

The background of the cover is a photograph. On the left, a weathered concrete wall with several small holes is visible. A vertical wooden post runs along the edge of the wall. To the right of the post, a lush green valley with scattered white patches (possibly snow or fields) stretches towards distant hills under a clear sky. In the bottom left foreground, a portion of a red, textured object, possibly a bag or a piece of fabric, is visible.

RECLAIMING SPACE

The 50 Village Project in Rural Palestine

Edited by

Khaldun Bshara and Suad Amiry

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RIWAQ



Aga Khan Award for Architecture

Reclaiming Space

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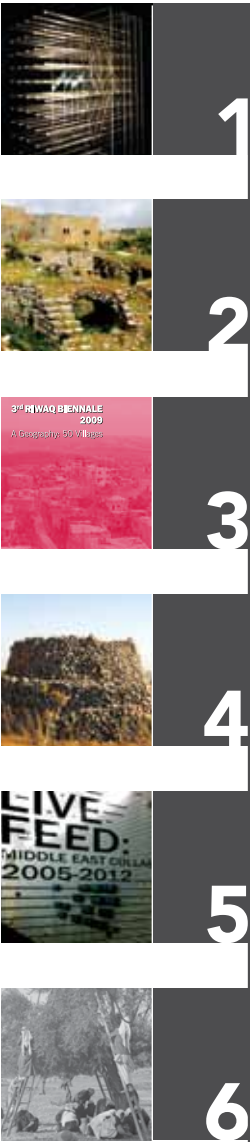
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3rd RIWAQ BIENNALE 2009

A Geography: 50 Villages

Palestine, Venice, various venues
3 June – 16 October



Yatta, Arraba, Adh Dhahiriya, Abu Dies, Surif, As Samu', Asira ash Shamaliya, Ya'bad, Deir Gassaneh, Anabta, Bani Na'eem, Burqa, Beita, Halhul, Sa'ir, Silat adh Dhahr, Ithna, Rantis, Aqraba, Ash Shuyukh, N'ilin, 'Aboud, Burin, Deir Istiya, Beit Ikra, Beituniya, Jamma'in, Hajja, Beit Hanina, Al 'Ubeidiya, Taybeh, Sabastiya, Abwein, Sanur, Beit Fajjar, Bruqin, Birzeit, Deir Ammar, Al Mazra'a al Qibliya, Mazar' an Nubani, Ajjul, Sanniriya, Al Jib, Beit Wazan, Jiljiya, Ein Siniya, Jaba', Kur, Ras Karkar, Khan Yunis

What is the significance of these 50 Palestinian villages? What could they have in common with great cities of the world such as Sydney, Sao Paulo and Venice? Many things, no doubt, but the most important one is that, like their better known international counterparts, they have all been selected as locations for major art biennales. These particular 50 Palestinian villages will be the locations for the 3rd Riwaq Biennale to take place throughout Palestine from the 3rd June – 16th October 2009.

Biennales are often arenas for monumental spectacles - big canvases, flashy sculptures, frenetic installations. With over 100 biennales and triennales now taking place around the world, it can sometimes seem as if the world has become one vast exhibition venue and art market, with cities competing to stage ever more elaborate exhibits to lure the international art world. But as the locations become more varied, it can also seem as though the artwork, as well as the curatorial approaches, increasingly represent the homogenisation of art leading to the flattening of cultural diversity under the dictatorship of the international art market.

It is not easy to stand out in this increasingly crowded calendar. In addition, the conditions of cultural production under occupation make it hard to justify taking an extravagant approach to curating a biennale in Palestine. As a result, the Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation has taken the decision to offer

the public a quieter register through which to engage with the contemporary cultural landscape of Palestine. The 3rd Riwaq Biennale will be for and about 50 Palestinian villages. The selection of these fifty historic centres was based on their architectural significance and, most importantly, on their well-preserved architectural fabric.

The starting point of the Riwaq Biennale has always been to advance Riwaq's aim of protecting and promoting cultural heritage in Palestine. Another unusual feature of this Biennale is that it is named after an organisation rather than a place. To emphasise this link with the organisation, the Biennale is structured around a series of visits, gatherings and projects in these 50 historic centres identified by Riwaq as being a priority to develop. In partnership with local institutions and communities, the aim is to use the Biennale as a way of creating opportunities for achieving the organisation's central goal of protecting, utilising and promoting cultural heritage in Palestine through tangible and intangible projects of rehabilitation and revitalisation.

In a radical shakeup of the biennale concept, this 3rd Riwaq Biennale will not feature any large-scale, central exhibitions. Instead, it will consist of a series of journeys between the fragmented and disparate locations, reflecting the fractured territory of Palestine. These journeys are conceived as a series of networking activities between local and international artists and theorists, providing the opportunity to develop ideas and artistic collaborations for the future. They will offer a series of curated conversations and interactions between Palestinian and international artists, and between architects, planners, conservationists, curators and theorists.

Through the deliberate omission of hype and spectacle, the Riwaq curatorial team aims to provide an alternative vision that challenges the perceptions and expectations of what a biennale can be. To add another dimension to and to alter the accepted understanding of a biennale even further, the 3rd Riwaq Biennale will, in fact, open in Venice. "50 Local Pavilions" will be installed in the Venice Biennale's first ever Palestinian Pavilion as part of the 2009 53rd Venice Biennale. To celebrate this landmark event, the Riwaq's entire office will transfer to Venice to lead a series of lectures, discussions and visits. Part art installation, part campaign team, they will use a section of the allocated pavilion space to present an Open House for Riwaq during the opening days of the Venice Biennale.

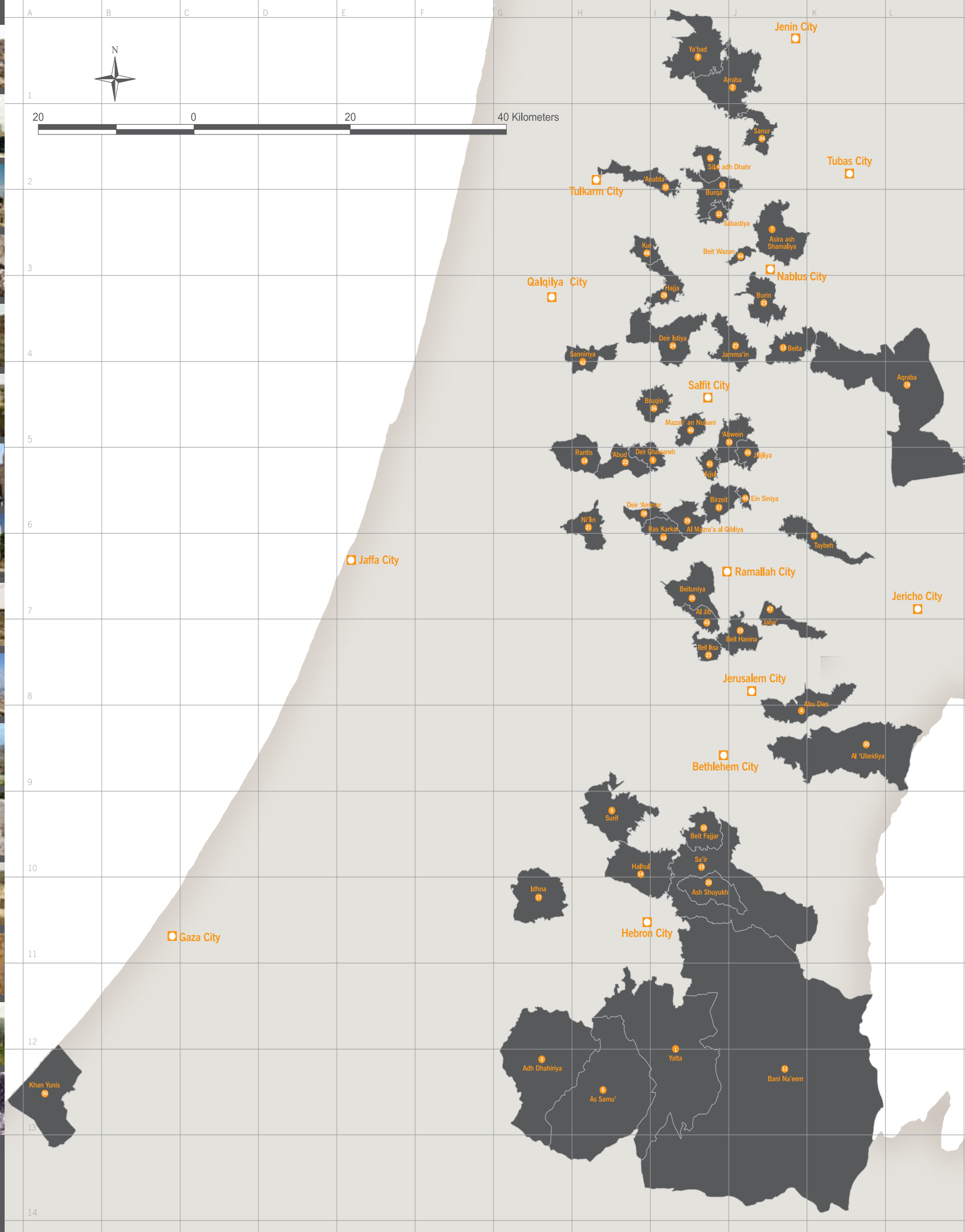
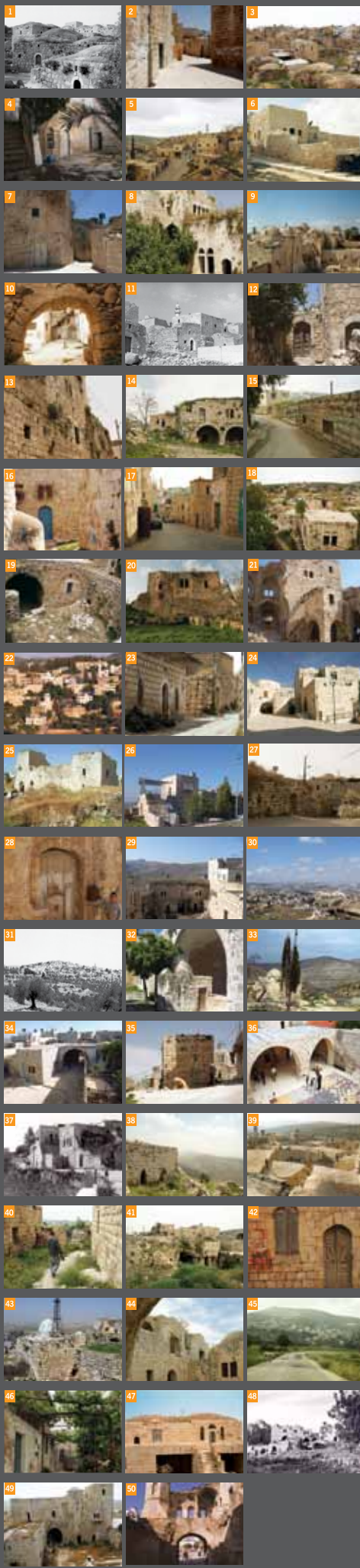
Guests invited to participate in the 3rd Riwaq Biennale will use the Palestinian Pavilion to present ongoing projects and manifestations that investigate collective projects and consider new ways and methods of working. Participants will use the space as a departure point to consider the relevance of a biennale and imagine the environs it takes place in. They will use the space to consider an notion of a biennale that reverberates beyond the physical confines of its place to rethink how such an event can stimulate, support and present cultural practices.

By focusing on the here and now, the 3rd Riwaq Biennale aims to question the roles of arts practitioners and interdisciplinary arts activities in relation to their communities and to the wider international artistic and professional community. By taking a more thoughtful approach to biennale culture, the 3rd Riwaq Biennale is creating an opportunity not only to investigate the trappings of our cultural codes and practices but also to look always of reconnecting isolated and walled Palestine to the international art world.

Khalil Rabah, 3rd Riwaq Biennale, 2009, A Geography: 50 Villages
Act I: Geography 102: In Venice a Biennale, in five parts, time specific, 2009

This work is part of Palestine c/o Venice
In collaboration with Riwaq

Sponsored by CCC Consolidated Contractors Company



01 Yatta (I,12) 12 km south of the city of Hebron and has 1263 historic buildings surrounded with agricultural lands. It is worthy of mentioning that Yatta has the highest number of inhabitants and number of historic buildings than any other village.	02 'Arraba (J,1) 13 km south-west of the town of Jenin and has 1009 historic buildings. It is divided into two sections: the eastern neighborhood, which is surrounded by a wall and the highest number of inhabitants and number of historic buildings than any other village.	03 Adh Dhahiriya (G,13) 23 km south-west of the city of Hebron and has 893 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated and protected three buildings to become: Adh Dhahiriya Service Center, Adh Dhahiriya Girls' School, and the Second Adh Dhahiriya Service Center.
04 Abu Dies (J,9) 5 km south-east of the city of Jerusalem and has 554 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated two buildings: Al-Nahda Women Center and Abu Dies Elder's Center.	05 Surif (H,10) 14 km north of the city of Hebron and has 548 historic buildings. The village has various historic mosques and graveyards.	06 As Samu' (H,13) 17 km south of the city of Hebron and has 530 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved one building to become As Samu' Child Center.
07 Asira ash Shamaliya (J,3) 5km north of the city of Nablus and has 458 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved one building to become Asira ash Shamaliya Public Library.	08 Ya'bad (I,1) 18 km west of the city of Jenin and has 420 historic buildings, most have simple architecture, except for a few such as the Al-Khan Palace and the tomb of Sheikh Ali.	09 Deir Gassaneh (I,6) 25 km north-west of the city of Ramallah and has 268 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved and renovated a number of these buildings, including what became Deir Gassaneh Clinic and Youth Center. It is also a throne village.
10 'Anabta (I,2) 9.5 km east of Tulkarem city and lies on the northern bank of the Shalar Valley and has 390 historic buildings. Its name is credited to the Syriac word for grapes.	11 Bani Na'eem (J,13) 6 km east of the city of Hebron and has 383 historic buildings as well as the Mosque and Tomb of the Prophet Lot.	12 Burqa (I,2) 17 km north-west of the city of Nablus and has 371 historic buildings. It is a throne village and home to Masoud Palace.
13 Beita (J,4) 13 km south of the city of Nablus and has 363 historic buildings. The village is divided into two parts: the Upper Beita and the Lower Beita.	14 Halhul (H,10) 6 km north of the city of Hebron and has 360 historic buildings. Riwaq worked on two renovation projects in the village: one became Al-Yarmouk Girl School and the other Halhul Cultural Center.	15 Sa'ir (I,10) 8 km north of the city of Hebron and has 354 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved a building to become the Sa'ir Women Association Center.
16 Silat adh Dhahr (I,2) 23 km south of the city of Jenin and has 344 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved a building to become Silat adh Dhahr Youth Center.	17 Idhna (G,11) 16 km north-west of the city of Hebron and has 343 historic buildings, most of which are comprised of one floor while four of them have two floors.	18 Rantis (H,6) 37 km north-west of the city of Ramallah and has 326 historic buildings. In the village are the tombs of four of the Awlaya' (Muslim saints).
19 Aqraba (L,5) 18 km south-east of the city of Nablus and has 321 historic buildings. It lies over the Roman village Anabtan.	20 Ash Shuyukh (I,11) 8 km north of the city of Hebron and has 298 historic buildings. It also has a number of historic mosques and tombs.	21 N'ilin (H,6) 22 km west of the city of Ramallah and has 292 historic buildings. It is a throne village and has the Al-Hawaya Palace that Riwaq renovated to become N'ilin Community Center.
22 'Aboud (H,6) 30 km north of the city of Ramallah and has 281 historic buildings. One of which is the Church of Our Mother Mary in the middle of town that goes back to the 5th Century AD.	23 Burin (J,4) 8 km south-west of the city of Nablus and has 268 historic buildings. It was known during the Roman times by Marjany.	24 Deir Istiya (I,4) 7 km north-west of Salit and has 255 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated one of the buildings as Deir Istiya Child Center and prepared a plan to protect the old city.
25 Beit Ikra (I,8) 9 km north-west of the city of Jerusalem and has 248 historic buildings. It was a throne village and the location of the Khayt tribe during the end of the Ottoman period.	26 Beituniya (J,7) 4.5 km west of the city of Ramallah and has 221 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated one of its buildings to become Beituniya Women Association Center and has presented a protection plan for the old city.	27 Jamma'in (J,4) 15 km south-west of the city of Nablus and has 217 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated and protected a number of buildings there; one became Jamma'in Municipal Service Center. It also prepared a protection plan for the old city.
28 Hajja (I,4) 18 km east of the city of Qalqilya and has 209 historic buildings. The word Hajja in Aramaic means market, but it could also mean society, festivity and season.	29 Beit Hanina (J,8) 7 km north of the city of Jerusalem and has 195 historic buildings. Riwaq has presented a protection plan for the old city.	30 Al 'Ubeidiya (K,9) 9 km north-east of Bethlehem City and has 189 historic buildings. The name refers to the Muslim leader Abu Obeida Amer Bin Al-Jarah (658AD) who came to Palestine to take control of Jerusalem.
31 Taybeh (K,7) 14 km north-east of the city of Ramallah and has 188 historic buildings. Riwaq has conserved two of them, one of which is now Taybeh Library and is working on the rehabilitation of the old city.	32 Sabastiya (I,3) 12 km north-west of the city of Nablus and has 183 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved and protected Al-Kayed Palace, Sabastiya is one of the throne villages.	33 Abwein (J,5) 30 km north of the city of Ramallah and has 163 historic buildings. It is a throne village and has the Salmeh Palace that dates to the Ottoman era, which was conserved preventatively by Riwaq.
34 Sanur (J,2) 27 km south of the city of Jenin and has 151 historic buildings. It is a throne village and has Al-Jarar Palace, which Riwaq performed protective conservation on, used to be where Beit Fajjar is today.	35 Beit Fajjar (I,10) 14 km south-west of the city of Ramallah and has 149 historic buildings. It is said that Bechtassa, the village documented by the Crusaders, used to be where Beit Fajjar is today.	36 Bruqin (I,5) 13 km west of the city of Salit and has 139 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved one building to become the Bruqin Community Center as well as prepare a plan to protect the old city.
37 Birzeit (I,6) 10 km north of Ramallah City and has 130 historical buildings. Riwaq has conserved two of them: one is Al Ruqana Association Center, and has prepared a plan for conserving the old city.	38 Deir 'Ammar (H,6) 17 km north-west of the city of Ramallah and has 110 historic buildings as well as the tomb of the Prophet Ghatti.	39 Al Mazra'a al Qibliya (I,6) 11 km north-west of the city of Ramallah and has 97 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated one building that became Al-Mazra'a al Qibliya Community Center, as well as prepare a plan to protect the old city.
40 Mazar' an Nubani (I,5) 10 km north of the city of Ramallah and has 130 historic buildings. Riwaq has conserved two of them: one is Al-Ruqana Association Center and is working on the rehabilitation of the old city.	41 Ajjul (I,6) 22 km north of the city of Ramallah and has 90 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated one of the buildings to become The Ajjul Clinic and Community Center and prepared a protection plan for the old city.	42 Sanniriya (H,4) 18 km south-east of the city of Qalqilya and has 89 historic buildings. Its name might be of the Canaanite word Samir meaning light.
43 Al Jib (I,8) 10 km north of the city of Jerusalem and has 82 historic buildings. Riwaq presented a protection plan for the village.	44 Beit Wazan (J,3) 5 km west of the city of Nablus and has 65 historic buildings. Riwaq renovated Al-Qasem Palace that was built in 1820 AD to become Al-Najah University Restoration Center. Beit Wazan is also a throne village.	45 Jiljiya (J,6) 27 km north of the city of Ramallah and has 56 historic buildings. It has many historic sites including walls and mosaic floors.
46 Ein Siniya (I,6) 10 km north of the city of Ramallah and has 44 historic buildings. Riwaq performed protective conservation to Al-Hassani Mansion in the village, as well as prepare a plan to protect the old city.	47 Jaba' (J,7) 11 km north of the city of Jerusalem and has 39 historic buildings. The name in Canaanite means hill and the Crusaders referred to it in the Middle Ages by its current name.	48 Kur (H,3) 19 km south-east of the city of Tulkarem and has 29 historic buildings. It is one of the throne villages that played an important role at the end of the Ottoman period. It has three large secure castles.
49 Ras Karkar (I,7) 12 km west of Ramallah and has 27 historic buildings. Riwaq conserved Al-Shehan castle that dates back to the 18th Century. Ras Karkar is a throne village.	50 Khan Yunis (A,13) Between Gaza city and Rafah and is 20km north of the Egyptian-Palestinian borders. It is home of the Khan built by the Mamluk prince Yunis Alkadar in 1387AD.	

Geography 401: Mosaic, 2009, Paper: Art Matt. Size: 73.5x42cm
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INTRODUCTION

Suad Amiry



Introduction

Almost twenty-four years after its establishment in 1991, Riwaq shares with the reader of this book and the public at large, the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project, its most regionally significant initiative to date.

In 2005, Riwaq ventured into its first large-scale cultural heritage initiative with the primary aim to rehabilitate and revitalize Palestine’s most significant 50 historic centers. *Riwaq’s Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine* (2006), which documented 50,320 historic buildings in 422 villages and towns in “Minor Palestine” (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), provided the necessary data to determine that saving 50 villages/towns would result in saving almost 50% of the cultural heritage in rural Palestine. Based upon architectural qualities (architectural fabric, and historic, aesthetic, social, and communal significance such as the feudal “throne villages”), Riwaq compiled a list of the 50 most significant villages across the region.

The 50 Village Rehabilitation Project, the subject of this book, is also referred to by Riwaq’s staff as “the **50-50-50** initiative:” the revitalization of the most significant 50 historic centers in rural Palestine that represent 50% of the cultural heritage, requiring a \$50 million budget. And this is not an inordinate amount, considering the scale and nature of the many projects mushrooming around us, but more importantly, with respect to the profound impact of the project on the most marginalized and impoverished sectors of Palestinian society, and also on the region’s long term community and economic development. Considering the alarming destruction of Palestine’s cultural and natural heritage, as well as the loss of character and quality of places and spaces worldwide, perhaps the 50 restored historic centers will become the only part of Palestine that will look like Palestine, or more accurately, will echo what Palestine looked like once upon a time...

In addition to its ambitious **national scale**, the challenges on the ground for such a project are colossal; from the negative attitudes and lack of appreciation for cultural heritage in general, to the absence of cultural heritage legislation (that moves beyond the protection of archeological sites) with respect to the protection of historic centers and natural landscapes, to the short-term goals of most “development schemes” carried out by the private sector with the government’s blessings, and the unprecedented destruction of natural resources and landscapes. Compounding this of course, are continuously sprawling Israeli settlements, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and scarcity of water, the destruction caused by the senseless construction of the Separation Wall, and the numerous checkpoints that obstruct the mobility of persons and products, hence making it rather difficult to achieve the rehabilitation of any village, let alone 50 of them.

In spite of it all... the will to carry on is strong and looming.

Since 2005, Riwaq has completed rehabilitation works in thirteen villages, indicated in the list below, six of which are discussed at length in Part 2 of this book.

From the dim bulb to the spotlight

The significance of the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project stems not only from the nature and the impact of such a large-scale initiative, but also from Riwaq’s mission-driven history, as well as Riwaq’s theoretical and practical experiences in the field of cultural heritage. Or as the *Riwaqioun* (Riwaq’s staff) describe it: “from the light-bulb to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (1991-2013),” which is to say, from the dim light used for Riwaq’s first meeting in its humble beginnings in 1991, to the organization’s acclaimed spotlight with the 2013 Aga Khan Award for Architecture and its grand celebration at San Jose Castle in Lisbon under the patronage of His Highness the Aga Khan and the President of Portugal.

The 50 Village Rehabilitation Project, the third phase in Riwaq’s development, captures the nature and scope of works and projects accomplished before it. It builds upon the **documentation** phase and **job creation** phase through the conservation of single buildings. While the documentation phase (1994-2004) culminated in the publication of the monumental three-volume *Riwaq’s Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine*, which was published in 2006, the job creation phase, a milestone in Riwaq’s development, has provided more than 300,000 working days and created some 100 community centers in hundreds of villages in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since it began in 2001.

It was in 2005 that Riwaq made the shift from the conservation of single buildings to the rehabilitation of entire neighborhoods and historic centers. Both however, kept job creation at the very heart of its work. It is needless to say that such wide-scale provision of jobs and community and cultural centers made cultural heritage a viable economic tool for development and social change. And as such, Riwaq’s role shifted from an architectural and technical provider to one that includes the provision of jobs, cultural infrastructure, and public spaces for communal interaction and social change, all of which are topics addressed in this book.

The process of revitalization, or bringing users, hence *life*, back to these historic centers has entailed numerous physical and non-physical interventions. While the physical interventions (infrastructure, conservation of single buildings, the preventive conservation of whole neighborhoods, and upgrading of public spaces and alleys) have been relatively easily attainable, the **non-physical interventions**, which were necessary in attracting users to the newly renovated areas, remained one our biggest challenges.

Hence, in addition to the numerous physical, economic, and social surveys carried out in 2005, Riwaq worked on **sixteen protection plans**. Such detailed protection plans not only established a foundation for the comprehensive planning and restoration works that followed it, but filled an important legal gap. In the absence of a National Cultural Heritage Law, these protection plans, accompanied by the appropriate bylaws, formed the guidelines for the protection of historic centers, the most important of which [to date] is

50+ VILLAGES				CITIES	
	Yatta	1283	Hebron	4083	Jerusalem
	Arraba	1009	Jenin	3397	Nablus
Adh Dhahiriya	893	Hebron	1222	Hebron	
	Abu Dis	554	Jerusalem	837	Bethlehem
	Surif	548	Hebron	546	Tulkarm
	As Samu'	530	Hebron	422	Jenin
	'Asira ash Shamaliya	458	Nablus	420	Jericho
	Ya'bad	420	Jenin	417	Gaza
Deir Ghassana & Beit Rima	411	Ramallah & Al Bireh	381	Ramallah	
	Beit Jala	398	Bethlehem	357	Tubass
	'Anabta	390	Tulkarem	219	Qalqilia
	Bani Na'eem	383	Hebron	166	Salfit
	Burqa	371	Nablus	168	Al Bireh
	Beita	363	Nablus		
	Halhul	360	Hebron		
	Sa'ir	354	Hebron		
	Silat adh Dhahr	344	Jenin		
	Idhna	343	Hebron		
	Rantis	326	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Beit Sahour	322	Bethlehem		
	Aqraba	321	Nablus		
	Ash Shuyukh	298	Hebron		
	Ni'lin	292	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	'Abud	281	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Burin	268	Nablus		
	Deir Istiya	255	Salfit		
	Beit Iksa	248	Jerusalem		
	Attil	243	Tulkarem		
	Beituniya	221	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Jamma'in	217	Nablus		
	Hajjeh	209	Qalqilia		
	Beit Hanina	195	Jerusalem		
	At Tayba	188	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Sabastiya	183	Nablus		
	'Abwein	163	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Sanur	151	Jenin		
	Beit Fujjar	149	Bethlehem		
	Bruqin	139	Salfit		
	Bir Zeit	130	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Qabalan	125	Nablus		
	Deir 'Ammar	110	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Kafr al Labad	106	Tulkarem		
	Kafr ad Dik	97	Salfit		
	Al Mazra'a al Qibliya	97	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Mazari' an Nubani	96	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Talfeet	94	Nablus		
	'Ajjul	90	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Sanniriya	89	Qalqilia		
	Sarra	92	Nablus		
	Deir Ibzi'	62	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Jiljillia	56	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Ein Sinia	44	Ramallah & Al Bireh		
	Jaba'	39	Jerusalem		
	Kur	29	Tulkarem		
	Ras Karkar	27	Ramallah & Al Bireh		

بينالي رواق الثالث
جغرافيا: خمسون قرية
3rd RIWAQ BIENNALE 2009
A Geography: 50 Villages



A GEOGRAPHY: 50 VILLAGES IS THE THEME OF THE 3RD RIWAQ BIENNALE 2009. THE LIST SHOWS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT 50+ VILLAGES AND TOWNS AS WELL AS THE NUMBER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN EACH VILLAGE OR TOWN, RED FOR VILLAGES WHERE RIWAQ HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTING THE 50-VILLAGE PROGRAM (2005-2015)

the Ramallah Protection Plan, a partnership project between Riwaq and Ramallah’s municipality.

All along, cultural activities have been an important component of the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project. Together with local communities, municipalities, village councils, and cultural organizations, Riwaq has organized a number of cultural activities in each of the rehabilitated village centers to date. These include Birzeit’s “Heritage Week” organized by al Rozana Association; “Concerts in Palaces,” which took place in partnership with al Kamandjati Association; and writing workshops and a literary festival in partnership with the Palestine Literary Festival (PALFEST). Of these activities however, the most far-reaching has been Riwaq’s series of biennales in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2014, as well as the Qalandia International in 2012 and 2014 that brought artists and hundreds of visitors to renovated historic centers across our region. It was going **beyond the physical**, and shifting certain concepts and paradigms that truly mattered and eventually made a big difference at the end of the day.

Shifting paradigms, historic fabric, and contemporary needs

In addition to many villagers’ negative attitudes and lack of appreciation for the potential in historic structure and spaces, it was the inherent tension between the traditional physical structure of historic centers and contemporary needs that posed a major challenge for Riwaq’s work. While the traditional village’s spatial structure, which once reflected **kinship** and **gender**, satisfied the needs of an autarkic agrarian community, today’s same village structure has to stretch its limits and possibilities to satisfy different contemporary needs and uses.

The spatial organization of historic centers reflects the social and economic structures that prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century. The division of agricultural lands, as well as the division of the village into three or four neighborhoods (*harat*) was based on kinship. The extended family that tilled the land together, forming a production unit, basically lived together in one neighborhood (*hara*). And the division of the small houses that formed the *hara* also reflected the basic needs of a peasant family (hence the division into three levels; *qaa’ al beit*, *al mastabeh*, and *al rawieh* for animal, human, and agricultural products). The shared or communal village spaces also fulfilled the needs of an agrarian society. The guesthouse (*al madafah*); the village plaza (*al saha*); the little mosques where the village men met; the semi-private courtyards, the water spring, and the holy shrines where women gathered; and the communal shared spaces which cut across kinship and gender such as the olive presses, *al baidar* (the huge natural rock used for threshing), the fastness of the open fields and *hawakir* (backyard gardens), all reflected and satisfied the needs of agrarian peasant society.

Today’s village community obviously has different aspirations and needs. Hence the main question that poses itself is as follows: how can these same physical spaces and places accommodate the contemporary needs of a vastly wage-labor society? A society that has, for a variety of reasons, deserted these spaces and gone out to live in nuclear family units along the streets that connect them not only to the neighboring big city, but also to the world at large; leaving behind the old and the poor, who have no means to leave and join the modern concrete jungle.

In order for Riwaq to meet such serious challenges, it had to go beyond the physicality of conservation and rehabilitation and create strategies for shifting a few paradigms and conceptions.

Modifying traditional fabrics and structures into contemporary needs made Riwaq face many challenges, and of most critical importance was the issue of **authenticity** of sites and buildings. This perhaps explains Riwaq’s contemporary approach to restoration, i.e. the alteration of historic structures to accommodate new functions, even if causing a loss of authenticity to the site. Perhaps the one guiding principle in most of Riwaq’s work has been making available a vernacular setting for a current and contemporary communal function.¹ The protection and maintenance of heritage have in fact, been achieved through *using* the sites and making them more accessible to larger portions of the local population.

Gentrification vs. positive discrimination for the marginalized

While the majority of world rehabilitation projects result in gentrification, that is, increasing the shares of wealthier newcomers at the expense of poorer residents, Riwaq’s rehabilitation projects increase the shares of marginalized residents and communities living in and around the region’s historic centers. Riwaq realizes this outcome by implementing a series of projects that improve the quality of spaces and services in historic centers where a marginalized sector of the population lives. By doing so, Riwaq also helps and encourages owners of properties to make use of their deserted spaces.

Hence one can safely say that Riwaq has succeeded in shifting the paradigm from gentrification (having the rich replace the poor in the historic centers) to having the local community benefit from its built environment and regard it as a source of income. In effect, the phrase “cultural heritage as a tool for economic development and social change” stops being a slogan and becomes truly meaningful.

¹ See Khaldun Bshara and Jacques Barlet, *Restoration and Rehabilitation in Palestine, Hosh el Etem in the Historic Centre of Birzeit* (Namur: Institut du Patrimoine Wallon, 2013).

Financial benefit vs. historic value

Riwaq has successfully shifted the concept of rehabilitation from a narrow professional interest of saving historic buildings for their historic aesthetic and architectural qualities, to an income-generating venture for the local community. **Benefit** seems to be the magic word or action that made a big difference. And yes, benefit means having a few dollars in one’s pocket at the end of the day, as well as a new skill in conservation. Benefit also means to have one’s child— daughter or son— or one’s grandmother, enjoy a beautifully restored historic building or neighborhood. While the professionals, the intellectuals, and the cultural heritage lovers value cultural heritage for its history—its aesthetic and rarity— the impoverished local community’s appreciation for an historic building or historic centers come as a result of having *benefited* from cultural heritage.

A happy marriage (if such a thing exists!)

Fragmented ownership as well as absentee landlords pose a major obstacle and make most rehabilitation projects impossible. In order to surmount this problem, Riwaq opted for long-term leases between property owners and users. In return for refurbishing a building without the owner paying a single penny, the owner gives a local non-governmental organization the **right to use** the newly renovated building free of charge for at least ten years, depending on the amount of money that Riwaq spends on its restoration. Riwaq, on its part, raises the funds necessary for a public project (community, cultural, women, children and youth centers, a village council, a public library or computer center) that benefits the local community at large.² Hence this “happy marriage” or “ménage à trois” between building owners, local users, and Riwaq has made it possible to make available many private buildings for public use.

In addition to providing community centers, Riwaq often gives priority to projects that benefit the community as a whole, such as the restoration of shared public spaces, a village plaza, children’s playgrounds, infrastructural works, or paving alleys and streets. Such enhancement of shared spaces not only improves the standards of living in the historic center but renders it possible for people to come together in inclusive, democratic, and secular spaces. Change requires an exchange of ideas, and an exchange of ideas requires getting together—“thrown togetherness”³ and getting together needs a space: a plaza, an amphitheater, a sidewalk, a bench, a tree, a community or cultural center, a playground...

² SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency and AFSED, the Arab Fund for Socioeconomic Development have been the primary donors for Riwaq’s restoration and regeneration programs.

³ See Ash Amin, “Collective culture and urban public space,” *Public Space*, accessed December 27, 2014, <http://www.publicspace.org/en/text-library/eng/b003-collective-culture-and-urban-public-space>; see also Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: SAGE publications, 2005), 5-13.

Restoration vs. constructing new

Last, but certainly not least, by using local materials, appropriate building techniques, as well as reviving the barter system of payment in kind (*al ’oneh*), Riwaq succeeded in making the necessary shift in conception and reality that renovating an old house is by far more economical than building a new one.⁴ Based on this, Riwaq initiated community-based **housing schemes**, which are discussed at length in Chapter 10.

This book

This book is divided into two parts: while Part 1 addresses conceptual and theoretical issues of rehabilitation, Part 2 describes, reflects and analyzes at length, six different rehabilitation case-studies that have been implemented by Riwaq as part of the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project.

Part One: The Regeneration of Rural Palestine

“In Search for Spatial Possibilities” by Yara Sharif stems from the need for an alternative discourse that can nourish the Palestinian space of imagination. Starting from within the historic centers and engaging in what happens in-between, she attempts to re-read and re-draw the Palestinian map by stripping it of the lines of the dominant power, exposing hidden topography born from everyday practices. The new layers—or what she calls ‘imagined moments of possibility’—provoke a critical form of practice, one which engages with spatial and social realities.

Nasser Golzari moves between scales and layers to build on the spatial ideas explored earlier in Sharif’s chapter. He views the design proposals taking place in the village of Beit Iksa and its surroundings as a fundamental part of the process of thinking and engaging with the community as well as with the map. Unlike what might be seen as an addition—or a side exercise—students’ involvement in the process have taken the whole idea of revitalizing historic centers into a highly creative level, offering responsive design and alternative forms of architecture that address the sociocultural and political conditions. Between zooming in and zooming out, these proposals, as we will see, break the isolation enforced on Palestine, not only on the physical space, but also on the space of imagination. Khalil Rabah has found inspiration for a number of his art works in Riwaq as an institution, in both *Riwaq’s Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine* and in Riwaq’s 50 Village Rehabilitation Project. In his

⁴ According to Riwaq’s experience in the restoration of single buildings, the cost of restoration is up to 50% of the cost of constructing the same square meters with contemporary construction technologies. As a result of spending a total of \$6,385,635, Riwaq renovated 33,077 m2 and rehabilitated 16,648 m2 of courtyards and terraces. See Khaldun Bshara, *Tashgeel: Riwaq’s Job Creation through Conservation 2001-2011*(Ramallah: Riwaq, 2011), 52-53.

essay, artist Rabah writes: “*Another Geography* visualizes the biennale’s disjointed locations with stacks of postcards depicting each of the villages, serving as mementos for the sites... the work contextualizes the concept of an artistic forum within a fragmented landscape, making the villages themselves part of a global art discourse.” Rabah’s artwork shows how an NGO like Riwaq can benefit from artistic platforms such as the biennale to advance Riwaq’s sociocultural and political agenda.

Anthony Tung’s essay "Promise and Contention in the Holy Land," is an impressionistic intellectual journey through the highlands of the West Bank. Tung is shocked by the "omnipresent latent volatility" he encounters. He, however, delights the ancient rural landscape, which he describes as "evocative beyond expectation." Having written about Israeli efforts to reconstruct the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem, Tung now contemplates the vistas to be found on the other side of "walls of separation and confinement." In his contribution “Palestine Fast Forward: Riwaq and the Preservation of Progress” Craig Konyk describes how Riwaq’s preservation thinking presents a progressive case study for contemporary concerns of urbanism and national identity. Craig writes: “Pedagogically, as actual built case studies, Riwaq has meaning far beyond its local application. The introduction of these examples to students from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) have a profound influence over the students’ approach to architecture, preservation, urbanism and the social aspects that define ‘who we are in history’.” Craig is interested in the role of preservation and how it is called upon to negotiate the discipline that “by its nature...is conservative, yet at the same time intervenes in space as a mode of social activism and community organization.”

In his essay entitled “Rural Urbanization: the Commodification of Land in Post-Oslo Palestine,” Khaldun Bshara argues that the conditions of the post-Oslo era contributed to the land commodification processes in Palestine. Instead of having the land at the very center of production and reproduction, rural Palestine has become a real-estate commodity stripped of its social meanings. For Bshara, treating rural Palestine as a commodity threatens the quality of life and time, and jeopardizes all these possibilities of land beyond the market value. He concludes by suggesting the “de-marginalization of rural Palestine” by reversing what he refers to as the “colonial conditions,” thus enhancing socioeconomic and sociocultural “rural interdependency.”

Part Two: Village Generation: Selected Case Studies

Part 2 of this book includes six contributions from Riwaq’s senior architects. While each one has had the experience of working on a number of projects in different villages, each chose to write, in detail, about the one village/ experience that was basically “theirs.” Even though there might be many similarities in the nature of the rehabilitation projects carried out in these villages, each one of the architects opted to concentrate on a different aspect of their case study and the way in which they tackled the same issues and the same challenges. As the reader will soon learn, each one of these villages had its own specificity that imposed itself on the nature of interventions and the end result of the rehabilitation project.

Perhaps the most contrasting two case studies, with regard to the different approaches to rehabilitation, were the cases of Birzeit and Adh Dhahiriya. In his article “Regenerating Birzeit’s Historic Center: An Integrated Approach,” lyad Issa addresses the need for strategic planning and appropriate legal frameworks and “bylaws” to strike a balance between heritage development and heritage preservation. For him, the regeneration of Birzeit was made possible through parallel processes of dynamic planning and physical interventions. Birzeit’s case study shows that “planning has gone hand-in-hand with the implementation of key projects and improvements on the ground.”

Unlike Birzeit’s regeneration process, Michel Salameh chose to coin Riwaq’s series of discrete physical and non-physical interventions in Adh Dhahiriya as “snowballing regeneration.” While in Birzeit, the series of projects and interventions were guided by intensive research, community participation, and strategic planning, the series of interventions *themselves* have guided Adh Dhahiriya’s regeneration plan, negotiating on-the-grounds of Adh Dhahiriya and the restoration sites what is possible/impossible within a particular space and time. Adh Dhahiriya’s case study, nevertheless, shows that an active municipal council can be a game-changer in the rehabilitation process.

In the case studies of Hajjeh and ‘Abwein, there is an implicit and explicit quest for the lost social or deteriorated “commons.” In a completely different approach, Shatha Safi gets her inspiration by closely observing the local community’s practice and use of spaces. In her contribution “The Revitalization of Hajjeh,” Safi builds on local knowledge and spatial practices including the incorporation of native design elements as well as employing the concept of *al ’oneh*; a traditional exchange system utilized to carry out the first housing scheme implemented through the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project. Safi suggests that *al ’oneh* is not only a “mode de fair” (implementation) but also of “savoir” (knowledge) production in the attempt of recreating the notion of the “common.”

Cultural Infrastructure: Spaces for Social Change

- Towns
- Villages
- ◆ Towns / ◆ villages where Riwaq has been implementing "Job Creation through Restoration Projects" (2001-2015)



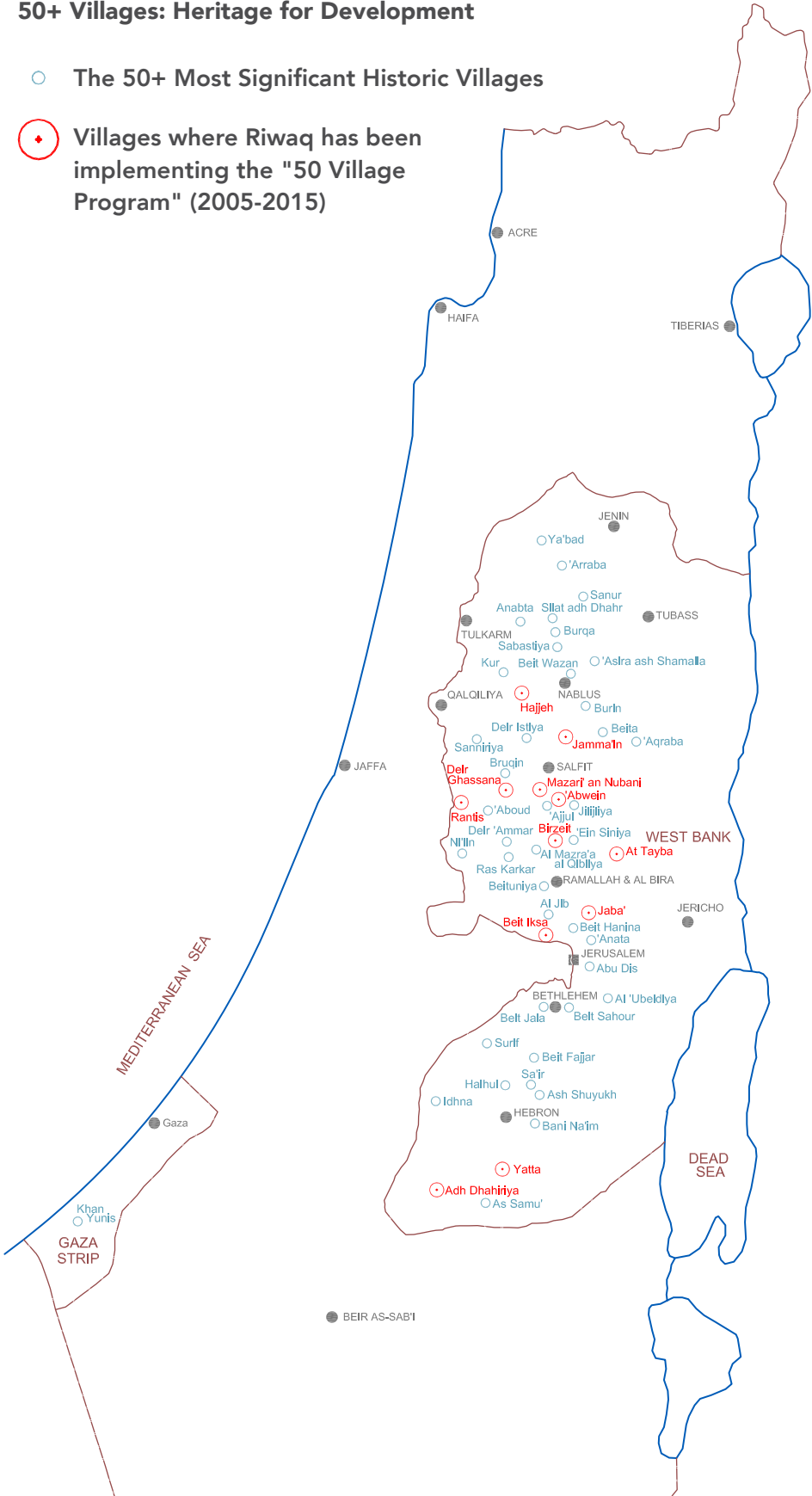
Throne Villages: Memory Palaces and Castles

- Throne Villages
- Throne villages where Riwaq has been implementing the "Preventive Conservation or Community Projects"



50+ Villages: Heritage for Development

- The 50+ Most Significant Historic Villages
- ◆ Villages where Riwaq has been implementing the "50 Village Program" (2005-2015)

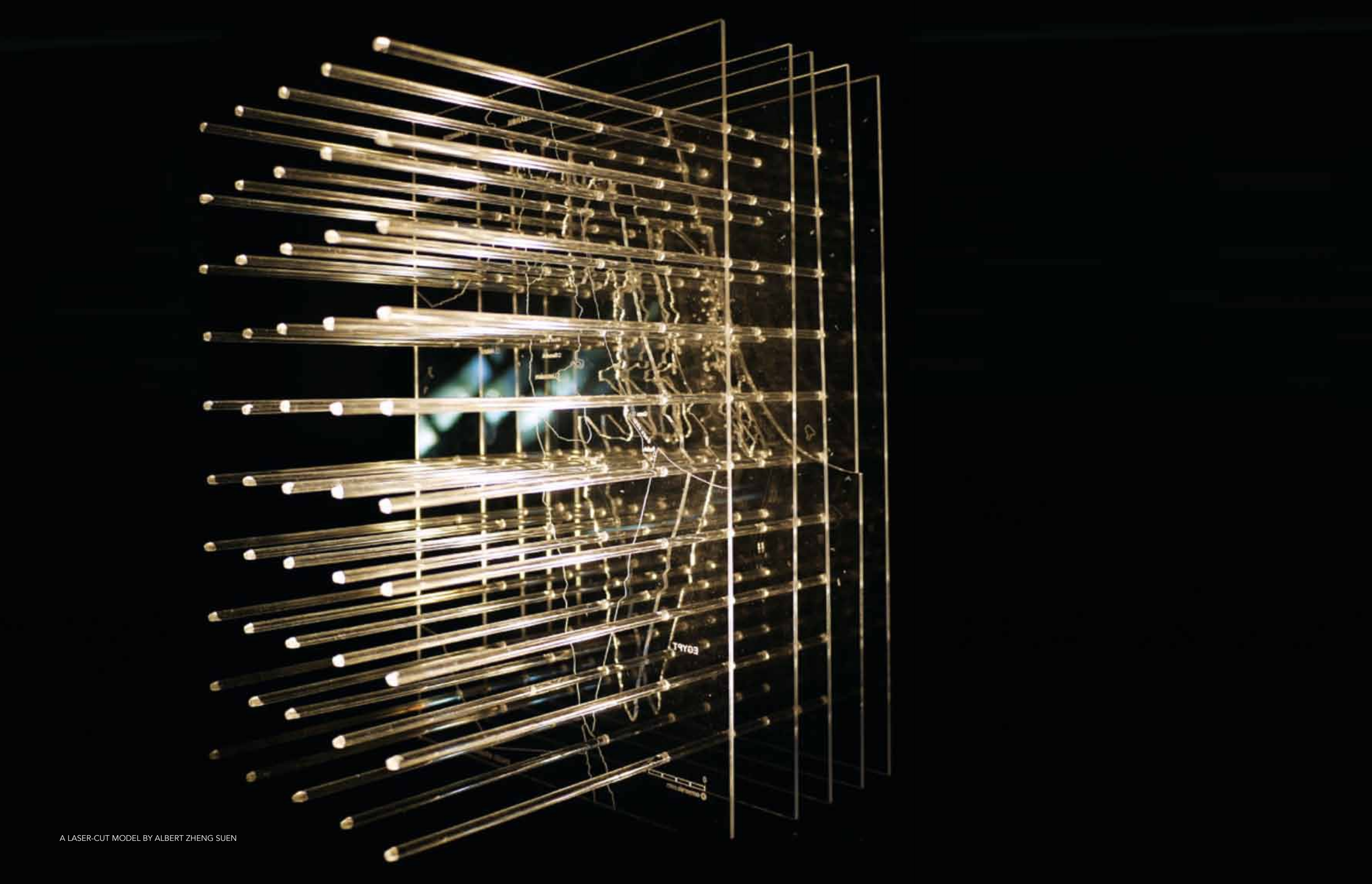


While Safi found the commons/the social in the concept of *al 'oneh*, Lana Judeh found it in-between private spaces and the village's dumps. While most of Riwaq's rehabilitation projects opt for the obvious, i.e., the reconstruction of run-down or ruined structures, Judeh introduces the concept of an "archaeological park" in which ruined structures were converted into communal public spaces used by the villagers for entertainment. In her article entitled "The Regeneration of 'Abwein Village: Living Archaeology," Judeh describes how "bringing back life" should not necessarily entail the rehabilitation and the reconstruction of ruined structures, but rather, how new functions, meanings, and borders could be equally rewarding. For her, blurring long-lived dichotomies such as public/private, indoor/outdoor, building/ruin and built/un-built might help communities in their quest for the common.

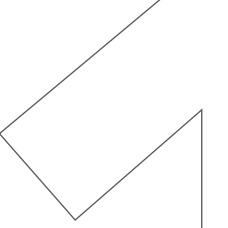
In her contribution "Deir Ghassana Revitalization Project," Ruba Salim addresses the importance of successful partnerships and the sustainable commitment of the local active NGOs in the village towards the rehabilitation initiative. Physically and spatially, Salim sees Riwaq's conservation of single building projects, the large-scale rehabilitation projects in the different neighborhoods, and the renovation of smaller public pockets and courtyards, as part and parcel necessity to achieve the "visual and physical connection" between the different neighborhoods, therefore creating a "comprehensive narrative" for the village as a whole.

In their contribution "Jaba' Regeneration: an Architectural Landscape Approach, Photo Essay" Leandro Couto de Almeida and Renad Shqeirat approach the village of Jaba' as an ecosystem and explore the offerings of architectural landscape as a discipline to a site with a multitude of environmental and geopolitical problems. The regeneration of Jaba', they suggest, "can find an ally in the surrounding landscape. Elements as topography, water, and vegetation have the capacity to address the village's current problems and assume a performative role in structuring the scene."

Suad Amiry is a writer and an architect. She is the author of a number of architectural and non-fiction books. Her book "Sharon and my Mother-In-Law" was translated into twenty languages and won her Italy's prestigious literary award, "Permio Viareggio" (2003). Her most recent book, "Golda Slept Here" was awarded the 2014 "Nonino Prize" in Italy. Amiry is the founder of Riwaq in Ramallah, Palestine. In 2011, she presented "My Work My Hobby" at TEDxRamallah.



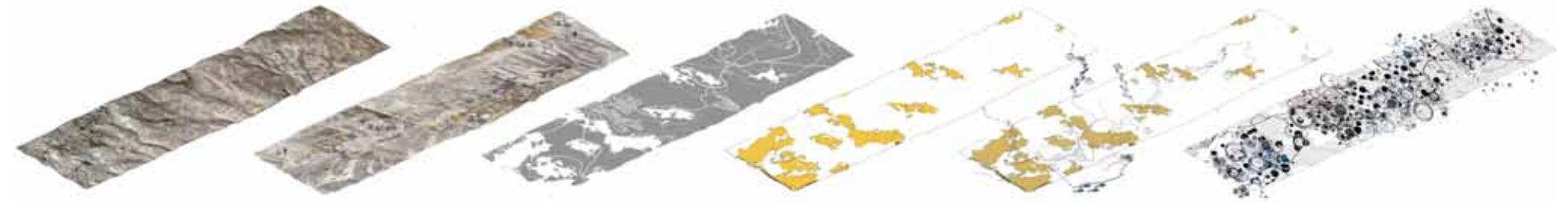
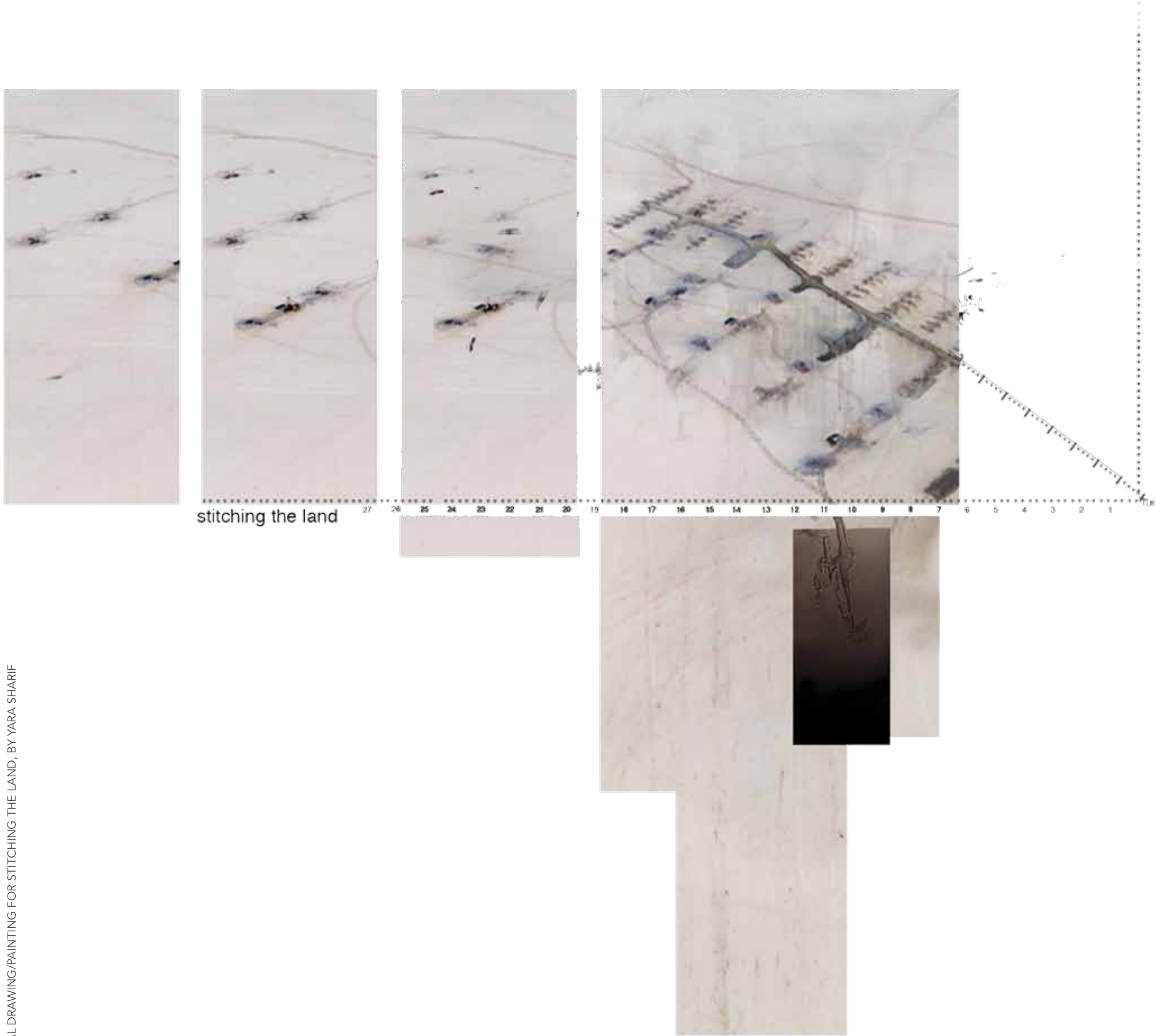
A LASER-CUT MODEL BY ALBERT ZHENG SUEN



CHAPTER

In Search for Spatial Possibilities

Yara Sharif
(all illustrations and images by the author)



MATRIXES OF POSSIBILITY: A MULTI-LAYER REPRESENTATION OF LAND, BY YARA SHARIF

In Search for Spatial Possibilities

1. Matrixes of possibility

With the urban morphology of the land being pushed to its extreme, Palestine today is being left with an absent mental map, hardly making sense of where its space starts or ends. Stemming from the need for an alternative discourse that can nourish the Palestinian spaces of imagination, one needs to look beyond the conventional in order to cultivate change. Re-reading, or re-drawing the land from a new perspective, by stripping it of the dominant power of lines to expose the hidden dynamic topography, is becoming of sheer urgency.

Riwaq saw in the concept of the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project a key tool to reconstruct an alternative Palestinian map; it is a conceptual shift that moves away from its conventional activities – i.e. the documentation and conservation of single buildings into an exploration of the wider urban context while also protecting the built heritage. Riwaq’s aims are also embedded within a conscious approach to explore what could be done with limited resources, and to cultivate possibilities for change from within Palestinian historic fabrics.

The following chapters will shed a light on our attempts to re-think the map, creating possibilities while working with Riwaq on the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project. On one hand, we aim to offer a new dimension to the historic centers in the West Bank by relating them to the wider urban context, while on the other hand, we hope to contribute towards offering the alternative map that Edward Said called for:

“In the history of colonial invasion maps are always first drawn by the victors since maps are instruments of conquer. Geography is therefore the art of war, but can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter map and a counter strategy.”⁵

⁵ See Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession; The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969-1994* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 416.

The new layers being created—what we call “imagined moments of possibilities”—ought to be seen as the matrixes and networks that can begin to stitch together the fragmented spaces. Some of these moments might be speculative in their nature, and at times they can even be seen as ironic. However, their ultimate aim is to provoke a critical form of architecture, one which engages with actual spatial and social realities.

We therefore regard the “process” itself, which involved finding, mapping, re-drawing and representing, as a fundamental part of creative thinking and spatial engagement, and it is this above all that we want to share with you. Our conceptual discussions using the techniques/media of drawings, photos, collages and diagrams, are aimed to reflect, interpret, analyze, question, exaggerate and imagine possibilities. Therefore, they all form a necessary part of the whole.

Furthermore, bringing in local narratives from these towns and villages in the Palestinian West Bank plays a crucial role in the process. Narrating daily life not only helps us to trace the different spatial patterns across the map, but also to explore whether new connections can be made between the different layers of social spaces. These narratives and small observations have informed us while defining the scope of our interventions, as will be seen from the projects we will present. Simple observations were at times seen by us as a moment to celebrate, and they were therefore then developed into a concept and a strategy for change.

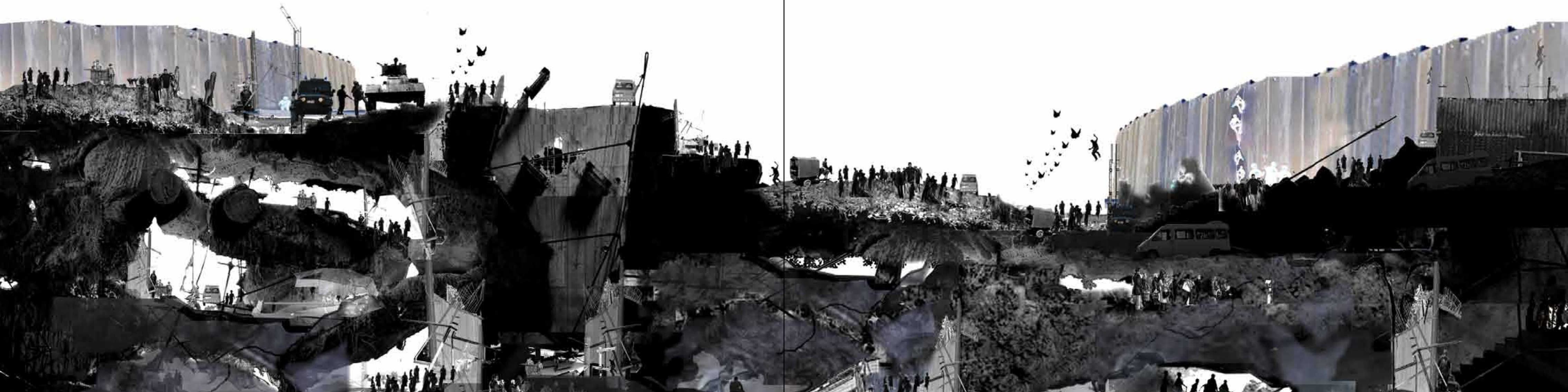
2. Cutting and breathing: Surface, Air and In-Between⁶

The following examples are fragments of different moments of possibility, which we have captured while looking at the historic centers. These were taken by cutting the occupied land of the West Bank as a desire to explore its

potentials. The outcome is a series of readings that take place on the *surface*, in the *air*, and also *in-between*. These three different spatial components form the framework for restructuring our imagined map of the West Bank.

⁶ This concept has been developed as part of my doctoral research by design. The content is an extract selected from different chapters. See Yara Sharif, "Searching for Spaces of Possibility and Spaces of Imagination within the Palestinian Israeli Conflict: Healing fractures through the dialogue of everyday behavior" (PhD diss, University of Westminster, 2011).

CUTTING AND BREATHING: SURFACE, AIR AND IN-BETWEEN, BY YARA SHARIF



2.1 Surface: the not-so-ordinary

“I cannot get you into Nablus, but I can get you to Burin from where you can walk to the town just up the hill some thirty minutes or so.”

“Yes, yes, of course, we know, we have been on the road, or more accurately off the road, since eight in the morning. It is already three hours now. We started our trip by walking across Birzeit checkpoint mound, and then Al Jawwal dirt mounds and Dora Al-Qare.”

(Suad Amiry, “Getting There”)

Being conscious of one’s surroundings is now related to how many checkpoints that we as Palestinians have to go through daily, how many alternative routes we can create across the confused landscape, and indeed to the stories that one needs to make up in order to survive and get on with life. As much as this troubles the mind, it is also loaded with potential and creativity, which then needs to be read in its spatial dimensions.

Since time and mobility have become key features in the dialogue of daily life in Palestine, the quest is for a counter-space, which can carve out new urban and social realities. Perhaps the most outstanding outcome of such a reality is the everyday forms of spatial resistance already taking place. The emergence of small-scale networks and informal agencies in the West Bank taking control over daily lives to survive—whether they are commuters, work hunters, farmers, porters, van drivers, etc.— are all in one way or another drawing new, if invisible, lines on the map.⁷

Today, Palestine is very much about two aspects: memories of the past, and the narratives of the present which mark time and space with such brutal clarity. Informal travel routes like *Wadi Al Nar*, *‘Roller Coaster*, and *Tora Bora* have become embedded within our narratives. The sewage tunnel, the daily “night hunters” crossing the border to seek work, Banksy’s drawing of a hole on the wall, porters and vendors across no-drive zones, as well as many other attempts to capture moments of hope, have all started as individual initiatives and turned later into collective ones. Despite the ephemeral nature of such activities, and the fact that they appear and disappear with the emergence

⁷ See Rema Hammami, “On the Importance of Thugs: The moral economy of a checkpoint,” *MERIP Middle East Report* 34 (2004): 26-34. Hammami, in her writings on Surda and Qalandia checkpoints, has referred to the role and importance of the Ford van drivers as a network given the absence of other structures, as noted on page 27: “In Palestine the absence of mass organizations, networks of informal sector workers have stepped into the gap. Thus the unlikely symbols of the new steadfastness are not national institutions, but rather the sub-proletariat of Ford van drivers whose semi-criminal bravado is summed up by the ubiquitous Nike “no fear” stickers emblazoned on their rear windshields ... the same thuggishness has become a crucial force for everyday resistance and organizing at checkpoints – not just to deal with the crowds and traffic jams but also deal with the thuggishness of soldiers.”

of conditions, what marks them out, however, is the way that so-called “non-spaces” are being transformed by everyday life into real spaces. Below is an excerpt from Suad Amiry’s writings illustrating this point:

“I froze, listened and fearfully examined all that surrounded me: suddenly there were hundreds and hundreds of dark silhouettes. There were ghosts there, there were ghosts everywhere. Some appeared from behind ghostly olive trees, somewhere still winding along narrow paths ... some were fast in motion, some were slow, some hovered in large groups, some in small, some in pairs, some alone ... I stood there and wondered: was it a carnival of existence or a carnival for survival? Was it a dance for life or a masquerade of death? ... Once I got rid of my fears and the black spot in my heart, I figured out what it was: an innocent Saturday evening chase for a living.”⁸

⁸ See Suad Amiry *Nothing to Lose but your Life* (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2010), 64-65.



50 + in-between

The formation of these collective moments in the West Bank—in their invisible and subversive manner—are managing to stretch social spaces far beyond the given. These creative daily practices are taking place within historic centers as well as on the margins and in leftover spaces. They are leaving us with new readings to the map that can add to the matrix of Riwaq's 50 Village Rehabilitation Project. By pulling together these micro-scale events,

Palestine can no longer be read as merely being formed in the city or the village; it is also now the *in-between*, the left-over spaces, the moments in which people move, remember, wait and try to reconnect and heal. In summary, Palestine today is very much about the not-so-ordinary life.⁹

⁹ See Sharif, "Searching for Spaces of Possibility and Spaces of Imagination within the Palestinian Israeli Conflict: Healing fractures through the dialogue of everyday behavior."

2.2 Air

While offering a critique to the current strategies of occupation, we look to the *air* as adding a new layer to the matrix. Stepping away from the exhausted surface of the land, birds are seen as tools of spatial reclamation; they represent a form of observing, reading, and stitching, which cannot be reached by humans on the ground.

Taking hence the air as our new medium of intervention, we investigated how to reconnect the fragmented historic centers together in the sky. A series of design interventions emerged. It is a well-known fact that Palestine has one of the richest habitats for bird migration in the world— only second to Panama—and as such, hosts about half a billion birds every season.¹⁰ However, what we found even more astonishing is the other dimension that these birds hold along with their beauty and poetic nature. Indeed, it is an ironic hidden layer that we came across while trying to understand the Israeli obsession for political and military control.

Apparently, this Israeli obsession with control has also so invaded the airspace above the West Bank that a new definition of aerial boundaries had to be invented just to deal with the Palestinian/Israeli situation. Thus, according to the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreement, "All aviation activity or usage of the airspace ... shall require prior approval of Israel."¹¹ Consequently, it was proposed that the sovereign "ceiling" for Palestinians should be significantly lowered, leaving the upper layers of airspace in Israeli control.¹²

An invisible map of exhaustive surveillance and military action has been born as a result, as described by Eyal Weizman here:

" ... The [West Bank and Gaza Strip] most intensively observed and photographed terrain in the world ... Every floor in every house, every car, every telephone call or radio transmission, even the smallest event that occurs on the terrain, can thus be monitored, policed or destroyed from the air."¹³

It is this same airspace—which in size is only 1/12th of the United Kingdom—that enjoys more resident bird species than that found in the whole UK. Add to that the huge number of migrating visitors every spring from their wintering grounds in Africa to their breeding grounds in Europe, and the same number

¹⁰ See Edward Platt, "The Migration," *Granta*, Summer 2008, <http://www.granta.com/Magazine/102/The-Migration>

¹¹ See Arab-Islamic States, Peace Agreements and Related, *Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (Oslo Agreement)*, 13 September 1993, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3de5e96e4.html>

¹² See Eyal Weizman, "Control in the Air," *Open Democracy*, 1 May, 2002, http://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politicsverticality/article_810.jsp%23%3C

¹³ Ibid.



returning back in wintertime. During the peak period between 10th March and 20th April each year, the residents of Palestine wake up to the sound of wings of 500 million birds migrating over the Great Syrian-African Valley.

“Take care...we share the air”:¹⁴ Ironically, the large number of soaring birds that migrate by day, so as to exploit the thermals rising from the land, in fact seems to be the main political crisis in the airspace in terms of negotiations and signed agreements. The heavy dependence of Israel on its air force, with high density of military airplanes and security measures, is disturbed by the possibility of collision with birds.¹⁵

50 + Birds: For us however, this magical reality bounding the airspace over Palestine is perhaps a key sign both for a sense of roaming freedom and for a dream of return. Birds are the moments of dream and the representatives of possibility. We would rather leave it for the birds to draw their own quiet map of possibility. Maybe they can remind us that there is still a level of weakness, somewhere on the other end, and a moment of power and hope that Palestinians can nourish on the surface of the land.

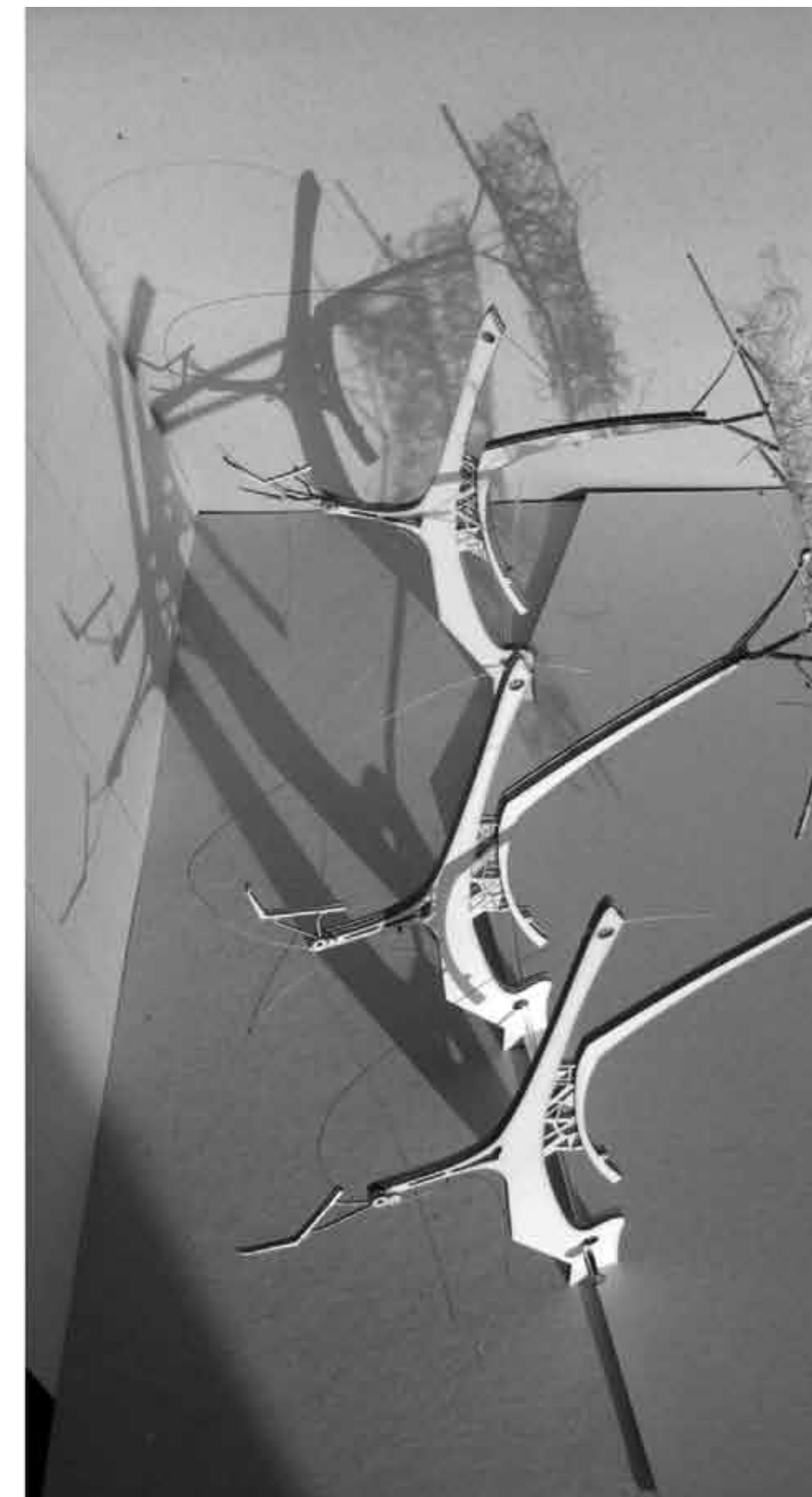
¹⁴ A poster for a guidelines booklet entitled “Take Care We Share the Air” was produced by the Israeli Air Force to raise consciousness and regulate pilots while flying.

¹⁵ See Platt, “The Migration,” Summer 2008, <http://www.granta.com/Magazine/102/The-Migration>. The report states that Israel has lost more aircraft through bird collisions than by any war or action by so-called “enemies.”



The Palestine Sunbird Pavilion: In a collaborative project to test out and explore further this concept of the aerial map, the Palestine Regeneration Team (PART)—co-founded by myself, Nasser Golzari and Murray Fraser—in collaboration with Riwaq, took part in the International Architecture and Design Showcase in connection with the 2012 Cultural Olympics in London.¹⁶ Within the Palestinian Sunbird Pavilion, the team showcased a mixture of actual “live” projects along with speculative projects, hinting at the new spatial possibilities when seen from the air.

¹⁶ The Palestine Regeneration Team (PART) is a design-led research team co-founded by Yara Sharif, Nasser Golzari, and Murray Fraser; see the official website of the Palestine Regeneration Team at: www.palestineregenerationproject.com



2.3 Underground and in-Between

Travelling around the West Bank, one is struck by the amount of damage being caused to the environment and the cultural landscape of the region, especially near the big cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus and Tulkarem. In this case I am not referring to the physical boundaries of concrete walls and checkpoints, or to the construction of high-rise buildings in historic centers, or to the illegal Israeli settlements occupying the top of the hills. What I’m talking about are the sudden cuts one sees in the landscape of olive terraces whereby whole mountains and hills are being completely flattened to create formal and informal clusters of stone quarries operated both by Palestinians and Israelis.¹⁷

Cutting underground, we are faced with a series of layers colliding with one another, no longer making sense of who owns what. Between the exploitation of natural resources, archaeology and scarcity of water, and the exploitation of stone as a building material, more voids are being created underground and in the in-between level. These voids in return are shaping life on the surface, and as such they call for urgent action.

For example, the stone-quarrying business has been taken over mostly by Israeli companies who are now confiscating land and initiating new outlets for material exploitation inside the West Bank area.¹⁸ No wonder then “It is predicted that a serious shortage of raw building materials will occur within a decade in the West Bank, due to the rate of extraction, since three quarters of what is quarried in the West Bank goes directly to Israel.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, therefore, stone exploitation is also showing that Palestine is often its own worst enemy, given the extent of the Palestinian contribution to creating the scars in the landscape. The issue is far more charged with Israel’s contention that stone— as an object— is becoming a form of “cultural currency.” This is something that is no longer taking place only in and around Jerusalem, or in illegal Israeli settlements, but is happening everywhere and duly ruining the land of the West Bank. As one rabbi, in an interview with the *New York Times* in 2007, stated proudly, “Today, every synagogue in the world has Jerusalem stone in it.”²⁰

¹⁷ See Sharif, “Searching for Spaces of Possibility and Spaces of Imagination within the Palestinian Israeli Conflict: Healing fractures through the dialogue of everyday behavior.”

¹⁸ See “Starting from the North to the South to Build Israeli Quarries: Confiscation of 16,733 Dunums from the West Bank,” *Al-Nahar*, September 1994. In a report published by the *Palestine-Israel Journal*, it is estimated that Israel has confiscated an area of at least 18,700 dunums in the West Bank to construct seven quarries in various locations. These new Israeli-run quarries represent a systematic pirating of Palestinians’ natural resources and the destruction of their environment.

¹⁹ See Nathan Jeffay, “Bibi’s ‘Economic Peace’ Faces Key Test at Quarries,” *The Jewish Daily Forward*, April 15, 2009, <http://www.forward.com/articles/104861/>; See also Sharif on quarries, in *Searching for Spaces of Possibility and Spaces of Imagination within the Palestinian Israeli Conflict: Healing fractures through the dialogue of everyday behavior*.

²⁰ See Paul Goldberger, “Passion Set in Stone,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1995, (<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/10/magazine/passion-set-in-stone>).

With the different layers of peeling, erasing and inserting into the landscape, the need to question what happens underground, and its mirror-reflection on the surface, are things which are becoming ever more crucial. What will be leftover on the surface and underground when illegal Israeli settlements are further “decorated” with stone from the West Bank, and with old-style windows and tiles stolen from traditional Palestinian villages? How will Palestine manage to bring back these dismantled layers in future years? Should they instead stay and fight for control over the land, or the materiality of the land?

Before that day comes however, we urgently need to rethink the surface and the underground of the West Bank region.

[html?sec=&spon=&pagewanted=7](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/09/nyregion/09litchfield.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper)); see also Christine Stuart, “In Historic District, Synagogue Plans are Criticized,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/09/nyregion/09litchfield.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper

3. Redefining the notion of heritage

The challenge for us has been to put these thoughts into the context of heritage and historic centers. Therefore, even the notion of heritage needed to be revisited throughout the process. Heritage architecture in this sense is no longer seen as a passive act of prevention of change, rooted in romantic values, as is common in countries like Britain. Rather, it can be treated as a dynamic form of enacting change. The concept and definition of heritage has hence gradually developed, opening up possibilities of new readings of urban spaces, buildings, as well as individuals. These possibilities embrace the contemporary activities, meanings, and practices that one can draw from the past to shape the future. This school of conservation theory focuses most on the role of the community, pattern of human activities, and the relativity of cultural values, as has been referred to by Jokilehti.²¹ UNESCO’s recommendations regarding the “Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas” have also set up some of the guidance for Riwaq’s recent approach, as follows:

“Every historic area and its surrounding should be considered in their totality as a coherent whole whose balance and specific nature depend on the fusion of the parts of which it is composed and which includes human activities as much as the buildings. All valid elements including human activities, however modest, thus have significance in relation to the whole which must not be disregarded.”²²

²¹ See Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 290.

²² Ibid.

4. Unfolding the relationship between time and space

Forming the different matrixes and networks needed to re-stitch the map is a cumulative process driven by the different events that shape Palestine. For that reason, the list of the fifty villages in Riwaq’s 50 Village Rehabilitation Project needs to be constantly revisited to ensure that we keep capturing any new possibilities that are emerging. In engaging with this wider context, one has to recognize what also happens at the micro-scale level, and what happens on the edges and the in-between spaces—all of which informs the living patterns of Palestinians, as well as their approach to cultural heritage. It paves the way to exploring spatial ideas that go beyond the conventional. After all, this initiative is aimed at provoking a critical form of architectural thinking and at finding new means to break the isolation of Palestinians, not only in terms of their physical space, but also in the space of imagination.

Between zooming-in and zooming-out in such ways, a creative space is left for the reader/viewer to imagine, question, and break boundaries in the West Bank. I have shared with you some of the fundamental ideas that deliberately try to escape from certain realities so as to carve out moments of possibility. These then, will surface in the design proposals discussed in Nasser Golzari’s subsequent chapter.

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