SURVIVING TOGETHER

INFRASTRUCTURES OF CARE IN PALESTINE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Anmar Rafeedie, Haneen Naamneh, Suzi Hall and Abaher El-Sakka

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Anmar Rafeedie, Haneen Naamneh, Suzi Hall and Abaher El-Sakka

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Abstract

This paper explores how everyday communal infrastructures of care and practices of coping in crisis unfolded in urban life in Palestine during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic (March–December 2020). It highlights day-to-day practices produced by social and informal initiatives in Palestine during Covid-19 in Ramallah. Situating care practices within urban space during Covid-19, we explore how the urban structure, residents' social networks and past care infrastructures interact to produce care practices that sustain communities during times of crisis. Using interviews, mapping of care initiatives, and socioeconomic analysis of urban spaces – including markets and residential neighbourhoods – this report explores everyday practices during the pandemic and varied agents of care within urban space. Data analysis revealed different ways residents expressed their care for others, including wellness-checking, service and information provision, isolation, and consolation. Everyday care practices that are a result of a Palestinian legacy of care are performed through interpersonal relations and built on communal values, and remain valuable for the survival of communities in times of crisis.

Research Context and Questions

On 5 March 2020, Palestine had its first confirmed case of Covid-19. Along with other countries in the world, it was forced into a nation-wide lockdown. Schools, businesses, government institutions and civil society organisations all halted their activities. Societies lived in a state of uncertainty, fear and lack of material essentials.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, Palestinians undertook various communal practices and initiatives of care across cities, villages and refugee camps. These practices included reconfiguring urban and public spaces and remaking public life, for instance repurposing playgrounds and public yards into spaces of prayer to avoid the closed spaces of churches and mosques, and transforming neighbourhood streets by rendering them 'greener'.

Communal initiatives throughout the pandemic included the establishment of local emergency committees to support neighbourhoods by engaging in preventative measures, facilitating the process of paying electricity and water subscriptions for those unable to leave their homes, and distributing food to deprived families and to those in quarantine. Residents reported that the pandemic highlighted pre-existing challenges of living in a permanent state of emergency under colonial violence, as well as invisible practices of care and everyday mechanisms of survival and refusal.

This paper, produced as part of the collaborative project 'Urbanity in the Time of Pandemic: A Study of Infrastructures of Care in Palestine during the Covid-19 Crisis', is primarily interested in the grounded practices of care and modes of day-to-day organisation that sit outside of the (quasi-) state in Palestine. It explores how informal communal infrastructures of care and practices of coping in crisis unfolded in urban life in Palestine during the first year of the pandemic from March to December 2020, specifically in Ramallah and its vicinities.[1] Building on historical and present informal societal forms of care that emerged in Palestine, this research explores the concept of care through engagement with themes of interdependency, circulation, reciprocity, solidarity, communality, mutuality and relationality. By analysing everyday practices that were shaped by forms of refusal and solidarity during the pandemic, it explores who the agents and subjects of care are within Palestinian society.

To understand the relation between care and urbanity, the report investigates how care and its networks and infrastructures operate within urban spaces, and whether and how practices of care sustain urban neighbourhoods and areas of everyday street economies.

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[1] 'Urbanity in the Time of Pandemic: A Study of Infrastructures of Care in Palestine during the Covid-19 Crisis', *LSE Academic Collaboration with Arab Universities Programme*, 2023. Available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/middleeastcentre/research/collaboration-programme/2021-22/haneen-naamneh (accessed 12 October 2023).

In addressing these questions, we are aware that the larger context of sovereignty and practices of settler-colonialism, that include how exclusionary powers sort citizens and allocate or restrict resources, shape the care landscape.[2] Relations between state and subject, the politics of distribution and prohibition of resources, the overlap between existing and emerging modes of labour exploitation, and the intricate geographies of property and public life, all mould care.

Focusing primarily on Ramallah, a principal urban centre in the West Bank, the report explores the link between care and urbanity. Ramallah is different from other urban centres like Hebron and Nablus; its demographic composition contains a large percentage of rural and urban immigrants from other parts of Palestine, a primary factor being labour migration.[3] Furthermore, during the pandemic, the multi-legal and political authorities that function within Palestine, whether via the Israeli occupation or the Palestinian Authority (PA), influenced care capacities differently in each of these urban centres. The effect of this multitude of authorities was reflected in the discrepancy in applying preventive measures by the PA between the cities, and the residents' submission to and refusal of them during the pandemic. Thus, it is important to situate care in its distinctive and nuanced geographic and governmental landscape.

Methodology

The methodological framework of the project aims to explore how public life shapes and reshapes different forms of commonplace publics as everyday spaces in which daily life and collective culture are convened and nurtured.[4] A group of ten Birzeit University (BZU) Masters students in Sociology, Architectural Engineering, Israeli Studies, and Social Psychology conducted qualitative fieldwork during July–September of 2022 to explore what everyday practices of care became commonplace in Ramallah and Al-Bireh during the pandemic.[5] These included: (a) The residential neighbourhoods Al-Massayef, Al-Tireh, and the Old City of Al-Bireh; and (b) Markets and shopping streets in Ramallah.

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[2] Omar Jabry Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie & Sobhi Samour, 'Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine,' *Settler Colonial Studies* 2 (2012), pp. 1–8; Lorenzo Veracini, 'Introducing Settler Colonial Studies,' *Settler Colonial Studies* 1 (2011): pp. 1–12; Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,' *Journal of Genocide Research* 4 (2006), pp. 287–409.

[3] Lisa Taraki, in-person interview, 29 August 2022.

[4] Suzanne Hall, *City, Street and Citizen: The Measure of the Ordinary* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012).

[5] Students involved in the project: Noor Araj, Hala Dadu, Saja Daraghmeh, Shahd Haitham, Madlein Halabi, Dua Issa, Fairouz Salameh, Mazen Shanti, Reem Suleiman and Tawba Qasem.
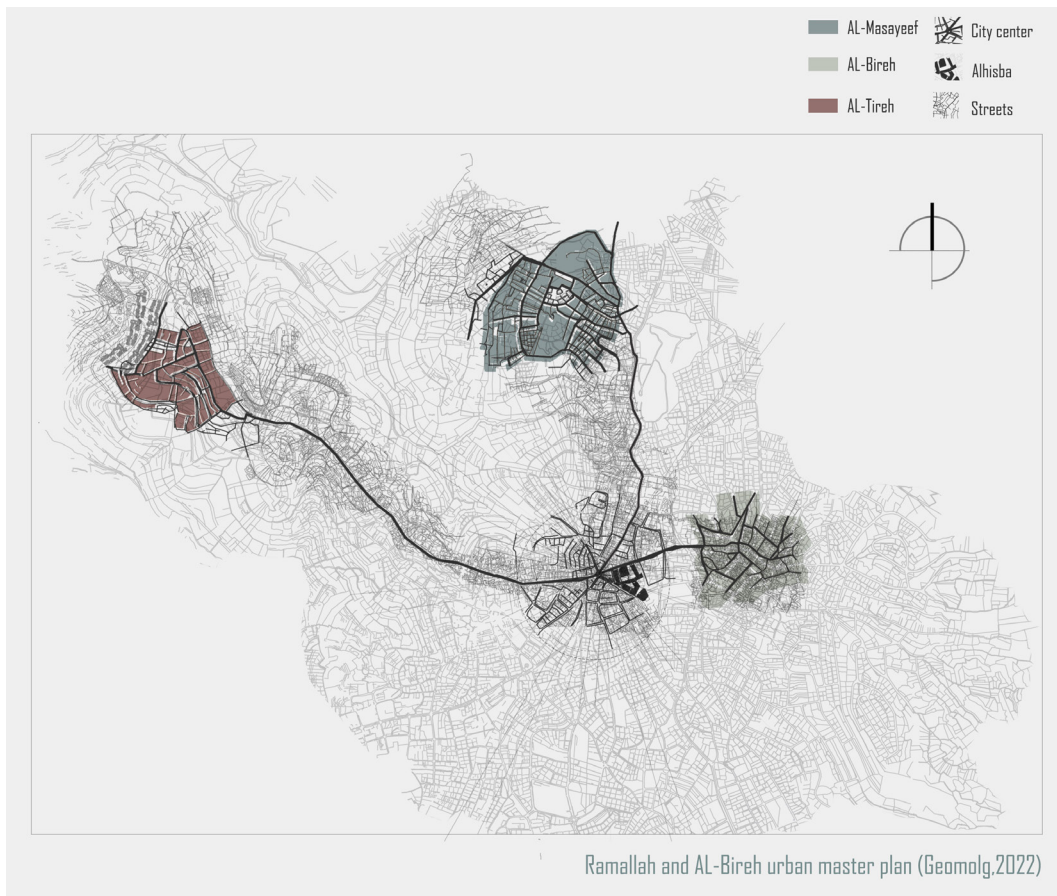
The Ramallah City Centre (in the middle) and its connections to the three neighborhoods, Al-Tireh, Al Masayeef and Al Bireh (from the left) (Geomolg, 2022)

The students interviewed twenty-five residents in the three neighbourhoods. Each locational interview process was initiated through visits to the neighbourhoods and engagement with social networks of current or former residents. The students chose to explore different economic activities: a coffee shop in Al-Bireh, a taxi ride in Al-Tireh and the local market in Ramallah, as an initial step for the interview process. Then, a snow-balling approach was used to identify other interviewees. As for Al-Massayef, and at a later stage in Al-Tireh, social networks were key to gaining access to the neighbourhoods, which proved more challenging to access than other areas.

A further challenge for interviews in neighbourhoods was recurring interruptions. The interviews were conducted in public places, and hence were often interrupted either by loud noises or commonplace economic activities (such as shoppers walking in and out). This meant that the interviews took longer to conduct than planned, but they nonetheless yielded rich material.

Having lived through the pandemic themselves, the students were able to both observe and readily understand experiences described in some of the researched cases. They mapped local initiatives and conducted interviews with the activists involved and their respective care recipients. The sensitivity of the topic of receiving aid posed a challenge for this partic-ular portion of the fieldwork, limiting the number of interviews with care recipients.

To overcome the limited recent literature analysing and discussing Covid-19 and social care within the Palestinian context, interviews extended to scholars interested in care in Palestine in the past and present. Three scholar interviews were conducted, chosen through direct sampling. In total, twenty-eight interviews were conducted within the scope of this report.

The Legacy of Care in Palestine

Care has long been integral to Palestinian society.[6] It is practised under different forms and conditions, including solidarity (*taddamun*), charity (*khairi*), responsibility (*maswulia*), steadfastness (*sumod*), adaptation (*takayof*), support (*daaʿem*), resistance (*muqawmeh*) and survival (*baqaa*). Continuous and shared vulnerabilities often create new forms of solidarity through coping and collective strategies among those who live through conflict and violence, including colonisation.[7]

Living for decades in a context of what Palestinians perceive as a permanent state of emergency, crisis and conflict, Palestinians have developed everyday mechanisms of survival[8] – ways of 'getting by' amidst the occupation[9] and its enforced social, economic and geographical segregations[10] – while seeking to live an 'ordinary' life despite the endemic violence.[11] A study by scholar Ahmad As'ad on the town of Beit Sahour in 1988 during the first Intifada showcases how Palestinians came together to develop tools to overcome the lockdown imposed by the occupation and collectively manage everyday life.[12] Solidarity and cohesion were utilised to sustain civil disobedience and resilience.[13] Sharing food, establishing neighbourhood committees, and more notably a livestock cooperative and

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[6] Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its 'New' Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920–1948* (California: University of California Press, 2003).

[7] Mike Joronen, 'Negotiating Colonial Violence: Spaces of Precarisation in Palestine,' *Antipode* 51/3 (2019), p. 842; Lisa Taraki, 'Introduction', in Lisa Taraki (ed.), *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility Under Occupation* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2008), pp. 12–3; Rema Hammami, 'Precarious Politics: The Activism of Bodies that Count (Aligning with Those that Don't)' in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay (eds), *Palestine's Colonial Frontier* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016); Yahya Abu Alroub, 'The Robbery of Steadfastness: How Social Protection Constructs were Built in Palestine and How they were Demolished [*Salb Al Sumoud: Kayf Bunieh Buna Al Himayeh al Ijtima'ie Wa Kayf Hudimat*]', *7iber*, 28 January 2022. Available at: https://www.7iber.com/politics-economics/بُنب-الحماية-الاجتماعية-في-فلسطين/ (accessed 17 February 2023); Ibrahim F. Mahajne, 'Key Manifestations of Societal Life in the Arab City Under Israeli Colonialism [*Tajaliat Al Tamadun Al Ijtima'i Lisukan Almadineh Alarabieh Al Munsha'a Fe Thil Alcolonialieh AlIsraelia*]', *Omran* 5/18 (2016), pp. 82–3.

[8] Lisa Taraki, 'Introduction', pp. 1–24.

[9] Lori Allen, 'Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal During the Second Palestinian Intifada,' *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008), pp. 453–87.

[10] Rema Hammami, 'On the Importance of Thugs/The Moral Economy of a Checkpoint', *Jerusalem Quarterly* 22–3 (2005), pp. 22–3.

[11] Tobias Kelly, 'The Attractions of Accountancy: Living an Ordinary Life During the Second Palestinian Intifada,' *Ethnography* 9/3 (2008), pp. 351–76.

[12] Ahmad As'ad, *A Country Ready for a New Dawn: Civil Disobedience and Daily Life in Beit Sahour* (Qatar: Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, 2021).

[13] Ibid.

home farming practices were all grounded practices by which residents of Beit Sahour became a relatively self-sufficient society, contesting the Israeli occupation.[14]

Yet, the push for a neo-liberal agenda post-Oslo and the shift in the political agenda of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), have led to increased fragmentation and individualism in today's Palestinian society. This has been accompanied by weakened socio-economic structures and planning, shifting people's focus to more immediate challenges.[15] The care programmes established by the Palestinian Authority (PA) tend to lack strategic and national overview of what care entails in the Palestinian context. This is exacerbated by limited and ineffective coordination between the different care providers.[16] It is argued that most Palestinians live outside of the official social protection system that is enacted by the PA and are more reliant on kinship and interpersonal relations for social protection.[17]

Moreover, care has been influenced by the intensive 'NGOization' and a proliferation of humanitarian and development agencies, often detached from the dynamics on the ground and with limited understanding of the cultural resources of care.[18] These agencies and institutions tend to determine what care is, who deserves it and why. Scholars of the provision of aid reflect on how the resulting distribution of care is mostly dependent on both colonial and paternalistic structures, which deny Palestinians their societal and political agency and right of self-determination.[19] Both the occupation and the PA policies have increased the need for new survival strategies for Palestinians, thus new spheres of care and solidarities have emerged.[20] This paper focuses on the grounded, communal practices that build on societal and cultural structures, ranging from kinship to voluntary and collective initiatives.

Al-Malki and Ladadwa argued that practices rooted in quotidian forms of solidarity within Palestinian society are essential socio-economic resources that help in 'understanding the existence and continuity of the Palestinian family and the local community under Israeli occupation.'[21] However, some believe that the rise of social networks, solidarity and

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Majdi Al Malki and Hasan Ladadwa, *Transformations of Palestinian Society Since 1948: Between Loss and Challenges of Survival* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2018); Lisa Taraki, 'The New Social Imagination in Palestine After Oslo [*Al Mutakhaiel Alijtima'i Aljadid Fe Filestin Ba'd Oslo*]', *Idafat* 26/27 (2014), pp. 52–4; Jamil Hilal, *The Palestinian Middle Class: Research into the Confusion of Identity, Authority and Culture* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies and Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 2006).

[16] Majdi Al Malki, Yasser Shalabi and Hassan Ladadwa, *Towards a Sociology of Civil Resistance During the Second Intifada [Al Mujtama' Al Felasteni, Sociologia Altakayuf Almuqawem Khilal Intifada Al-Aqsa]* (Ramallah: MUWATIN - The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 2004), p. 40.

[17] Misyef Jamil, *Options for Social Security and Protection Systems in Palestine: A Review [Khayarat Anthimat Al-daman Alijtima'i W AlHimayeh Alijtima'ieh Fe Filisten: Moraja'a 'ameh]* (Ramallah: Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, 2016), p. 51; Yahya Abu Alrob, 'The Robbery of Steadfastness'.

[18] Mandy Turner, 'The Political Economy of Western Aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Since 1993', in Mandy Turner and Omar Shweiki (eds), *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[19] Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2018).

[20] Penny Johnson, 'Living Together in a Nation in Fragments' in Lisa Taraki (ed.), *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation* (Ramallah: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2008), pp. 83–6.

[21] Jamil Hilal, Majdi al Malki and Yaser Shalabi, *The Informal Social Support System in Palestine [Nitham*

kinship in public life is due to poor public institutions, 'a counter reaction to the spectrum of the absent Palestinian state […] and to the contradictions of the limited Palestinian rule since then (1994).[22]

Beyond interpersonal ties, differentiated class composition also shapes care in Palestine, an example is the work committees (*Lijan al-ʿAmal*), which constituted alternative institutions of support for workers between the years of 1967–87.[23] Robinson examines how the forming of medical and agricultural committees by the new elite in the 1980s played a role in providing a care system for Palestinians during times of crisis.[24] In the 1970s and 1980s, volunteer-based popular committees expressed a common goal to overcome Israeli attempts to dominate Palestinian society.[25] They played a significant role in social protection during the first and second Intifadas through the support structures of home-schooling, health care, medical and agricultural relief and economic committees. Such initiatives that grew from communal needs and resources emphasised self-reliance and resistance, while protecting those most affected by the occupation.[26] These were forms of direction action that built popular alternatives to address people's needs, delinking from the colonial apparatus, but also alternative institutions to Palestinian formal state-orchestrated ones. Popular committees were also important in creating programmes of political education and awareness across the generations.[27] Care in this sense was about utilising local forms of provisioning and engaging with political agency and consciousness.

These infrastructures of care are not static, their forms and tools changed throughout different periods and contexts.[28] Ongoing structural constraints established by state systems of exploitation, bordering and marginalisation have historically led to formations of infrastructures of care in society.[29] But it also threatened this infrastructure and influenced the ways in which it is practised and its active actors. In periods of heightened crises such as war, or a pandemic such as Covid-19, the limitations on movements, lockdowns, and siege all affect social and kinship relations that play an important role in care.[30]

Al Takaful Al Ijtima'I ʿair Al Rasmi (ʿair *Al Muma'sas*) *Fi Al Difa Al ʿarbieh Wa Qita' Gaza*] (Ramallah, Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, 1997), p. 17.

[22] Penny Johnson, 'Living Together in a Nation in Fragments', p. 85.

[23] Linda Tabar, 'People's Power: Lessons from the First Intifada' in Centre for Development Studies (ed.), *Critical Readings of Development under Colonialism: Towards a Political Economy for Liberation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (Birzeit: Birzeit University, 2015), p. 3.

[24] Glenn E. Robinson, 'The Role of the Professional Middle Class in the Mobilization of Palestinian Society: The Medical and Agricultural Committees', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25/2 (1993), pp. 301–26.

[25] Laith Hanbali, 'How to Repair Destruction: Public Committees is One of the Answers [*Kayf Yuramam Al Damar: Al Lijan Al Sha'bieh Ehda Al Ijabat*]', *Metras*, 6 June 2023. Available at: https://metras.co/فيك-ممري-امدلا؟-ناجللا-ناجللا-ةيبعشلا-/ حا (accessed 17 February 2023).

[26] Tabar, 'People's Power,' p. 13; Hanbali, 'How to Repair Destruction'; Laith Hanbali, 'Reimagining Liberation Through Popular Committees [*I'adat Tasawor Al Lijan Al Taharur Min Khilal Al Lijan Al Sha'bieh*],' *Al Shabaka*, 16 February 2022. Available at: https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/ةداعا-روصت-رتحتلا-رير-نم-لالخ-لالجان-/ اشلع (accessed 17 February 2023).

[27] Ibid; Hanbali, 'Reimagining Liberation'.

[28] Majdi Al Malki, in-person interview, 18 September 2022.

[29] Alam, Ashraful and Donna Houston, 'Rethinking Care as Alternate Infrastructure', *Cities* 100 (2020), p. 102662.

[30] Penny Johnson, 'Living Together in a Nation in Fragments', pp. 81–138.

Although social and grassroot-level initiatives started to re-emerge after 2011 in the forms of social movements, campaigns and activism in an attempt to replicate acts of activism happening in neighbouring countries during the 'Arab Spring,'[31] social protection and care systems are more limited in the past decade compared to previous years.[32] The Covid-19 crisis revealed how deep inequalities endure and spread across the city differentially depriving urban residents of their life, yet also providing them with an opportunity to reclaim their cities through reimagining collective life.

Neighbourliness, Companionship and Kinship as Care in Palestinian Urban Space

As a result of occupation, cities in Palestine have been constant spaces of imposed and lived forms of change.[33] Militarised checkpoints, colonial annexation and segregation have all had a role in fragmenting the physical space, and reorganising it to serve the purpose of domination and surveillance of urban and rural spaces.[34] This led to a flux of internal migration from rural areas to these new and deformed urban spaces, with which came new forms of social organisation, and sociocultural networks.

In addition to the occupation's role in 'spatial dismemberment',[35] the introduction of neo-liberal policies in the post-Oslo era introduced a newer edition of Palestinian cities that is overcrowded with governmental institutions, civil society organisations and the marketisation of space with large shopping centres, chain restaurants, hotels and other sites of consumption.[36]

It has been argued that the middle classes living in those cities aspired for development and aid. For example, Ramallah as the seat of the PA, has become more buffered from societal shocks,[37] as compared with other Palestinian cities, given the high concentration of PA institutions and local and international non-governmental organisations. Significantly, this came in conjunction with the general trend of the retraction of collective practices that reflect care, such as volunteer work, and solidarity.[38] During the first months

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[31] Ahmad Jamil Azem, *The Palestinian Youth from Movement to Mobilization (1908–2018)* (Ramallah: The Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies - Masarat, 2019), p. 81.

[32] Yahya Abu Alrob, 'The Robbery of Steadfastness.'

[33] Majdi Al Malki and Salim Tamari, 'Introduction: The Palestinian City and The Challenges of the Urban' in Majdi Al Malki and Salim Tamari (eds), *The Palestinian City: Issues in Urban Transformations* [*Al-Madinah Al-Filistinyah: Qadaya Fi Al-Tahqqulat Al-Hadariyah*] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2021), pp. 3–18.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Lisa Taraki, 'Enclave Micropolis: The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/al-Bireh', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37/4 (2008), pp. 6-20.

[36] Khaldun Bshara, 'Modernist Ramallah: Courses for Understanding Urban Planning Under Occupation [*Ramallah al Hadathiyeh: Masaqat Li Fahm Al Takhtit Al Hadari Taht Al Ihtilal*]' in Al Malki and Tamari (eds), *The Palestinian City*, pp. 248–50.

[37] Hilal, 'The Palestinian Middle Class'.

[38] Ayman Abdul Majeed, 'Introduction to the Palestinian Situation and Current Trends' in Jamil Hilal (ed.), *Palestinian Youth: Studies on Identity, Space and Community Participation* (Birzeit: Center for Development Studies – Birzeit University and American Friends Service Committee, 2017), p. 38.

of the pandemic, closures imposed on cities and villages across the West Bank elevated the divided geography and existing sense of fragmentation. Cities became further isolated from each other by barriers set by the PA.[39] Therefore, urban localities, including neighbourhoods, homes and residential buildings, became the primary spaces for infrastructures of care to be activated or developed.

Here, we engage with the notion of 'infrastructures of care' to examine the reciprocal relation between everyday spaces and practices of care, as arrangements of sociality and circulation. These are 'social and technical infrastructures that can be made and shared by communities.'[40] Care can be found in various everyday spaces in which people themselves and their practices and rituals constitute urban infrastructure.[41] Everyday spaces 'are important to connect people, their lives and activities that are concentrated in these public spaces.'[42] Such spaces, including neighbourhoods, markets, shops, churches, mosques, parks and more, allow for practices of care to be acknowledged and exchanged within society. Practices of care vary between urban centres, their suburbs, refugee camps and rural areas, and within different areas in the cities themselves. We examine these practices through the concepts of interdependency, circulation and reciprocity. These are reflected in social modes of neighbourliness and kinship, which influence how proximity, intimacy and companionship are experienced within space.

In the city of Ramallah and the adjacent city of Al-Bireh, practices of care are shaped by various political and social transformations, including internal migration, which significantly affected the city's demographic composition and urban texture. Ramallah is considered a very mixed city of immigrants with many sub-identities.[43] As a result of people's movement into and within the city, their interpersonal relationships are not easily maintained over time, creating neighbourhoods with a mix of cultural compositions.[44] Furthermore, the post-Oslo urban regime, including zoning regulations, the rise in land prices, and the availability of housing loans and commercial building schemes, led to the deepening of residential segregation and the salience of place-based class and status differentials. Different kinds of neighbourhoods began to appear, ranging from choice high-and-middle-class neighbourhoods such as Al-Masyoun and Al-Tireh to more popular (*shaʿbi*) neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the towns.[45]

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[39] Majdi Al Malki, in-person interview, 19 September 2022.

[40] Abby Mellick Lopes, Stephen Healy, Emma Power, Louise Crabtree and Katherine Gibson, 'Infrastructures of care: Opening Up 'Home' as Commons in a Hot City', *Human Ecology Review* 24/2 (2018), p. 43.

[41] Shannon Mattern, 'Maintenance and Care', *Places Journal*, November 2018. Available at: https://doi.org/10.22269/181120 (accessed 17 February 2023); AbdouMaliq Simone, 'People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg', *Public Culture* 16/3 (2004), p. 407.

[42] Lima Najjar and Shadi Ghadban, 'In-Between Forgotten Spaces in Palestinian Cities: The Twin Cities of Ramallah and Al-Bireh as a Case Study', *Sustainable Development and Planning* 7 (2015), p. 811.

[43] Ahmad Izz As'ad, in-person interview, 15 August 2022.

[44] Majdi Al Malki, in-person interview, 19 September 2022.

[45] Taraki, 'Ramallah and Al-Bireh', pp. 15–6.

Solidarity as Care at a Time of the Pandemic in Palestine

The pandemic has exposed the combined fragilities and strengths of the urban infrastructures of care in Palestine and the challenges to coping with yet another crisis. This section highlights the links between coping and care during the pandemic in Palestine.

Drawing on literature from the Global South on care and urban studies, and through specific examples of how different grassroot initiatives helped Palestinians cope during Covid, we refer to care as everyday practices undertaken by individuals and communities within urban spaces, highlighting how networks of interdependency are crucial elements of social life.[46] As such, care is to be considered not through ethical or normative lenses, but rather as a practice that defines heterogeneous communities and structures of belonging.[47] We engage with practices beyond the structures of the nation-state and global liberal institutions of 'aid', allowing individuals to bring their agencies to organise themselves in different relations.[48] Accordingly, we consider who the varied subjects and providers of care are, by focusing on 'the work of caring', as well as 'who is uncared for, who receives care and who does not, and who is expected to perform care work, with or without pay.'[49]

Setting the Scene: The Pandemic in Palestine

The presence of a continuous source of external threat produces a vital need for collective action and 'being together'.[50] Marginalised social groups tend to gain marginal force through collective action and everyday modes of resistance.[51] The pandemic was perceived as an external threat, in which the central engine was fear and anxiety, alongside a sense of collective responsibility to control the disease and limit its spread. Colonial mechanisms of spatial and social control serve to undermine political, economic and social infrastructures, and in our fieldwork it was apparent that the overlap of exploitation, bordering and marginalisation in Palestine produced additional precarities as also referenced in the secondary data outlined below.[52] This included the day-to-day challenges of finding and sustaining employment, as more broadly reflected in the global context of profound job losses over the pandemic that substantially exceeded the period of the 2008 financial crisis.[53]

[46] Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, '"Nothing Comes without Its World": Thinking with Care', *The Sociological Review* 60/2 (2012), pp. 211–2.
[47] Ashraful Alam and Donna Houstion, 'Rethinking Care as Alternate Infrastructure', *Cities* 100 (2020): pp. 8–9.
[48] Ibid, 7.
[49] Hiʻilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, 'Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times', *Social Text* 38/1 (2020), p. 3.
[50] Colette Harris, 'The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period' in Freide Acar and Ayse Ayata (eds), *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000); Islah Jad, *Women at the Crossroads: The Palestinian Women's Movement between Nationalism, Secularism and Islamism* (Ramallah: MUWATIN - The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 2008), p. 37.
[51] Jad, *Women at the Crossroads*, p. 37.
[52] Lorenzo Veracini, 'Introducing Settler Colonial Studies'; Omar Jabry Salamanca et al., 'Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine'; Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native'.
[53] BBC News, 'UN: Covid Jobs Crisis "Most Severe" Since the 1930s', 25 January 2021. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/business-55803092 (accessed 19 February 2023).

Palestinian workers in Israel who come from both the West Bank and Gaza were amongst some of the most affected groups during the pandemic.[54] It has been recorded that one sixth of breadwinners in Palestine stopped working during the pandemic, and slightly less than half of the families lost half their income.[55] Over 60% of Palestinian families felt anxious over not having enough to feed themselves.[56] Meanwhile, the high dependency of the Israeli economy on Palestinian labour meant special arrangements were put in place for the continued entry to Israel of 55,000 workers in essential sectors.[57] Research shows that these workers lost housing and health care provisions and were exposed to greater exploitation.[58] Only 15% of families received social assistance in the forms of food coupons and packages.[59] This is not to say that other governmental or institutional bodies did not play a role in the pandemic, which will be highlighted in a later section.

Colonial mechanisms are also defined by enforced state limits to self-governance and authority, as well as the maintenance of stringent border and surveillance regimes, and during the pandemic, these persistent conditions of bordering were heightened by the Israel.[60] Thus, Palestinians had to live with the imposition of several additional restrictions on borders, including the reported limitations on the entrance of health and laboratory equipment to test and treat Covid-19 patients[61] and the reported obstruction of the access of 2000 doses of the vaccination allocated by the Palestinian Ministry of Health for medical personnel in Gaza.[62] The UN reported the irregular supply of vaccines, highlighting practices of restriction which hindered health conditions in areas where PA intervention was severely limited.[63] The health sector suffered from chronic shortages in medical equipment, beds and staff (only some 6440 beds in both the West Bank and Gaza), thus exacerbating the effects of the health crisis and crisis of supply. Many Palestinians considered the situation 'a crisis on top of a crisis', what they experienced as a brutal intersection of the pandemic and the occupation.'[64]

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[54] Rafeef Ziadeh and Riya Al-Sanah, 'Palestinian Workers Are Bearing the Brunt of the Pandemic,' *Jacobin* (2020), p. 1.

[55] Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 'Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) Announces Results of Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic (Coronavirus) on the Socio-economic Conditions of Palestinian Households Survey (March-May), 2020,' 2020. Available at: https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3825 (accessed 17 February 2023).

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ziadeh and Al-Sanah, 'Palestinian Workers Are Bearing the Brunt of the Pandemic', p. 3.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020.

[60] Elia Zureik, 'Colonialism, surveillance, and population control: Israel/Palestine,' in Elia Zureik, David Lyon and Yasmeen Abu-Laban (eds), *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine* (London and New York: Rutledge, 2011)

[61] Yara Assi, 'Occupation in the Times of Covid-19: Palestinian Health is Israel's Responsibility [*Al Ihtilal Fi Zaman Covid-10: Sihat Al Filistineen Mas'oliat Al Ihtilal*],' *Al Shabaka*, 15 November 2020. Available at: https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/الاحتلال-يف-نمز-ديفوك-19-حصح-الفلسطينيب/ (accessed 17 February 2023).

[62] Aziza Nofal, 'Corona Vaccines in Palestine: Corruption, Division, and Political Exploitation' [*Luqahat Conora fi Filesteen: Fasad, Inqisam wa Tawthif Siasi*], *7iber*, 22 March, 2021. Available at: https://www.7iber.com/politics-economics/ (Accessed on 5 May 2023);

[63] OCHA, 'COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report 24 (3-16 December 2020)', 17 December 2022. Available at: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/sitrep_24_3-16-dec-2020.pdf (accessed 17 February 2023); Awad Rujoub, 'Area C... The Soft Power of Facing Corona [*Mantiqa Jem.. Khasirat Al Sulta Al Rakhua Fi Muajahat Corona*]', *Al Jazeera*, 12 April 2020. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2020/4/12/مانطق-ج-السلطة-الفلسطينية-فلسطين (accessed 17 February 2023).

[64] Weaam Hammoudeh, 'The End of the Tunnel is Unclear': Reflections on the Covid-19 Pandemic Under Occupation,' presentation, not published.

Care, as an existing cultural construct grounded in networks of kinship and communality, was immediately awakened in response to the pandemic.[65] Limited governmental support and the lack of a public social security system in Palestine created a sense of abandonment among the residents. A man living in a village near Ramallah expressed 'The PA abandons us (villages outside the city), and Israel doesn't care, if we don't stand together, who is going to stand with us?'[66]

Mutual aid, in its essence, comes from the 'awareness that the (official) systems we have in place are not going to meet them (survival needs).'[67] Local responses in the Baddawi camp (in Lebanon) showed that through mutual aid, Palestinians 'seek to fill gaps and redress inequalities that have been created and reproduced by national and international actors alike.'[68]

This is not to claim that there were no formal governmental care plans and initiatives. In fact, those were more visible and present through mainstream media than youth initiatives. An example is '*Waqfet Izz*' [Standing with Pride], a governmental initiative directed towards gathering donations from individuals and private sector companies to support those affected by the pandemic, especially families of workers who lost their income. While some people positively viewed the role of formal institutions in managing the pandemic, many thought otherwise. Formal institutions' role during the pandemic was described through its failures: its inability to connect to the community or reach those who are most in need, being untrustworthy, and poor planning, especially in relation to the '*Waqfet Izz*' fund.[69] Such governmental initiatives not only showcased the weakness of the PA's socio-economic policies but also the unreliability of the Palestinian private sector as an active participant in community solidarity.[70] Some residents and community groups referred to the variable private sector donations during the pandemic as inadequate, such that charitable donations were not viewed as a sufficient substitute for more consolidated social responsibility.[71]

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[65] Majdi Al Malki, in-person interview, 18 September 2022.

[66] Interview with a resident of Deir Nidham village, August 2022.

[67] Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)* (New York: Verso Books, 2020), p. 4.

[68] Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Responding to precarity: Beddawi Camp in the era of Covid-19', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 49/4 (2020), p. 32.

[69] Ahmad Izz As'ad, 'The Homeland is Carried by its People: Wafet Izz Fund, the Optimism of the Mind and the Pessimism of the Will' [*Al Balad Behmiha Ahilha: Sandoq Waqfet Izz, Tafa'ol Al Irada wa Tasha'om Al Aql*], *Institute for Palestine Studies*, 18 May 2020. Available at: https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/1650092 (accessed 17 February 2023); Salim Abu Thaher, 'Corona: A Pandemic and Emerging Practice [*Corona: Ja'iha Wa Mumarasat Mustajade*],' *Institute for Palestine Studies*, 18 May 2020. Available at: https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/1650094 (accessed 17 February 2023).

[70] Abaher El Sakka, 'Between the Palestinian Authority's Social Policies and Israel's Occupation Policies: Palestinians `during the Corona Pandemic', *Arab Forum For Alternatives* (2021), p. 112; Izz As'ad, 'The Country is Carried by its People.'

[71] Izz As'ad, 'The Country is Carried by its People.'

Care Practices during Covid in Palestine

The insufficiency of formal initiatives emphasised the importance of mutual care. Care initiatives better supported those in need, including through voluntary work, like neighbourhood committees.[72] They provided different forms of care that reflected inter-dependency, reciprocity, solidarity, communality, mutuality and relationality. Fieldwork in different neighbourhoods in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, as well as a mapping process of different care initiatives, showcased that care manifests in various forms, all of which co-existed to overcome the pandemic:[73]

1. *Service Provision*

    A widespread form of care in Palestinian society has been through service-provision to produce and distribute goods and services, including health care and education. The fieldwork highlighted the persistence of this phenomenon during Covid and lockdown, and its connection to the production of goods, often agricultural, whereby people share what they produce or grow with their neighbours in small affordable quantities. This particular mode of care was also practised during both Intifadas.[74] Campaigns such '*Al-Nas lba'ad*' [People for Each Other] in Ramallah, '*Al Kheir Feki Ya Balad*' [Goodness in the Homeland] in the Suburbs of Jerusalem and '*Jasad Wahed*' [One Body] in the Gaza Strip showcased how care can be material.

    Almost all initiatives were operated and managed by Palestinian youth, which exemplifies informal youth activism within Palestinian society, and their role as social actors of care in the absence of formal care. One activist of Al-Nas lba'ad stated that the campaign was founded to fill a gap within the formal care system, and the mapping process supported his claim. Not only did the campaigns showcased youth initiation as care actors, but widespread community solidarity as well. Community donations came in financial and material forms. Examples include bakers opening their bakeries and offering use of their ovens for the initiatives to make bread or as spaces for preparing packages. These campaigns were able to provide material care and basic needs for poor families during the pandemic. 'A lot of institutions and corporations participated and volunteered, through personal and social relations', one activist mentioned, and that is how they were able to gather donations for the campaign.[75] Other campaigns similarly highlight community solidarity, particularly Jasad Wahed campaign which has been sustained since before Covid-19 as a result of community donations. Other campaigns came to a halt when financial donations were no longer available, exemplifying the limitations of informal care.

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[72] El Sakka, 'Between the Palestinian Authority's Social Policies and Israel's Occupation Policies', p. 113.
[73] Such practices of care could be different in form and scale in other neighbourhoods that this paper did not cover.
[74] Taraki, 'Introduction', pp. 1–24.
[75] Interview with an activist, July 2022.

Through the analysis of social media pages dedicated to the campaigns, and inter-views conducted with two activists, it became clear that the Palestinian youth are not only aware of the need to help people in times of crises but are also taking on the initiative of organising care practices themselves. Using slogans such as 'people are for each other in times of need', they exhibited community solidarity, relational-ity and mutuality as primary care elements. Other campaigns used pre-existing skills to help the community survive the pandemic and its lockdown. '*Eid b'eid*' [Hand in Hand] campaign performed free medical check-ups and examinations for community members with the direct help of medical personnel and other official bodies, ensuring that financial strains are not a burden to people's health. Others in Al-Massayef pro-vided educational services. Classes in Arabic, Religion and English were all given over the phone to keep the educational process going during lockdown.

2. *Wellness Checking*

In times of lockdowns and mobility limitations, moral support became an essential way of caring. Community members replaced home visits with phone calls and social media to reassure each other and check up on others' health and access to basic needs. A resident of Al-Bireh expressed that they would ask about their neighbours, 'we would care who tested positive, and if their son or daughter recovered [...] people welcomed phone calls, and nobody was displeased (about them being a replacement of physical visits).'[76] Wellness checking became a form of solidarity expressed irre-spective of distance. One resident stated that isolation played a role in rebuilding dormant social relations.[77] Furthermore, wellness checking, became a prerequisite for the distribution of care and identifying those who were older, or lived alone and were in need of basic necessities. 'My neighbour was checking in on everyone and helping them, and I don't mean with financial needs, but with anything', is how one resident in Al-Bireh expressed the variety of care in the neighbourhood.[78] Interviews in Al-Bi-reh and Ramallah showcased the interdependency of community members on each other in this respect. In Al-Massayef neighbourhood in Ramallah, a young man who was running a food stand shared that through interacting with his customers he was able to identify those in need of assistance, and provide them with what they needed

3. *Isolation as a Collective Concern*

Self-isolation was an essential form of non-material care in communities during the pandemic. 'The best you can provide for your neighbours is to survive, which you will not be able to do except through isolation',[79] testified an interviewee from Al-Tireh describing the relation between care and isolation. Another interviewee from Al-Mas-sayef highlighted the link between generation and isolation, stressing that 'as youth, we did not care much for our health, but we did worry because we lived with older

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[76] Interview with a resident of al-Bireh, July 2022.
[77] Ibid.
[78] ibid.
[79] Interview with a resident of Ramallah, July 2022.

people such as our parents',[80] hence they chose to commit to isolation. Taking care of others was enacted by ensuring that people stayed home, or, as an interviewee explained, they would break isolation only when certain of no infection and only gathering outdoors. 'Even when neighbours offered us help, if we tested positive we would refuse [...] at the end, we don't want to harm people',[81] this is how one resident in Al-Bireh summarised isolation as a care practice. While usually discussed in negative connotations, isolation during the pandemic showcased high solidarity and communality. *Eid b'eid* campaign emphasized isolation in its informational posters as part of 'the sense of communal responsibility' in times of crisis. Doctors took up medical consultations over the phone and often provided medical help to people who were still waiting for their Covid-19 test results, to limit face-to-face interactions and further protect their communities.

4.   *Consolation and Condolences*

One important form of care during the pandemic was expressing condolences, more specifically, how it took place. Given the nature of the lockdown, restrictions were imposed on funerals, but condolences were a way to express grief, care and solidarity in times of crisis. Etiquette surrounding expressing condolences was highlighted during interviews when discussing community care and connectedness. Given the role social media played in wellness checking during the pandemic, it was not considered less polite or shameful to express condolences on Facebook, as it was in pre-pandemic world. Instead, a phone call was regarded as more appropriate, some came to the bereaved front door to express their condolences without entering the house, maintaining social distancing. Additionally, how one expresses condolences depends on the degree of kinship; and the requirement to pay respects to close relatives even during the pandemic, was undertaken with strict precautionary measures.

5.   *Information-Providing Care*

Another form of care that emerged during the pandemic was health information-providing. Official and non-official bodies in the Palestinian community took to social media and the streets to spread health-related information and raise the community's awareness of the pandemic and combating the virus. *Eid b'eid* campaign was an example of a youth volunteer campaign that provided health-care awareness in the suburbs of Jerusalem, through cleaning public spaces and handing out sanitisers, masks and cleaning supplies as well distributing infographics. This campaign in particular highlighted the remarkable participation of youth volunteers in this communal action and solidarity within the community.

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[80] Interview with a resident of Ramallah, September 2022.
[81] interview with a resident of Al Bireh, July 2022.

Posters Source: The Cultural Forum Center, 2020

These initiatives were able to utilise new media channels for proactive societal action and new ways of organising, such that societal or health action in the event of a pandemic, is not limited to institutionalised action. These initiatives of care and solidarity that emerge from within the community, indicate a capacity for mutual aid and mobilisation. Reflecting on how care shapes belonging and citizenship in a context of systemic exclusion, these informal practices challenge the humanitarian and liberal conceptualisations of care in Palestine,[82] particularly the depiction of Palestinians as being on the receiving end of care, thereby dismissing Palestinian agency. Care as solidarity, rather than charity,[83] renders it a mutual act and a communal responsibility that produces nuanced and dynamic infrastructures of care within the community. Moreover, this approach ascribes care with political meaning, which is at the heart of Palestinian society and citizenship. Refugee camps' popular committees' work during the pandemic exemplifies just that. Given the absence of formal Palestinian institutions, popular committees within refugee camps not only became a major care-provider during Covid-19 and across the years, but also took over as the de-facto 'formal' institution within camps.[84]

One thing to note when discussing acts of care, is that mutual aid defies systems of domination that re-produce socio-economic differences. As Dean Spade puts it, mutual aid projects are defined 'in opposition to the charity model.'[85] Using examples of local initiatives, cooperatives, other alternatives for transformation strategies and 'on the ground' practices, others also argued for the concept of solidarity 'from below' in the urban sphere.[86] This is visible in the youth's new direction towards production cooperatives

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[82] Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2018).

[83] Dean Spade, 'Solidarity Not charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival', *Social Text* 38/1 (2020), p. 136.

[84] Majdi Al Malki, in-person interview, 19 September 2022.

[85] Spade, *Mutual Aid*, p. 24.

[86] Athina Arampatzi, 'The Spatiality of Counter-Austerity Politics in Athens, Greece: Emergent 'Urban

which aim to overcome the current crisis of unemployment in Palestine, caused by poor governmental planning and neoliberal policies.[87] The 1988 civil disobedience in the city of Beit Sahour had a mass supra-partisan characteristic, which allowed it to be a resilient act of disobedience and resistance.[88] As'ad notes that had it not been for this characteristic, and orders had come from 'above', the disobedience would not have worked. This reveals how mobilisation and organisation 'from below' can generate notable change by encouraging people to join.

Locating Care in Ramallah's Neighbourhoods

To expand the exploration of care in and through space, we investigated in three neighbourhoods in Ramallah how care operates through the urban: specifically, its location, what and whom it connects to, and how 'caring capacity' is made possible within existing and emerging urban infrastructures.[89]

The capacity of urban residents to care and cope during the pandemic was significantly affected by ongoing structural transformations, changing their experiences of intimacy and companionship in everyday spaces.

The city residents interviewed in the fieldwork constantly compared between rural and urban space and culture, highlighting their sense of estrangement within cities, as opposed to village life that is grounded in consistent personal, close, and familial relations, increasing the provision and reciprocity of care.[90]

The post-Oslo skyline of Ramallah, a result of the massive building of apartment blocks and office buildings at the expense of the historic fabric of red-tiled roofs houses,[91] influenced people's communality and relationality. According to several interviewees, people living in apartment blocks and multi-storey buildings established no neighbour-relations prior to or during the pandemic.

Although care was provided through service committees, it was described as lacking 'intimacy' usually common in neighbourhoods populated by the same family, or in refugee camps that are adjacent to cities or located within them,[92] or in the villages surrounding the city.[93]

However, these geographies are complex and dynamic, with some rural spaces witnessing patterns of urbanisation, including changes to the architecture of houses, which could lead to the same feeling of estrangement. Urban residents who had migrated from rural areas can and do retrieve the village practices of care within their urban neighbourhoods, as our interviews showed.

Solidarity spaces"', *Urban Studies* 54/9 (2017), pp. 2155–7.

[87] Rasim Khamaisi, 'The Palestinian City Between Captivity, Siege and Development [*Al Madina Al Filestinia Bain Al Asir Wal Hisar Wal Tanmieh*]' in Al Malki and Tamari (eds), *The Palestinian City*, pp. 49–64.

[88] Ahmad Izz As'ad, 'A Country Ready for a New Dawn', 239–304.

[89] Emma R. Power and Miriam J. Williams, 'Cities of Care: A Platform for Urban Geographical Care Research', *Geography Compass* 14/1 (2020), pp. 3–5.

[90] Majdi Al Malki, in-person interview, 19 September 2022.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Lisa Taraki, in-person interview, 29 August 2022.

[93] Ahmad Izz As'ad, in-person interview, 15 August 2022.

Al-Tireh neighbourhood, which is perceived by other neighbourhoods' residents as an affluent and isolated space, is composed mainly of individual homes that were initially created as a housing project for the Birzeit University Society. Yet, interviewees indicated, many of those residents are originally from villages and refugee camps. They consider the practices of companionship meaningful, thus trying to create the dynamics of a village in the neighbourhood, through activities of the Birzeit University Housing Cooperative that bring them together to eat, play, or to participate in offering congratulations on weddings and birthdays, or condolences.

The notion of receiving care in areas outside the urban space has different connotations than within it. According to an interviewee, the disregard of formal institutions in providing care to areas outside the urban space, such as villages, has not only created a sense of community care between those living in villages, but was also seen to remove the 'shame' surrounding receiving external care.[94] Activists in different initiatives greatly showed the correlation between their existence and the absence or almost dormant nature of formal institutions. The latter were reported to have felt threatened by the existence of some initiatives and attempted to take over their work, as one activist recalled.[95]

However, other interviewees disputed that such companionship was integral or available in Al-Tireh. They clarified that perceptions of care and sociability of rural origins complicated the modes of companionship created in the neighbourhood. Hence, the very meaning of care through companionship and neighbourliness is fluid and transformative, even within one area.

Social intimacy is therefore an accumulation of relations that depend on time and space. The isolation imposed during the pandemic emphasised how local histories of neighbourhoods extended beyond distant spaces. In the old city of Al-Bireh and Al-Massayef neighbourhoods some interviewees recalled how they were able to stay in contact even as some residents moved out of the neighbourhood, indicating that a 'balance' of companionship had been accumulating over the years, despite the spatial distance. Such balance was reactivated during the pandemic, as people checked on each other through phone calls.

Other patterns of companionship were formed outside of the neighbourhood's everyday spaces of care, like schools and workplaces, yet were carried back to the neighbourhood. In Al-Tireh, which is relatively new compared to Al-Bireh, companionship was established prior to relocating to the neighbourhood through the Birzeit Society, where parents worked together in university and their children studied in the same schools outside their neighbourhood. These intersecting everyday spaces generated a network of companionship that informed and influenced communal residential life.

Kinship interdependency, however, was the most distinguished feature of care for urban residents during the pandemic. Many Palestinians across Palestine and refugee camps were mostly dependent on their familial and communal networks.[96] Family is thus per-

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94 Interview with a campaign beneficiary, August 2022.
95 Interview with an activist, July 2022.
96 Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Responding to Precarity: Beddawi Camp in the Era of Covid-19,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 49/4 (2020), p. 32.

ceived as the main care provider, regardless of its form, whether financial, emotional or otherwise, where both nuclear and extended family arrangements enable caring functions in Palestinian society.[97] The relationality of care extends between family members, even when they stop living in the same space, including when some family members live in the village while others in the city. The pandemic highlighted familial forms of care, such as daily checking on family, or helping with paying rents due to increasing unemployment.[98]

Moving the Centre to the Margin: Re-organising Urban Space During Covid

The closures and isolations that the pandemic imposed influenced both the social relations and the spaces in which they took place. One of the most distinguished features of urban life during the pandemic was the repurposing of social and private spaces. In Ramallah, for instance, streets were less occupied by passing cars and were reclaimed as public spaces with playgrounds and walking routes.[99]

As city centres were shut, economic and social spaces became inaccessible to the city's residents. This brought a gradual shift of the centres and their activities to the margins, i.e residential neighbourhoods. Within these neighbourhoods, informal socio-economic alternatives were forged, and some formal economies were operating not only regardless of lockdown, but also in spite of it. These became spaces of care shaped by communal needs and priorities, through their inhabitants' determination of what 'public good required in a particular time-space and thus initiate necessary reparation efforts,'[100] and driven by the inactivity of formal institutions.[101] The pandemic, as an extreme and distinctive experience of disruption, deprived city dwellers from accessing many urban facilities, while allowing them to reclaim alternative urban spaces and to rethink their own engagement with the city. Through these everyday practices, city residents reproduce and reshape their cities.[102] Such infrastructure of interventions enable the remaking of the inner city through 'economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life.'[103]

When major activities and venues located in residential neighbourhoods closed during lockdown periods this released more street space. For example, the temporary closure of the Ministry of Finance in Al-Massayef neighbourhood meant the street on which it was located, once-packed with the cars of the ministry's employees and visitors, became a public space for gathering and selling goods.

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[97] Hasan Ladadwa, 'The Sociology of the Informal Economic Sector During the Intifada, A Coping Mechanism [*Sociologia al Qita' Al Iqtisadi 'air and Munatham Khilal Intifada Al Aqsa, Wasila lil Takayuf Wal Sumoud*]', (Master's Dissertation, Birzeit University, 2003) (unpublished).
[98] Ahmad Izz As'ad, in-person interview, 15 August 2022; Interview with a resident of Ramallah, 4 August 2022.
[99] El Sakka, 'Between the Palestinian Authority's Social Policies and Israel's Occupation Policies,' p. 107.
[100] Alam and Houstion, 'Rethinking Care', p. 8.
[101] Interview with an activist, July 2022.
[102] Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (California: Stanford University Press: 2013), pp. 43–65.
[103] Simone, 'People as Infrastructure,' p. 407.

Socio-economic activities increased significantly in this neighbourhood, as one of its local supermarkets remained open despite the lockdown. This was partly possible given that the shop had a back door accessible through the owners' home. This indicates a different form of repurposing during the pandemic, where some private spaces became an extension of or an alternative to public space, creating an overlap between the private and the public. The supermarket became a landmark of Al-Massayif neighbourhood, attracting customers, and rendering the street a public and social place. Different informal businesses emerged in response to increased social engagement, including kiosks to sell sweets, grilled food, falafel, etc. The wider neighbourhood was transformed to a gathering space, young people began to invite their friends from other neighbourhoods to spend time and eat snacks, rendering the space an alternative to the inaccessible city centre.
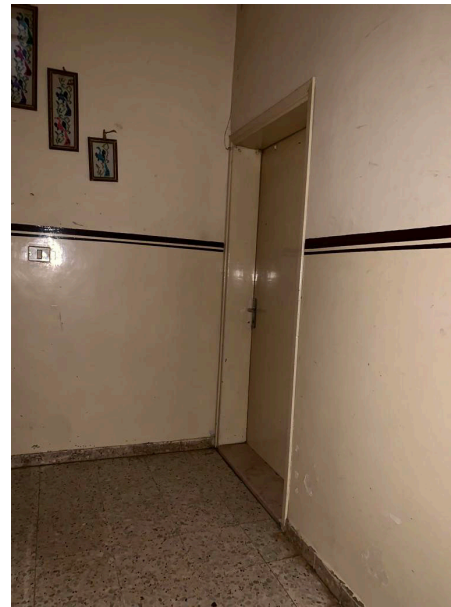
Figures 4 & 5: The backdoor of the supermarket from the residential building (the student's fieldwork, 2022).

A Map Showcasing Economic Activity Location in the Neighbourhood During the Pandemic

🔴 Al Tumaizi Supermarket   🟢 Grilled food Kiosk

🔵 Knafeh Kiosk   🟢 Falafel Kiosk

Economic activities sites in Al-Massayif Neighbourhood During Covid (Ramallah-GIS,2022).

A Map Showcasing Place of Socioeconomic Interactions in the Neighbourhood

● **Places of Social Interaction**   - - - **Fadwa Tuqan Street (Center of Neighbourhood's Interaction)**

● **Places of Economic Interaction**

Socio-economic sites in Al-Massayif Neighbourhood During Covid (Ramallah-GIS,2022)

Kiosks were allowed to remain open" and remove the rest – going straight into "as economic activity was not prohibited. Thus, the kiosk owners took on an informal 'policing' role of banning gatherings next to their stalls, so they could continue operating. The decision on what to sell was based on the neighbourhood's needs. Furthermore, those who set up kiosks were meeting their own employment and income needs, having lost their jobs during the pandemic, as in the case of a hairdresser who opened a kiosk, and a grill kiosk owner who used to be a construction worker.

For these kiosk sellers and the supermarket owners, having commercial activities in their residential neighbourhoods was a way of benefiting from and contributing to this communal space, meeting the different needs and keeping the financial income 'within' the neighbourhood. Moreover, they referred to the sentiments of 'being a community' again, referring to these increased interactions. Yet, such interactive forms of care in and through space is not new to this neighbourhood and a resident we interviewed highlighted the role of the neighbourhood's mosque in encouraging cooperation between community members and providing care for them. What is noteworthy here, however, is the adaptive use of space for day-to-day socio-economic purposes, that then accommodated additional forms of sociability.

Epilogue: Care Beyond the Pandemic?

Can these infrastructures and practices of care be sustained in what is referred to, perhaps too lightly, as a 'post-pandemic' world? As with any crisis, the capacities and rhythms of care are influenced by the needs produced by the crisis, and vary depending on the structures of social difference and differentiation, as well as the networks of social capital, institutions, and spatial formations. What is also evident is that care is an evolving social practice, one that emerges through the histories and politics of a place, while taking on new inflections in relation to the immediate context. Over the intense period of Covid-19 in Palestine, some care practices adapted to and transformed everyday urban localities. While some of these endured in the aftermath of Covid-19, a key question remains as to whether care capacity and culture in Palestine can be sustained beyond these varied initiatives, particularly in a context of the ongoing structures of domination and colonial practices of violence as articulated in our interviews and engagement with secondary data.

Our interviews further highlight that different elements affect the sustainability of care in Palestine. While our research has focused on everyday practices of care, the vitality and longevity of these cannot be understood as separate or distinct from a wider circuit of funding, support and governance. Everyday care is ultimately related to institutional dimensions of care, and the multi-scalar support structures these rely on. Legacies of domination and destruction that deeply compromise the formal Palestinian political system continue to severely hinder the ability to mobilise, and to build on everyday institutional and state structures of care.[104] The political context in Palestine affects the continuity of care capacity, with no clear political vision, nor strong parties, the resources to sustain the vital cultures of care are weakened. The strategic and life-affirming capacities of the everyday-institutional overlap is further compromised by neoliberal policies in which care is marketised and fragmented, alongside the proliferation of NGOs and the respective frameworks of care which seldom prioritise grounded and collective care capacity and practices. We would argue that a cultural legacy of everyday community care is not enough for care initiatives to flourish and grow. Structures of social, political and financial capital, all play a role in the formation and sustainability of care.

Yet the fact that many of the individual and collective practices and initiatives we explored were organic to their communities of practice and the spaces of daily life is a significant consideration, one highlighted by urban scholars working on the lived realities of improvisation and repair.[105] Throughout this paper, several interviewees highlighted the importance of grassroot mobilisation. Returning to the successful examples and principles of popular committees, future considerations of community care and mobilisation for change are connected to the features and resources of shared cultural practice, shared public spaces, collective organisation, and the attendance to basic and emerging needs.[106]

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[104] Hanbali, 'Reimagining Liberation.'

[105] Abdou Maliq Simone, *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

[106] Hanbali, 'How to Repair Destruction.'

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