

# Palestine: The Development of Fortified, Ethnically-exclusive Jewish Enclaves in The West Bank

Considering the Political Agency of Residual Landscapes in the West Bank

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*Amidst a series of dramatic events in recent weeks, the Palestinian strife of living under Israeli occupation for close to half a century has once again entered global media attention. Contributing to the headlines were two new Israeli announcements of Jewish-only settlement construction in the peripheries of East Jerusalem.*

The first- obfuscated by the fanfare of the United States Presidential elections- involving the announcement of 1,200 new Jewish-only housing units in Ramot and P’sgat Zeev, at the north end of the municipal boundary; and the second- ‘in response’ to the Palestinian bid for statehood recognition at the United Nations, involving the announcement of 3,000 new settlement units in unspecified locations throughout East Jerusalem, as well as the zoning and planning approval of the highly-contested area of E1 east of the city and adjacent to the West Bank settlement of Maale Adumim.



## Unilaterally Established Jurisdiction Through Urbanization

Following these announcements, the world’s attention was again drawn to the outright brazen geopolitical manipulations taking place ‘on the ground’ by Israel, outside of the peace negotiations, through unilateral settlement construction. Yet, more than simply highlighting Israel’s consumption of occupied land, the announcements underscored what has for decades been the less recognized political agency of architecture and urban design in the trajectory of this conflict. At the core of the Israeli occupation stands a fixation on the de-facto power that rapid urban development – the logic of “facts of the ground” – affords settler-colonialism in its quest for territorial gain. Urbanism has become a tactical form of war by other means.

As the development of fortified, ethnically-exclusive Jewish enclaves spreads across this contested landscape, it has invariably contributed to the marginalization of long-standing Palestinian agrarian practices and traditions. Those farmers still determined to cultivate their land do so under great duress, navigating permit, travel, and checkpoint restrictions, as well as struggling with water access and frequent attacks from armed Israeli settlers. Palestinian society’s strong rural and nomadic roots therefore remain constantly threatened and their futures in the region overwhelmingly uncertain. With individuals and organizations striving to preserve and reinforce such traditions, landscape, too, has been thrust into the political arena.



The annual Palestinian Olive Harvest has become perhaps the most notable of these politicized agrarian practices. As such, it offers insights into the vastly-overlooked political agency of nature and landscape. Having always been central to Palestinian society and the economy of the West Bank, in recent decades the olive harvest has also become a way for Palestinians to affirm their land ownership under occupation vis-a-vis the provisions of the Ottoman Land Law, which recognizes cultivation as a means of maintaining property title. This dual role of the olive harvest, however, places a substantial amount of pressure on olive cultivation. Olive orchards have also frequently been targeted and destroyed by Israeli settlers aiming to limit Palestinian land access. With roughly one quarter of the gross agricultural income in the Occupied Territories coming from the cultivation of some 12 million olive trees, and with olive groves occupying roughly 45% of Palestinian agricultural land, the stakes for a successful high-yield harvest impact not only the Palestinian economy, but also the West Bank's prospective territorial boundaries.

Using the olive harvest as precedent, there is an opportunity to further explore new forms of politically-linked Palestinian agricultural amplification. These new forms could also alleviate the burden currently placed solely on olive cultivation. Shifting from an emphasis on land conservation to one of land activation and reclamation, a tactical approach could amplify the Palestinian agricultural sector while promoting new avenues for local economic stimulation. To be considered fully, the examination of the reassertion of Palestinian territorial rights on undeveloped West Bank land would need to be linked with the further examination of the continued imposition of the Oslo Accords some thirteen years after their expiration. It would also require in-depth scrutiny of the legitimacy of the occupation and the ongoing Peace Process- not to mention a multitude of other related historic, religious and political concerns. My own contribution here, therefore, is not towards the particular intricacies of the legality of the occupation or Oslo Accords, or to the current legitimacy and efficacy of the protracted Peace Process as it relates to territorial claims and land access. Instead, my aim is to conceive of the instrumentality of architecture, landscape and nature as overlooked political participants in the occupation's processes while working within the constraints of its highly spatialized, militarized, and ethnically-divided framework.



Harnessing Potential from the Residual: Considering the 'Militarized Spatial By-Products' of the West Bank

How might urban designers, architects and landscape architects devise ways of not only resisting damage to nature and agriculture amidst the disastrous environmental impacts of the occupation, but furthermore reconstitute agriculture and nature in a way which enlists them as agents of territorial re-appropriation within their broader political context? To begin addressing this question, I would like to make the case for considering the strategic political utilization of overlooked areas within the West Bank's militarized landscape.

Attention to the territorial aspects of this conflict has long been focused on Jerusalem and the West Bank's most geographically-strategic sites and resource-rich locations, particularly those - such as E1- in the periphery of East Jerusalem and along the fertile and water-rich spine of the mountain region near to the 'Green Line'. While the political desirability of these most strategic sites and their relationship to natural resources is by now widely accepted, what has yet to be properly recognized in comparison is the great degree of opportunity

simultaneously lying dormant in the West Bank's least desirable sites: in its overlooked and forgotten areas of contamination, illicit solid waste dumping and demolition ruin; in its barricaded closed military zones and live firing areas, as well as in its multitude of off-limits settler security buffer spaces. These overlooked spaces collectively form what I have called 'militarized spatial by-products.'



### The Production of 'Militarized Spatial By-Products'

Studying the West Bank's processes of settler-colonial urbanization, it becomes apparent that the surge in fortified development associated with such processes cannot take place without the simultaneous production of a correlated body of 'by-product' space: those areas which serve as security buffer zones and places of territorial delineation disassociating the Israeli settlements religiously, ethnically, infrastructurally, and legalistically from their Palestinian context. The overall impact on the territory of these separation spaces is the presence of vast quantities of de-activated, under-utilized and banal land. Within the occupation's framework, these frozen by-product areas are not merely underappreciated and less valuable real-estate, but rather something more fundamentally systemic to the settler-colonial process; they are territories which are actively generated by the occupation's highly-secured urbanizing practices. Here, the term 'by-product' requires clarification since it may initially infer Israeli abandonment or undesirability with regards to such lands and their ultimate use. In many instances, however, the boundaries of security buffer zones and closed military areas have been intentionally exaggerated so that they may serve the tacit dual-purpose of securing undeveloped land away from Palestinian use, therefore safeguarding it for future Israeli settlement expansion. Therefore, it should be clear that when I refer to 'spatial by-products', the emphasis is on the relationship between fortified urban development and its adjacent underutilized areas in their present form, rather than on the legitimacy of Israel's land classifications or on these land's ultimate potential for future settlement use.

These 'militarized spatial by-products' can more broadly be seen as akin to what American urbanist Alan Berger has described as 'Drosscapes' and what French landscape architect Gilles Clement has termed the 'Third Landscape'. Such spaces are the inevitable outcome of rapid development taking place across large sprawling areas, appearing as 'remnants' to development's expansionist tendencies. In the context of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, these spaces emerge not merely as 'remnants', but more as frozen frontiers resting dormant within the restrictive conditions of land access and land use under military rule.

As designers struggling to operate within the overwhelming constraints of the current status quo, we have an opportunity to ask what unforeseen prospects exist in such networks of by-product spaces. How might they be enlisted from the ground up? As liminal areas devoid of development, these spaces have an unprecedented potential to push the political agency of landscape in the West Bank. Many such areas are exempt from the immediate threat of urban development (such as the sides of by-pass roads) and therefore vary greatly in terms of their potentiality from the prime undeveloped lands of their adjacency. Put differently, the residual ceases to be only that which separates fortified enclaves from one another, but itself becomes a unique and crucial territorial space for consideration and use.





Yet, how do we relate this discussion of ‘spatial by-products’ to the problem of apprehending their use in highly militarized and confined contexts? Those entering into such an arena are immediately confronted with the task of establishing how much they will operate within the existing biased legal framework and how much they will respect its unilaterally-imposed territorial boundaries. With specific regards to utilizing landscape and nature, here I would argue for an approach which is malleable, flexible and ‘soft’ in nature. Taking into account the volatility of the landscape, such an approach employs a design methodology comprised of a network of interconnected spatial tactics operating in a responsive and indeterminate fashion which recognizes, yet simultaneously subverts and diminishes the current ‘on-the-ground’ restrictive boundary conditions. The designer is pressed to operate as agent and double-agent, at time working within- while simultaneously compromising the unilaterally imposed legal restrictions. The power of this soft form of design lies in its ability to operate in a manner which is non-linear; which can augment its performance and resilience in unpredictable situations because it is not fixed or static. The enlistment of nature further works to harness the complex adaptability of living ecologies- something absent in conventional means of more-permanent construction.



Using this ‘soft’ approach to design, I have begun exploring a series of theoretical spatial design tactics which first unpack the specific degree to which landscape and nature are implicated in the occupation’s land claiming processes and then extract, harness, and manipulate the political potency of nature and landscapes in overlooked sites, to inform a strategy towards Palestinian territorial re-activation. Shown here is a brief overview and sampling of one such propositional design. The tactical approach suggests a certain reinterpretation and loosening of our conventional conceptions of jurisdictional control within the West Bank’s politically volatile climate. And with it, the introduction of a new fissure through which to begin thinking critically about the potentials for ‘ground-up’ re-activation of militarized spatial by-products.

More broadly, these designs operate on a number of levels, decidedly residing in the tension between sincere pragmatic proposals for grass-roots agricultural amplification, and broader, more complex and symbolic statements aiming to elucidate the spatial restrictions facing West Bank Palestinians (something more closely aligned to political art and landscape installations). In line with the latter, these designs have aimed to use landscape and nature to underscore the madness of the ongoing protraction of the military occupation and to stress the inevitability of Israeli military reprisals to the point of their absurdity, potentially leading to restrictions on insect flight routes and the culling of a nation’s own protected wildflowers for ‘security reasons’. Accordingly, subverting the West Bank’s military laws and highlighting the impossibility of Israel’s vehement attempts at ethnic separation becomes equally as important as the provision of agricultural re-activation, economic fortuity and territorial reclamation through these designs.



Design Tactic 1: Extraterritorial Appropriation

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israeli 'closed military areas' confine vast amounts of prime agricultural and grazing land -over 40% of the total West Bank- away from Palestinian use. The tactical design of Extraterritorial Appropriation therefore, seeks to introduce another layer of meaning and function to these highly restricted closed areas through the exploitation of their residual and neglected spaces.

Extraterritorially planted wildflowers turn large swaths of previously unusable lands into honey bee feeding grounds, which in turn re-activate Palestinian apiaries and contribute to the stimulation of the local Palestinian economy. By using 'cultivation capsules' as a proxy form of agricultural planting and honey bees as proxy agents for their cultivation, trespassing restrictions are obviated. Such planting resists military destruction by enlisting Israel's own environmental protection laws (issued by the 'Israeli Nature Reserves Authority' and the 'Israeli Society for the Protection of Nature') which prohibit the uprooting of native protected plant species.

The proposed process of apiary re-invigoration moves beyond its role, contributing to economic stimulation and social cohesion to re-enforce the biodiversity of this scarred military landscape and symbolically reinstate a Palestinian claim to lands which have been unilaterally-seized as a result of the occupation. The simultaneous blooming of thousands of wildflowers in the West Bank's derelict closed military zones is further intended to produce a rapidly legible visual register, rendering visible the spatial contours of Israel's occupation and broadcasting the underlying confining conditions of Palestinian land access and use hidden within.



Suzanne Harris-Brandts received her M.Arch from the University of Waterloo's School of Architecture under the supervision of Lola Sheppard where her thesis work investigated the role of architecture and landscape in the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. In 2010 and 2011 she was an 'architect in residence' at Decolonizing Architecture (DA/AR) in Beit Sahour, Palestine. Her work has been exhibited with Architecture for Humanity and was featured at Cambridge Galleries in the exhibition "Landscapes of Resistance: The Marshall Islands + Occupied Palestinian Territories". Her work was also published in the book '[bracket] Goes Soft' (2012) and will be forthcoming in an article for 'Shift: Process". She is currently an Assistant Adjunct Professor at the University of Waterloo's School of Architecture.

## End Notes

Associated Press in Jerusalem. ["Israel pushes forward with 1,200 homes in East Jerusalem settlements."](#) The Guardian. 06 November 2012

Peace Now. ["11 thousand units in one week - the government's settlement offensive."](#) 05 December 2012.

The Ottoman Land Law of 1858 remains in place in the West Bank due to the continuation of Jordanian law under the terms of military occupation. Structuring land ownership around the premise of effective agricultural cultivation, the Land Law enabled farmers cultivating land for ten consecutive years to be granted title. The farmers were further obligated to pay

taxes on their new property. Land not cultivated for a period of three consecutive years, however, could be returned to the state, thus alleviating its owner of any tax burden. The law was never intended to be a tool for state seizure on the grounds of poor agricultural production. However, the Israeli government has since also reconceived of this law and took to utilizing it as a means of legally-obfuscated annexation of occupied land.

Aside from reinforcing territorial legitimization, olive cultivation in the West Bank provides employment and income to approximately 100,000 Palestinian families who cultivate the olives for their oil. A 2010 Oxfam report found that 'in a good year, the olive oil sector contributes over \$100 million income annually to some of the poorest communities.' See: Oxfam. [The road to olive farming: Challenges to developing the economy of olive oil in the West Bank](#) (2010): 5, accessed November 22, 2011, and; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. ["Olive Harvest Factsheet"](#) (October 2011):1, accessed November 22, 2011

The Oslo Accords were produced as interim agreements and as such were slated to expire and be replaced by new mutually-negotiated agreements five years after their original imposition in 1995. Instead, to-date they remain de-facto in place as spatial divisions across the West Bank.

See Berger, Alan. "Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America." New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.; and; Clement, Gilles. "Manifeste du Tiers-Paysage." Editions Sujet/Objet, 2003.

18%, 10%, 10%, 7% & 1% respectively, as per the UN OCHA report "Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank." (December 2009)

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