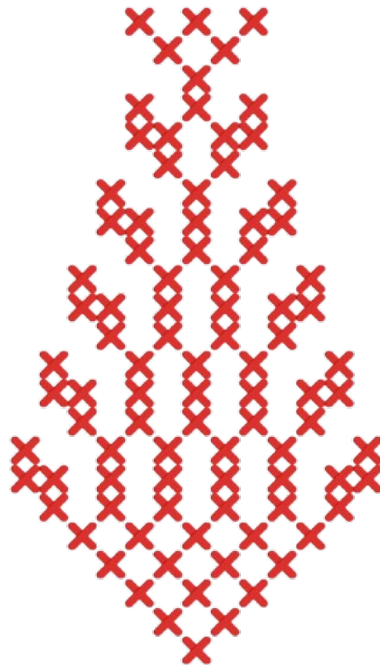




SCARS OF SETTLEMENTS

Destruction of mobility, identity, and urban space in Al-Khalil

Isra Barham

Chalmers University of Technology
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
(Society, Justice, Space)

Examiner: Kristina Grange
Supervisor: Emilio Da Cruz Brandao
Co-supervisor: Feras Hammami

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UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Scars of settlements

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isra.barham@hotmail.com

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Examiner: Kristina Grange

Supervisor: Emilio Da Cruz Brandao

Co-supervisor: Feras Hammami



*A Palestinian is trapped in time
remaining forever a child
standing in front of a tank
trying to protect himself and his people
with nothing but a stone in his hand
pain in his heart
and a fierce will to resist.*

-Isra Barham

على هذه الأرض ما يستحق الحياة: تردد إبريل، رائحة
الخبز في الفجر، آراء امرأة في الرجال، كتابات
أسخيلبوس، أول الحب، عشب على حجر، أمهات تقفن
على خط ناي، وخوف الغزاة من الذكريات.

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تترك الأربعين بكامل شمسها، ساعة الشمس في
السجن، غيم يُقلد سرباً من الكائنات، هتافات شعب
لمن يصعدون إلى متفرجهم باسمين، وخوف الطغاة من
الأغنيات.

على هذه الأرض ما يستحق الحياة: على هذه الأرض
سيدة الأرض، أم البدايات أم النهايات. كانت تسمى
فلسطين. صارت تسمى فلسطين. سيدتي: أستحق، لأنك
سيدتي، أستحق الحياة.

وردد أقل
- محمود درويش

(Darwish, 2014)
Translation on page 57

MANIFESTO

Architecture is never neutral. It is political. It shapes power, controls movement, and carves spaces of inclusion and exclusion. As stated by Lebbeus Woods, “Architecture is a political act, by nature. It has to do with the relationships between people and how they decide to change their conditions of living.” In conflict zones, this political nature becomes very visible, architecture dictates who moves, who stays, and who is excluded. The built environment can be shaped by violence, but it can also be reclaimed as a force for justice.

It is naive to accept architecture as a passive bystander in war, while every restricted road, every demolished home, every fortified settlement is evidence of architecture used against people. And this will not change unless we understand the power we uphold as architects.

Architecture should serve people, not power. In places of conflict, where movement is regulated and freedom is denied, design must become an act of resistance and reclamation. Architects must question their role: Do we accept to be complicit with oppression, or do we want to help dismantling it?

The illusion of neutrality must be rejected. Architecture is political, ethical, and urgent. It must be a tool for those displaced, restricted, and silenced, to confront injustice, to expose the violence embedded in space, and to build for liberation, not control.

“No amount of guilt can change the past and no amount of worrying can change the future”

-Umar ibn Al-Khattab

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Student background

Chalmers University of Technology

Gothenburg, Sweden

September 2023-June 2025

Master program of Architecture and Planning

Beyond Sustainability

Studios: Design and Planning for Social Inclusion;
Healthcare architecture 1.

Thesis direction: Society, Justice, Space

Bachelor of Architecture

Gothenburg, Sweden

September 2019 - June 2022

Politecnico Di Milano

Milano, Italy

February 2024 - July 2024

Erasmus program

Master program of Architecture and urban design

Studios: Architecture preservation

Courses: Sustainable built environment in the
Global South; Sustainability assessment and
territorial valorization; European environmental
and landscape politics and projects.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the fragmented urban landscape of Al-Khalil (Hebron), where the Zionist settler-colonial state («Israel») imposes severe restrictions on Palestinian mobility. Through architecture, urban planning, and physical barriers such as checkpoints, settlements, and militazy zones, the occupation reshapes daily life and transforms the relationship between people, space, and identity. My research focuses on how these spatial practices operate as tools of control, and how they affect the social fabric, sense of belonging, and lived realities of Palestinians.

Because of the ongoing genocide in Ghaza (Gaza) (Amnesty International, 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024) and the vulnerability of conducting on field research as a Palestinian myself, the study utilizes remote research methods. Conversations with Palestinian people, both who were and who are still in Al-Khalil, combined with mapping tools, provide critical insights into the social, psychological, and spatial effects of these restrictions and the highly oppressive spatial interventions.

In addition to that, this research aims to raise awareness of how architecture functions as a tool of power and domination, emphasizing the need for a more conscious engagement with the built environment in contexts of occupation and segregation.

Methodologically, the thesis is grounded in narrative and decolonial approaches, drawing on indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008), narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 2004), and decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2022). These frameworks guide me to treat testimonies not as data but as living knowledge. Storytelling becomes central in my thesis.

Tatreez (Palestinian embroidery) is woven into this process as both symbol and method. Through the slow, repetitive act of stitching in response to each testimony, I engaged with the stories in a way that allowed me to listen through the hands as well as the mind. The resulting visual works combined with Tatreez serve as another layer of interpretation, translating lived experiences into material form.

By documenting the realities of daily life under occupation, and by centering Palestinian storytelling and embodied forms of making, I aim to contribute to a broader discussion on spatial justice, highlighting how architecture is used as a mechanism of domination, while also foregrounding the resilience, memory, and lived knowledge of Palestinians navigating an environment structured to control them.

Keywords: Settler-colonialism, Apartheid, Occupation, Identity, Control, Power dynamics, Resistance.

TO THE PEOPLE OF GHAZA...

To my people

As I write this, you are enduring a genocide. We are watching you being besieged, displaced, starved, burned alive, brutally killed...enduring what is worse than a Nakba.

We are watching, unable to do anything to help.

And yet, despite all that you are facing, you stand stronger than we ever could.

*You have taught us humanity.
you have taught us freedom.
You have taught us life...*

*Please forgive us for what we couldn't do, and bear with us for what we will. Because one day, together we will stand free,
but untill then, we will fight.*

-Isra Barham
12 May 2025

"The wars will end and the leaders will shake hands, and that old woman will remain waiting for her martyred son, and that girl will wait for her beloved husband, and the children will wait for their heroic father, I do not know who sold the homeland but I know who paid the price."

-Mahmoud Darwish

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	1
Relevance of the topic	
Power and responsibility	
Thesis glossary	
Perspective analysis	
Aim and purpose	
Thesis question	
Methodology	
Research under violence	
Delimitations	
INTRODUCING PALESTINE	11
The past	
Nakba (1948)	
Settlements and control	
First Intifada (1987–1993)	
Oslo Accords (1993)	
Second Intifada (200)	
Separation (apartheid) wall	
October 7th and genocide (2023–ongoing)	
AL-KHALIL	19
Introducing Al-Khalil	
Settlements as a colonial project	
Settler and military violence	
Boundaries and movement restrictions	
BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND RESILIANCE	31
The fight to exist	
Tatreez	
SCARS	37
Story-listening	
Falastin	
Mohammad Aburajab Al-Tamimi	
Ehab Natshe	
ARCHITECTURE AS A SITE OF POWER, KNOWLEDGE AND RESISTANCE	59

Printing instructions

The following page spreads are designed in a larger format than the rest of the document and should be viewed or printed at a larger size to ensure readability:

pp. 45–46

pp. 51–52

pp. 57–58

When fully expanded, the page size is approximately 630 × 297 mm. If printed on standard A4 paper, text and details may appear too small. For optimal readability, these pages should be viewed in their full format or printed at a larger size, such as A3.

The printed version of this publication includes physical embroideries integrated into the pages. A copy is available at the ACE library at Chalmers for those who wish to experience the material in its intended physical form.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter defines the orientation of the thesis, in addition to the delimitations.

Relevance of the topic

This thesis addresses the critical role that architecture plays as a tool of occupation in Al-Khalil. In the context of an increasingly militarized and segregated urban environment, architecture is not merely a passive entity but an active instrument of control, shaping spatial realities and reinforcing power dynamics (Weizman, 2024). The relevance of this topic is particularly acute in light of the ongoing human rights violations faced by Palestinians in the West Bank and Ghaza, which have been consistently reported by several human rights organizations, including Amnesty International (2025), Human Rights Watch (2020), and the United Nations (2019). These violations include restrictions on movement, military and settler violence, home demolitions, and establishment of illegal settlements, all of which are deeply embedded within the spatial fabric of cities like Al-Khalil.

“Israel maintained onerous restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. OCHA documented 705 permanent obstacles such as checkpoints across the West Bank in July. Israeli-imposed restrictions designed to keep Palestinians far from settlements forced them to take time-consuming detours and restricted their access to their own agricultural land.”

-Human Rights Watch, 2020

Architecture, in this context, becomes a tool that enforces the spatial, social and psychological fragmentation of Palestinian communities, perpetuating systems of control, surveillance, and segregation (Amnesty International, 2025). These dynamics are further amplified in the urban landscape of Al-Khalil, where the presence of military infrastructure, checkpoints, and settlement expansions restrict movement, undermine community interactions, and impede access to vital services. The built environment is not neutral in such a setting, it becomes a site of constant struggle, both spatial and social, as Palestinians navigate the everyday challenges posed by occupation.

Power and responsibility

This study extends beyond architectural critique and into the realm of social justice, by addressing the spatial injustices faced by marginalized communities in Al-Khalil. It challenges the restrictions imposed on movement and the resulting social and architectural fragmentation, advocating for a more just and inclusive urban environment. Architecture, often perceived as a neutral and mere aesthetic practice, is proven here to be inherently political. Yet, today it is rarely interpreted as such. As Picon (2020) argues, architecture exerts political force both practically by organizing or restricting behavior, as in Bentham's Panopticon, and symbolically, through forms that reinforce power structures, such as in Speer's Nazi monuments or the spatial rituals of Versailles. Even when unintentional, design often reflects and reinforces political values shaped by its social context (Picon, 2020).

Architecture defines the individual's world, it is not just about buildings, it's about people. It mediates how individuals experience the world, move through it, and relate to one another. In conflict zones, the built environment can either entrench injustice or be reimagined as a tool of resistance, care, and solidarity. Inspired by the methodologies of Forensic Architecture (e.g. Weizman 2014 and 2017) to expose hidden power structures and systemic violence through architectural techniques and spatial analysis, this approach to the discipline of architecture treats the built environment as a form of evidence, exposing the ways in which architecture participates in exclusionary power dynamics.

By reframing architecture as a political act, this thesis advocates for a more critical, engaged, and activist approach to design that prioritizes human experience and social justice within architectural thinking. Rather than proposing a specific design, this thesis advocates for a different way of practicing architecture: one that uses the knowledge and tools of the discipline to critically understand how architecture can be complicit in reinforcing power dynamics. By exposing these mechanisms, the aim is to learn how to design more intentionally, placing people at the center. Additionally, this thesis seeks to broaden the conversation around architecture's role in conflict zones, advocating for an architectural discourse that is aware of the realities of occupation and its social, psychological, and spatial consequences.

Thesis glossary

In this section I present, in my own words the main terms that this thesis evolves around. In all situations this thesis will refer to the name of Palestinian places, as cities and villages in their Arabic and original names.

Al-Khalil

Hebron, Arabic: خَلِيل الرحمن Al-Khalīl or خَلِيل الرحمان Khalīl Al-Rahmān

Al-Quds

Jerusalem, Arabic: القدس ("the Holiness"), short for بيت المقدس ("the House of the Holiness").

Apartheid

The term “apartheid” was originally used to refer to a political system in South Africa which explicitly enforced racial segregation, and the domination and oppression of one racial group by another. It has since been adopted by the international community to condemn and criminalize such systems and practices wherever they occur in the world, through the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (Amnesty International, 2025; Atran 1989).

Genocide

The deliberate and systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race (britannica.com).

Ghaza

Gaza, Arabic: غَزَّة, Ḡazza

Settlement

In the context of this thesis, a settlement is referring to settler colonies illegally built on occupied territory.

Settler

In the context of this thesis, a settler is a Zionist who lives in a settlement within occupied Palestinian territories.

Zionism

Zionism is a political settler-colonial movement that emerged in the 19th century Europe, aiming to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine (White, 2009). Consequently the Zionist movement motivated the creation of a surrogate colonial and settler state on Palestinian territories in the beginning of the 20th century (Atran 1989), commonly known as the «state of Israel».

Perspective analysis

Al-Khalil

Since the Zionist occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Al-Khalil has seen the imposition of settlements, military infrastructure, and a host of restrictions that have transformed the city into a highly contested space. The establishment of settlements within the city center, reflects the broader strategy of using architecture and urban planning as tools for control and domination. This process has turned Al-Khalil into a segregated and militarized environment where Palestinians face constant restrictions on movement and access to their own urban spaces (B'Tselem, 2007; Eldar & Zertal, 2004).

Settlements and movement restrictions

The settlements within Al-Khalil are located at the heart of the city, strategically designed to fragment the Palestinian urban fabric. Checkpoints, road closures, and the military presence disrupt the flow of Palestinian life, reducing mobility and eroding the city's social and economic vitality. This situation aligns with Weizman's concept of "architecture as a weapon," where the built environment is employed to enforce power and control (Weizman, 2024). In Al-Khalil, architecture is not simply a passive backdrop but a central mechanism in maintaining the occupation, limiting Palestinian presence, and reinforcing settler expansion.

The Zionist occupation includes extensive control over critical infrastructure, impacting Palestinians' access to resources such as water and electricity. The Zionist authorities controls most water distribution in the West Bank through the colonial water company, Mekorot. This control means that many Palestinian communities in Area C (see maps on pages 13 and 14), which is illegally under the control of the Zionist state, often face severe restrictions on water access, despite proximity to water pipelines that serve Zionist settlements. This differential access not only affects daily life but also agricultural productivity, as Palestinian farmers are often forced to switch to less water-intensive, but also less profitable, crops due to restricted water supply (Amnesty, 2017).

Over the years, the Old City of Al-Khalil, once a thriving Palestinian commercial hub, has been systematically emptied of its residents and businesses due to military orders and settler violence. Shuhada Street, a central thoroughfare, remains largely closed to Palestinians, exemplifying the spatial segregation enforced by the occupation. (B'Tselem, 2007) This spatial division serves as a mechanism of dispossession and control, echoing Lefebvre's (1974) argument that space is socially produced and manipulated by those in power. The restriction of Palestinian movement and access to public space in Al-Khalil has not only physical implications but also profound cultural and psychological effects, disrupting community life and erasing historical connections to the city (Hammami, 2019; B'Tselem, 2019).

The architecture of occupation in Al-Khalil also plays a critical role in shaping identity. As De Cesari (2019) notes, space and heritage are key battlegrounds in the Palestinian struggle for rights and identity. The forced displacement of Palestinians from their homes and the occupation of historically significant sites by Israeli settlers disrupt the continuity of Palestinian cultural memory and identity. This dynamic is further explored by Said (1978), who argued that colonial powers use space and representation to reshape identities and assert dominance. In Al-Khalil, the erasure of Palestinian presence from key areas of the city is not only a physical occupation but also a symbolic one, aimed at reconfiguring the cultural landscape (Hammami, 2019; Petti, Hilal, & Weizman, 2013; Weizman, 2024)

Resistance through architecture

However, architecture also becomes an instrument of resistance. Architecture can be mobilized not only to dominate but also to resist (Petti, Hilal, & Weizman, 2013; Eyal Weizman, 2013). In Al-Khalil, Palestinians engage in forms of spatial resistance, whether by remaining in their homes despite settler encroachment, maintaining cultural practices, or advocating for international recognition of their rights to the city. Hammami (2022) describes this as "rupture in heritage," where heritage and space become sites of both domination and co-resistance in a colonial context.

Aim and purpose

In this thesis, I investigate how architecture operates as a tool of power, control, and domination, particularly within contexts of occupation and segregation. Focusing on the city of Al-Khalil in the occupied West Bank, I critically explore how spatial design, urban planning, and the built environment are used to enforce systems of oppression, shaping both the urban landscape and the lived realities of Palestinian residents.

The purpose of my research is twofold: to examine how architectural interventions contribute to restricted mobility, segregation, and territorial fragmentation, and to understand how these spatial conditions impact identity, agency, and daily life. Through case studies and testimonies, I aim to reveal how space is weaponized to regulate movement and assert control, while also examining the ways in which residents resist, adapt, and reclaim their environments.

Central to my work is a commitment to act in an aware and respectful way that actively humanizes the individuals and communities affected by an unjust spatial division. Rather than abstracting space into theory alone, I seek to amplify the voices of those who live within these contested landscapes, making their stories, experiences, and resilience listened to and visible. By engaging with architecture through this lens, I aim to challenge dehumanizing narratives and reclaim the discipline's focus: the people it serves.

Ultimately, I hope to contribute to the development of a more ethical and socially engaged architectural practice. This work reflects on the responsibilities architects carry in shaping environments, especially in zones of conflict, and calls for a more critical, compassionate, and conscious approach to design, one that acknowledges the profound social, psychological, and political implications of space.

Research question

In this thesis I aim to address the following question:

How do settler-colonial spatial policies in Al-Khalil affect Palestinian mobility, identity, and access to urban space?

Methodology

This research was conducted primarily through remote methods, as it was not possible for me to carry out fieldwork in person. This was due both to the risks associated with my identity as a Palestinian and the restrictions I would face in my homeland under Zionist occupation, as well as the ongoing genocide and violence in the region.

Spatial analysis

I used mapping tools to analyze the spatial layout of Al-Khalil. Through this analysis, I identified the physical locations of checkpoints, barriers, settlements, and restricted zones, and examined how these spatial conditions and architectural interventions affect the daily lives of Palestinians.

Literature review and policy analysis

I conducted a comprehensive literature review to establish the theoretical and contextual framework for this thesis. In this review, I examined the thematic intersections between colonial architecture, spatial justice, and the impact of Zionist settler colonialism on the urban landscape of Al-Khalil.

This process included both historical and contemporary analyses of oppressive spatial practices in urban planning, focusing on how such practices have functioned and continue to function to maintain systems of control over Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Alongside the literature review, I carried out a brief policy analysis to explore the legal and political frameworks that regulate and restrict mobility in Al-Khalil. I critically assessed the role of international law and human rights instruments, including United Nations resolutions and conventions, to understand how these mechanisms both address and, at times, fail to prevent ongoing violations of the rights of Palestinian residents.

Personal stories

Given the limitations on conducting in-person conversations, I carried out remote conversations with Palestinian people, both those currently living in Al-Khalil and those who have left. These conversations, conducted in Arabic, were transcribed, translated, and then carefully shaped into a narrative that preserved the tone, rhythm, and emotion of the original exchanges. Each story became a space where memory and voice could be expressed authentically, bridging spoken testimony and written narrative. I also shared the stories with the participants, and together we refined them until they were satisfied with how their stories and experiences were represented.

The conversations focused on the social, emotional, and psychological impacts of restricted mobility and occupation, exploring the personal experiences of those who live or have lived under the constraints of settler-colonial policies in Al-Khalil. Through these narratives, I examined how the built environment and systems of spatial restriction intersect with daily life, shaping not only movement but also identity, community relations, and social structures.

My engagement with these stories was guided by indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008) and other decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2022), which emphasize respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in the sharing and retelling of lived experiences.

Decolonial language approach

In this thesis, I approach language not merely as a vehicle of communication, but as a methodological choice imbued with political significance. My use of original Palestinian place names, such as Al-Khalil instead of Hebron, is intentional and grounded in a practice of resistance and decolonization (Smith, 2022). Naming is not a passive act; it is a form of survival, a way to counter erasure and assert historical and cultural presence in spaces where occupation seeks to rewrite memory and identity. By consciously using indigenous terminology, I aim to resist the normalization of colonial narratives (Smith, 2022) and reclaim the spatial and cultural specificity of the Palestinian landscape.

Tatreez as method

Tatreez, traditional Palestinian embroidery, functions in this research both as symbol and as method. Each stitch represents a fragment of memory, a scar of displacement, a line of continuity between land, body, and identity (Sheets, 2024). Through the act of embroidery, experiences of restriction, violence, and resistance are translated into visual and tactile narratives. This can be understood as a form of spatial storytelling, where the thread becomes a cartography of emotion and survival.

Tatreez offered a decolonial way of engaging with space, one that resists the dominance of Western architectural language by centring indigenous forms of making and remembering. In my thesis, I recreated and adapted traditional motifs from the Al-Khalil region to reflect the testimonies shared by participants. Each pattern carries symbolic meaning, connecting the personal to the collective. The tatreez thus became an analytical tool as well a medium through which architecture's violence and resilience are both recorded and reimaged.

In this sense, Tatreez is not merely representational; it is performative. The act of stitching is an act of resistance a process of reclaiming authorship over Palestinian spatial narratives and transforming pain into pattern.

My connection to the thesis

As a Palestinian woman, architect, and researcher, I approach this work from both within and outside the context I study. My understanding is shaped by personal experience of colonial violence, restricted mobility, and the constant negotiation of identity under occupation. This positionality is not neutral; it is deeply political and emotional. Rather than distancing myself from the subject, I acknowledge that my voice, my memory, and my own lived experiences are part of the narrative this thesis seeks to unfold.

My position, therefore, is situated in a decolonial framework that values lived knowledge, embodied experience, and resistance as valid sources of understanding. This perspective allows my work to move beyond detached observation, instead embracing research as an act of care, self-representation, and spatial reclamation. The process of writing and making thus becomes an ethical responsibility to document and to remember.

Research under violence

Given the ongoing genocide and the highly dynamic and unstable situation in Palestine, particularly in Al-Khalil, I must clearly state the context in which I conduct this research. The violations heavily influence the daily lives of Palestinians and therefore impact my research process. The “normal” state of affairs is continuously altered by the immediate, unpredictable effects of the war, making it a unique and highly sensitive time for gathering data.

The state of violation presents significant challenges for my conversations, policy analysis, and spatial documentation. Participants may have experienced additional emotional stress, displacement, or loss during this period, which in turn may have affected the accuracy or completeness of their responses and experiences. Further, the ongoing strict military operations and the uncertain situation have restricted my access to certain areas of Al-Khalil, complicating the collection of on-the-ground data, especially visual documentation such as photographs, videos, and maps.

Therefore, I take into account the impact of these circumstances on both the lived experiences of Palestinian residents and on my methodological approach. To adapt to these limitations, I have utilized remote data collection, such as virtual conversations and self-reported mapping, as an alternative method to engage with participants. However, I am aware that these conditions may result in additional biases, as participants’ experiences and views are shaped by the immediate, fluid nature of the war.

It is important to recognize that the ongoing genocide in Palestine may also affect the policy frameworks and the analysis of legal structures in place in Al-Khalil. The shifting nature of political and military dynamics can alter or temporarily suspend policies, making it essential for me to understand the temporal context and adjust my interpretations accordingly. I address the contemporary situation as an added layer of complexity, while also drawing comparisons with historical and more stable moments to deepen my understanding of how architecture and urban planning are used as tools of occupation.

Delimitations

In this thesis, I focus on mobility restrictions in Al-Khalil, mainly in area H2 (see maps on pages 17) that contains the Zionist settlements, exploring the relationship between architecture and identity and how spatial design, urban planning, and the built environment are used to enforce systems of oppression, shaping both the urban landscape and the lived realities of Palestinian residents. Additionally, I consider current policies and developments that shape mobility in the city, incorporating case studies of affected communities to provide a localized perspective.

While this study does not extend to the broader context of the entire West Bank or provide a detailed historical account predating 1948 and 1967, nor does it deliver a comprehensive political analysis or include the perspectives of refugee and settler communities, I focus on particular incidents and areas to provide a more profound understanding of how spatial design under occupation affects the daily lives of Palestinians.

INTRODUCING PALESTINE

In order to understand the critical situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, a series of crucial events will be presented in this chapter.

*“We are captives, even if our wheat grows over the fences
and swallows rise from our broken chains. We are captives
of what we love, what we desire, and what we are.”*

-Mahmoud Darwish



An unnamed Palestinian man poses as a Biblical subject for an American photographer during the early twentieth century (Jerusalem). source: www.loc.gov

The past

Zionist colonization in Palestine developed within the broader context of European imperialism and nationalism in the late 19th century. Initially, Zionists struggled to establish a Jewish settler-state, relying on sporadic colonization efforts. However, these efforts saw limited success before World War I (Sayegh, 1965).

In 1916, during World War I, Britain and France negotiated the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided Ottoman territories and placed Palestine under British control (Khalidi, 2020). The following year, in 1917, Zionist leaders formed an alliance with British imperialism, leading to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. This declaration pledged British support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine (Masalha, 1992). Consequently the Zionist movement motivated the creation of a surrogate colonial and settler state on Palestinian territories in the beginning of the 20th century (Atran 1989).

After the Ottoman Empire’s defeat, the League of Nations formally assigned Britain the Mandate for Palestine in 1922, incorporating the Balfour Declaration as a guiding principle of British rule (Masalha, 1992). Under British administration, Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine increased, ultimately leading to the establishment of «Israel», as a Zionist settler-colonial state, resulting in the displacement of 700-750 thousand Palestinians during Al-Nakba in 1948 (Khalidi, 2020).

Unlike conventional European imperialism, the Zionist settler-colonial state does not seek to exploit indigenous Palestinian labor but rather to replace them entirely (Sayegh, 1965). Understanding the Nakba is crucial for comprehending the complexities of the settler-colonization of Palestine, as it highlights issues of dispossession and the quest for justice (Said, 1979).

Nakba (1948)

The Nakba, meaning “catastrophe” in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians in 15th of May 1948, which followed the establishment of the Zionist settler-colonial state. Approximately 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homes and lands, and they were, for the foreseeable future, subsequently denied of their right to return. Today, there are over 5.2 million UN-registered Palestinian refugees, primarily residing in Jordan, the West Bank, Ghaza, Lebanon, and Syria, with many facing statelessness and poverty, as a consequence of these events (Amnesty International, 2019).

The Nakba is not merely a historical event but a foundational moment that continues to impact Palestinian identity and politics today (Khalidi, 1992; Pappe, 2006). The Nakba was seen by Zionist leadership as necessary and justified to achieve a Jewish majority state. Dozens of documented massacres, including Deir Yassin, were intended to cause widespread fear and trigger mass flight and over 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed or depopulated (Pappe, 2006).

The Nakba didn't end in 1948. Wolfe means that the logic of the establishment of the Zionist settler-colonial state in Palestine was not an event-based but an ongoing structural imperative that doesn't depend on regime changes or singular moments of mass killing (Wolfe, 2006). Furthermore, he argues that the concept of the Zionist settler-colonial state as a form of structural genocide represents one of the most influential theoretical interventions in contemporary colonial and genocide studies. His key claim is that settler colonialism inherently and continuously seeks to eliminate Indigenous peoples in order to secure land for settlers, not just through physical means, but also through social, cultural, and political erasure (Wolfe, 2006).



Evacuating Al-Falouja village source: ©1949 UN Archives



Evacuating Jaffa source: ©1948 UN Archives



Refugee camp in near Betlehem source: ©1948 UN Archives

Settlements and control

By 1956, around 5,000 Palestinian refugees that attempted to return to their homes were killed by occupation forces (Morris, 1993). Since 1948, the Zionist settler-colonial state has enacted around 30 laws that expropriated land from Palestinian citizens and transferred it to Zionist state ownership, with most large-scale dispossession occurring in the early years of statehood (White, 2009). The first settlement established was Kfar Etzion, in the occupied West Bank. Early settlements were constructed in strategically significant areas under military justifications, though they remained sparsely populated (Hoyle, 2019). Settlements in the West Bank are mostly build on hilltop, overlooking the palestinians in the valleys between them – the main reason being for self protection and for them to dominate the surrounding (Weizman, 2024).

According to UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk (2022), around 300 illegal Zionist settlements were established in East Jerusalem and the West Bank Since 1967 (Lynk, 2022). These settlements are considered illegal under international law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of an occupying power's civilian population into occupied territory (UN Security Council Resolution 242, 1967).

In addition to the establishment of the illegal settlement in 1967, a military occupation began, as well as a full control of water resources, leaving Palestinians with only 17 per cent of the annual water usage, while the Zionist settlements consume more than four times as much water (White, 2009).

First Intifada (1987-1993)

The Intifada, meaning “uprising” in Arabic, refers to two major Palestinian uprisings against Zionist occupation. The First Intifada began in 1987 and lasted until the early 1990s, characterized by widespread protests, civil disobedience, and grassroots mobilization. It was marked by stone-throwing youth confronting the Zionist forces and aimed to challenge the status quo of occupation while advocating for

Palestinians' rights (Smith, 2001). The response was severe and harsh. Nearly 1,900 Palestinian houses were destroyed, more than 600 homes were demolished as punishment, and over 1,000 Palestinians were killed, one in five of them were children (White, 2009).

Oslo Accords (1993)

The Oslo Accords came as a series of agreements between the Zionist settler-colonial state and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) aiming to achieve a peace framework in the region. The first Accord was signed in 1993, marking the first time both parties officially recognized each other. The Accords established a framework for Palestinian self-governance in parts of the West Bank and Ghaza, setting the stage for further negotiations on key issues like borders, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem (Shlaim, 2000). In fact, in the years that followed, the number of settlements doubled, demolitions of Palestinian homes continued, average of unemployment rose by 900 percent, while violence and the Zionist apartheid system persisted (White, 2009). The failure of resolving the critical issues has led to disillusionment with the peace process and ongoing tensions in the region (Said, 2000; Abunimah, 2006).

As part of the 1993 Oslo Accords the occupied West Bank was divided into three areas: A, B and C (see maps in pages 13 and 14).

In Area A and B, the Palestinan Authority (PA) is in charge of education, health and the economy, while the Zionist state has full control of external security, meaning they retain the right to enter at any time.

The control of Area C was supposed to be handed over to the PA, thus security, planning and construction stays until today under the control of the Zionist state (Al Jazeera, 2025).



Area A grew from 3 percent to 18 percent of the West Bank by 1999.

■ Area A



Area B Represents about 22 percent of the West Bank.

■ Area B



Area C represents 60 percent of the West Bank.

■ Area C

Second Intifada (2000)

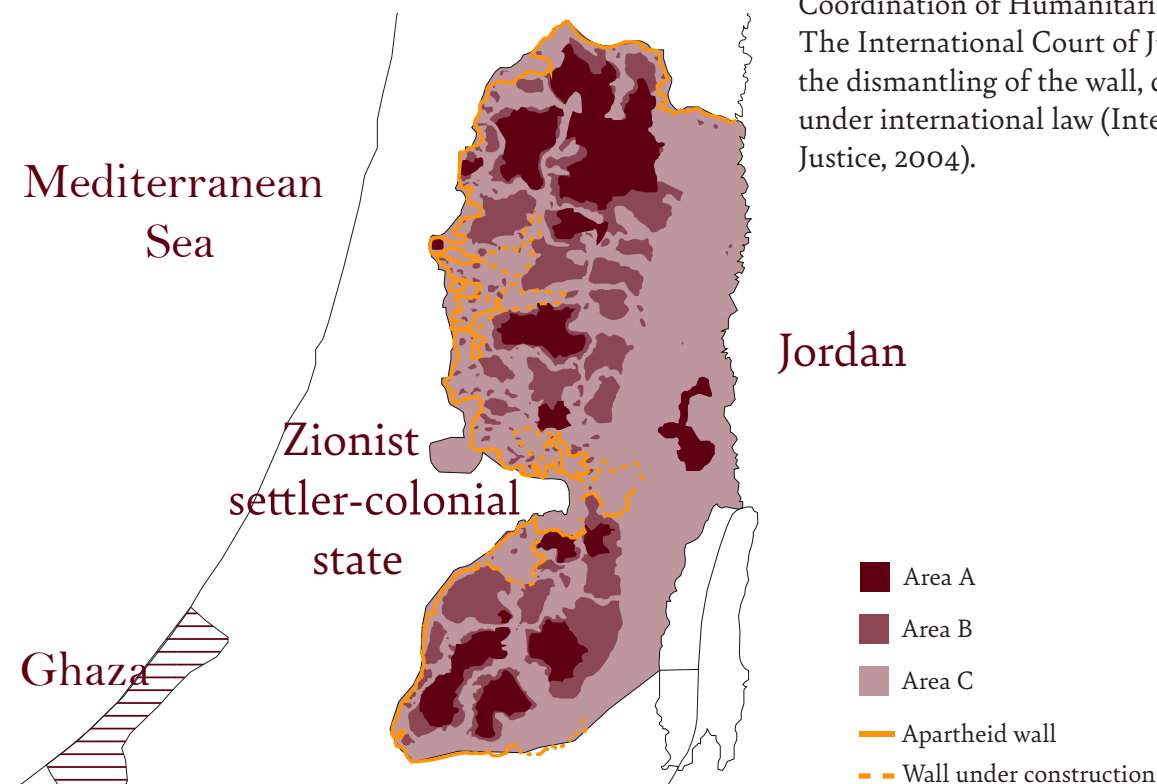
Tensions over access to holy sites, growing movement restrictions, and escalating violence contributed to the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000. The uprising prompted intensified Zionist military responses, including the demolition of over 5,000 Palestinian homes and the killing of approximately 5,100 Palestinians, many of them children, including 12-year-old Mohammad Al-Dura, who was mortally wounded by Zionist forces gunfire in Ghaza, dying soon after. More than 1,000 «Israelis» were also killed during this period (White, 2009). In the aftermath, Palestinian communities suffered long-term economic devastation, and the political landscape was deeply altered. A major post-Intifada development was the political split between Ghaza and the West Bank, which fragmented Palestinian governance (Adam, 2020). More settlements were established, described by Weizman as units on a battlefield because of the way they separate Palestinian areas. At the same time bypass roads, walls, checkpoints and border terminals were constructed as means of incarceration and movement control (Weizman, 2024).

Separation (Apartheid) wall

The occupation is an environment that slowly was conceived to strangle Palestinian communities, villages and towns, to create an environment that will be unliveable for the Palestinians (Weizman, 2024). The Separation Wall, also known as the «Apartheid Wall», is a series of barriers constructed by the Zionist settler-colonial state, beginning in 2002, primarily in the West Bank.

The apartheid wall is constructed in the style of a border barrier, primarily consisting of an electronic fence with paved paths, barbed-wire fences and ditches flanking it on either side. The planned route of the Separation wall extends approximately 712 kilometers. As of September 2017, around 460 kilometers had been completed and the rest of the wall is still under construction (B'Tselem, 2017).

The wall encroached on Palestinian land, isolating communities, leading to significant restrictions on Palestinian movement, affecting access to jobs, education, and healthcare, and exacerbating humanitarian calamity in many areas (B'Tselem, 2015; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2006). The International Court of Justice has called for the dismantling of the wall, declaring it illegal under international law (International Court of Justice, 2004).



October 7th and genocide (2023-ongoing)

Due to the long-range history of violence and oppression on Palestinians, and the siege on Ghaza, to which many referred to as the «world's largest outdoor prison», Palestinian fighters conducted an attack on their colonisers on the 7th of October 2023 (LeVine & Cheyfitz, 2025; Weizman, 2024). Since then, Zionist forces have arrested more than 10,000 Palestinians, with 5,262 of them held without charge or trial (Amnesty International, 2024).

Ghaza

The Zionist military started their unfolding genocide on Ghaza, resulting at the time of writing in upwards of 75,000 killed, either by weapons or buried under rubble, where the vast majority of them are civilians (LeVine & Cheyfitz, 2025). Additionally, permits were cancelled for those from Ghaza with chronic illnesses, who had been scheduled to receive treatment in the West Bank (Amnesty International, 2024).

The Zionist response also involved the destruction of a significant portion of Ghaza's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, holy places, heritage sites and homes, leading to mass displacement and a humanitarian crisis (LeVine & Cheyfitz, 2025; Saber, 2024).

West Bank

Post-October 7th, the Zionist settler-colonial state started redrawing the map of the occupied West Bank by demolishing agricultural infrastructures, homes and other buildings, evacuating and demolishing refugee camps and forcibly expelling at least 40,000 people from their homes (Al Jazeera, 2025; UNRWA, 2025).

Furthermore, 48 new settlements were established in the West Bank. The number of roadblocks and checkpoints increased to 793, and mobility infrastructures were destroyed, obstructing Palestinians' movement between Palestinian villages and towns, and delaying access by emergency services. Settler violence on Palestinians escalated, especially in rural areas near settlement outposts and according to OCHA, between 7 October 2023 and 25 March 2025, 906 Palestinians were killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (Al Jazeera, 2025; Amnesty International, 2024; UNRWA, 2025).

AL-KHALIL

This chapter examines how architecture has developed as a tool of occupation and colonization in Al-Khalil, reshaping the city to enforce control, segregation, and domination.

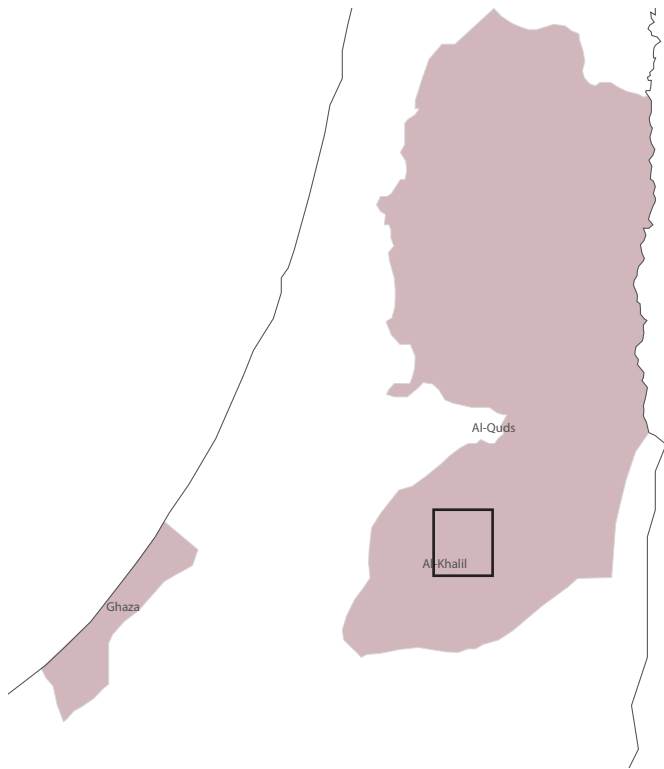
[You can rewrite history, but...]

“You can not construct history”

-Tamimi, M., Interview

Introducing Al-Khalil

Al-Khalil is located in the southern part of the West Bank, known for its historical, and cultural importance. It has a population of approximately 201,063 residents within the city, and over 700,000 residents in the surrounding villages, making it the most populous governorate in the West Bank (Wikipedia, 2024).

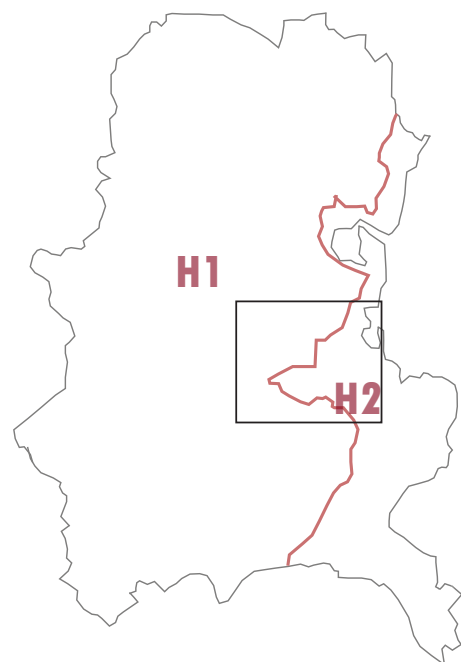


Map 4: Al-Khalil's location in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) as part of the Oslo Accords.

Covering an area of about 74.1 square kilometers, Al-Khalil is the second-largest Palestinian city in the West Bank (Wikipedia, 2024). It is situated geographically about 30 kilometers south of Al-Quds and about 60 kilometers northeast of Ghaza, where a genocide is taking place (Amnesty International, 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024).

Urban division

Due to the presence of Zionist settlers in Al-Khalil, the city stayed under full military control, until the Settler-colonial state and PLO signed the Oslo Accords. The agreement resulted in a division of the city into two zones: H1 and H2. Area H1 was placed under Palestinian Authority (PA) control for both civil and security matters, and Area H2 under Zionist control in terms of security, while the PA was given civilian powers relating to Palestinian residents only (B'Tselem, 2017 ; B'Tselem, 2019). Al-Khalil falls under a division into area A, B and C following the Oslo Accords (Youth Against Settlements, n.d.).



Map 5: Conceptual map of Al Khalil's geospatial division.

Settlements as a colonial project

Strategic settlements

The first Zionist settlement was informally founded in Al-Khalil in 1968, when a group of Zionists rented rooms in a hotel and refused to leave afterward (B'Tselem, 2019). Ever since then, more illegal settlements were established, making Al-Khalil the only city in the OPT, apart from Al-Quds, with illegal settlements inside the city (Oakland Institute, 2017).

In Al-Khalil, the settlements are strategically located to fragment Palestinian communities and disrupt their daily lives. The settlements are built not only to serve the colonies themselves, but continuously to create material damage, cutting apart the Palestinian built fabric (Weizman, 2024). They are often accompanied by a heavy military presence, checkpoints, and restrictions on Palestinian movement, which exacerbate tensions and lead to violence (B'Tselem, 2017).

The Zionist government has promoted these settlements as part of a broader strategy to solidify claims to the area, which is also of significant religious importance to both Jews, Christians and Muslims (B'Tselem, 2018).

The impact of these settlements is profound, contributing to the displacement of Palestinian residents and the erosion of their economic and social fabric. The situation is emblematic of the broader challenges facing peace negotiations, as settlements are a major point of contention in discussions about the existence and acceptance of a Palestinian state (Khalidi, 2013; Pappé, 2006).

Segregation as policy

To protect and promote the settlements in Al-Khalil, the Zionist settler-colonial state implements a "principle of separation" as a policy of segregation enforced both physically and legally between Palestinians and settlers, similar strategies as the ones implemented throughout history of racial and social segregation, in South Africa and Nazi Germany. This discriminatory system inflicts prolonged and severe harm on Palestinians living and working in the city center. Over the years, this systematic policy has led to the forced displacement of thousands of

Palestinian residents and merchants, many of whom had no choice but to leave the area (B'Tselem, 2024; Weizman, 2024).

Since late 2015, the H2 area is declared a 'closed military zone', isolating over 800 Palestinian residents. In order for them to access the area, they must register with the occupying Zionist authorities and be screened at a checkpoint to reach their homes. They only can access on foot, and visitors are not allowed (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018).

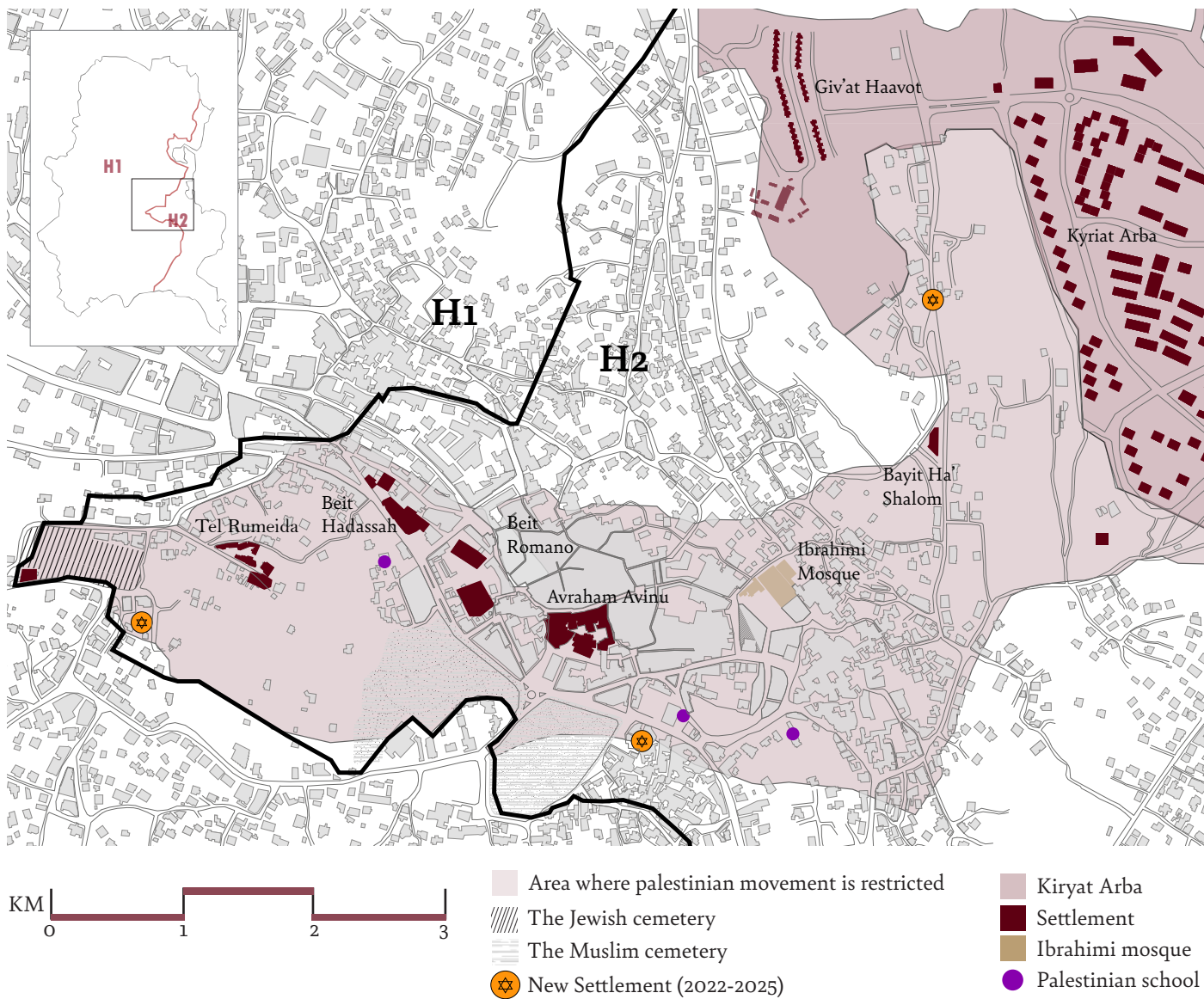
Colonization in progress

Over the years, settlements kept expanding, and new settlements were established violently by settlers illegally taking over Palestinian homes and refusing to leave, usually under protection of the Zionist military. Settlers have even changed the names of streets from Arabic names to Hebrew names, where the Arabic language is excluded from the street signs (Oakland Institute, 2017).

Today, there are over 800 Zionist settlers living within four established settlement enclaves located in and around Al-Khalil's Old City: Beit Hadassah, Beit Romano, Avraham Avinu, and Tel Rumeida. In addition to over 7,000 settlers live in Givat Harsina and Kiryat Arba on the outskirts of the city, from where they frequently enter Al-Khalil. Since 2022 at least 3 new settlements are in progress, as settlers attacked and took over Palestinian homes (Peace Now, 2025; Amnesty International, 2016).



Street signs in Hebrew and English.
Photo: The Oakland Institute



Map 4: Settlements in Al-Khalil H2



The Fruit Market, 1990s. The Fruit Market, 2007. Photos: Na'if Hasalmon, Al-Watan Center; Keren Manor, Activestill.

The Fruit Market, 1990s. The Fruit Market, 2007. Photos: Na'if Hasalmon, Al-Watan Center; Keren Manor, Activestill.



Shops closed by military order in Al-Shuhada Street, Al-Khalil
Still from Louis Theroux: The Settlers (Theroux, 2025)

A-Sahla compound, near the Camel Market, 2007. Photos: Keren Manor, Activestill.



Wire mesh above homes and shops to protect Palestinians from the settlers living above. Photo: The Oakland Institute

Settler casually carrying weapon on a Zionism festival.
Still from Louis Theroux: The Settlers (Theroux, 2025)



Settlers vandalize Palestinian agricultural land in Jurat al-Kheil.
Photos courtesy of Shalalda; B'tselem.

Settlers attacking Palestinians in Tel Rumeida neighborhood.
Source: palinfo.com

Settler and military violence

Ibrahimi Mosque massacre

On February 25, 1994, Baruch Goldstein, a Zionist settler of American origins, opened fire on Palestinian worshippers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Al-Khalil killing 29 people, including at least 7 children, and injuring over 100 others (Al Jazeera, 2016). Rather than curbing settler activity, the Zionist authorities responded by imposing sweeping and discriminatory restrictions on Palestinians. Access to the Ibrahimi Mosque was severely limited for Palestinians, the doors of Palestinian homes and 520 businesses were closed entirely to Palestinians, while Zionist settlers retained unrestricted access to the Old City (Amnesty International, 2016; Oakland Institute, 2017).

Military violence

More than 1,000 soldiers enforce the systems of separation and military control in Al-Khalil (B'Tselem, 2024). Reports by the UN Secretary-General and various human rights organizations indicate that military activities in the H2 area frequently involve harassment, abuse, and detentions. Among those regularly detained are Palestinian children, often on suspicion of stone-throwing. This sustained military presence constitutes a core element of the coercive environment imposed on Palestinian residents (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019).

Home demolitions as collective punishment

Ilan Pappé argues that the destruction of Palestinian homes during the 1948 Nakba was not incidental or random, but rather a deliberate and systematic strategy carried out by Zionist militias as part of a broader plan to expel the Palestinian population and prevent their return (Pappe, 2006). The physical erasure of homes helped solidify the "no return" policy, but also instilled fear, trauma, and demoralization among Palestinians (Pappe, 2006; White, 2009).

Over the years, the Zionist authorities have demolished hundreds of houses and agricultural structures as a form of collective punishment, leaving thousands of Palestinians homeless (B'Tselem, 2019).

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 33 homes have been demolished in Al-Khalil since October 2023, affecting 122 people.

Settler violence

Settlers in Al-Khalil have repeatedly declared their intention to expand into additional parts of the city. This objective appears to be a driving force behind the ongoing violence: by making life in the City Center unbearable through constant harassment and intimidation, settlers aim to get Palestinians to abandon the area (B'Tselem, 2007).

Settler violence, protected by the military and the Zionist police, focuses largely on daily harassment of Palestinians that live around the settlements, but also on Palestinian farmers and shepherds (Peace Now, 2024; B'Tselem, 2019). In the Old City the space is colonised from above by the settlers, who inhabit the higher floors of buildings in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods. From there, they periodically raid the buildings and streets, marking the space with garbage and dirt (Ferrato, Lewicki, & Scott, 2013).

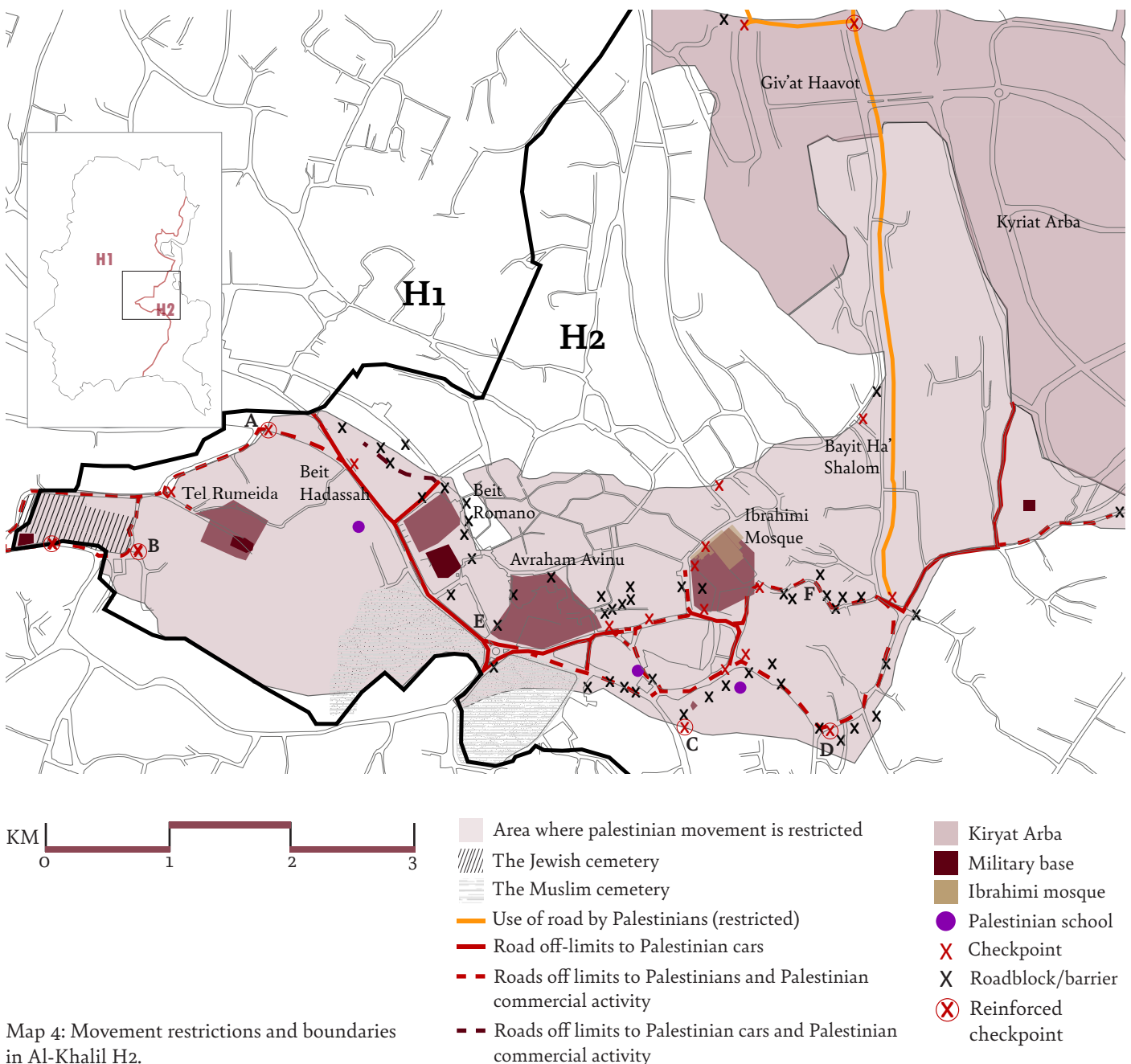
Settler violence keeps increasing as time passes. The year 2024 has recorded the highest number of incidents related to settler violence against Palestinians, resulting in many cases of injuries and property damage. In addition, widespread intimidation and attacks on Palestinian Bedouin communities have led to the displacement of over 300 families, comprising 1,762 people, including 856 children. These figures underscore the escalating humanitarian impact of settler violence in Al-Khalil (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025). Since October 2023 the settlers have taken their aggression a step further and are now destroying homes and even local schools (Peace Now, 2024).

Boundaries and movement restrictions

Destruction by design

Since the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre the Zionist settler-colonial state has imposed severe movement restrictions on Palestinians, and by the second Intifada this was exacerbated, while the settlers move freely under Zionist military and police protection. These movement restrictions involve numerous fortified checkpoints, roadblocks, and both permanent and temporary military posts, which often open and close unpredictably (B'Tselem, 2024).

The movement restrictions by the Zionist settler-colonial state enforce the policy of 'closure' on Palestinians, a series of restrictions placed on the free movement of Palestinian people, vehicles and goods (White, 2009). When conflict erupts in the region, the slow violence of the environment springs into immediate use, Zionist soldiers move down into Palestinian areas, the checkpoints harden and nobody can move through (Weizman, 2024). Since October 2023, Palestinians were placed under full curfew, later eased to a few hours of freedom on some weekdays, but until today they are not allowed to move in the city at night. Furthermore, the curfew has put many families in economic and emotional hardships (B'Tselem, 2024).



Map 4: Movement restrictions and boundaries in Al-Khalil H2.

Checkpoints and roadblocks in Al-Khalil H2

Figures A–F show the conditions of checkpoints in Al-Khalil. The locations of these checkpoints are indicated on the map on page 22 with the same letter labels, providing a direct spatial reference for each image.



A. Bab a-Zawiya/Shoter Checkpoint separating Tel Rumeida from the H1 Area. Source: Eyal Hareuveni, B'tselem.



B. Al-Arb'in Checkpoint at one of the entrances to Tel Rumeida neighborhood. Source: Eyal Hareuveni, B'tselem.



C. Pharmacy Checkpoint separating A-Sahla from the southern neighborhood in H1 Area. Source: Eyal Hareuveni, B'tselem.



D. 160 Checkpoint separating H2 Area from the southern neighborhood in H1 Area. Source: Eyal Hareuveni, B'tselem.



E. Barrier in the now deserted, Palestinian vegetable market. Source: Eyal Hareuveni, B'tselem.



F. Barrier blocking access to Woshippers' Road in the neighborhood of a-Salaihmeh. Source: Eyal Hareuveni, B'tselem.

Checkpoints and roadblocks

The presence of checkpoints exacerbates the humanitarian situation, as they impede access to healthcare, education, employment opportunities and day to day activities (B'Tselem, 2020).

Checkpoints are the definition of 'Politics on the most mundane elements of architecture' as Weizman describes it (Weizman, 2024). Power dynamics at checkpoints in Al-Khalil are visibly and structurally embedded in the built environment. They don't just control movement, but also symbolize and enforce an unequal system of domination. Settlers, Jewish visitors and most of the international tourists are not subjected to detailed and often humiliating control, which proves that discrimination is based on national-ethnic origin (Youth Against Settlements, n.d.).

Checkpoints and roadblocks are used to enforce the separation policy that divides Al-Khalil from the settlement area. Yet this area lies in the heart of the Old City, encompassing major streets, thousands of Palestinian homes, and hundreds of businesses, which were all forced to close, turning the Old City of Al-Khalil into what many call a 'ghost town' (B'tselem, 2007).

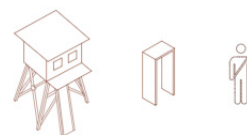
Oppression and control

Since the end of 2015, six of the checkpoints (reinforced checkpoints) within H2 have been fortified with towers, turnstiles, revolving doors, metal detectors and advanced identification and data collection AI-powered system called "Red Wolf", which scans Palestinians' faces and determines whether they can pass a checkpoint or be denied entry. Palestinians crossing these checkpoints are often subjected to humiliation and violence. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019; B'Tselem, 2024).

As part of the oppression and humiliation, at some checkpoints Palestinians have to wait for hours to pass, walking through turnstiles, where people who are a bit larger, older people and mothers with children get easily caught up within the turnstile, reducing the Palestinians to nothing more than bodies (Weizman, 2024).

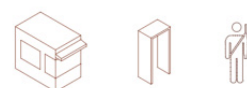
BORDER CHECKPOINT

Description: a complex structure composed of a removable watchtower, a metal detector and the constant presence of soldiers



BORDER CHECKPOINT

Description: complex structure composed of a watchcabin, a metal detector and the constant presence of soldiers



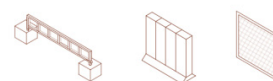
INTERNAL CHECKPOINT

Description: composed of a cabin and the presence of soldiers



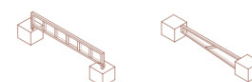
BARRIER - CLOSURE

Description: the checkpoint is usually protected by barriers or partial closures



OPENABLE BARRIER

Material: steel and concrete
Description: openable street block for preventing cars to pass



CONCRETE CUBE

Material: concrete
Description: concrete street block for preventing the passage of cars, usually located as an addition to an openable barrier



Illustrations of military checkpoints and roadblocks in Al-Khalil
Source: www.hebronapartheid.org

Restrictions and off-limits

While checkpoints, roadblocks, and the separation barrier are not merely physical obstructions but rather deliberately designed to monitor and restrict Palestinian mobility, there are even areas and roads within H2, around the settlements, that are off-limits for Palestinians. This type of environment serves as tool of spatial control, segregating communities and disrupting daily life (Weizman, 2024).

The conditions in H2 have profound and multifaceted impacts on Palestinians living within this area, making life hard to bare. The sections of road where vehicles are prohibited, were once used regularly by all residents and those from surrounding areas. Today they act as a partition, cutting off the main traffic routes between the northern and southern parts of the city. The ban on Palestinian vehicles in the City Center significantly impairs emergency and rescue services, as Palestinian ambulances are not allowed to enter H2 without prior coordination with the Zionist authorities. In urgent situations where time does not allow for such coordination, residents in need of emergency care must go on foot to areas where vehicle access is permitted (B'tselem, 2007; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025).

Al-Khalil Municipality vehicles are also not permitted to enter the City Center without prior coordination with the Zionist authorities. This restriction severely hinders the ability to promptly repair electricity, telephone, water, and sewage infrastructure, leaving some families without essential services for several days before they can be fixed (B'tselem, 2007).

Heritage, power and colonial domination

The architectural heritage of Al-Khalil is a vital component of Palestinian identity and history. Like other colonial powers, the Zionist authorities and settlers use heritage to legitimize their colonial settlement project by targeting and rewriting the past (Hammami, 2019).

UNESCO designated Al-Khalil's Old City as a World Heritage Site in 2017 due to its outstanding representation of Mamluk-era urban planning, its religious significance to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and its historical role as a trade hub. The site was also placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to ongoing violence in the region, the restricted access, and threats to preservation (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2017).

Feras Hammami argues that Zionist settlers and state institutions strategically use architectural heritage in Al-Khalil as a tool of settler colonial domination, by selectively preserving Jewish narratives and erasing Palestinian cultural and architectural presence through demolition, renaming and by restricted access to places (Hammami, 2022). He means that in reality it is not merely about historical narratives, but it is about who belongs, who remembers, and who has the right to shape the city's future.

Militarization of agriculture

Agriculture in Al-Khalil governorate embodies both the livelihood and cultural identity of Palestinian rural life, yet it has become one of the main targets of spatial violence under settler colonial power. The designation of large swaths of land as “firing zones”, “closed military areas”, and “nature reserves” has systematically denied Palestinian farmers access to their fields and grazing lands, transforming spaces of cultivation into militarized frontiers. These designations are not security classifications but constitute a strategic apparatus for land control, enclosing more than 18 percent (in year 2022) of the West Bank and concentrating especially in the South Hills of Al-Khalil—precisely the agricultural areas on which Palestinian herding communities depend (Bimkom & Kerem Navot, 2022). Despite being labeled as military training grounds, vast portions of these zones are rarely or never used for actual “training”, exposing the gap between official justification and material practice.

Weizman argues that such designations are not security measures but architectural acts of domination, legal and cartographic tools that redraw the landscape from domestic and agricultural to strategic and colonial (Weizman, 2024). The archival evidence highlighted in the briefing supports this analysis: firing zones were historically conceived as a means of reserving land for future settlement, rather than responding to genuine “military need” (Bimkom & Kerem Navot, 2022).

In the southern hills of Al-Khalil, entire communities have been displaced or live under constant threat of eviction after their farmland was reclassified as a “military training area”. According to humanitarian organizations, recurrent military exercises, demolitions, confiscations of agricultural structures, and movement restrictions render agricultural continuity impossible, eroding the economic and ecological base of Palestinian life (OCHA, 2024). Fields once planted with wheat and olive groves are turned into barren terrain scarred by army tracks, while access roads are blocked or controlled by checkpoints (Bimkom & Kerem Navot, 2022).

Settler violence compounds this process. Attacks on farmers, the uprooting of trees, and the theft of harvests are frequent during the olive season, often carried out under the protection or indifference of the Israeli army (B’Tselem, 2023). The briefing shows how settlements adjacent to firing zones benefit directly: once Palestinian access is restricted, parts of these areas are later reallocated to settlement “state land” declarations or outpost expansion (Bimkom & Kerem Navot, 2022). These acts of aggression and bureaucratic erasure are not isolated incidents but form part of a broader strategy of dispossession, where fear, instability, and legal precarity push families to abandon their land. The militarization of agriculture in Al-Khalil thus reveals the intersection of spatial, ecological, and bodily violence: a slow, deliberate erasure of Palestinian presence enacted through maps, military orders, settlement expansion, and daily terror.



“Mortal danger– military zone– any person who passes or damages the fence endangers his life”. This message is written in Hebrew, Arabic and English on signs all along the fence/wall, as the picture shows.

Source: Amer Madi

IN-BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

“Does the world expect us to be well-behaved victims while we are being killed, for us to be slaughtered without making a noise?”

-Yehya Sinwar

The fight to exist

“Indigenous Peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment.”

-UN

Like many other indigenous peoples, Palestinians have for as long as anyone can remember fought for their right to exist, some by being resilient, some by resisting, and some by doing both.

Resilience (صمود; sumud) is not about overcoming danger, but accepting it as a permanent condition – in this context, by adapting to the Zionist regime and rules in order to survive the occupation. As Evans and Reid (2014) argue, the resilient subject is shaped to adapt rather than resist, with collective aspirations for security replaced by individual self-adjustment. Palestinians in Al-Khalil are expected to endure and navigate the violence of occupation, rather than challenge or transform it. Resilience can act as a form of everyday resistance. By being resilient, Palestinians aim to seek ways of building alternative institutions so as to resist and undermine the Zionist occupation of Palestine.

Resistance (مقاومة; muqāwama), on the other hand is a broader form of steadfastness to exist and to seek freedom. Palestinians engage in a wide range of resistance strategies: Armed resistance, Non-violent resistance, Cultural resistance and Political resistance.

In 1974, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed that all people living under colonial rule, racism, or foreign domination have the right to seek freedom, independence, and self-determination (UNGA Resolution 3314). It also recognized their right to resist oppression, even through armed struggle as long as it aligns with international law.

Tatreez تطريز



A practitioner sewing traditional tatreez.
Source: Tatreezandtea



Woman from Ramallah, standing in courtyard of the American Colony, with pottery vessel on her head.
Source: Tatreezandtea

Tatreez as a story-listening tool

Tatreez (تطريز) gains a central role in this thesis, both because of its cultural and historic importance, and because I will use it in the next chapter/section as a form of decolonizing methodology (Smith, 2022) applied in the way I will process and listen to accounts I collect from the context of Al-Khalil.

Tatreez as cultural heritage

The majority of the Palestinian people were fellahin (فلاحين, 'people of the land') that lived in villages and relied primarily on agriculture for their livelihood (Ahmad, 2024).

Tatreez was practiced by Palestinian village women, but today it has become an important heritage and defiance, Inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Unesco, 2021).

Every region in Palestine has its own colours and patterns, and for over 3,000 years the way the needle and thread are used has remained the same (Savoir Flair, 2023).

What is Tatreez?

Tatreez is the arabic word for a unique style of cross-stitch embroidery, deeply rooted in the history and culture of Palestine (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2024).

Palestinian cross-stitch embroidery, known as "Fallahi", is a distinguished craft practiced by village women, who decorate their traditional dress and domestic accessories with embroidery designs. (Kawar, & Nasir, 2021).

Unlike many other regional forms of cross-stitch embroidery, Palestinian Tatreez has evolved beyond decoration into a form of cultural storytelling, a visual language through which memory, displacement, and resistance are expressed. Each motif and colour combination carries meanings that are both personal and collective, encoding

experiences of belonging, exile, and survival within the fabric itself. Historically, embroidered garments such as the thoub (ثوب; dress) served not only as items of clothing but as narrative objects: the arrangement of motifs could indicate a woman's village, marital status, or social background, functioning as an archive of identity worn on the body (e.g. Weir, 1989; Nassar & Weir, 2012).

Tatreez beyond clothing

Tatreez has long extended beyond the surface of clothing, carrying with it a wider practice of memory, storytelling, and cultural continuity. While historically embroidered onto dresses and garments, Tatreez also appeared on household textiles—pillows, wedding linens, and everyday fabrics—marking the intimate spaces of Palestinian life (Weir, 1970; Saca & Saca, 2006). In the diaspora, Tatreez has transformed even further. It has become a method of preserving heritage, a communal practice of gathering, learning, and storytelling, stitched into framed panels, contemporary artworks, and collective workshops (Ghnaim & Ghnaim, 2018).

This expansion of Tatreez beyond clothing reflects its deep symbolic weight. As Sheets (2024) notes, it functions as a form of postmemorial remembrance, where embroidery becomes a vessel for emotion, loss, and intergenerational connection. More recently, Tatreez has emerged as a visual language of political resistance. Artists and activists employ it in installations, protest art, and cultural interventions that assert Palestinian identity in the face of erasure (Quinn, 2019). Even in handmade textiles rescued from destruction, Tatreez survives as a thread of cultural endurance, as seen in the stories of garments preserved from Ghaza (Shomali, Sunbula & Dedman, 2025).

Whether stitched onto cloth, framed on walls, carried in protest, or taught across continents, Tatreez continues to evolve. Its patterns hold memory, its colours hold lineage, and its threads bind a dispersed people to their land, reminding us that Palestinian identity is not only worn, it is continually made and carried forward.



An arrangement of Palestinian cultural artifact.
Source: www.palestinechronicle.com



The six-branch dress (1950s–1960s).
Source: www.metmuseum.org



The Intifada dress.
Source: Tatreezandtea

Tatreez as resistance

The threads of the Tatreez had become the threads of the Palestinian identity. The needle became a women's choice in the face of colonial efforts to erase the Palestinian identity (Dedman, 2016; Sheets, 2024; Ghnaim & Ghnaim, 2018). Tatreez has become a statement that firmly asserts the physical representation of the existence of the Palestinian people, storytelling inherited by Palestinian women, a symbol of cultural identity that could never be occupied or stolen (Sheets, 2024; Dedman, 2016; Ghnaim & Ghnaim, 2018; Shomali, Sunbula, & Dedman, 2025).

During the Nakba, Palestinian women wore their Tatreez thoub as a statement of the very existence of the villages they were ethnically cleansed from (Savoir Flair, 2023). Tatreez functioned as evidence of their villages' existence.

During the first Intifada, Tatreez has become a powerful tool for political expression and resistance. Women sewed the national flags, territorial maps, and natural motifs like olive branches and orange trees, onto their dresses after the Zionist settler-colonial state banned the Palestinian flag (Kawar, & Nasir, 2021; Savoir Flair, 2023). Palestinian women have found a way to reclaim their power by standing firm in their identity and asserting their existence in space. The preservation of Palestinian embroidery and dressmaking stays today as a symbol of Palestinian tradition, resistance and identity.

In contemporary contexts, Tatreez continues to operate as a form of political expression. Many artists and practitioners reinterpret traditional motifs to address ongoing occupation, displacement, and the struggle for visibility (Dedman, 2016; Ghnaim & Ghnaim, 2018; Quinn, 2019; Shomali, Sunbula, & Dedman, 2025). The thread thus becomes both material and metaphor, connecting generations while binding together fragmented histories. Through the language of pattern and repetition, Tatreez turns the domestic act of stitching into a political gesture.

Tatreez in Al-Khalil

Women's traditional dress in Al-Khalil include a richly embroidered dark linen thobe, adorned with cross-stitch embroidery and silk appliqué, complemented by a large embroidered ghudfeh (scarf) and a short-sleeved taqsira (jacket). A distinctive feature of traditional embroidery from Al-Khalil region is 'talis', a technique where entire sections of a garment are densely filled with intricate cross-stitch embroidery (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2024; TIRAZ Widad Kawar Home for Arab Dress, n.d.).



Al-Khalil area - chest panel.

Source: Palestinian Embroidery: Traditional "Fallahi"

Cross-stitch by Widad K. Kawar and Tania Tamari Nasir (1992).

Stitching stories

Tatreez is traditionally made by stitching coloured silk or cotton threads onto a base of linen, cotton, or wool fabric using a counted-thread technique. The embroiderer follows the weave of the fabric rather than a printed pattern, creating small diagonal crosses that gradually build into geometric or figurative motifs (Weir, 1970; Saca & Saca, 2006; Dedman, 2016). Each motif formed through repeated and precise movements of the needle, produces a symmetrical design that is both decorative and symbolic.

SCARS

This chapter presents the findings from conversations conducted with residents from Al-Khalil

*“Stop calling me resilient. Because every time you say,
Oh, they're resilient
that means you can do something else to me.
I am not resilient.”*

-Tracie L Washington

Story-listening

In this chapter, I analyze the testimonies I conducted with Palestinians from Al-Khalil through a narrative and decolonial lens, drawing upon indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008), narrative-based analysis (Czarniawska, 2004), and other decolonizing research methodologies (Smith, 2022). These frameworks guide me to approach stories not as mere data, but as living, relational, and transformative forms of knowledge. In Al-Khalil, where silence is often enforced by violent oppression and testimony itself is an act of defiance, storytelling becomes a form of resistance, and engaging with these narratives carries a profound ethical responsibility.

Archibald's methodological concept of indigenous Storywork highlights that stories carry emotional, spiritual, and communal dimensions, connecting knowledge to lived experiences and to places (Archibald, 2008). Through this lens, I approach each story with respect and humility, understanding that these accounts are not simply about life under occupation, but expressions from within it, where each story embodies a relationship between self, space, and community. Czarniawska's narrative approach (Czarniawska, 2004) complement this by helping me interpret how individuals make sense of disrupted spatial and social realities. Through narrative, people construct continuity in contexts of fragmentation, and with this I aim to treat the participants' voices not as objects of study, but as co-authors of spatial knowledge.

Integrating Smith's decolonizing methodology (Smith, 2022) reinforces my commitment to research that is relational, respectful, and politically aware. I recognize that knowledge production cannot be neutral in settler-colonial contexts; it must prioritize the perspectives and lived experiences of those whose voices are often silenced. Engaging with participants' stories in this way allows me to center reciprocity, responsibility, and care, valuing Indigenous and marginalized ways of knowing.

Each testimony I collected was conducted remotely, transcribed, translated, and interpreted into a personal story that preserved the tone, rhythm, and emotion of the original conversation. Then, I shared these stories with the respective participants and refined them collaboratively until they were satisfied with how their experiences were represented. Three testimonies are presented in this chapter, with aliases used where necessary to protect privacy, and where each story is followed by a short analytical reflection and a visual illustration that supports the participant's lived experiences.

Tatreez in this context functioned both as a symbol and a method. Its slow, repetitive, and intimate practice allowed me to think through the details of each story, to listen with my body as well as my mind, and to inhabit the narratives in a way that verbal analysis alone could not achieve. The illustrations combine Tatreez with hand drawings and photographs from Al-Khalil manipulated into collages, each representing a different layer of documentation. Tatreez becomes memory and emotion, while the rest of the collage becomes a reflections of daily struggles and spatial evidences. The illustrations do not literally reproduce the participants' words, but respond to them, translating listening into form, processing, and re-creating the spaces described in the testimonies.

In alignment with the Tatreez-based illustrations, the page that follow each illustration contain my own reflections on the stories. These reflections are intentionally non-linear and may be engaged with in whatever order the reader finds meaningful. Tatreez itself has two sides—a front that displays the pattern, and a back where the knots, loose threads, and small “scars” of the labour remain visible. On the pages where my reflections appear, it is the back side of the Tatreez that is shown. Just as the stories shared with me carry hidden scars beneath what is spoken, the exposed reverse of the embroidery reveals the traces of the “scars” of Tatreez.

FALASTIN (ALIAS)

Female (20y), Tel Rumeida

Living in-between checkpoints

I live in Tel Rumeida, Al-Khalil, near the Ibrahimi Mosque and Al-Shuhada Street, an area heavily controlled by military presence and multiple checkpoints.

I study at Bethlehem University, and before October 2023, my daily trip to university was already difficult. By then I had to only cross the Tel Rumeida checkpoint. But now, I pass through three more: Ras Al-Jura, Al-Nashash, and another one at the entrance to my neighborhood. The journey that should take 40 minutes can now take up to two hours, and how long I wait depends entirely on the soldiers.

Before October 2023, I used a different route to get to university, but since then, more restrictions have been put in place. In my neighborhood there are at least three permanent checkpoints. I cannot enter or leave without passing through one of them. Checkpoints used to close before as well, but now, they are closed more often than they are open. On Saturdays, we have to stay home entirely because it's the "free day" for the settlers, and all the checkpoints are closed.

*A specific situation occurred at a checkpoint the other day, when a soldier stopped me at a machine scanner to check if I had anything on me. **After scanning, he asked if I actually lived there because he couldn't find any record of me in their system. I told him I pass through every day, but he still called the nearby military base to verify my information. If he would have asked the wall who I was, I am sure that the wall would have recognized me.***

*Leaving home is easier than returning, but **every time I leave my home, I fear that I might not make it back.** I have already been forced to sleep outside on multiple occasions because of the checkpoints, especially during Jewish holidays when all movement is completely restricted. On my way back home, I often have to wait for the soldier to open the gate. Sometimes, they take their time, and I have to keep calling for them to let me in. Just today, I had to call out for nearly 10 minutes before the soldier woke up from his sleep to open the gate for me.*

Home before 10 PM

Checkpoints are a constant part of life in my neighborhood. Some, like the one in Tel Rumeida, are permanent, while others appear randomly. Ras Al-Jura, in particular, has become especially difficult to pass through, so I try to avoid it when I can, even if it means taking a longer route through Farsh al-Hawa. Due to the settlements there are many roads around my neighborhood that you can only walk in if you live on that particular street, you will have to prove that at the checkpoint at the head of the street. This only applies to Palestinians, while settlers are free to move as they wish. For instance, I remember one time when my father wanted to take the stairs that lead from our home to our land because he saw the settlers attacking it, and the military interfered because he was not allowed to walk the stairs. That piece of land is also now considered a military zone.

People nowadays are scared to refuse soldiers' orders, knowing that the soldiers can do anything without facing any consequences.** For example, when I go through a checkpoint, the scanner might react to something as simple as a jacket zipper or a pair of shoes. If that happens, the soldiers force me to remove the item, and if I refuse, they won't let me pass. **The humiliation is unbearable, and the situation in Al-Khalil keeps getting worse.

We're treated like animals, with no regard for our rights. If the soldiers decide to let us through, we can pass, if they don't, we are locked out.

*Daily routines are constantly interrupted. When I return home from university, I might have an exam or need to study, but living in Tel Rumeida means I can never be sure of my plans. If the checkpoint is closed, I can't get home, no matter what responsibilities I have. The soldiers' treatment varies based on where you are going. There's no consistency, just control, and for me, I know that **I must be home before 10 PM because after that, the checkpoint closes, and I won't be able to enter.***

Public transportation is safer, so I prefer it, even though it's not always reliable. At the checkpoints, they don't always search the cars, but men are usually stopped more often. They make them get out, search them, and sometimes even harass or hit them. If there's a lot of traffic, or if the soldiers are taking a break, standing around, smoking, or talking, it can take much longer.

I remember one specific time, **my father had a heart problem, and when we called an ambulance, the soldiers refused to let it pass through the checkpoint.** In moments like that, I realized how little our lives matter to them.

Between land and safety

Since my father passed away, things have become more difficult, especially when it comes to our safety and our land. **Settlers have become increasingly aggressive, regularly entering our land, cutting down and burning our olive trees.** Just yesterday, they destroyed more of our trees. When we called the Israeli police for help, they simply told us to prove that the land is ours, which felt like another way to ignore our rights.

The land that we own next to our home has been completely taken over and turned into a military base. We are no longer allowed to harvest our olives from this land, which harms the trees over time. It's not just that they are taking our land; they are also slowly destroying it. We're not even allowed to tend to it, which is incredibly painful.

I actively avoid going to our lands now, something I used to visit with my father before he passed away. Now, the settlers enter more frequently, and each visit feels dangerous. Besides the destruction of the trees, it's a constant reminder of how little control we have over our own land.

I also avoid areas where I know settlers gather or where soldiers randomly set up roadblocks. These areas are often unpredictable, and any encounter can turn dangerous. For instance, **when I return from my university, the situation at the checkpoints can be tense, with soldiers being harsh and aggressive.** It's exhausting knowing that each day can be a struggle just to move around, especially near areas where settlers or soldiers are most active. The constant uncertainty adds to the feeling that we're never fully free to go where we need to go. It is even dangerous to walk alone in the neighborhood. If the settlers would see a child walking alone, they would hit him or let their dog attack him.

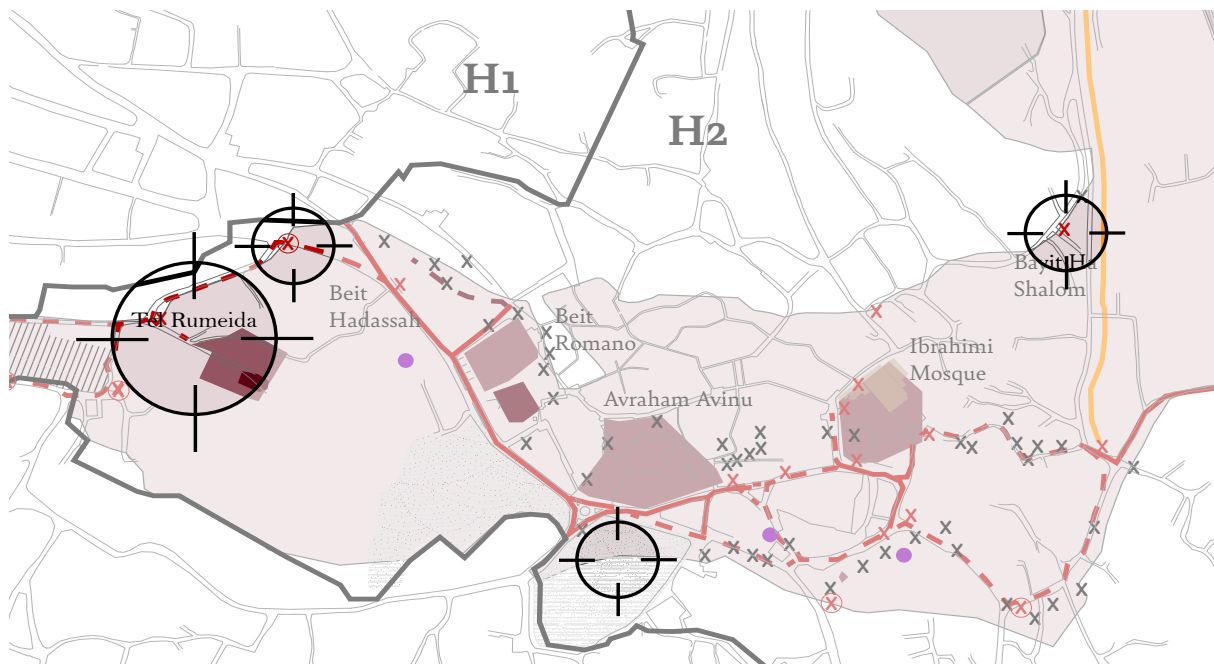
A constant battle

Despite everything, I can still remember some moments of joy. One that stands out is when I passed my final exams in high school. It was a happy time, despite the occupation, and I felt proud of my success. However, when my relatives tried to visit to congratulate me, the soldiers stopped them. They were not allowed to enter the area, so I couldn't celebrate with my family the way I wanted to. Instead, I had a small celebration with some of my neighbors.

The loss of my father remains one of the most painful moments of my life. He passed away six months ago, I was not allowed to attend his funeral or even visit his grave due to the occupation's restrictions. The military does not permit entry into the cemetery without authorization. If someone approaches without permission, soldiers respond with gunfire or tear gas. The burial process was even delayed by the soldiers, which made everything so much more painful and exhausting. **Even now, I still have not been able to visit my father's grave.**

My dream is to be free, to move freely like everyone else. Every day, I can see the soldiers from my window, the settlement is only 50 meters away from my home. **Ans there's always this lingering fear that one day, they might decide to shoot, just because they can.**

This is my life. It's been like this for as long as I can remember. It's hard to get used to a life filled with such uncertainty, where every day could bring new challenges. But at the same time, I don't know when or if things will ever change.



This map illustrates the key locations through which Falastin moves in her daily life.

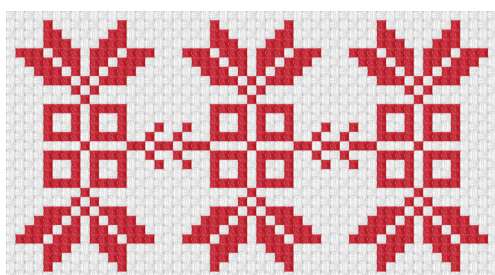
Restriction on movement and a life lived under constant fear.

Scars (Tatreez elements within the illustration on next page)



Bwab Al Jannah / Gates of Heaven | ابواب الجنة

Symbolizes the loss of Falastin's father.
The traditional symbolic significance: yearning for paradise, peace, beauty and spiritual hope.



Irq Al Zaytoun / Olive Branch | عرق الزيتون

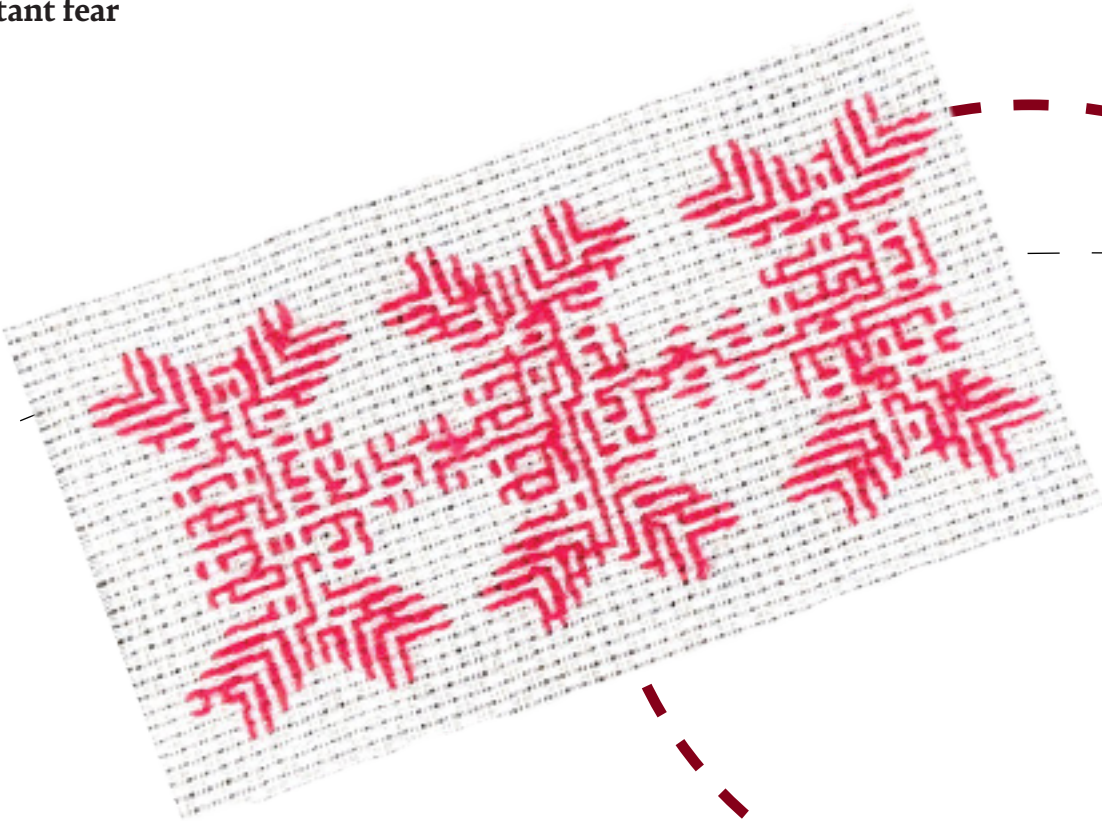
The land that the Zionist military occupy.
The traditional symbolic significance: peace, prosperity, and resilience.

لو تسال الحيطه
عني لتكون حفظتني



Restriction on movement and a life lived under constant fear

Falastin's narrative illustrates how spatial control and militarized surveillance profoundly shape her everyday life in Tel Rumeida and how the spatial segmentation limits her freedom of movement and isolates her within controlled zones.



Spatial dispossession

Turning private agricultural land into a military base and preventing Falastin and her family from maintaining or harvesting their olive trees not only undermines their economic livelihood but also severs a deep cultural and emotional connection to the land. In her case, the land holds memories of her father, a place they once cared for together. Today, it is also a site of trauma, marked by the violence of settlers and the military. She watches helplessly as settlers destroy their olive trees, unable to intervene out of fear for her safety. The act of being forced to witness the slow destruction of her land, without the power to protect it, reflects the broader condition of powerlessness imposed by the occupation. This experience illustrates how spatial control operates as a form of emotional and psychological violence, where land is not only taken, but love, memory, and heritage are systematically eroded.

Spatial violence

Living in Tel Rumeida, surrounded by settlers who can erupt into unprovoked violence, and being subjected to daily scans and interrogations at checkpoints, creates a constant state of fear and constant alertness. The unpredictability of being attacked or being locked out of her own neighborhood forces Falastin to move through everyday life with caution, always alert, always calculating her actions.

Apartheid and segregation

The checkpoints in Falastin's experiences symbolize more than physical barriers, they are instruments of power that control her movement, deny access, and communicate that Palestinian lives matter less. Her 40-minute journey to the university turns into a two-hours struggle and she knows that she has to be home before 10 pm to secure that she will be able to enter her neighborhood, since the soldiers will not make any exaptions, not even letting an ambulance pass during an emergency.

Social exclusion

The denial of access for Falastin's family during her graduation, and the refusal to let her attend her father's funeral, exemplify how spatial restrictions in Al-Khalil function as tools of social exclusion and violence. These restrictions do more than limit movement, as they deny Palestinians the right to experience and express fundamental human emotions. Moments of joy, like graduation, and grief, like the loss of a parent, are stripped of their communal meaning. The occupation in this context, not only disrupts daily life but also invades the most intimate aspects of personal and collective memory. By preventing Palestinians from being with their loved ones in life's most significant moments, it inflicts a deep psychological suffering that extends far beyond physical barriers.



MOHAMMAD ABURAJAB AL-TAMIMI

Male (60y), Dahiet Al-Rami

Life under occupation

I live in Dahiet Al-Rami, in the city center of Al-Khalil. Due to the difficult situation, myself, as many of my country men, am no longer working full-time. I still spend my days walking through the Old City, where my family is originally from. I visit my office, though the current situation has made work difficult. I also help run an association for elderly people called Almarid Al Muhtaj (The Needy Patients) Association. In our culture, sending parents to nursing homes is not acceptable or "shameful", but their children have responsibilities away from home, and they can't always stay with them. So, we created this club as a part of the association where elderly people can come during the day, socialize, and pass their time. Their families drop them off in the morning, and I oversee the place, ensuring they have a space to gather.

Getting around the city is not easy. I can never be sure which roads will be open. **Every morning, I check the news and the media to see if the usual paths are accessible, because the situation changes unpredictably. A road that was open yesterday might be blocked today, forcing me to take long detours or walk long distances just to get where I need to go.**

I used to visit Nablus often, where my wife's family lives, and I have friends in Ramallah. Now, I can't reach them anymore. For over a year and a half, I haven't been able to visit Nablus, and I don't even attempt to go to Ramallah because of the roadblocks. **If I leave Al-Khalil, I might find myself stuck at a checkpoint with no way forward or back. It's easier to just stay in my city.**

Even within Al-Khalil, **there are places I can no longer reach, including my family's old house in the Old City.** Since the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre in 1994, the area has been under military control. Many Palestinians were forced to leave due to restrictions, and those who stayed had to make a new entrance to their homes through windows because settlers and soldiers blocked the main doors. **Now, our old home is off-limits to me. The settlers took over abandoned properties, and the city has been carved up into restricted zones.**

Life with restrictions

We are not living, we are surviving. It's not just about land, it's about systematic destruction. Education in the occupied territories, including Al-Khalil, has collapsed in the last two years. Students now attend school around two-four days a week due to the tense situations, bad economy in addition to the restricted movement. Imagine children only getting around three days of education each week, what kind of future does that create? Even teachers have stopped receiving full salaries, barely making 70% of their wages, while transportation costs have increased. Students who once walked 3 to 5 kilometers to school now must walk 20 kilometers if they cannot afford transportation.

Healthcare has also suffered, with clinics only open for two days a week. Recently I had to visit the clinic but was surprised that they had closed, and I was told to come back on the days that the clinic is open. **It feels nowadays that you should program your sickness if you are a Palestinian living in Al-Khalil.**

Roads are closed unpredictably, forcing people to take long, dangerous detours. We have no choice but to adapt. If we take transportation, we have to pay, but where will we get the money from when there are no salaries?

I remember a time when I could drive from Al-Khalil to Jerusalem without a permit, or take a trip to Ghaza in just an hour and a half. Now, even reaching Bethlehem, which is close by, depends on the mood of the soldiers and whether the checkpoints are open. **This is not just about land, this is ethnic cleansing, a slow genocide through starvation, through ignorance, through healthcare deprivation.** The situation has become dire. No health, no education, no transportation, no movement, no water, no electricity. **We are at war, but an undeclared one.** The war is happening, but we are losing in the media. We are very weak, very poor in the coverage. Even though the situation is simple, you could expose everything to the world with minimal effort.

The worst part is that the world does not see our suffering. If someone came to the checkpoints in the morning and filmed the traffic jams of people trying to get to work, it would reveal the inhumane situation. This is not normal. The road to Wadi Al-Nar, for example, is incredibly dangerous. **Unfortunately, Palestinians are creative in dealing with oppression. If one road is blocked, they will open another one from the other side just to keep life moving. We have become their servants in this game of survival.** If Wadi Al-Nar didn't exist, we would still be taking the Jerusalem road, as it is our right. But now, even going to Jerusalem requires a permit. You need to be over 55 years old. And it must be filled out in Hebrew, and we don't know Hebrew. I might know a few words, but I can't write it. **The goal is clear; to force people to leave.**

We keep hearing about a two-state solution, but I no longer believe in it. **There is no land left for a Palestinian state. The settlers are inside our cities, inside our villages and our refugee camps.** The West Bank has been carved into isolated pockets, each one disconnected from the next. **We are prisoners in our own homes, in our own cities.**

Blaming the victim

I still remember when I was just four years old, during the Naksa in 1967, we had to leave our home. We packed what we could, some mattresses and basic items, and escaped with my mother and grandparents in a truck. We hid in the grapevine fields nearby, living in small stone houses called Siyar until things calmed down and we could return.

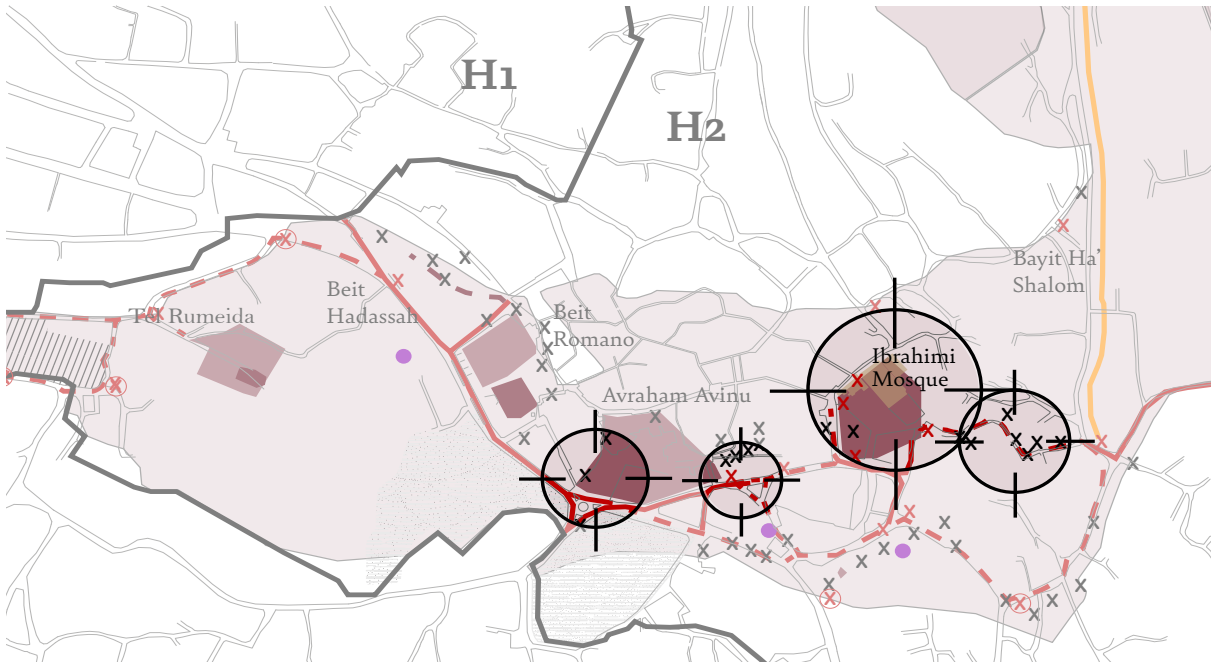
Over the years, I've seen how life here has changed. **One of the hardest moments was in 25th of February 1994, when Baruch Goldstein, an American-Israeli physician and Extremist of the far-right ultra-Zionist Kach movement, carried out a mass shooting of Palestinians who were performing morning prayers in the Ibrahimi Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan, killing a very large number of people while they were praying. I lost many people back then, including friends and neighbors. I remember the alert situation and the shock, the healthcare system collapsed back then, people were transporting the injured ones on top of the cars. Those scenes were horrible. After that, everything became even more restricted. The Old City was closed off, and Al-Khalil was divided into H1 and H2. Even though we were the ones who lost people, we were the victims and the accused.**

A state in name, a siege in reality

I still visit the Old City from time to time. It's not the same anymore. Many people have left, and the place feels empty. What's hard is not just what we've lost, but knowing that things didn't have to be this way.

We are still under occupation, nothing has changed. People talk about a two-state solution, but that idea has no basis in reality. There is no land left for a Palestinian state. What exists now is a single-state reality. The settlers are inside our cities and villages. There is no clear Palestinian land anymore; everything has been divided into isolated zones. The bypass roads have cut off Palestinian communities from one another, **making movement difficult and pushing people out. That is the real plan, to make life so hard that people leave on their own.**

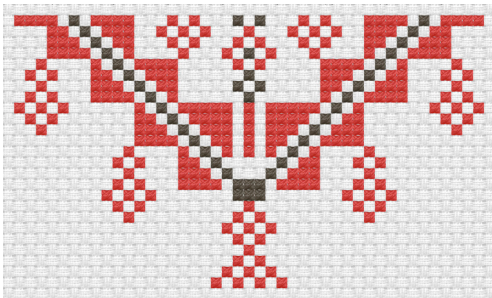
The Palestinian Authority exists in name only. It distributes salaries, but beyond that, the occupation controls everything. There is no real Palestinian state, just restrictions, loss of land, and survival. This is a war, even if it has not been officially declared. We are under siege, cut off from basic needs like education, healthcare, and transportation. **The goal is clear: to break people, to make life unlivable. They don't want to see any Palestinian. They are making life very difficult to force people to leave, while the whole world is watching and being silent.**



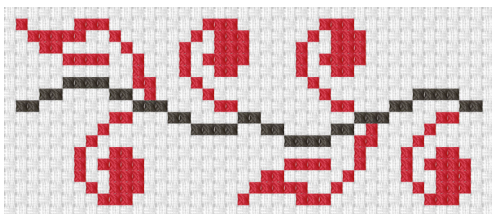
This map illustrates the key locations through which Mohammad moves in his daily life.

Isolation and the feeling of being unseen, where places of memories have faded into empty shells, stripped of their meaning and presence.

Scars (Tatreez elements within the illustration on next page)



Aqwas / Arches (1) | أفواس
The Ibrahimi Mosque massacre.



Enab / Grapes | عناب

Naksa, hiding under the grapevine as a four years old.
The traditional symbolic significance: life, growth, and prosperity.



- ← חלקת חב"ד
בית העלמין
CHABAD CEMETERY
- ← בית העלמין העתיק
OLD JEWISH CEMETERY
- ← תל חברון העתיקה
ANCIENT TEL HEBRON
- ← שכ' אדמות ישי
ADMOT YESHAI



Welcome to
APARTHEID
STREET

Isolation and the feeling of being unseen, where places of memories have faded into empty shells, stripped of their meaning and presence.

Mohammad's testimony reveals how architecture, under occupation, ceases to be neutral. It becomes weaponized as homes become tools of exclusion, streets become barriers, and memory is rewritten through the appropriation of space.

Movement and navigation

Every day, Mohammad must check whether the roads he needs to take are open. This is not a simple act of navigation, but a constant negotiation with a militarized geography. In a functional city, roads are designed to connect people and places, in this context they have are transformed into instruments of disconnection, subject to arbitrary closures, military control, and the unpredictable logic of occupation. Even simple acts like visiting friends and family or going to work are dictated by the shifting conditions of this spatial siege. Mohammad has not been able to reach family and friends in Nablus or Ramallah for over a year. This enforced isolation fragments not only the physical landscape but also social bonds, cultural continuity, and personal identity. Furthermore, to visit cities like al-Quds, Mohammad must submit a permit application written in Hebrew, a language he does not know. This bureaucratic barrier is another deliberate tool of exclusion, designed to erase and isolate Palestinians by denying them access to their own land and restricting their freedom of movement through linguistic and administrative obstacles.

Collapsed of daily life

Mohammad is navigating an environment where the built fabric has been weaponized to systematically deny the most basic conditions necessary for survival. He describes how everyday life has deteriorated, not due to natural disaster or economic collapse, but because of an intentional spatial and political order designed to fragment, exhaust, and isolate. The result of this environment is a profound economic and psychological toll. Without steady access to education, medical care, or stable work, the entire community is pushed into precarity. The absence of functioning infrastructure forces individuals into a daily struggle to survive. Mohammad's description reveals a stark paradox: an environment remaining spatially present but functionally absent, mirroring the transformation of Al-Khalil's Old City, once a busy hub of social and economic activity, now turned into a 'ghost town'.

Erased belongingness

When Mohammad was forced to leave his family home, it marked not only a physical uprooting but also a violent rupture of spatial belonging. Architecture transformed into a site of trauma, a form of spatial violence, where architecture no longer protects or embraces but becomes inaccessible, occupied, and surveilled. From a broader perspective, such acts are not isolated events but part of a larger system of spatial erasure. The military appropriation of Palestinian homes, especially in contested areas like Al-Khalil, turns domestic space into contested territory. Mohammad's former home, now inaccessible to him, becomes a visual and material reminder of loss, domination, and erasure. The trauma of displacement is thus not only in the act of fleeing but in watching the architecture that once held life being reoccupied, rewritten, and denied back. Psychologically, the forced abandonment of home introduces a state of disorientation. The architectural anchor that once provided safety is lost, and the emotional structure built around it collapses. This dislocation embeds trauma not just in the individual, but in the spatial memory of the city itself.

Displacement

At just four years old, Mohammad was forced to leave his home and hide in grapevine fields with his mother and grandparents. This incident marks an early experience of collective rupture. The Naksa, or "setback," become spatially and emotionally etched in his body through the act of fleeing, the closeness of family under threat, and the improvisation of survival.

Apartheid

Mohammad feels deeply unseen by the world. Despite living every day under an oppressive regime that controls and restricts nearly every aspect of life and suffering remains largely invisible for the world. This sense of erasure compounds the pain of living under an unjust apartheid regime. One of the darkest scars in Mohammad's memory is the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre, for him a traumatic event that not only shattered the sense of safety in his community but also marked a turning point where unjust violence, fear and segregation intensified.

EHAB NATSHE
Male (36y), Dwer Ban

My hometown

I left Al-Khalil ten years ago. I'd like to go back, but it's hard to imagine living there under occupation, without freedom, safety, or justice. Back when I lived there, I thought that my life was pretty normal. I worked at a supermarket near Dwer Ban, close to where we lived, and also at a gym in Al-Hawz.

My routine included work, going to the gym, spending time with friends either shopping, eating out, or visiting family. Most of the places I visited were inside Al-Khalil, in areas nearby. I would avoid going to places like Al-Azariya or the Old City near the Ibrahimi Mosque, since those areas felt more tense, especially after the Second Intifada.

Growing up, I remember settlers mainly being in Kiryat Arba, but over time they expanded deeper into the city. They moved into parts of the Old City and took over half of the Ibrahimi Mosque. Areas near the mosque became inaccessible to most Palestinians. Some streets were closed entirely or reserved for settlers.

I remember when I was a kid and we used to go to the old city, there were a lot of shops and people used to make their purchases there. Shops in the Old City were shut down, and Palestinians there had to use back alleys to reach their homes. There's fencing and mesh over some streets to protect Palestinians from settlers throwing trash or stones. One time, my friend and I were stopped near the mosque. They made us wait three hours, took our IDs, and then finally let us go. They didn't let us enter the mosque, not even go down the main road, only a side road because some areas are only accessible for settlers. Soldiers let them in freely, but block us Palestinians from walking there.

Leaving the city was complicated as well. To go to places like Azariya or even towards the Jordan border, you'd have to go through major checkpoints like "The Container" checkpoint, where you could be stuck for hours. Depending on the mood of the soldier. If one passenger had issues, they'd pull the whole car aside. If there was any attack in Israel, even if it was far away, they'd lock down all checkpoints and no one would be able to move from where they are, that's why people would smuggle themselves across the mountains.

Before things got worse, movement within Al-Khalil wasn't too difficult. Since we lived in the city, I usually didn't have to go through checkpoints on a daily basis. But after the Second Intifada, more closures were put in place. Some areas became hard to reach, and the Israeli army set up permanent checkpoints between neighborhoods, city and the villages.

People from nearby villages who worked in the city had to deal with major delays. For example, if you come from Halhoul to Al-Khalil, you take the car from one side, get out at a junction, walk across Halhoul bridge, and then take another car from the other side. Or you take a completely different, longer path. That's how most teachers, workers, and others who live in the villages and work in the city are having a hard time getting to the city.

Childhood under occupation

Gatherings are essential in our family, but even those were not free from fear and violence. I remember being a kid when we went for a barbeque with our uncle and grandmother. We were sitting under a tree when a military plane flew very low overhead. The air got dusty, and the plane pointed its weapons toward us. We had to step out from under the tree to show we were just children.

Thankfully, we were able to leave in a car without anything happening.

Another time, the army came to arrest my uncle. **I was 11, helping my father at his workshop. I was alone at the moment when suddenly soldiers stormed in, grabbed me, and asked about my uncle. I told them I didn't know. They pushed me against the wall and searched me, took me outside, locked down the whole street, raided our home and arrested my uncle. He stayed in prison for 26 years, and was recently released in prisoner exchange.**

It wasn't easy growing up in Al-Khalil. At school, classes would sometimes be canceled if the army was expected to invade an area or arrest someone. **We'd block the roads so that the military wouldn't be able to enter, we would throw stones at them and run through the hills. We got chased with rubber bullets and tear gas. The ones of us that were caught would get beaten or arrested for one or two days.**

The Israeli army jeeps would pass right outside whenever. They would just barge into places whenever they wanted. There wasn't any safety or justice. **Anyone who did anything suspicious would be arrested or summoned and if that person wouldn't go in, the military would raid his house, break stuff, and arrest him anyway.**

Worship under occupation

During Ramadan, we used to go to the Ibrahimi Mosque to get Shorabet Sayyidna Ibrahim, a traditional barley soup. People came with all kinds of containers to collect it. It's a well-known tradition tied to the history of the mosque and the Prophet Ibrahim.

Even attending the mosque was not simple. They used to search us thoroughly when we entered the Ibrahimi Mosque. Of course, they had sensors and electronic gates, and they'd check our IDs. They'd run them to see if anyone had issues and if someone did, they'd get detained. We'd go into the mosque, in areas that were mostly under Israeli control. Jews would go visit the tomb or the memorial of Prophet Joseph. And there were other areas we'd go into, like in Ras Tanya.

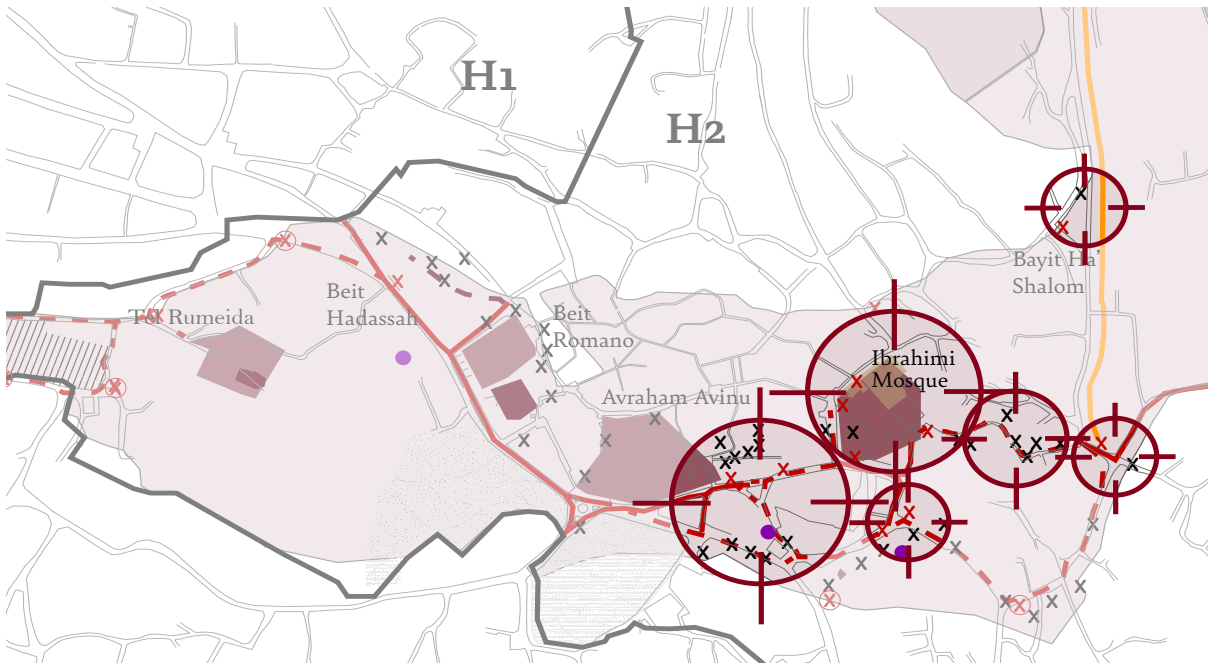
I had a friend that lived near the Ibrahimi Mosque together with his family. Because of the constant tension and presence of settlers in the area, they eventually had to move. The house still belongs to them, but they can't live there anymore. During Ramadan, we used to visit his house. The old homes had beautiful, traditional Arabic architecture. We'd pray in the mosque and sit together at his house afterwards, but even opening the house was difficult due to the heavy army presence and nearby checkpoints. **Some families in the area chose to sell their homes, others refused and continue visiting to assert their ownership, though it's becoming harder as settlers push to expand their settlements.**

Going to Al-Aqsa during Ramadan is something that every Muslim Palestinian would do. After the separation wall was built post-Intifada, it got worse. **It was hard for us to get a permit as young guys but we used to smuggle in.** We would go through Azariya and areas like Anata near the wall where sometimes people put a ladder on the wall, or dig a hole, and sneak through.

Once, we made it through but were spotted by a police car. There were five of us and they chased us. We ran through mud and fields. They fired tear gas at us. But once we got past the wall, we were in Jerusalem. Once you made it inside, no one would ask where you came from, it is always very crowded, and that makes it safe. It's just the entry that's dangerous.

The bullets still speak loud

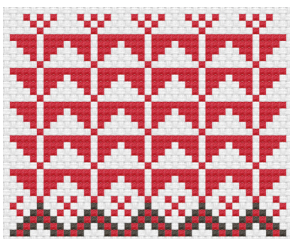
I left Al-Khalil, my family and friends, and I know that things there are getting worse. Everyone and everything there is being affected. When I was still there and used to visit the Ibrahimi mosque, I used to see bullet marks in the wall from the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre. They had marked the holes and even displayed them. In a way it reminded me of the most terrifying moment I experienced during the Intifada, as the Israeli army had taken over a building in Al-Khalil and turned it into a military base. One day, I was out shopping with my mom and suddenly gunfire broke out. We were inside a building and the glass started shattering. My mom and I ran out, ducking under walls and hiding. The army kept control of that building for months afterward. I must've been 12 or 13 back then. That incident stuck with me just as the bullets stuck in the walls of the Ibrahimi mosque.



This map illustrates the key locations through which Ehab used to move in his daily life.

Holding on identity

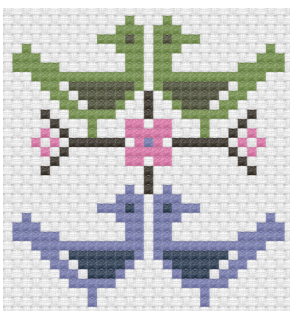
Scars (Tatreez elements within the illustration on next page)



Muftah Al Khalil / Key of Hebron | مفتاح الخليل

Identity

The traditional symbolic significance: displacement, loss, and the enduring hope for a return.



Al Asafeer / Birds (1) | العصافير

Stolen childhood

The traditional symbolic significance: freedom, hope, and the ability to soar above challenges

Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.



Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and existing non-Jewish community in Palestine, or their rights and political status under the present Ottoman Government.

I should be grateful if you would convey this declaration to the knowledge of the Jewish community in Palestine.



PALESTINE POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS

TELEGRAM

PALESTINE POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS

PALESTINE POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS

Plaster 50

رسوم محاکم فلسطين

PALESTINE COURTS FEES



NO JUSTICE



Holding on identity

Ehab describes oppression as woven into the fabric of daily life. At first, life seems “pretty normal”, working at the supermarket, going to the gym, hanging out with friends. But beneath the surface, the presence of checkpoints, surveillance, and occupation was constant.



Imposed fear

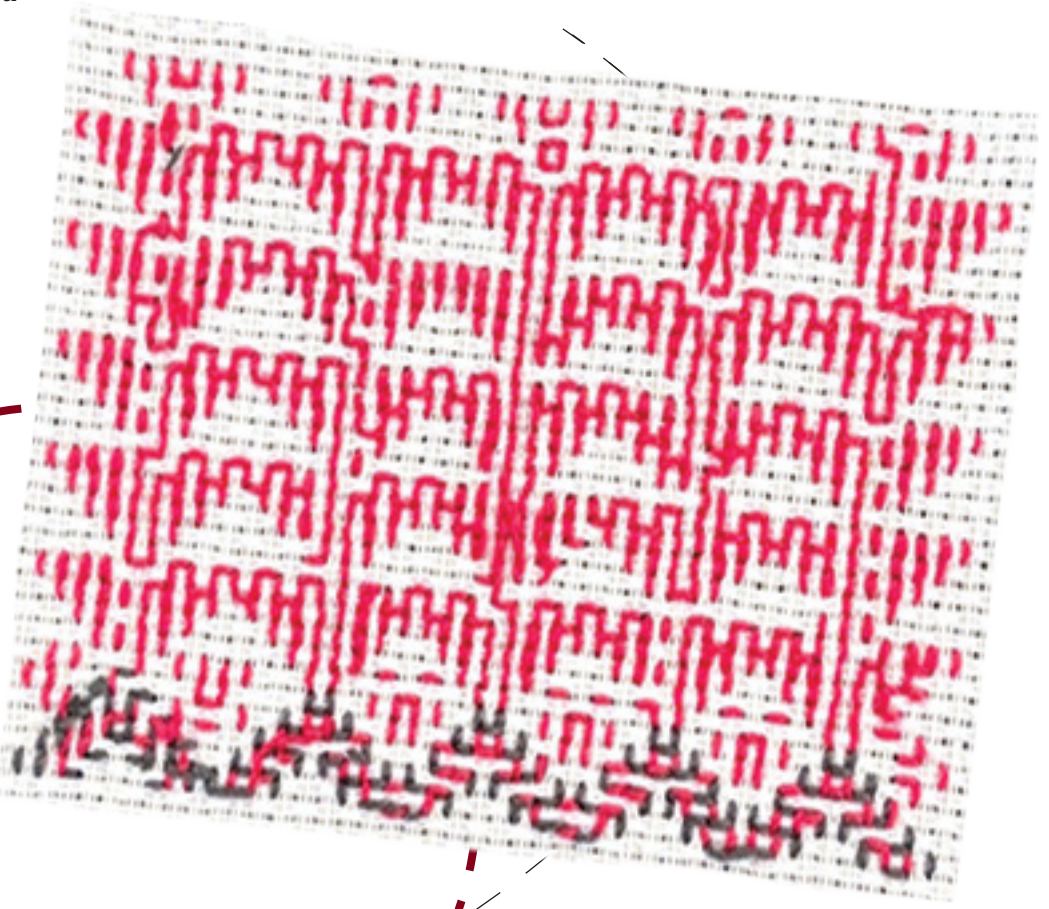
Ehab recalls distant battles in ordinary moments throughout his childhood. The very act of needing to "prove" one's innocence through one's body, as a child, speaks to a system where safety is never guaranteed, and innocence is never assumed. The distant battles in ordinary moments throughout his childhood show how the occupation produced a constant state of precarity. There was no reliable space of safety, not in public, not at home, not even among family. This is a way of physical control and psychological subjugation, growing fear from childhood, to instill a deep sense of helplessness, to make even joy feel dangerous.

Restricted access

Memories of worship and traditions in Al-Khalil, especially during Ramadan, were portrayed as both beautiful and deeply obstructed. Yet they were filtered through ID checks, metal detectors, blocked roads, and discrimination. Moments of spiritual gathering and tradition were shadowed by surveillance and violence. To pray becomes an act of endurance. To visit a mosque becomes a defiant claim to dignity. It is not safe, but people go anyway. That courage reveals the resilience of faith, and the refusal to let even the most personal and traditional rituals be stolen away.

Scars

In Ehab's testimony a profound sense of dislocation can be sensed, not just geographic, but emotional and psychological. The built environment, especially sites of memory like the Ibrahimi Mosque, bears the scars of violence: bullet holes, military checkpoints, and abandoned homes. These are not abstract symbols; they are physical reminders of a past violently interrupted and a present under siege.



Violation

Ehab describes moments that most children should never experience, being searched by armed soldiers at the age of 11, seeing a loved one arrested during a family gathering, and navigating tear gas and rubber bullets while trying to get to school, instill fear and create a sense of instability from a young age. The home, which should serve as a place of safety and comfort, is instead turned into a site of trauma when soldiers can barge in at any time. Even spaces of worship or family celebration are violated by military presence. The repeated exposure to violence and control conditions children to internalize a sense of powerlessness. It teaches them early on that their rights can be suspended at any moment, and that their bodies and lives are subject to external forces beyond their control.

Displacement

The decision to leave Palestine, leaving behind his hometown of Al-Khalil, along with his family, friends, and entire way of life, speaks to a profound sense of necessity rather than choice. It was not merely a search for opportunity, but a deeply personal response to a life shaped by occupation, where safety, freedom, and justice were continuously denied.

Growing up under constant military presence, facing harassment, checkpoints, house raids, and the daily unpredictability of violence, Ehab came to realize that what he had once considered “normal” was in fact a life of restriction and fear. Leaving meant stepping away from the familiarity of home, family gatherings, and friendships rooted in shared struggle, but it also meant carrying the burden of witnessing worsening conditions from afar, knowing that those left behind continue to endure what he could no longer live through.

His migration is a testament to the human cost of systemic oppression, a reminder that people often leave not because they want to, but because they are pushed out by structures of violence that render life unbearable. Yet even in leaving, the participant’s identity remains deeply tied to the place and people he left behind. His sense of self is inseparable from the collective memory and ongoing struggle of his community.

This kind of psychological conditioning is not accidental. It serves a political purpose, shaping a society to suppress resistance by embedding fear deeply into everyday life.

ARCHITECTURE AS A SITE OF POWER, KNOWLEDGE AND RESISTANCE

My work with this thesis began as a study of architecture, but it evolved beyond that. It became an act of remembering, an act of witnessing and an act of understanding architecture's role and accountability in the context of highly violent colonial occupation of Palestinian territories. I wanted to understand how the city of Al-Khalil has been carved into fragments by its occupiers, and how those fragments still pulse with life. What I found is that architecture is not a silent witness, it speaks. It decides who moves, who waits, who belongs. Architecture is a language of power, while it also can be a language of resistance.

In Al-Khalil, architecture does not merely stand; it commands. The different architectural elements of occupation and control are sentences written with concrete, defining who may pass and who must stop. These are not random structures but deliberate instruments of domination. As Weizman (2024) observes, architecture in colonized landscapes becomes a weapon, a choreography of movement that disciplines the body. The denial of movement in this context becomes a denial of identity. This becomes painfully clear when Arabic street names vanish, when day to day life is forced to pause, when places are renamed to serve someone else's story, turning the city's architecture into an archive of erasure where every restoration becomes an act of rewriting history. Yet beneath this erasure, identity finds a way to persist, quietly and stubbornly, through small gestures of continuity and the simple act of remaining.

As an architect and human rights activist myself, I reject the idea that architecture can ever be neutral. To design without conscience is to design for power, and to draw without questioning who benefits is to be complicit in injustice. Weizman (2017) reminds us that architecture always carries politics, meaning it can either conceal violence or reveal it, becoming a tool of decolonization.

Practicing architecture to decolonize means unlearning the arrogance of the universal. It means listening before drawing and witnessing before intervening. Smith (2022) and Escobar (2018) remind us that decolonial practice begins with humility, acknowledging that knowledge already exists within the community, the land, memory, and the indigenous people who sustain it.

For me, a decolonizing approach to my research also meant reclaiming the language and actively working with it as a tool, by choosing the right terms and descriptions. And choosing the Arabic name, Al-Khalil, over its colonial translation was a conscious way of writing that helped to reclaim the space, and to clearly take a stand as a writer and researcher.

As architects, our words, our lines, our plans and our decisions shape how people live, move, and remember. To practice ethically is to acknowledge this power openly and use it deliberately. In the context of colonial occupation, to work ethically is to resist silence. The act of mapping becomes an act of exposure, and the act of drawing becomes storytelling. And sometimes, the most radical design is the refusal to design what sustains oppression.

Working with stories changed me. In this thesis, I approached the narratives shared with me by Palestinians from Al-Khalil through a practice I learned to call story-listening — listening as an ethical, relational, embodied form of knowledge-making. Guided by indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008), narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 2004), and decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2022), I came to understand stories not as data but as living forms of truth. In a place where silence is often enforced and where speaking becomes an act of defiance, story-listening becomes a form of resistance. Listening became activism, while writing became care for, and with, the stories that we are listening to.

Archibald (2008) teaches that stories carry emotional, spiritual, and communal dimensions. I felt that these aspects unfolded as participants shared their stories with me. These were not stories about occupation, they were stories from within it, carrying the weight and warmth of lived realities. Through Czarniawska's lens (2004), I saw how people build continuity in fragmented landscapes, how narrative became a tool for healing and meaning-making. My role was not to interpret from afar, but to accompany each story with humility, treating participants as co-creators of spatial knowledge.

Smith's decolonizing methodologies (2022) demand accountability and political awareness. Knowledge production in settler-colonial contexts can never be neutral; it must be relational, reciprocal, and responsible. Story-listening required me to listen with my whole self, with attention, with empathy, with responsibility, knowing that amplifying a story is never the same as owning it.

Each story was shared with me remotely, then transcribed, translated, and shaped into a narrative that preserved its emotional rhythm. I returned each story to the participants, refining it together until it felt true to them. This was a way to honor the trust they placed in me, to ensure that they were represented with accuracy, respect, and care. These conversations were not just interviews. Through shared moments of exchange, collaborative acts of meaning-making of the stories became grounded in reciprocity. My role was not to speak for them, but to help create a method through which they could tell their stories in their own voice, ensuring that what they shared was understood, carried, and translated with integrity.

My methodological path throughout this thesis was also shaped by the work of Forensic Architecture (e.g. Weizman 2014 and 2017), whose spatial investigations have been exposing violence with forensic clarity. Their work inspired me deeply, teaching me how architecture can reveal the invisible. But as a Palestinian, I also feel that our suffering is so often transformed into data, diagrams, evidence. Our lives become case files and our pain becomes analytical material. Necessary, but often devoid of emotion, humanity, complexity.

I realized that besides reading violence in space, I wanted and needed to read life, emotion, identity, and resistance in that space too. I wanted to focus on the person

and their story, not only on the case and the statistics. I wanted to challenge how Palestinians are too often represented, as victims to be rescued and as cases to be studied. Through this thesis, I wanted to actively change that narrative and to show Palestinians as humans, with names, voices, stories and dreams.

Tatreez became my way of listening deeper and to process the stories and the pain they might hold. Its slow, repetitive rhythm allowed me to inhabit each story beyond words. Through embroidery, I listened with my hands, and by integrating the Tatreez in the illustrations I was not intending to reproduce the stories literally, rather to respond to them and to translate my listening into form. Tatreez taught me that research can stitch together softness, rigour and emotions.

A city can be full of scars. In Al-Khalil, scars stretch across facades, walls, trees, and hearts. But these scars are not only signs of pain, they are signs of resistance and healing. They remind us that something once hurt and that it survived. The scars in Al-Khalil are visible, shuttered shops, bullet holes, fences cutting through homes, but some of the scars are invisible, like the pauses before crossing a checkpoint and the memories too heavy to speak. Together, they tell the collective story of a people who endure.

Weizman (2024) argues that architecture can reveal violence, I believe it can also reveal endurance. Every cracked wall carries a lesson in persistence. Hammami (2019) calls this the co-resistance of heritage, the ability of culture to resist even when stones crumble. I argue that Al-Khalil becomes a living archive of survival, a city where endurance is written into the landscape.

Through this research, I have come to see the scars not as ruins but as stories. They demand that we remember. They ask architects to confront what design can do, to hurt or to heal, to erase or to repair. The architecture of scars teaches us that beauty can coexist with brokenness, and that sometimes, to rebuild is to remember, not to replace.

Architecture, as I now understand it, is both evidence and possibility. It can imprison, but it can also liberate. In Al-Khalil, space reveals the depth of human cruelty, but also the resilience of the human spirit. To study architecture in this context was to study power, identity, and resistance all at once. The scars of settlements are more than traces of destruction, they also are the surfaces where resistance writes itself. Through story and stitches, Palestinians continue to inhabit, narrate, and reimagine their space. This is where architecture begins again, not with lines drawn on paper, but with the recognition of lives.

This thesis also carries the story of my own journey as an architect and as a Palestinian. During my bachelor studies, I searched for ways to merge architecture with activism, to break free from the idea that architecture is only about objects or

aesthetics. I wanted to confront social inequalities, challenge imperial structures, and expose the injustices shaping our built environment. For years, I sensed that architecture could be a stance, a voice, a form of resistance. This thesis finally gave me space to practice that belief unapologetically.

I learned to write about historical events with precision and care, to navigate archives that often silenced Palestinian memory, and to re-read them through a decolonial lens. I learned to move fluidly between disciplines, combining social science with architecture, storytelling with spatial analysis and artistic practice with political reflection. In embracing decolonial methodology, I discovered that architecture expands when we allow it to feel, when we let it breathe through stories, emotions, and memory.

This thesis, therefore, is not only a contribution to knowledge, it is a declaration to myself, of what kind of architect I choose to be.

This work began with maps and ended with voices, with threads, with scars that taught me how architecture feels when it is weaponized and how it can transform when reclaimed. I write these words not as an observer but as a Palestinian architect shaped by the same histories I studied. The boundaries on the maps I drew are the boundaries that have shaped my movement, my identity. And yet, through research, through stories, through resistance, I found that architecture must not be silent.

This thesis is my act of resistance, a pledge to use architecture not as a tool of domination but as a practice of care, memory, and justice. Everything I have learned, every archive I entered, every story I held and every stitch I traced, strengthened my conviction that architects must be critical, accountable, and courageous.

I end this thesis with the knowledge that architecture can wound, but it can also care and heal.

And I choose the side of care and healing.

*"On this earth there is that which deserves life:
the recurrence of April,
the smell of bread at dawn,
the opinion of a woman in men,
the writings of Aeschylus,
the beginning of love,
moss on a stone,
mothers standing on a flute's string,
and the invaders' fear of memories.*

*On this earth there is that which deserves life:
the end of September,
a woman leaving forty in all her prime,
the hour of sun at prison,
clouds mimicking a flock of beings,
a people cheering those who ascend to their fate smiling,
and the tyrants' fear of songs*

*On this earth there is that which deserves life:
On this earth there is the lady of the land,
The mother of beginnings, the mother of endings.
It used to be called Palestine, it will be called Palestine.
My lady: I deserve, because you are my lady, I deserve life."*

*On This Earth
—Mahmoud Darwish
(Translated by Ashraf Osman)*



Palestinian poet and journalist Mahmoud Darwish gestures during his show in the northern Palestine city of Haifa, [GIL COHEN MAGEN/AFP]

Mahmoud Darwish is a Palestinian poet who gave language to the loss, longing, and resilience of the Palestinian people. Through his words, he expressed what many felt but could not articulate—the pain of displacement, the love of homeland, and the ongoing struggle for dignity. For generations of Palestinians, Darwish’s poetry has become a collective voice, carrying memory, identity, and hope.

If you’re new to Darwish’s work, here are some essential books to explore:

“Identity Card” (1964) – Palestinian identity and resistance.

“A Lover from Palestine” (1966) – Love poetry infused with politics.

“Unfortunately, It Was Paradise” (2003) – A collection of poems exploring exile and belonging.

“The Butterfly’s Burden” (2007) – Lyrical reflections on love, homeland, and loss.

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