

The Politics of time: political entropy, settler colonialism and urban ruination in Hebron/AI-Khalil, Palestine

In the state of siege, time becomes space

Transfixed in its eternity

In the state of siege, space becomes time

That has missed its yesterday and its tomorrow.

Mahmoud Darwish, Under Siege (2002)

Introduction

The city of Hebron is a microcosm of the colonial settlement project in the entire West Bank. Located 30 km south of Jerusalem, Hebron is one of the largest cities in the West Bank with a population of circa 250,000. Following the Hebron Protocols in 1997¹, the city was divided into H1, controlled by the Palestinian Authority and home to about 85% of the city's residents, and H2, which remained under full Israeli military control (Neuman, 2018). Today, H2 is inhabited by 33,000 Palestinians and 700 Jewish settlers, but the existence of the former along the historical urban space is haunted by the violence of absence. Walking through Hebron's H2, an area that includes the old city of Hebron, which used to make up the urban heart of the entire region, is an unsettling experience. Estimations state that at least one third of the Palestinian properties in the Old City are already abandoned (OCHA, 2019). Slowly but steadily H2 is being dispossessed and the emptiness of the street is coupled by the slow decay of the façade of Palestinian homes. H2's restricted area provides a haunting experience of urban void and violence. At times, one can walk back and forth the area's main streets

¹ The Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron, also known as the Hebron Protocol or Hebron Agreement, was signed on 17 January 1997 by Israel, represented by Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), represented by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, under the supervision of U.S. Secretary of State. It concerned the partial redeployment of Israeli military forces from Hebron in accordance with the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ("Oslo II").

without seeing a single sign of life. The segregation policy through which Palestinian space is constantly cordoned and barred achieved its goal of turning the old city into a ghost town (Amro and Bunte, 2017).

Yet, unlike other cities-in-ruins like Varosha (Dobraszczyk, 2015), Pripjat (Stone, 2013) or segments of Detroit (Apel, 2015), the uncanny feeling is not necessarily derived from actual emptiness and abandonment, but rather from the persistent knowledge that behind the broken windows and sealed doors there is a living city dominated by a settler-colonial regime of slow ruination and an urbicidal project (Abujidi, 2014). At times, it remains unclear which part of the houses is inhabited and which is vacant, as the boundaries between home and ruin, use and non-use, seem to be permeable and undefined (see figure 1). We situate the ruination process not only within the spatial framework of material demolition and political urbicide, but rather as a temporal regime of purposeful decay. Israel has repeatedly utilized temporality as a political tool to extend its territorial scope (Petee 2017, 45) and its domination over Palestinian space (Busbridge 2020) and Palestinian lives (Jamal 2016; Tawil-Souri 2017).

As we shall show, Israel uses the power of time and entropy to let Palestinian assets decay slowly, while prohibiting proper renovation and maintenance. The mundane violence of political entropy tends to remain unseen, as the harm is done slowly, allegedly naturally. Settler colonial temporalities (Sa'di-Ibraheem 2022), when combined with messianic perceptions of the Jewish *longue durée* (Busbridge 2020), makes it possible to maintain a state of undecidedness, where deferral itself becomes a weapon since it lets entropy operate without interruption. While the paper's main focus is on the settler-colonial state apparatuses, the last section shows how Hebron's Palestinian inhabitants aim on their part at slowing down the effects of time by applying friction to the process of ruination, as well as by the insistence on preserving hope and futurability. By identifying the temporalities trapping the city's Palestinian population, our paper thus frames Hebron's H2 as space that is simultaneously ruined and reclaimed. Ruins are not only an agglomeration of rubble but a network of temporal regimes repositioning Hebron between violence and resilience, destruction and construction.

The research is based on a series of field observations, in-depth interviews conducted with residents of H2, media surveys and archival research.² The first part presents the conceptual framework focusing on the notion of political entropy within the broader discussion on settler colonialism and ruination in Palestine/Israel. The next part moves into the settler-messianic temporalities in Hebron/Al-Khalil's H2 area, to show how the messianic logic renders relics of Jewish past existence into an archipelago that arrests Palestinian development. The following chapter examines forms of slow ruination and political entropy imposed on Palestinians living in the area, exposing the naturalization of ruination and its impacts on H2's urban fabric. The last part engages with the Palestinian efforts to slow down the slow ruination, that is to counter the entropical effort by shaping temporal possibilities for a Palestinian future.

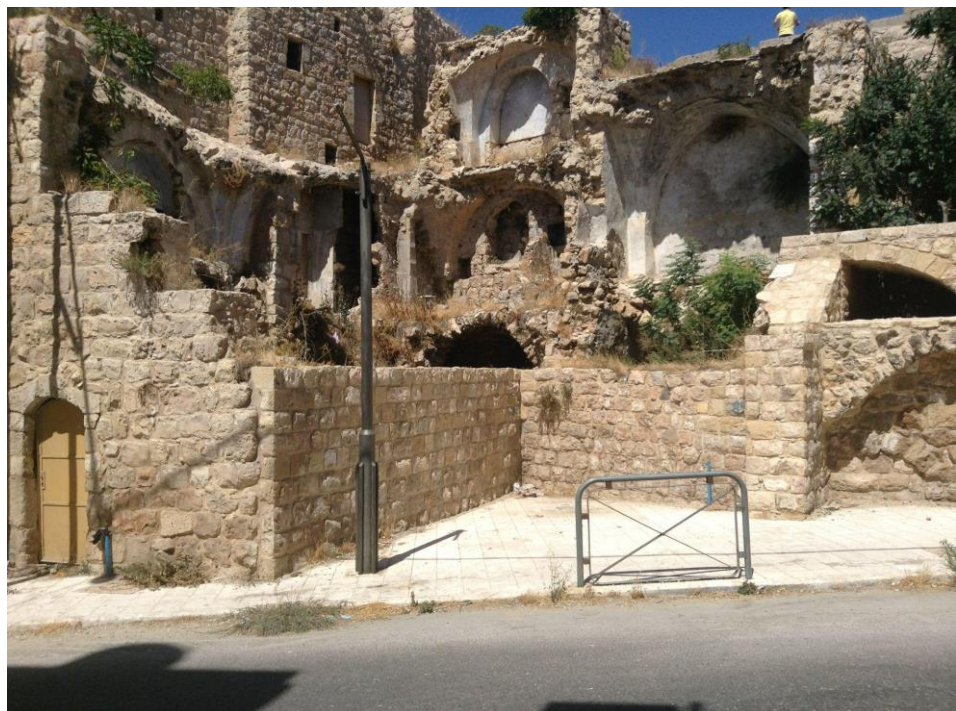


Figure 1: The continuum of ruination in the old city. Photo by authors.

Ruins, ruination and political entropy

² Interviews took place in Arabic and then transcribed and translated. The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.

From ancient archaeological sites to houses in a varying state of forced abandonment or of renovation, ruins and ruination can serve as a signifier of violence or sanctity, represent a historical narrative, or be used as a material proof of political ownership – as well as personal histories, attachments, and everyday lives (Leshem, 2017). In this article, we understand ruins as material embodiments of social time, representing decay and degradation, while holding meanings of historical significance and future possibilities.

Academic interest in ruins and ruination has gained significant momentum over the past decades. While previous writing on the subject has focused on *ruin lust* as an aesthetic materialisation of history and memory (Simmel, 1965; McCauley, 1953), research from the 1990s onwards takes more seriously the political complexities of ruins. These studies critically examine the human fascination with forces of destruction (Hell and Schönle, 2017) and the ways in which representation of ruins and the choice of what to preserve and how are part of power networks that produce and fortify national narratives (Nelson, 2012). For instance, how ruins can be used to rationalize the "global war on terror" (Nayar, 2017); and in recent years, with an increasing emphasis on neoliberalism as a major factor in slow ruination processes (Apel, 2015; Batuman, 2013), the imageries they invoke (Dobraszczyk, 2014) as part of crises (e.g. in 2008: Korcheck, 2015) or in response to planetary calamities like the climate crisis (Paprocki, 2019).

Our purpose is to tie time and politics into the discourse on ruins, with specific emphasis on the temporality and materiality of settler colonialism. Ruin is not (only) a noun but rather a process in which time is embedded in matter. From the very moment a structure is built, it already begins to number its days. In ruins, the relationship between time and matter is dependent on power regimes of deceleration and acceleration. While the purpose of ongoing maintenance and renovation work is to slow down the passage of time on the building materials, opposite power regimes seek to accelerate its action to promote demolition, erosion and dismantling.

Thus, rather than a finite outcome, a ruin should be understood as a process with a clear political context that poses a series of questions: When does a structure become a ruin, how fast does it take to become 'ruined', when and how does the ruination stop? These questions allow us to investigate the work of time to analyse

the rhythms of ruination and the dialectics between the acceleration and deceleration of entropy as well as the legitimacy regimes involved in the process (Sa'di-Ibraheem, 2022).

We would therefore wish to present the idea of *political entropy* as a key concept to the analysis of ruination. Expanding from the laws of thermodynamics, entropy designates the flow of time from a state of order to disorder (or from certainty to uncertainty). The entropy of a system always grows, thus to preserve order and certainty, energy must be invested. If time is allowed to take its course without intervention, the inevitable result would be processes of dissolution and decay.

Political entropy is a temporal technology of control that builds on the necessary process of natural decay. More specifically, political entropy points to the fact that nothing is “natural” in the implications of nature laws on social and human structures. Entropy is an active agent with which political systems deal as an ongoing project of the management of matter and time. Decay and ruination are co-authored by entropy and by human decisions regarding the investment of energy and work, and mainly decisions on whose order and stability matters. Entropy is thus saturated by the political, as the management of time – acceleration, deceleration, deferral – has clear effects on single structures as well as on entire cities – while at the same time, it normalizes and depoliticizes ruination, suggesting a form of legitimacy that is based on allegedly natural laws.

Ruination, settler colonialism and the politics of time in Israel/Palestine

An important part of the new ruins discourse is devoted to imperial and colonial contexts. Ann Laura Stoler refers to imperial ruins, as "the deeply saturated, less spectacular forms in which colonialisms leave their mark", as well as on the active process of ruination, so as "to reposition the present in the wider structures of vulnerability, damage, and refusal that imperial formations sustain" (Stoler, 2008, 194). Thus, studying ruins is not meant to sanctify them as mere sites of memory, but rather as evidence "to what people are *left with*" (Ibid.).

We situate our discussion with the critical conversation on settler colonialism as a specific type of colonialism, where settlers come to stay. Its primary goal is to create a new home for the colonizers, thereby pushing the colonized out of their own

homes, replacing them as the new "natives" of the place (Wolfe 2006; Salamanca et. al. 2012). It replaces the "classic" colonial imperative to exploit and coerce the native and the colony's resources (while keeping institutional and emotional ties to the metropole) with the imperative to create a new home for the colonizer at the expense of the colonized using a repertoire of exploitative modalities.³ Settler colonialism, in other words, is a political form of violent dwelling: a home-making for the colonizer which is at the same time home-destruction for the colonized (Handel and Kotef, 2023). Either concretely or metaphorically, settler colonialism is an act of dwelling inside depopulated homes, sites of destruction, or landscapes of ruination (Shalhoub Kevorkian, 2005). Paradoxically, ruins operate as the building blocks of newfound homes (Kotef, 2020).

As a process of homemaking, settler colonialism also entails specific modes of legitimacy-seeking to conceal its inherent violence. Veracini distinguishes between colonialism and settler colonialism, arguing that while "the first aims to perpetuate itself [...] the latter aims to supersede itself [...] that is, when the settlers cease to be defined as such [...] and their position becomes normalized" (Veracini 2013, 28). People, settlers included, don't want to feel that they live in other people's homes (see Navaro Yashin 2009). Thus, in settler colonialism, physical ruins tend to be naturalized into the landscape (as "antiques" to be aestheticized, or as "abandoned properties" to be redeemed), while seeking to conceal the active processes of ruination.

In recent decades, settler colonial studies have played a major role in understanding political violence, subjugation and control in Palestine/Israel (Salamanca et. al, 2012; Sabbagh-Khoury 2022; Barakat 2018; Englert, 2020; Alqaisiya 2020; Zreik 2016). The settler colonial lens enables one to analyse the structure of the Zionist control over the territory between the river and the sea as an ongoing process of expansion cum dispossession.

Veracini (2013) distinguishes between settler colonialism in the 1948 territories (that is, the internationally recognized borders of the State of Israel) and those occupied in 1967. For him, the 1948 Nakba and its ongoing outcomes are a case

³ For a critique of the binary division between exploitation and elimination, see Englert, 2020.

of settler colonialism, whereas the Occupied Territories conquered by war in 1967 are a failure of the settler colonial project. In this analysis, the “classic” model of settler colonialism (i.e. where the indigenous population has been reduced to a manageable remnant), does not apply in the 1967 territories as it does in the part of Palestine conquered in 1948.

Rana Barakat (2018) criticizes this analysis, asking “how is it that Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1967 are not part of the settler colonial project?” (Ibid, 350). Moreover, she criticizes the application of settler colonialism to Israel/Palestine, referring to the paradigm’s tendency to see its research objects as a done-deal, where “native elimination happened (past tense) [...] a ‘completed’ story with a known outcome” (Ibid, 352). While this might be the case in the US, Australia and New Zealand, says Barakat, it is not the case in Palestine. Warning us from replicating the temporal division between 1948 and 1967, Barakat's critique is vital for any reading that takes into account the continuity of dispossession, displacement and exploitation.

While adapting Barakat's critique, it is important to note that within the settler colonial framework there is a wide variety of tools, technologies of control, political measures and frames of legitimacy. Wolfe (2013, 274) explains that “since Israel/Palestine remains locked in a frontier situation, a particularly wide range of settler-colonial modalities co-exist simultaneously.” In that regard, while clearly accepting the continuities between 1948 and 1967 (as well as between different kinds of control within those areas), we also pay attention to the differences and variations within this ongoing mode of settler colonialism.

Palestinian ruins are inseparable from the landscape of Israel/Palestine, on both sides of the Green Line. The scholarly literature on the aftermath the 1948 war situates ruins as a political outcome, a physical presence and a social fact upon which the Israeli national project is predicated. Ruins and ruination associated with 1948, Israel’s independence and Palestinian Nakba, tend to emphasize the materiality of ruins and their (in)visibility in the present (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod, 2010; Kadman, 2015).

When discussing 1967 and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, however, the focus tends to shift from material ruins to the active ruination. That is, the ongoing process of destruction and home negation (Harker, 2009; Joronen and

Griffiths, 2019; Handel, 2019). During the now 57 years of Israeli occupation, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian homes have been demolished: demolition of 'illegal' structures; punitive demolition by order of a military officer, often after a hearing and legal revision; and demolition as part of operational actions, sometimes in the midst of battle and as part of its outcomes, sometimes as a planned operation dubbed "exposure" in military jargon, referring to the bulldozing of pathways for movement and surveillance and removing possible hiding places. In the Gaza Strip, Israel's attacks from 2005 on (including the one that broke in October 2023, at the time of writing this paper) have been accompanied by a massive destruction of homes, public buildings and urban infrastructures. Moving from the single structure to the urban fabric, a prevailing concept used to discuss post 1967 ruination is *urbicide* (Graham, 2004). Nurhan Abujidi's (2014) analysis looks at Palestinian cities to consider the political, social and cultural ramifications of Israel's strategy of ruination in and of Palestinian space.

While most discussions on ruins, demolitions and urbicide focus on their material and spatial aspects, our analysis sheds light on the workings of time. Several authors have referred to the role of time in the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories (Tawil-Souri, 2017; Peteet, 2017; Busbridge, 2020). Everyday life in Palestine is slowed down due to checkpoints, queues, detours, time wasted on waiting for permits, and other constraints on free movement (Rijke and Minca, 2018; Kotef and Amir, 2011; Hammami, 2015; Tawil-Souri, 2011; Handel 2009). On a wider level, authors such as Falah (2005) and Azoulay and Ophir (2012) have shown how Israel's tendency to defer decisions – on the status of the settlements and East Jerusalem, for example – operates as a strategy of "constructive ambiguity" (Benvenisti, 1988, 49), a strategy that buys time for Israel while enabling further colonial expansion.

On top of the forced slowing down, Ghantous and Joronen (2022) point to the idea of *dromoelimination* – that is, intensified and accelerated eliminatory rhythms that accelerate settler colonial expansion, as done by Jewish settler NGOs (such as *Regavim*). In all cases, however, the "weaponization of time" (Peteet 2017) grants more significance to the settler's time while "depleting" (Joronen 2021; Jamal 2016) Palestinian time, referring to it as worthless, to the point of "futurelessness," when the loss of time is also the loss of hope in the future.

Our discussion wishes to enrich the existing body of knowledge by thinking the materiality of time as seen through the lens of ruination. In her illuminative ethnography on Hebron, Chiara De Cesari (2010, 16) notes how the city is “imploding into multiple cities, inhabiting different spatialities and temporalities”. Following her insight, our aim is to situate the discussion not only within the spatial framework of material demolition and urbicide, but also against the temporal regimes of political entropy which justify and facilitate the process of ruination.

In the following we will refer to the idea of "settler colonial temporalities," which in the case of Israel's occupation of Palestinian space, are strongly connected to messianic *longue durée*: a time regime that ignores the present in the name of the past (divine promises) and the future (messianic redemption) (see also El-Haj 2001). The longevity of the mythical-messianic temporalities – when standing in conflict with the mundane time of everyday lives – gives them the power to create a world for those who can 'take their time' at the expense of those from whom the time is literally taken, if not robbed (Jamal 2016; Tawil-Souri 2017).

Put differently, if settler colonialism is a "structure, not an event" (Wolfe 2006), then rather than simply tracing physical *ruined structures* in the city, we should examine the *structures of ruination*. Ruins and ruination are integral to the settler-colonial world. They represent the concrete destruction shadowing settlement and erasure, but at the same time they encapsulate tangible memories of the erased past. Matter becomes both ruins (that is, representations of violence and destruction) and relics (namely, material remnants with high symbolic value and attachments). In the case of Hebron, material remains are used to justify current control and impose political entropy by creating linkage to Jewish history, while other remains are presented as proof of the indigenous steadfastness in the occupied territory.

Relics: settler-messianic temporalities

Hebron/al-Khalil is an urban nod saturated with multiple hallmarks of religion, nationalism and political violence. Up until 1929, the relationships between the Arab majority and the Jewish minority were characterized by relatively peaceful neighbourliness (Klein 2014, 58). However, as the national conflict in Mandatory Palestine intensified, these relations were strained to the point during the 1929 riots

when the city became one of the main sites of inter-communal violence (Cohen 2016). Hebron/al-Khalil grew to become a crucial Palestinian hub that in 1948 remained on the Jordanian side of the new border, thus inaccessible to Israeli citizens for nineteen years. When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, the city became a target for colonization efforts of the settler groups that began to operate, with the backing of the state, to Judaize the West Bank.

In Hebron/al-Khalil the temporal manipulation of Jewish past becomes a technology that shapes relics as tool of spatial production and material destruction naturalising the imposed entropical order. The city was portrayed as a place of danger and yearning—a lost city, simultaneously desired and feared. To justify their invasion of the city, Jewish settlers mobilized the memories of the Biblical Patriarchs and Matriarchs, the Hebronite roots of King David, the historical Jewish cemetery, the 1929 massacre and the forced evacuation that took place in 1936 (Feige 2009). This template of hallowed narratives has been used to consolidate their hold in the city under the slogan “Hebron, Then and Forever.”

An imagined theological past is mobilized to justify the infliction of violence on the city’s Palestinian residents. Being one of the four holy cities (with Jerusalem, Safed and Tiberias), Jewish presence in the city has been continuous (though sporadic) since biblical times. As the last Jewish families left the city after the 1929 massacre and the Arab Revolt of 1936, Hebron/al-Khalil's identity has been organized in the Zionist image around the tragic toll of human lives and the notion of symbolic and material loss. The Jewish-Israeli colonization after 1967 was thus enabled by re-acquiring the properties of the Jewish families who had resided in the city. Some of these were severely damaged from an earthquake that occurred in 1927 and demolished after 1948 when they were seized by the Jordanian Custodian of Enemy Property (Shoked 2020, 92). Only twenty plots of land and twenty-four buildings were registered under the names of exiled Jews in Hebron (Ibid), but these have been the stepping stone for physically and symbolically taking over the entire city. The settlers, who occupied properties belonging to the former Jewish residents of the city, were bent on reimagining, and reshaping, the city according to messianic conceptions of Jewish redemption, wishing to remake Hebron as a purely Jewish city. The messianic-settler present progressive wishes to tie together past and future, using the mobilising sense

of loss as a drive for renovating Jewish presence while grounding the violent conquest of the city. Zionism is not just an effort to nationalize a religious faith but also to theologize a national narrative.

Messianic-settler time in Hebron is a frozen meta-time of permanent present progressive. As sociologist Michael Feige has shown (2009), the claim for Hebron was engulfed by a theological demand to take the city outside actual history and into Jewish mythology as the urban hub that has always existed. Such a framework has a clear articulation in urban space. A process of *relicification* of place alongside spatial and temporal ruination – a process not just in the city but of the city, turning Hebron into a meta-city, an idea, no less than a concrete urban fabric.

Hebron epitomizes the underlying principle predicating Israel's colonization's impetus, that Palestinian space, and time, must make way for Jews to reclaim their place. The relic archipelago, that draws its legitimacy from an assumed claim to a perceived Jewish past in the city, provides the bedrock for arresting a tangent Palestinian urban future. Urban ruins are reborn as relics, that is, as material forms of legitimacy (see figures 2&3). As El-Haj (2001) notes in the case of archaeology, the science of uncovering the past is also a way to articulate a narrative about national identity. In Hebron/al-Khalil, this narrative seeks to normalize vacating Palestinian space and life from the urban nod. It puts both Palestinian time and space on hold (Busbridge 2020) by using political entropy while invigorating Jewish-settler place-making.

The meta-city, lying outside of everyday time, turns time into a weapon. The persistence of those who live in the city out of pure ideology and faith grants them power over the Palestinian inhabitants of the city who carry their daily lives in it, work, take children to school or maintain social connections beyond the restricted area. The relicification of Hebron/ al-Khalil – that is, the sanctification of Jewish ruins, coupled by the present progressive of settler-messianic temporalities – is part of the structure of ruination in the city. Rather than simply being taken out of time, these relics constantly operate as political anchors around which Jewish presence, and colonial domination are ascertained. As we shall see, the Jewish relic is part of the structure of Palestinian ruination within the temporal framework of political entropy, slow decay and arrested regeneration.



Figure 2: Mural depicting destruction, near the old Palestinian market. The mural imagines the city after 1929 as empty and ruined, neglecting the Palestinian presence. Photo: Authors.



Figure 3: Mural depicting the ostensible Jewish return to Hebron in 1967 as the city's rebuilding and liberation. Photo: Authors

Ruins: Slow violence and political entropy

We showed how the Jewish settlers use material ruins as relics, that is, charging them with meaning while (ab)using the past as leverage to take control over the entire old city. The formation of the relic archipelago is a move to weaponize the past, to render the city's colonial memories of former shared life into a colonial temporality that takes hold of Hebron's present. The parallel process to the 'relicification' of the old town is the ruination of Palestinian space, based on slow violence and political entropy, or in other words, on ruination as a structure, not an event.

As mentioned above, Israel has demolished tens of thousands of houses in the Occupied Territories since 1967. In Hebron, the number of the demolitions remained

relatively low, with a few noticeable exceptions.⁴ This doesn't mean, however, that Hebron is not suffering from processes of ruination. As a matter of fact, H2 is probably one of the most vulnerable urban areas in the West Bank, where instead of bulldozing or bombing Palestinian houses, Israel enacts two forms of ruination: (1) breaking into homes and temporarily taking control on parts of them; and (2) letting Palestinian structures decay and fall apart, while forbidding maintenance and renovation.

The first form of ruination is based on daily breaching of the home's boundaries by soldiers and settlers: these infiltrate homes, take over parts of them for alleged security purposes, sow destruction and create a climate of uncertainty and lack of security—acts resulting in the negation of homeness and the sense of security in one's own home (Joronen and Griffiths, 2019; Handel, 2019; Akeeson, 2014).

Compared to the entire West Bank, Hebron's H2 Palestinian residents are significantly more exposed to military invasions of their homes and intrusion into their private space. Invasions to homes in the city are carried out at all hours of the day and night. Israeli soldiers enter Palestinian homes in routine patrols, for the purpose of "mapping" (Huss, 2019) and as part of takeovers of roofs or parts of houses for time periods that can vary between hours and weeks.

"The army always used the roof of the house as a military point, since it is the house closest to the Al-Haram al-Ibrahimi checkpoint," tells us Mariam, a resident of H2, "In 2000, the army broke into the compound, which consists of 15 families, and searched all the houses. The army blew up any house that was closed, including my own house. People were away at work because the operation took place during the day, the army blew up our second floor completely."

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2019) Israeli soldiers invaded 75% of the Palestinian homes adjacent to the Israeli settlements in Hebron – an area inhabited by about 7,000 Palestinians. In addition, 44% of the families reported that during this period the military took over the roof or another part of the house for a period that varied between hours to weeks.

⁴ Among these, one can refer to Al-Dabweya operation, which resulted in the demolition of 16 commercial stores on Al-Shuhada Street. Secondly, Wadi al-Nasara operation, which resulted in the demolition of 11 Mamluk historical buildings and the creation of a prayer road for Jewish worshippers linking Kiryat Arba and the Ibrahimi Mosque.

Yousef, whose family lives in the house for four generations, described how soldiers have used his home and roof, mainly during Jewish holidays: "The behaviour of the soldiers bothered me a lot, several times I was surprised with a group of soldiers over my head while I was sleeping in my bed, these soldiers don't respect the sanctity of our homes".⁵

Invasion of homes in Hebron is carried out with the purpose of demonstrating the presence of the Israeli security forces in Palestinian neighbourhoods and creating a mechanism of control. Soldiers who served in the city said that the mission was to "show the Palestinians there's someone ruling them," and to "instil in them this sense of persecution" (Breaking the Silence, 2015). In this context, the blurring between the private space and the public space in the city is particularly noticeable, as both are completely exposed to the continuous presence of soldiers. According to one of the soldiers: "In Hebron, if you're a Palestinian, I'll enter your house whenever I feel like it, and search for whatever I want, and I'll turn your house upside down if I want to" (Yesh Din et al., 2019, 52).

The Palestinian house in H2 is penetrable. The structure itself and the walls that are supposed to provide ontological security are placed under a temporal colonial rule in which at any given moment the home can be invaded and temporally taken. Furthermore, more often than not, the break-in is accompanied by physical ruination of Palestinian property. Displacement of doors, breaking walls and tearing down furniture and pillows, leaving the house in rubble – thus leading to a serious damage to the sense of homeness to the point that Palestinian residents saying that they refrain from buying things for the house or from repairing the items that were broken during the invasion, knowing that they will be broken again anyway (Ibid).

The violent break-ins and the temporal invasions reveal that beyond the home/homelessness dichotomy, there are intermediate conditions in which the housing is insecure and unstable; cases in which there are walls and a roof – but the house still lacks a sense of home (Heywood, 2005). The constant threat of invasion is in itself a source of alienation from one's home, resulting in a reluctance to invest time, efforts, and resources in making it a full "home" (Parrott, 2005). Conditions of

⁵ *Hurmat al-bayt*: a term used to express the gendered privacy of homes where no one should enter another house without permission and must knock on the door so that women can cover their hair.

instability and constant threat may give rise to situations in which home demolition occurs even though the (physical) house still stands. Referring to Palestinian East Jerusalem, Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian (2015, 94) calls this situation “the demolition before the demolition,” further explaining that “the homeplace, despite its invaluable and precious meaning, becomes a trap, a hunting zone. It is in the home that children are getting arrested; it is in the middle of the night that homes are raided; and it is during the early morning, while everyone is still in bed, that the demolitions take place” (Ibid, 91).

In addition to the temporal breaches that ruin the homeliness of the home, is the second form of ruination in Hebron's H2: blocking homes, sealing them from their vicinities, and preventing renovation and maintenance. Settler violence leads Palestinians to cover their windows with metal nets and avoid staying in rooms that face the street. In several places Jewish settlers have placed large quantities of soil on the roofs of the shops adjacent to the settlements and turned them into a vegetable garden. The Palestinian owners were not allowed to access their roofs in order to isolate them from the humidity, a fact that has resulted in irreversible damage to the shops.

The settler actions are facilitated by state violence. The Israeli military has welded the doors of houses populated by Palestinian families living in sections of Al-Shuhada Street, which is forbidden for Palestinian movement. In some cases, families are prevented from opening windows to the street, in order to protect the daily movement of the settlers. In one example, the Israeli military has sealed the windows and the front door of a nine-people family house with blocks and cement, due to its proximity to a narrow alley used by Jewish settlers. Closing the windows prevents fresh air and sunlight from entering the house, and the family is compelled to rely on artificial lighting most of the day. Mould and moisture are found on almost every wall of the home, and the air in the house is musty with a strong, dank scent. The house has been sealed in that way for more than a decade. A petition submitted to the military commander of the city against the forced sealing was submitted a few years ago but failed to make a change – the home is still sealed, slowly deteriorating from the inside and nearly cut off from the outside (ACRI 2019). In other cases, sealed

homes have been abandoned, creating a situation in which “life is drained from the home structure as people no longer come and go from the building” (Siegfried, 2020, 276).

The slow, incremental, damage reveals political entropy as a power that fuses the temporal and the spatial. The messianic settler colonial power regime allows settlers in Hebron to "take their time," that is, to wait patiently and let time do its entropical work, while Israeli authorities prohibit the Palestinians from slowing down the slow violence by means of maintenance and renovation. Israel places strict restrictions on construction, expansion and restoration of existing buildings, or even entering construction materials (Shaheen 2021). The policy of prevention which Israel enacts, operates as a form of ruination by default. Palestinian families are relegated to live in a dilapidated housing environment, where high levels of humidity, constant water leaks and exposure to the weather causes deterioration of their health. In some cases, families reduce their space of living within the home. Aisha told us that her two-story house is very old and that due to the restrictions they could only renovate a small part of the first floor. The second floor is dark and scary without electricity, while the entire house suffers from major dampness and electricity problems. Thus, in her large house, Aisha and her seven children limit their lives to one room, bathroom and kitchen.

In 2019, OCHA surveyed 970 units, of which 70% were in an urgent need of renovation. 82% of the households reported on leakages in their ceilings and walls, 41% on inadequate and broken water pipes, 32% have unsafe doors and windows, while 29% of the families live in a state of insufficient light and air. Furthermore, 85% of the surveyed inhabitants said that they face severe difficulties in renovating or making repairs in their homes. Most of them referred to Israel's blocking access (of materials, workers and equipment) as the main problem. Most of H2 is closed for vehicular movement, crucially limiting the ability to transfer building materials, construction workers and heavy equipment. Thus movement within H2 is either pedestrian or done on the backs of donkeys and horses.

The form of ruination by prevention is a clear example to what Joronen (2021) has called “unspectacular spaces of slow wounding.” “The area did not turn into a ghost centre overnight”, tells us Hassan, but the city passed through several stages before reaching this final status. Now, he reflects, “our social lives are non-existent. Our homes are our prisons.” Following Rob Nixon’s (2011) idea of slow violence, Joronen (2021, 998) suggests that “slow wounding should be seen, not as something opposed to events, but as a peculiar kind of event – as a quasi-event of ordinary harming, which doesn't necessarily have a start, a phase, or an end that is spectacular, event-like, or instantly visible in nature.”

The mundane violence of political entropy is exactly the way in which harm is done slowly, allegedly naturally, in a nearly invisible manner. Yet, the effects of slow violence are not smaller than those of the spectacular event-like classic type of violence. As a matter of fact, the influence of the slow ruination-by-prevention on the urban fabric of H2 is massive. 1,400 families have left their homes, and abandoned properties constitute approximately 42% of the real estate in the Old City. The evacuation and emptying of the Old City also affected markets and shops, as 1,829 shops were closed, which constitutes 77% of the total shops in the Old City (Stacher 2016).

Nour lives with her family in an old house that needs major repairs, especially in the electricity system, which she describes as hazardous to their personal safety:

"I called many electricians to solve this problem, but everyone refused to help me. All of them told me that they fear for their lives [by entering H2], the only electrician who accepted to come, the army did not allow him to enter the area. In short, living in area H2 means constant humiliation."

Beyond the effects on families and on single structures lies the impact of the slow ruination on the city itself. Abed describes how "ruins have become part of my daily scene, my house surrounded by deserted houses where the army prevented the neighbours from repairing and renovating them." The urban slow ruination, coupled

by the daily invasions and the temporary takeovers, puts H2 in a state of routinized forced waiting. H2 residents are cut from the rest of the city. They wait in the checkpoints in every movement to other parts of the city. They wait in their homes for the next military invasion or settler attack. They wait in fear for their children to come back from school. In that, the struggle over time in H2 – from the suspension of the present everydayness to the potential of hope and futurability – is inseparable from the structure of the settler colonial regime.

Slowing down the slow violence: countering ruination by producing Palestinian futurability

Mark Griffiths (2017) points out that one of the tools Israel uses to dominate the Palestinian space in H2 is by creating an unclear future. Political entropy—that is, the activation of physical processes of disorder and uncertainty—can thus be found not only within the material realm of ruins and ruination, but rather also in the structurization of time itself. Amal Jamal (2016) uses Heideggerian concepts to show how time is controlled in Israel/Palestine. Time, argues Heidegger (2008), is felt when its regular, flowing movement is disrupted. Heidegger makes a distinction between two kinds of such ruptures: suspension and emptying. Being stuck in suspended time (*hingehaltenheit*) is a situation characterized by forced waiting, which brings about a “waste of time”; emptied time (*leergelassenheit*) refers more to loss of the meaning of time and of one’s sense of control over it. In the colonial present-progressive, where a whole city is put on hold, time itself is emptied-out (Jamal 2016).

In a city on hold, the temporary becomes permanent. In the old market area, the army issued hundreds of closure orders to Palestinian shops during the second intifada. These orders are apparently temporary. In most cases the owners of the shops still live nearby and are waiting to return to them. This “temporariness,” however, lasts already for two decades. Hagit Ofran, from the Israeli NGO Peace Now, says that “There are shops where I peek inside and see a restaurant with a calendar on the wall where the year is still 2001. The chairs are raised, as they would be before cleaning the floors at the end of the day. There are still customer’s receipts on the table” (Adra and Abraham 2022).

Israel attempts to amputate H2 from the Palestinian urban and communal fabric, by cutting off its links to the rest of Hebron and by trying to slow down the daily lives in it to the point of a halt. Referring to the imposed time regime in H2, Abed points to the fact that the checkpoint closes at 9 pm: "Imagine that you are governed by a certain time limit! Frankly, there is a social class image to the people who live in the Old City, whether for marriage or work [...] there are many cases where parents refused to marry their daughters or sons from the Old City due to the difficulty of reaching there." By measures of slow ruination its aim is to shrink Palestinian space and time to the extent of "making Hebron Jewish again." The settler-messianic perseverance is thus a weapon that enhances the existing extreme asymmetry in power in the occupied city.

Yet as Mark Griffiths (2022) notes we need to be wary from the discussion that overplays Israel's subject-making capacities while understating Palestinian political agency.⁶ An analysis, critical as it might be, of messianic time, slow ruination and political entropy, produces a particular gaze which focuses on the agency of the occupier. Turning to the Palestinian rendering of steadfastness in the present and to the preservation of a future can offer a way to break away from a perspective that overstates the capacities of the Israeli state and its domination regimes. Palestinian steadfastness, known as *sumud*, as we can also see in Hebron, is organized through temporal agency that clings to the present, whether through active resistance or by everyday activities (Griffiths 2017) while actively imagining an emancipated future (Ebileeni, 2023).

By insisting on everyday practices, Palestinian residents of the besieged city mobilize time to suspend the progress of entropy. As Deborah Rose (1991, 46) argues, "to get in the way of settler colonialism, all the native has to do is stay at home." Waiting is not necessarily a passive state of emptied-out or suspended time (Heidegger 2008), but rather a form of active stasis (Peteet, 2017, 44). Accordingly, the struggle for time in H2 is captured in the tension between passivity and

⁶ Barakat stresses as well that the settler-colonial lens (in that case, referring to settler-messianic temporalities) holds the risk of concealing the indigenous point of view and agency, which is why she suggests indigenous framework as an overarching category within which the analysis of settler colonial practices should take place (see also Alqaisiya 2020).

“futurelessness” (Joronen, 2021) on the one hand, and active world-making signified by the insistence of living in the present and building a future on the other hand.

Facing the power of deferral and "taking the time" by the messianic-settler temporalities, Palestinians maintain an opposite rhythm of permanent alertness. Abed noted to us that although he has two houses, one of them is in H1, "moving between the two homes is very difficult, and I cannot sleep outside the house [in H2], as I have to return before the settlers notice my absence and break into my house." When existence is resistance (as a famous Palestinian slogan goes), *sumud* is revealed as a "form of power through powerlessness" (Furani, 2012, 3). The dialectics between powerlessness and forced waiting to the degree of being physically constrained on the one hand and steadfast defending of one's home and city is shown in Aisha's words, saying that due to “great fear of settlers taking over the house [...] I never leave the house, even to visit my family.” The temporal regimes that dictate the pace of political entropy and shaping Hebron’s colonial present renders Aisha’s home as both a prison and an anchor: a place in which one cannot live, but a place one cannot leave either.

Sophie Richter-Devroe (2018, 111) points out that *sumud* animates in the tension between two close words in Arabic: the “proactive survival strategy resisting the material effects of Israeli settler colonialism through continuous daily *amal* (work/action),” and the “ideational strategy of maintaining *amal* (hope), thus resisting the colonization of the mind.” Present and future are thus closely intertwined. What grants the power to stick to the present is hope, as a temporal structure of political anticipation (Shaindinger, 2023). Hope is a counter way of "time taking" by the colonized directed to oppose the erosion of time by the colonizers' temporal practices. In hyperprecarious (Joronen and Griffiths, 2019) H2, hope is an active practice of waiting, not just for a better future, but as a way to render such future conceivable. That is, for *futurability*. In front of the unleashing of time's effects, the preservation of certainty, daily routines, and the maintenance of physical homes not only slow down the slow violence but also grant time itself a new significance: rather than suspended or emptied-out, a time of life, active agency and hope.

Resistance to colonization has become in great part the desire and insistence to continue with daily life and movement (Hammami 2015). The movement in and out

of H2 for daily activities has become vital as the ability to simply live inside one's home which is in a constant process of (un)becoming. For Hammami (2015, 12) the essence of *sumud* lies in the idea "that simply being Palestinian marks one out for a life of suffering is a Palestinian common sense. But the refusal to be made abject by that suffering is what marks you as a member of this particular moral community."

Hassan told us that "the more the checkpoints and the blockages increase, the more I insist on staying in the area because I know well that as soon as I leave the house, the army will take over it, and I also love this house very much, as it is the place that witnessed all stages of my life, from childhood until today." Stressing the tension between the sorrow caused by the ruins, on the one hand, and their being part of his intimate surroundings, on the other, Khaled stated: "These ruins became part of my daily experience. They remind me of the sorrow, humiliation, and dozens of barriers scattered in the city, but at the same time these ruins witnessed the most beautiful memories of my childhood." Navigating through the landscape of colonial violence, both Hassan and Khaled refer to the past and present not only as painful but rather also as a source of childhood memories, hope and futurability. Ruins become part of the reasoning to exist and to resist.

As the settler colonial mechanism is applied through ruination and the negation of homeness, resistance appears through maintaining everyday life within the ruins as well as through efforts of organized renovation of houses and of the urban fabric. In face of the urban scars, Palestinian inhabitants are working to recover and re-knit their daily spaces. For instance, families living in the section of Al-Shuhada Street, where Palestinian movement is mostly barred, have used the grey areas of ruins between the inhabited houses to create an informal network of horizontal and vertical items (such as ladders and bridges), so that they could reach their homes discreetly, away from the eyes of the settlers and their violence.

Resistance in H2 is not only a bottom-up movement. An example of an organized *Sumud* is the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC). In 1996, in response to the massive abandonment of the area due to the movement restrictions, the checkpoints, and the military and settler violence, the Palestinian Authority initiated the establishment of the Committee (Vitullo 2003). Its aim was to preserve the Old

City and conserve its cultural heritage. The goal, however, was not purely architectural or cultural, but rather a means of resistance to Israeli control over the city or what De Cesari designates as “heritage as a technology of life”. To protect the old city from the fierce Israeli expansion, HRC started by focusing on housing, restoring buildings to re-house citizens in the heart of Hebron's old city (which is now part of H2). Beyond housing the HRC also invests in renovating infrastructures and public facilities to support the daily lives of the population. Iyyad tells us about his house in H2:

The neighbourhood in which I live is a neighbourhood inherited from our ancestors and it is named after my family that inhabited it hundreds of years ago, Jaber neighbourhood (Haret Jaber). As for my grandfather's house, it is an Ottoman house that is more than two hundred years old. [...] The Israeli army closed the main entrance to the house and it is still closed until now. The HRC has worked to open alternative entrances not only to my grandfather's house, but to all the neighbouring houses, which changed the features of the neighbourhood, because all the buildings here are connected to each other.

The HRC faced many Israeli obstacles, which included preventing contractors from entering building materials into the work area during the implementation of projects, arresting workers more than once, and the ongoing closures. Within the settler colonial dynamic of dispossession and desolation, the struggle over Hebron's urban Palestinian fabric becomes a critical juncture. De Cesari (2019) shows how the HRC's political act of urban rehabilitation operates to compensate in part for the lack of viable Palestinian sovereign institutions.

"When we started our work in 1996, this area was like a ghost town", said Imad Hamdan, HRC's Director General, in a TV interview (MAAN 2018). "Most of the buildings were cracked, dilapidated, nearly destroyed, and empty. Now, as you can see, buildings are restored and ready to live in." And yet, despite the renovation efforts, convincing people to live in H2 is not an easy task:

"it was necessary to provide many incentives and encouragements for citizens to come and live in the Old City. Our policy was as follows: We allowed the original citizens who wanted to return to live in their homes after renovating them for free. As for the new residents, the committee allowed them to live for

free too. In addition to tax exemptions, exemptions from paying electricity and water bills and free health services for all citizens of the Old City".

HRC thus fights the slow ruination and abandonment by renovation and repopulation. Yet, a closer look shows that sometimes behind the renovated façade there is still a void – as for example in the case of al-Qasbah, the old market, where most shops are renovated, yet closed. Some shops that have been renovated in al-Qasbah, tells us Mariam, “open seasonally, i.e. on religious occasions, when the movement of people is large, but these shops close their doors on normal days." At times a place is only partly renovated such as in the case of Aisha, we discussed earlier, where only a small part of her house was renovated by HRC, while the rest of the structure remained uninhabitable, creating a place that is on the continuum between a ruin and a home.

Conclusion: time and the urban fabric of ruins

In the poem brought in the article’s epigraph, Mahmoud Darwish refers to the specific spatio-temporality of the state of siege. “Time becomes space,” when time turns into a tool in the arsenal of movement restrictions; “space becomes time,” when the limitations on mobility and the freezing of everyday life results in indistinction between yesterday, today and tomorrow. Exploring the processes of ruination in Hebron’s H2, we sought to describe the material entanglements between time and space, showing how the settler-messianic temporalities lock the Palestinian space in a state of siege, when “space becomes time” and “time becomes space.”

The article identified several temporal formations shaping H2’s urban coloniality: the settler-messianic time that spatializes the past as a platform to facilitate colonial present; contemporary military control that seeks to slowly ruin Palestinian homes, their everyday lives and ontological security as a way to destabilize the Palestinian presence in the present; and the Palestinian response articulated as an effort to recalibrate the rhythm of ruination and recover both the present and the future.

Conceptually, political entropy illustrates H2’s formation as an urban space caught between multiple temporalities. While Palestinian time-space is ruined to destabilize the continuity of indigenous presence in the city and to challenge its claim

to the city, the settler-messianic time-space is based on the colonization of relics that are used to claim linearity and continuous Jewish colonial sovereignty. Therefore, to read the ruination of Hebron's H2 as a process that constantly produces relics and ruins is also to understand the temporal and spatial regimes that determine the past, present and future of the city. The abovementioned colonial strategies accumulate into a slow urbicide (Shaw 2019), meant not only to displace single families and empty specific houses, but rather to do irreparable damage to the urban fabric of Hebron/al-Khalil.

Ruins theorists refer to their unique temporality, a space akin to Henri Bergson's notion of duration (*durée*), whereby the present is contracted into the simultaneity of past and future. The ruin is a matter wavering between being and extinction, on the borderline – a violent relation between place and time. The slow ruination transforms H2 into a 'ruin-in-the-making,' a place of waiting, where entropy itself is deeply saturated in political violence.

In his discussion of ruins and rubble, Gaston Gordillo (2014, 31) stresses the difference between haunting and memory. Haunting, for Gordillo, is the "affect created by an absence that exerts a hard-to-articulate, non discursive, yet positive pressure on the body, thereby turning such absence into a physical presence." Referring to "object-oriented negativity", Gordillo seeks to politicize object-oriented approaches through an attentiveness to destruction and violence. It thus opens the opportunity to understand ruination as an interplay between violence and time, giving attention not only to the ruined structures but rather also to what is absent. The sense of uncanniness and haunting in H2 is derived from this tension between presence and absence. H2 can be seen as a ruin-in-becoming, a ruin of urbanism, in a state of slow urbicide, when most physical structures are still standing, but the urban life is frozen and deteriorating. In H2, the perceptive differences between ruin and structure in the city trigger an optic illusion. Buildings that look ruined and abandoned may be actually inhabited, while renovated buildings with a new facade may be completely abandoned.

The uncanny is revealed in the tension between what a home and urban fabric should be – places of shelter, ontological security and everyday life – and their actual condition of instability, lack of future and slow deterioration. Hebron is thus a

battlefield of palimpsests organized around a coloniality of distinct temporalities. While settler-messianic temporality can "take the time" as it aims for the far future while ignoring the mundane temporalities of everyday life, Palestinian lives in the city are halted as noted by Darwish's poem. Deferral and disrepair have become a ruination strategy, locking Palestinian residents into a constant state of precarity penetrating the most intimate fibre of their being.

In H2, single structures and the urban fabric itself are straddling around the brink of the ruin/home division. While entropy, weaponized by settler messianic practices of deferral, push the structures towards their ruination, Palestinian *sumud* pulls them to the pole of homeness, stability and futurability. The static clinging to one's home, which is in constant state of (un)becoming, is an effort to articulate a future moment in the city, and of the city. Clinging, staying, waiting, persistently renovating, become ways to negotiate for a political possibility of a future where the structure of political entropy will be mitigated.

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