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e-mail: penerbit@salam.uitm.edu.my

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Conservation of Heritage as a Non-violent Resistance against Foreign Occupation

Ziad M. M. Shehada¹ Naziaty Mohd Yaacob²

Nila Inangda Manyam Keumala³

¹PhD Candidate, Department Of Architecture,
Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya,

²Senior Lecturer, PhD. Department of Architecture,
Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya,

³Architect, Expert Consultant to Department Of Architecture,
Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya.

zshehada@yahoo.com, naziat@googlemail.com, nim@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The conservation of old buildings and monuments with heritage value around the world is implemented as an effort to preserve, highlight and honour historical, cultural and religious significance. But it is entirely different in Palestine today. Here, the process of conservation took on a more drastic task of being a tool of resistance against foreign occupation. Building conservation becomes a necessity for much needed economic and social development. This article focuses on politics and space in Hebron (Al Khalil) city, one of the victims of the ongoing Palestine-Israeli conflict. The research methodology adopted followed the adaptive and analytical methods to analyse the urban space creation in old Hebron, a conflict of two entirely different objectives from two opposing political divides; colonializing projects of dismemberment by a foreign power and conservation as well as revitalization attempts of oppressed, rightful citizens. These conservation and revitalization projects target the rehabilitation of the social and urban fabric through spatial analysis of maps between 1994 and 2007. This article will show that illegal Israeli settlements created a splitting built-up geography which successfully isolated people according to ethno-national, gender and social classes. Their main aim is 'urbicide'. However, to a certain extent, the rehabilitation projects in 1996 managed to foil this insidious attempt, blocking or redirecting the Israeli occupation sprawl.

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Keywords: *Rehabilitation, Heritage, Non-Violent Resistance, Foreign Occupation, Hebron*

INTRODUCTION

The structure of urban cities is a dynamic one as it is related to changes in the population and economy; which in turn are related to technological innovations within the urban area. In the Palestinian context, whilst these factors are important, the primary influence on urbanization is the political situation, which is a key factor in determining the degree of economic growth. During the 46 years of Israeli occupation, Palestinian urban growth was limited in its extent and rate due to the significantly proliferation and expansion of Israeli settlements in all over Palestine, especially Hebron city.

Hebron, founded in the first half of the second millennium, is proclaimed as one of the oldest and most sacred cities in Palestine. Situated 32 km south of Jerusalem, Hebron is an important centre for three of the world's great religions; Islam, Judaism and Christianity (Simon et al., 1996). Although Hebron does not have outstanding palaces and monuments, with only a coherent traditional vernacular architecture, it has great religious significance. Hence it was listed in the tentative list of UNESCO's World Heritage Site on 2nd April 2012 (David C. Natcher, 2012). Hebron has a past full of important religious events related to the Abraham Mosque, around which the city developed and grew. However, for the last thirty years, to the utter consternation of the Palestinians and the whole world, the ancient city became a target of merciless, aggressive, forceful, inhuman, unlawful, Israeli occupation (Effarah, 2007). The original inhabitants were harassed, threatened and forced to flee the city for their very lives. These catastrophic events inevitably led to the urgent need for a massive rehabilitation exercise, to stop the rampant tearing down of the city to make way for even more Jewish settlements.

Surrounding the Abraham mosque is a dense historic fabric consisting of groups of houses which organically grew around patterns of irregular, narrow courtyards, and fragmented by zigzag vaulted paths and small routes (Figure 1). It is the soul and the most beautiful part of Hebron; known as

qasaba or old *suq*. However, its contemporary history was shaped deeply by Military war machine, giving rise to a profound uncanny and desolate quality, lingering in the empty, silent streets, further marked by unwanted military presence. These are some of the sad aftermath of urban conflict and forced displacement of former residents.



Figure 1: Compact urban tissue in Hebron old city

THE PROJECT OF DISMEMBERMENT

Since the invasion by Israel in 1967, the Palestine has been a goal of several settlement projects in breaking of international laws and against the United Nations Resolution No. 242 (Tomeh et al., 1999). The Oslo Agreement 1993 did not end occupation and illegal settlement activities. In fact Israeli settlers significantly doubled since 1990s, reaching more than 500,000 people in West Bank today (Samman, 2013). The outlook analysis (Figure 2) clearly reflect the non-stop rate of expansion, and illustrates the estimated annual increase in the Israeli colonies' area (about 523 dunums/year) which will definitely increase four times by 2020.

West Bank Settlements

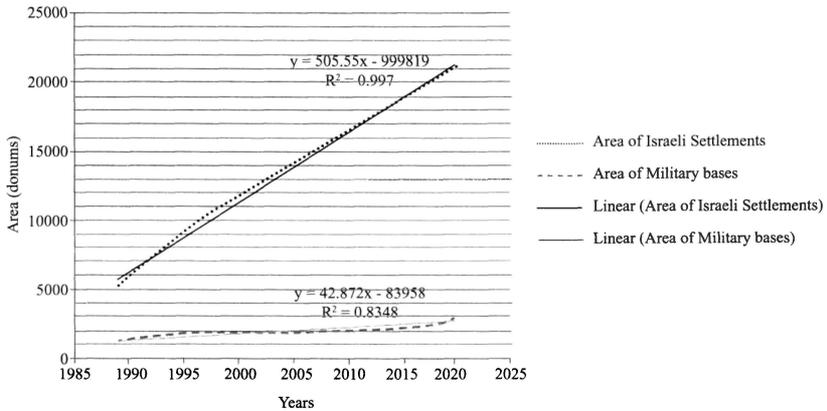


Figure 2: The rapid growth for the Israeli settlements from 1989 until 2020

The West Bank was transformed into a series of disconnected cantons by the rapid evolution of these settlements, also by creation a side roads network for Israeli only. These disconnected areas are comparable to the South African Bantustans which may never reach the status of a viable, sovereign polity. The current Israeli policies towards Palestinians are labelled apartheid by many across the globe (Beinin et al., 2006; Hilal, 2007; Misselwitz and Rieniets, 2006; Sorkin, 2005). At the centre of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was the problem of the crafting of space. In Palestine, space has a substantial flexibility conceptualized as “constantly transformed, morphed, claimed by action” rather than with respect to the static background of the conflict (De Cesari and Anthropology, 2008).

In 1981, more than 3,000 dunums of land were expropriated to construct houses for the Jew settlers brought in from other countries (Nakhleh, 2004). Militarization of the city by Israel to protect their settlers’ safety led to further segregation and the proliferation of borders, imprisonment, fear as well as humiliation for Palestinians. 4000 Israeli soldiers were stationed there to protect only about (200-400) settlers (Swisa, 2003). A manner of daily abuse by these soldiers and limitation of movements emerged disrupting Palestinians in the city, making life unbearable. This then pushed many Palestinians to flee causing a dramatic deterioration of the socio-economy.

In late 1967 there were about 10000 inhabitants in the Hebron city center. In 1996 it dwindled down to a mere 400 (Bishara, 2013). The drastic reduction of the local residents and the evacuation of 85% of homes in the city centre came about from the Israeli policy of discouraging people from living there. Amidst fighting and harassment, all entrances to the city were walled up except one (Figure 3). Extended curfews from ten to twenty days were imposed in the city (De Cesari and Anthropology, 2008). Arab families of questionable backgrounds were however encouraged to reside there. Empty houses were torn down. These soon forced home owners as well as tenants to get away *en masse* from the city centre which retained 99% of its old buildings (Tarākī, 2006).

All these, especially the construction of separation barrier, checkpoints, bypass tracks, and new settlements resulted in two overlapping but hierarchically organized various spatial shapes on same West Bank hills; the enclave and the archipelago (Petti, 2007). The former was topography of correlating Jewish settlements. The latter was the patchwork of Palestinian urban spaces and villages with main features of increasing disconnection, fragmentation and camp-like character.

The Oslo Agreement intensified segregation in Hebron instead of preventing further Israeli encroachment. Due to the settlements, the Palestinians and Israelis signed a Protocol of Hebron in 1997. The protocol states: “The city is divided into two areas; New City under Palestinian administration and the Old City under Israeli military control (Upper and Lower Hebron also called H1 and H2)” (Gordon, 2008, Jones and Pedahzur, 2013) (Figure 3). In the area of H2, the protocol places a double legal authority where settlers are liable to Palestinian Authority civil law and Israeli military. This research shows a vivid connection between the close proximity of Palestinians houses to those of Jewish settlers and the number of Palestinian inhabitants who left the area.

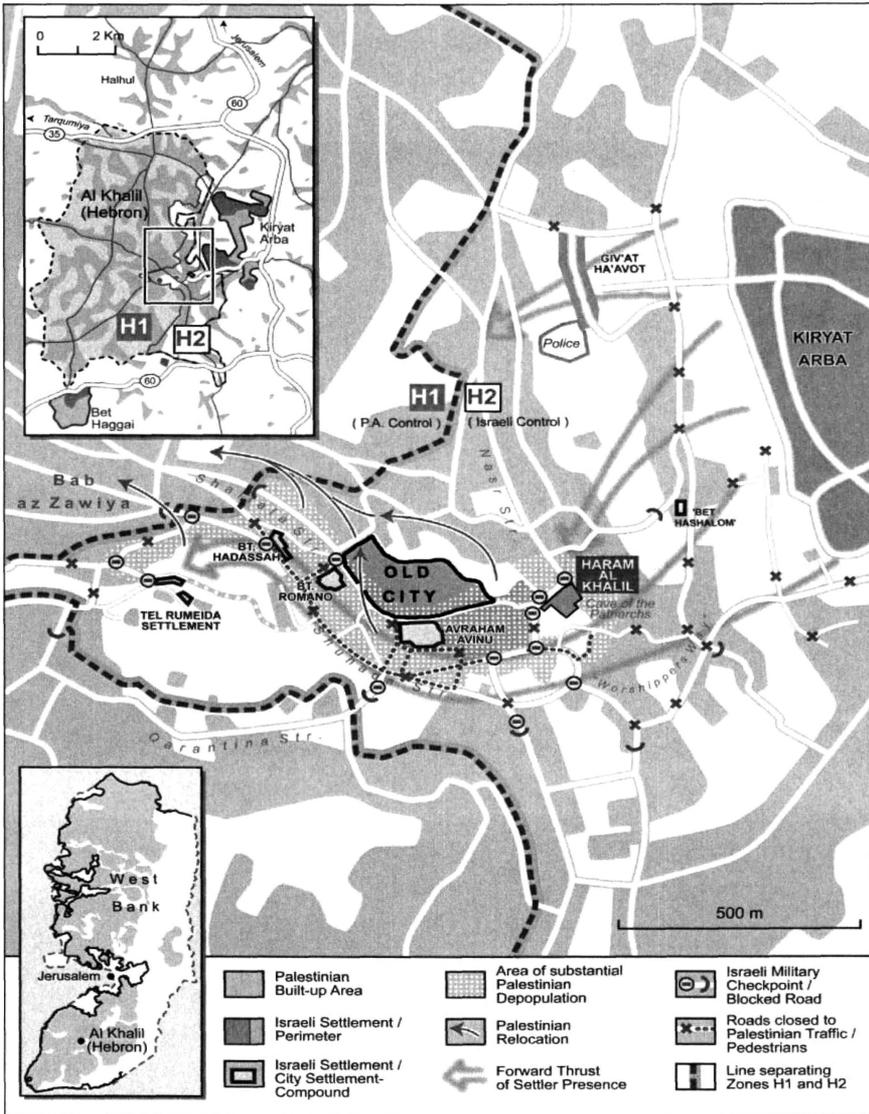


Figure 3: Geopolitical Map of Hebron Old City

The conglomeration of dismemberment and restoration in Hebron led to a vicious cycle of unending repetition without a way out. It got worse in this city with routes far from straightforward. Sociologists freely labelled this city as being stoically against modernism. Hebron did not reach the level of a modern city and urban space in sociologists' eyes, and to Palestinians, the city represented a locus of backwardness and tradition (Tarākī, 2006). Hebron today is the production of the heritage and space policies in volatile territories. In certain aspects, things went backwards, an example being the reinforcement of customary laws to address conflicts and produce resolutions, which altogether hastened the post 2000 collapse of the Palestinian Authority. In accordance with Hebron agreement, Palestinian policemen that localized in the Old Hebron City must not be armed nor equipped with cars and other facilities in carrying out their duties. Hence, these personnel were able to only use outdated, hardly effective tribal ways to enforce law and order (De Cesari and Anthropology, 2008).

THE RESTORATION PROJECT

Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) had many objectives. The major and most important objective was to counteract political pressure on local residents to vacate the Old City as well as to prevent the erection of more Jewish settlements. Projects were geared towards the resistance of Anti-Colonialism, elaborating via spatial methods to hinder the sprawl of Jewish settlement in Hebron. It also targeted the conservation and rescue of the old Hebron fabric based on scientific criteria and international charters (Nigro, 2006). The main idea was to make the old city livable once more. An intensive rehabilitation program was drawn up to facilitate the process of making existing dwellings on par with contemporary standards of habitation, to attract the return of former inhabitants including other homeless Palestinians. In the endeavour, the project preserved the cultural as well as the religious significance of Hebron. This effort of course inevitably overlapped with the sensitive position of the Palestinian Authority which was at the threshold of becoming a sovereign state (Weizman, 2012). Land, property, identity and cultural awareness were of paramount importance. Thus HRC collaborated with and administered the city instead of Palestinian Authority whose powers were extremely restricted due to full control of Israeli army in H2 area.

The HRC restoration projects followed neatly the political central events of last years. It all started in late of 1970s in the same time of the initial colonization of Hebron. A municipal board -elected by people- attempted to fix the derelict and decaying buildings besides providing basic essential services like clean water supply and electricity to residents. However, all these were put to a stop hastily by the dismissal and exile of the municipal council. An Israeli appointed body replaced the democratically elected members of the council (De Cesari and Anthropology, 2008). The Israeli military in 1980 authorized new settlements and Jewish inhabitants in Hebron heart. In 1979 illegal settlements actually began. The new Jewish settlers released Hebron master plan in 1984, calling for recovering the alleged Israeli assets relinquished from 1929 to 1936 (Ibid); these efforts aim to Judaize the whole city by displacing the original residents gradually. Finally in the late 1980s a group of brave young Palestinians stood up for their nation. They took up arms not on the battlefield but they utilized their knowledge and expertise in various disciplines. Together they began a series of important architectural and social surveys in Hebron. These young architects and scholars of the Hebron Polytechnic had a noble ambition to restore, preserve and conserve the historical, cultural and religious significance of their beloved Hebron. The spirit of the First Intifada gave them added strength when Palestinians as a whole began a much awaited march to save the Old City.

The status of Hebron then was on the negotiating table, excepted in the latest moment from Oslo accord II, the case of Hebron went on to become isolated due to Israeli's refusal to deploy its settlers. President Yasser Arafat's main goal was to present credible facts before signing the agreement (Payes, 2005). He particularly wanted the Palestinian citizens to be increased in areas under the Israeli control. The Palestinian Authority gave strong political and financial support to the rehabilitation projects in Hebron as well as in Bethlehem. Hebron then became a major heritage project site, a symbol of the re-birth of Palestine itself while Bethlehem geared more towards opportunities in tourism.

Battlefield Language

HRC focused in the initial years on the concept of 'first circle'. Employing the language of battlefield HRC referred to zones directly

surrounding the Jewish settlements where the goal was to restore ruined buildings and to provide basic infrastructure and basic amenities. Recently however, the organization adopted a more comprehensive developmental approach. Work on the ‘second circle’, further down from these settlements, started soon after with efforts to break down the wall separating the Old and the New City, thus physically linking both parts (Figure 4). While abiding by international conservation charters and standards, the HRC undertook a few alterations and improvements in old houses to adapt current requirements of inhabitants. These modifications cover the division of large clusters into smaller units, normally two-room with kitchens, bathrooms and separate entrances (De Cesari and Anthropology, 2008). These spatial alterations indicate the social changing in the Old City landscape, foremost a marked transformation in the families from extended to nuclear. Poor nuclear families without solid social relationships replaced extended families that used to live in relatively homogeneous quarters. Those extended families had then partly reorganized their neighbourhoods that based on kinship in the New City.

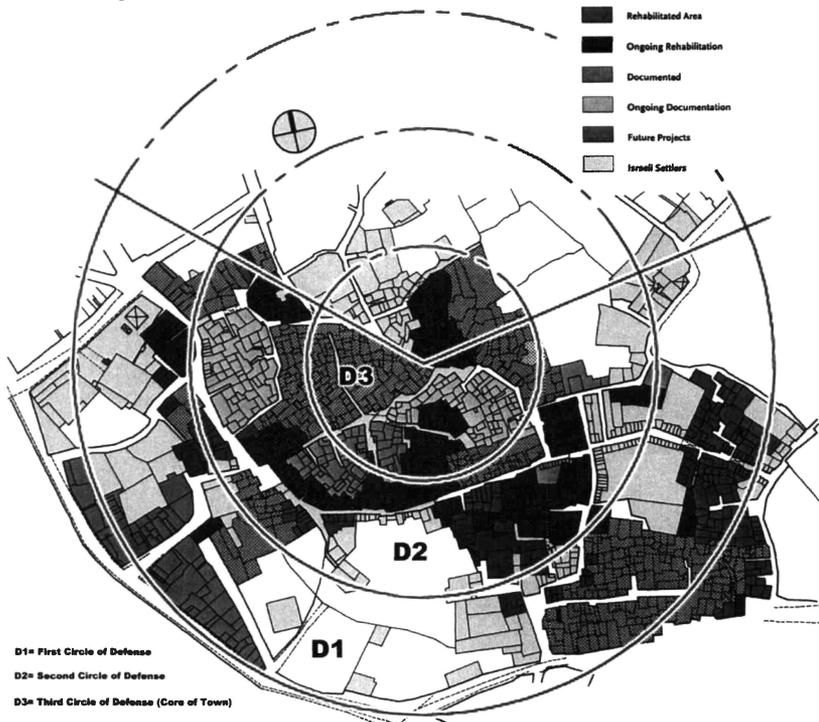


Figure 4: Stages of Rehabilitation as a Priority of its Proximity to Settlements

To counter this collective exodus, the Old City residents were given attractive offers; they include appropriate systems for rent as well as a number of free services like various tax reductions, health insurance, water, and electricity. This subsidization was stimulants to encourage the area repopulation and to reward Palestinians' service to the nation, living on the very battlefield. In order to reduce the impacts of boosting unemployment and deterioration of the social and economic situation, Old City's families were given additional food supplies per month by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) since the Second Intifada. Although there were no new surveys for Old City population to affirm the de facto latest inhabitants' number, HRC succeeded between (1996-1998) in returning back about (3000-4000) people to stay in the Old Hebron City (Dumper and Stanley, 2007, Platt, 2012).

The 1999 survey indicated that between (60-70%) of residents were living under poverty level. Two families only were incomes more than USD1000 per month (Tamari, 2008). This survey also showed that more than half the residents, 58%, owned their residential units, while the other 42% rented from absent owners. According to information provided by HRC's social unit, the number of tenants had increased after 2000 to nearly 60% of the residents of Old City (Qawasmeh, 2007). These data highlighted the continued departure of indigenous people, replaced by a flow of poor newcomers. It was also noted that most of tenants in 1999 were either native Hebronites or their immediate relatives.

Spatial Analysis for the Maps from 1994 Until 2011

According to the maps, there are 5 colonies surrounded the built-up areas in Hebron old city (Avraham Avinu, Beit Romano, Beit Hadasah, Tel Rumeida, and Kiryat Arba) with an area of 22.2 dunums (Swisa, 2003). Kiryat Arba settlement was set up in the eastern portion in 1970, starting the unwanted sprawl in the city. In 1980 things took a serious turn as efforts were made to quickly strengthen Jewish presence and settlement in the heart of Hebron. The Beit Hadassah settlement was immediately established near A-Shuhada Street in the centre of the Palestinian commercial district. A colony of Tel Rumeida to the south west followed, accompanied by the Avraham Avinu settlement in the south and the Beit Romano in the west (Ibid). This obvious sequence indicated a well thought out plan of firmly establishing the settlements. It was not done at random.

The Israeli colonies are scattered all over the city but are concentrated at the south, the colonies growth is fundamentally geared to the formation of blocs (they expand outwards and also toward each other). The colonies are administered by Israeli Council through a quite different operation and the settlers have been controlled by Israeli law. In 1994, it was estimated that the Israeli colonies population in the old city was around 200 Israeli colonists (David C. Natcher, 2012). The year 1994 has experienced a remarkable increase in the colonists' population where at least three of Hebron's illegal colonies have undergone expansion. It is noteworthy that a discrepancy has been between the average annual growth rate for Israelis in Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories (8.0%), and that in Israel (2.0%) (ARIJ, 2006). (i.e. Israeli growth rate in the colonies is four times more than in Israel).

It was a natural urban expansion and population increase in Hebron before 1967, where according to (PCBS, 2010) the population in Palestine have doubled every 25 years. Logically this increase should be outwards, However, the presence of settlements and Israeli army around the city has prevented this normal sprawl. The expansion had continued inwards until it arrived to the moment that cannot be tolerated, then many families left the old town towards other places. This departure was to the area H1, which is under the control of the Palestinian national Authority and thus the Israel government and settlers had achieved their goals of emptying the old town.

After the Oslo agreement (1993), Hebron was separated into two areas, area under the Palestinian authority (PA) control and area under the Israeli control as previously mentioned. Israeli colonies and their expansions, segregation walls and fences, by pass roads, military bases, observation towers and land levelling have been violating the Palestinian lands, separating the Palestinian communities from each other and from their lands. Confiscation of approximately 32% of Hebron land under various pretexts has imposed enormous limitations on Palestinian development (Samman, 2013). Significantly, the Israeli colonization has raised the population density in Palestinian built-up areas to reach 969 capita/km² of the area under Palestinian control when compared to the population density for Palestinians under Israeli control which decreased immensely to only 18 capita/ km² (Feuerstein, 2007).

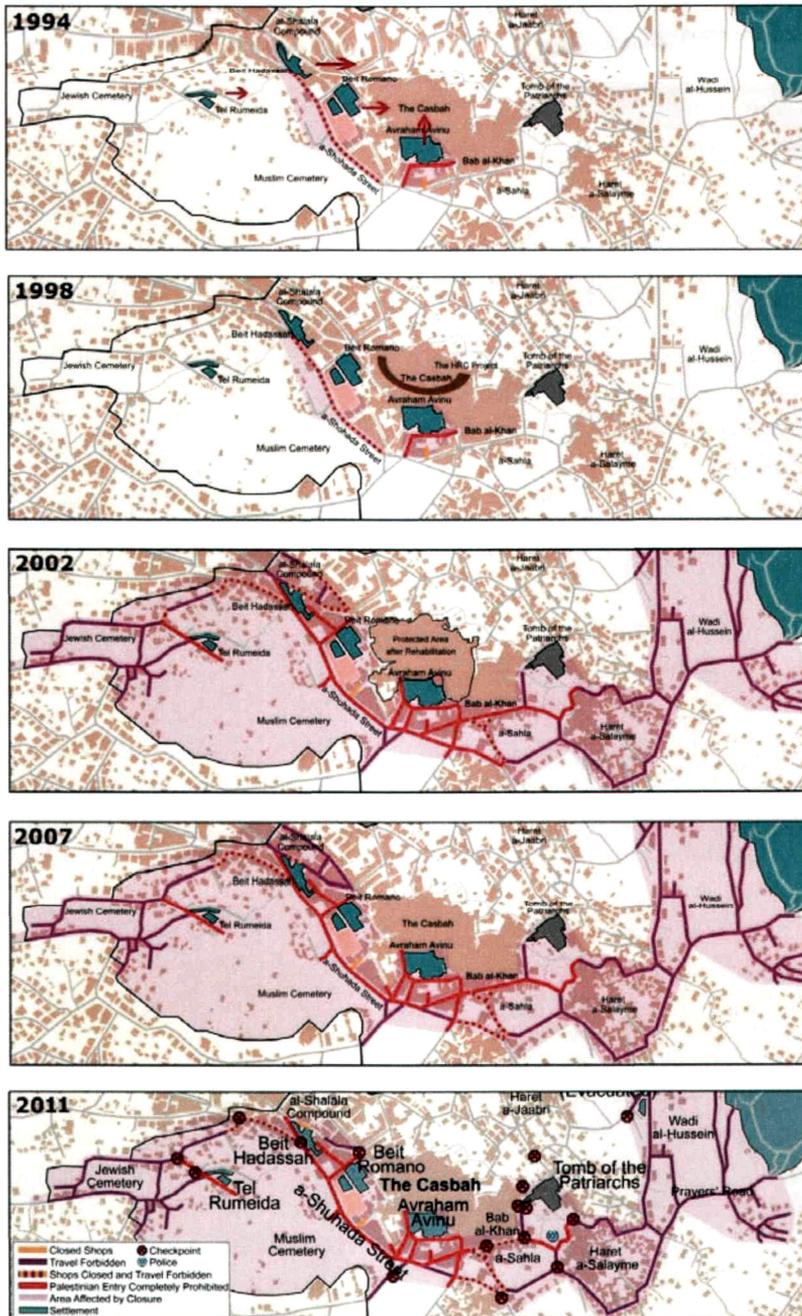


Figure 5: Settlements Sprawl and the Impacts of the Rehabilitation Project

It is worth mentioning that most of restored units were in the south of the city (the most dangerous part), thus they reserved the core of Hebron from any external risk. The result is no changes have occurred on the shape of the city from 1998 until now, but the majority of alterations had been on the surroundings. Actually, the Israeli army and settlers have attempted many times to break into the city but the presence of citizens prevented them. Between 2002 and 2011 the direction of expansion was in different ways, and the Harassments increased; more roads were closed, a lot of lands were confiscated, and checkpoints were established. These Actions reflect the state of anger and frustration happened to the settlers due to their inability to control the old town. The researcher believes that the accelerated changes during the past ten years prove the continuous Israel's intention to control the urban fabric of the city. If not for the Hebron Rehabilitation project, the city would have been now purely Jewish city without any Palestinians.

It is clear from the previous maps analysis that the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee succeeded in preventing Israeli settlement expansion and changing its direction although the expansion continued in other ways and forms. The HRC also provided much needed accommodation to more than 800 families at a minimum cost while taking into consideration closely the future needs of the occupants (Tamari, 2008).

The lack of available space for urban development due to the Israeli government's prevention of the city's master plan expansion and improvement created a situation where decision makers had to carry out restoration works on ancient buildings fast before the Jewish settlers got hold of them. In this context, Palestinian urban development differed greatly from Israeli colonial activities as urban development was urgent and necessary to accommodate population growth, while Israeli occupation was meant to divide Palestinian territories with malicious intents including destroying the geographical unity and depleting the country's natural resources.

Most important was the fact that HRC prepared a master plan for conserving Hebron Old City and devised mechanisms to guarantee its socio-economic revitalization including integration among different portions of the city (Qawasmeh, 2007). HRC aimed to conserve the historic fabric while simultaneously planning for future developments in tourism. The master plan of HRC however hinted at a contradiction, a steady

characteristic of heritage in Palestine generally, that HRC functioned at the same time non-governmental and governmental. In normal circumstances, preparing the master plan of a city is carried out by the local government. In Hebron it was implemented officially through international funding by a semi-governmental organization dedicated to heritage preservation. Due to its nature as a heritage non-governmental organization, HRC had successfully carried out a series of governmental functions in the fields of statistics, mapping, survey; state control (giving certificates of residency, surveillance, planning) and welfare (counselling, distributing health certificates, and public housing). In the beginning HRC was funded by the Palestinian Authority and Arab donations. Later the infrastructure of financial support diversified extremely towards major variegation due to its good reputation from successful, effective, humanitarian scientific projects. From the late 1990s, a number of increasing European donors contributed financially. Twelve million US dollars have been spent to date for the various projects (Laidi-Hanieh, 2006). A comprehensive conservation master plan is currently being developed by HRC, aided by the Swedish Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the expertise of the Palestinian NGO *Riwaq* (Qawasmeh, 2007).

Deconstruction Out of a Reconstruction

An astonishing fact was that the new urban geography seemed to have too many pitfalls. If Oslo Agreement years saw the reproduction of invisible and visible barriers, others were seen to divide Palestinians amongst themselves. This was evident in H1 and H2 where residents were divided according to class and social standing. With the collective departure of the families who could bear the higher prices of real estate elsewhere, the dismemberment converted Old Hebron City to a place of miserable and poor, stigmatized as a place filled with utter backwardness, crime and danger. The majority of those who remained in the City and newly moved to the restored houses were the typical exhausted Palestinian families.

The relationship between those two parts of the city was severed in a way so pervasive that HRC had to spend much energy to organize workshops and activities on social coherence issues. Conventional family visitation did not occur anymore and almost all new city residents have not travelled to the Old City for years in spite of being born in the Old City and still

owned the abandoned houses there (Gordon, 2008). Marriage, a prominent component of social integration had also in recent years been decreasing in number between residents of the two parts of Hebron due to the present stigma of the Old City.

This peculiar phenomenon arose which resulted in the social coherence dilemma that baffled the social workers and architects of HRC. The other critical problem was raising awareness among the people to generate a sense that they were living in a place with a significant history to the Palestinian nation and the world, hence to instil in them a strong obligation to their City. The HRC then initiated activities related to the concepts and all facets of development, an effort to check social erosion as Hebron became more and more fragmented. The committee began to look into broader spatial and social concerns to restore the city's social perspectives as relations were fostered again between all areas of Hebron. To cater to all these, a research centre, a social unit and a lawful department were set up together with a various social program of development. The social development agenda included diversified courses for training the unemployed, women; enjoyment events for kids; outreach actions like seminars, lectures on integration and heritage as well as school trips to the Old City to instil its value and great significance especially on the younger generation.

Factors That Determined the Success of Rehabilitation Projects At Hebron

The achievements and outstanding experience in Hebron were due to:

1. Acknowledging the truth however painful, addressing issues directly, recommending answers based on the truth instead of on hypothesis and analysis; and assessing based on communal investigations;
2. A good comprehension of the disposition of the outdated houses and the requirements of modern lodgings which then gave rise to the implementation of suitable solutions with the wants of the people uppermost as well as restoring the ancestral structures by emphasizing on utilization;

3. The inhabitants of the Old City as the focus group in the rebuilding exercise which then commenced with the handling of personal interior open areas being the main target in the homes rather than the exterior;
4. A speedy response towards the growing threat and fast proliferation of Israeli outposts;
5. Most importantly, the collaboration with and willing involvement of the dwellers as well as the different local organizations in a concentrated, joint effort with a single, common objective;
6. An efficient administration that obtained and capitalized on general consensus and unanimous decisions, which in turn garnered public interest, rather than focusing on separate actions that would not bring much impact;
7. Finding feasible answers to one of the most crucial problems in rebuilding – the proprietorship issue, where the solution was to hold on to original residents and landlords as legitimate owners;
8. The implementation of the rehabilitation works on houses that were empty first so that the task ran smoothly and fast without disturbances and having to house occupants temporarily at another building;
9. Financial assistance from third parties besides full government support; this led to achieving commercial success and generating jobs;
10. The rehabilitation work being done by the Restoration Committee proper with relevant experts, and not the by the ordinary populace, thus creating massive public awareness, solving problems well and getting the right solutions.

CONCLUSION

The Hebron Rehabilitation Committee's successes did not automatically arise from a vacuum but they were the product of immense, concentrated efforts laced with plenty of suffering as several serious problems cropped up during implementation of the projects. For instance, the Israelis

blocked and prohibited entry to the clusters of houses in the city, creating such difficult working conditions where workers had to move into the buildings to be restored with their families, working from within. Between 1996 and 1997, a total of 416 workers were arrested forcing restoration work to be stopped 108 times (Yavuz, 1998). In some buildings next to or in the vicinity of the Israeli settlers' apartments, the spaces facing these apartments could not be restored or worked upon at all.

The HRC projects were characterized by the simultaneous implementation of multiple tasks, showcasing the flexibility of heritage technology as is the norm with such projects elsewhere in the world. However, a difference here is the linkage to justice and life. Although doing a lot of things at one time, HRC architects did a good job restoring and preserving a very significant aspect of the national heritage whilst trying their best to halt Israeli settlement expansion by the repopulating of old city, maintaining the identity of Palestine as well as developing and managing Hebron.

HRC's technology linked to life was a direct response to the uricide and frequent process of dismemberment (a technology of destruction), the bulldozers literally obliterating Palestinian urban fabric along with multi historical layers. This technique is spatio-political for it seeks to organize the social relationships via their spatial configuration as "Rehabilitating houses is rehabilitating social life". Heritage conservation technology transforms relations between humans and objects. In Hebron it attempted to reconnect people with their historical past besides tracing the organic relation in the new city to create a conducive, livable environment. The past gives people roots with a sense of continuity and stability.

Therefore this case proves that the process of rehabilitation of historic buildings anywhere in the world can take on another dimension, another purpose pertinent to the survival of a very race; that of being a peaceful means of blocking the lawless, unprecedented, persistent invasion and encroachment of a sovereign land; of halting the rampant demolition of existing buildings and monuments; of preventing further illegal occupation and settlement sprawl; of maintaining the urban and social fabric of an ancient city; in actual truth, of trying courageously to hold on to the very soul of a people and a place of significance!

In 1998 HRC was awarded the internationally acclaimed and prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture, in recognition of its outstanding contribution to the preservation and rehabilitation of Islamic architecture in the Old City of Hebron. It also won the World Habitat Award in 2013 according to its efforts in rehabilitating more than 1,000 units and housing almost 6,000 people (Habitat, 2013).

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