility to develop parallel projects. Marco Cerati and Silvia Columbo expanded the work started with the manual of decolonization; Merlin Eayers and Silvia Bellotti focused on Oush Grab; and a new group of residents began developing the returns project. We felt the need to expand the notion of decolonization to other areas. Badil and Zochorot played a crucial role in accompanying such critical and difficult reflections; without them we would have felt alone. The ongoing discussions with Naji Odah, Sari Hanafi, and Ismael Sheikh Hassan deeply influenced our approach. Ahmad Barcley, Maria Rocca, Marcella Rafaniello, Nina Valerie Kolowratnik, Bert Ruelers, and Tashi Enders, the “returns team,” were able to continue and develop DAAR’s work in their academic theses and project initiatives.

In January 2010, Lorenzo Pezzani, the first Delfina resident in DAAR, contributed greatly to research that led to the third summer program in the village of Battir. This was the first occasion which we moved the studio and the residency directly to the site of investigation. Nicola Perugini played a fundamental role in helping establish our new temporary studio in Battir. There, we had the opportunity to meet new people and involve new partners, among them: Samir Harb, Hassan Muamer, Mohammed Hammash, Iti'dal Muammar, and Ackram Bader of Battir Village; we are grateful to al-Quds Bard University, which accepted our proposal for a summer program available to students, UNESCO for supporting a program of local and international guests; and Valentina Azarov for her contribution.

The real activator behind the task of putting together such an incredible assemblage of students, educational institutions, international and local organizations was Alessandra Gola.

We would like to thank the team of architects who worked with us on the Battir project: Benoît Burquel, Luisa Cerlini, Elisa Ferrato, Alessandra Gola, Suzanne Harris-Brandts, Benjamin Leclair-Paquet, and the artists Michael Baers and Amina Bech. Special thanks to Ghia Nasser for his legal advice.

Our appreciation goes to the Foundation for Art Initiatives which, in 2011, helped consolidate our practice. After receiving the grant we opened a residency space in the Old City of Beit Sahour, in a recently renovated group of old houses. During the summer, with the help of the grant, we started a collaborative partnership with local and international participants. We established an International Summer Research and Internship Program in Beit Sahour in collaboration with Al-Quds Bard College and Goldsmiths, University of London, involving the participation of students, architects, NGO staff, and village officials. During the summer program, DAAR produced performances, videos, and research that culminated in a number of exhibitions: “Common Assembly I” at Can in Neuchâtel Switzerland (September 2011), “Common Assembly II” at Nottingham Contemporary, England (January 2012), “Common Assembly III” at the James Gallery CUNY in New York, United States (March 2012). On these occasions, seminars, lectures, and symposiums activated the exhibition space, not only as a site of display but also as a site of production. This was exemplified by the CUNY students’ transformation of the exhibition space into a site for public meeting and discussion concerning the role of public education in New York.



Special thanks goes to the team that worked on the parliament building project: Benoît Burquel, Suzy Harris-Brandts, Runa Johannessen, Zografaia Karekou, Lejla Odobasic, Carina Ottino, Elizabeth Paden, Sameena Sitabkhan, Amy Zion, and Ghassan Bannoura as well as Nishat Awan and Cressida Kocienski, both residents of the Delfina Foundation. For the parliament project we produced an exhibition that traveled to Open City Istanbul, Home Works V Beirut, Architekturforum Tirol Innsbruck, Edinburgh Art Festival, Oslo Triennale, Centre Pompidou, Venice Film Festival, and the Gallery of Modern Art, Australia.

Our last project was produced through the initiative of a group of students from the Berlage Institute who persuasively convinced the Dean to invite DAAR for a year-long design studio course. The team was composed of Sanne Van Den Breemer, Patricia Fernandes, Gabriel A. Cuéllar, Zhongqi Ren, Sai Shu, and Rizki M. Supratman. Lieven De Cauter collaborated in the design studio course. Special thanks, again, to Gabriel for giving us the permission to publish in this book the chapter “Ruins under Construction.”

We would like to thank Leila Shahid, first woman ambassador of Palestine, for her generous acceptance of our invitation to participate in talks and events, and Anwar Hilal for his encouragement, support and hospitality.

Ines Weizman participated in many seminars and events and, in her unique and brilliant way, added a massive dose of energy and insight. Our debt to Ines is obviously much greater than this!

The work and discussions with Giorgio Agamben alleviated the sometimes rather claustrophobic and obsessive aspects of our practice.

The generous support of the Foundation for Art Initiatives made this book possible.

And finally, this book is dedicated to our (combined) four daughters, for whom there is nothing better than being together; we hope that in twenty years our work will appear to them as a historical curiosity.



Battir.

Michael Baers, 2011



Architecture after Revolution

Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, Eyal Weizman

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