

# **CONFLICT IN CITIES AND THE CONTESTED STATE**

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***Divided Cities/Contested States***

**Working Paper No. 23**

**Cultural Governmentality:  
Government Through Heritage Conservation in Old  
Hebron**

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## **Editorial note**

This working paper relates to the “Holy City / Holy Places” CinC research module. It is part of the author’s ongoing work on the politics of space and heritage in Hebron: an earlier stage of this research was published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly* n. 41. Versions of this working paper have been presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Research Meeting at the European University Institute (Italy) in April 2011, and at the City Seminar Workshop held at CRASSH, University of Cambridge, in May 2011.

## **Biographical note**

Chiara De Cesari is an anthropologist and a lecturer in heritage studies in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University.

**Cultural Governmentality:  
Government through Heritage Conservation in Old Hebron  
Chiara De Cesari**

**Abstract**

The Old City of Hebron in Palestine is a site of great religious and historical importance that has been thoroughly militarized due to its occupation by Israeli settlers. Confronting colonization, a local Palestinian organization, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC), has undertaken a major urban regeneration project in an effort not only to conserve endangered historic monuments, but also to halt the expansion of the settlements and repopulate the militarized core of the Old City. This paper argues that the urban space of Old Hebron is produced through the clash of two competing spatial projects: an Israeli colonial project of dismemberment, and a Palestinian heritage project of restoration and rehabilitation. Drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, I argue that conservation activity and the recuperation of tradition by organizations like the HRC can function as a mode of non-state governmentality that shapes community life and sociality as well as individual subjectivities. My ethnographic fieldwork and analysis of the HRC demonstrates that the work of this organization is not only a project of heritage conservation, but an act of resistance in the context of ethno-national conflict, and a form of local government that must also confront internal Palestinian class and gender rifts.

**Keywords:** Palestine, heritage, non-state governmentality, urban rehabilitation, politics of space and architecture

**Introduction**

Hebron is the West Bank's second most populous town, and its core is the area around the *Haram*, the Ibrahim mosque or Tomb of the Patriarchs of the Abrahamic faiths. This richly historic area is known as the old suq or *qasaba*. It is Hebron's most beautiful quarter, with its winding, vaulted alleys, tiny thoroughfares, and narrow, irregular courtyards nestling between houses from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. But today the suq is an uncanny, unhomey place. Israeli settler colonization has displaced most of its former Palestinian residents: while at the time of the 1967 occupation there were seven thousand five hundred Palestinians living there, their number had declined to a mere four hundred by the 1990s. Its streets are silent and empty today, and the quarter is deeply marked by military presence and urban conflict.

Figure 1: An Israeli military base amidst old Palestinian houses in the Old City of Hebron

(Photo courtesy Chiara De Cesari)



Yet the silence of the Old City is interrupted, not just by the sounds of children at play in the streets, but also by the noise of building construction: engineers, architects and labourers at work to refurbish empty houses, build and renovate infrastructures, turn decaying public spaces into gardens and playgrounds, and provide the streets with lighting. This is the work of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (the HRC, also known simply as the committee or *lajna*), a Palestinian heritage conservation organization that has focused most of its work on the restoration of the Old City as a liveable urban space. The HRC has its offices in a refurbished Ottoman palace, which today sees a steady and unusually diverse stream of visitors: employees, labourers, development experts, Palestinian Authority officials, foreign consuls, and solidarity groups in search of information about Israeli settlement and human rights violations in the city. Most striking of all are the local residents, who visit the HRC offices for many different reasons. One such visitor was Suad, a woman whose story I will discuss later in this paper. Like many Old City residents, Suad was a tenant of the HRC. When Israeli settlers smashed her windows, she came to the HRC not just to organize their

repair, but also to seek legal advice. On another occasion she came because she needed a residency certificate. So why are residents coming to a semi-governmental heritage organization to get their residency certificates? How have they come to be tenants of the HRC?

Under the terms of the Oslo Agreements, Hebron is partitioned between the Palestinian-controlled New City and the historic Old City, which is under Israeli military control. Since 1996 the HRC, which is local but now largely foreign-funded, has been undertaking major urban work in Hebron in an effort not only to conserve endangered historic monuments, but also to halt the expansion of the settlements and repopulate the militarized core of the Old City. This paper analyses the HRC's heritage conservation and urban regeneration project as a form of non-state governmentality. Drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, I will argue that conservation activity and the recuperation of tradition by organizations like the HRC can function as a mode of non-state governmentality that shapes community life and sociality as well as individual subjectivities.

The concept of governmentality, which has been developed from Michel Foucault's late work (Foucault 1991; Rose et al. 2006), enables us to focus on the complex micro-processes through which territories and people are governed. This concept frames modern government broadly as the management (or 'conduct of conduct') of populations and the production of self-regulating citizens, while at the same time acknowledging the crucial role of knowledge and the plurality of agencies involved (Gordon 1991). Advanced liberal governmentality operates by means of freedom rather than command (Rose 1996), producing subjects who are 'free' to think and act in specific ways discursively constituted as good, virtuous and responsible. Some scholars have accused the Foucauldian approach to governmentality of Eurocentrism, and have pointed out that aspects of 'neoliberal governmentality' can also be found in other cultures of government (Kipnis 2008). Others have refined and extended the concept of governmentality by uncovering its multiplicity, highlighting the multiple ways in which it combines globally circulating techniques and discourses with local cultural logics (Ellison 2009; Ong 2006).

Even more importantly for my argument in this paper, some anthropologists have also reworked the concept of governmentality to emphasize its transnational and dispersed quality in forms that blur the boundaries between top-down and bottom-up politics. Anthropologists such as Jim Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002; see also Ferguson 2004) place this development in the context of a broader shift of the operations of government from the nation-state to non-state entities (Trouillot 2001). This new modality of 'transnational

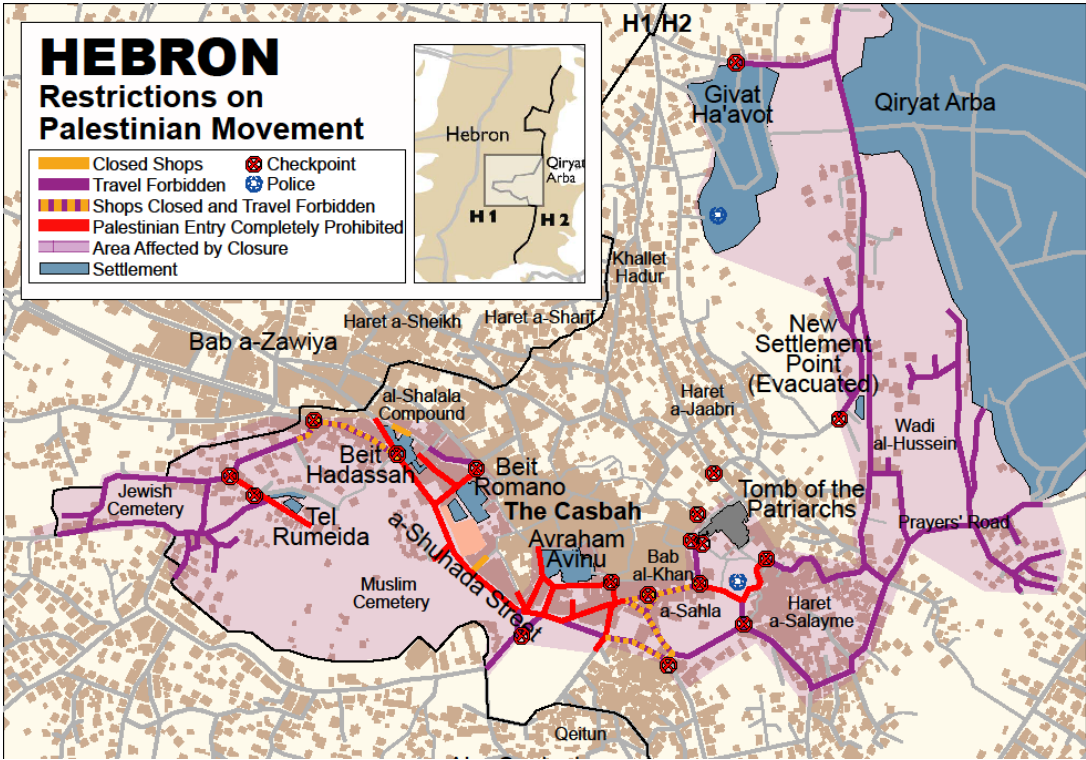
governmentality' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) coexists with, but does not replace, the nation-state (see also Gupta and Sharma 2006). In contrast with the Eurocentric mode of scholarship which celebrates 'civil society' as small, grassroots volunteer organizations situated outside of or opposed to the state, Ferguson and Gupta highlight the neoliberal erosion of national sovereignty and the partial transfer of state functions to non-state and often transnational entities such as NGOs, donor countries, and institutions like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. For Ferguson and Gupta, NGOs can often hardly be called local, at a closer look, given their transnational connections; nor are they 'as "NG" as they might wish us to believe' (2002:993). In spite of the exceptional character of the Palestinian situation, and in spite of HRC's peculiarity, which I will discuss below, this organization clearly points at some of the dynamics highlighted by Ferguson and Gupta, and offers an example of the ways in which 'heritage' can become an important terrain of transnational governmentality.

Palestine is a peculiar governmental space, and this paper will indeed focus on its semi- and non-governmental actors and unconventional fields of government. In her historical study of the administration of Gaza, Ilana Feldman (2008) uses a Foucauldian framework to identify techniques that enable tenuous forms of government to subsist in the absence of stable state structures. Her notion of 'layered government' distributed across actors and layers (e.g. 160) is similar to what I call Palestine's 'state-which-is-not-one'. The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in 1994 in the wake of the Oslo Accords. As a semi-autonomous structure—a non-sovereign 'quasi-state'—struggling to govern the shrinking patchwork of enclaves left to the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank (e.g. Halper 2000; Hilal 2007), the PA is only one actor—probably the least powerful—in a field of government characterized by its multi-sitedness. The more powerful forces are a new form of Israeli colonial rule, international donors and aid agencies (LeMore 2008), a grassroots infrastructure of local service provision (Hammami 2006), and various militias. It is my argument that heritage organizations like the HRC are part of this precarious governmental infrastructure.

Weaving together description and analysis, I will begin with the stories of two Old City women, two of my main informants, to discuss the HRC's impact on their lives. Then, in what follows, I will move to discuss the Israeli colonization in Hebron. Through ethnographic examples, I will explore the multiple ways in which the partition of Hebron continues to generate an increasingly fractured and segregated urban space, along multiple lines, in spite of HRC's attempts to counteract this phenomenon. I will argue that the spatio-temporal political dynamics at work in Hebron today pivot on a *movement towards* 'tradition'—a re-turn

to it—and a dialectics of dismemberment and restoration that produces an inverted temporality as well as a tortuous spatiality. Most importantly, I will outline the history of the HRC and detail how, in an area under Israeli military control where the PA has no jurisdiction, this organization came to govern the Old City almost as if it were a municipality unit. This is a government by heritage and ‘tradition’.

Figure 2: Map of the Old City of Hebron with the Israeli settlements  
 (Photo courtesy B’Tselem, 2011)



The black line marks the border between Palestinian and Israeli-controlled areas (called H1 and H2), which also roughly corresponds to the division between the New and the Old City. The light blue areas in and around the old suq indicate the Israeli settlements.

**Old City Lives**

Let us begin with the stories of two women who live and work in Hebron’s Old City—two lives intersecting each other and imbricated with the walls, alleys and tense spaces of this historic and religious centre.<sup>i</sup> The first is Nuha, a woman in her 30s. In spite of the differences between our lives and trajectories, Nuha and I felt a sense of solidarity and affinity right from the moment of our first encounter at the HRC. We were introduced to each other because I was looking for rental accommodation in the Old City. At that time, Nuha was

working as a secretary at HRC—a bare 100 metres from the old house where she had been living her entire life. Although in the end I did not move into her house, it was through her that I rented the top floor of the Ottoman house belonging to her next-door neighbours (who were also her distant relatives), and we continued to visit each other, often via the roof that connected our apartments. Nuha quickly became my best friend and guide through the alleys of the Old City. Located right next to the sacred core and highly contested heritage of Hebron, the Haram Ibrahimi, but relatively far from the Israeli settlements—which meant there was less danger of settlers' attacks and fewer soldiers patrols—our neighbourhood retained its long-standing socio-spatial structure, still being largely populated by members of one or two big Hebronite families of ancient origin who were traditionally based here. This was not the case for other quarters of the Old City, as we will see.

Nuha quickly socialized me into her family and friends in the *hara* (quarter), and their living rooms and courtyards were where I spent most of my free time during my stay in Hebron. Many people in the *hara* have low levels of education (few attain A levels), and they tend to work at odd and precarious jobs in the new suq or in the factories and workshops of the New City, once famous for its manufacturing base and today devastated by both the Israeli occupation and Chinese competition. Business closures and skyrocketing unemployment following the Second Intifada took a very heavy toll on these people. While the family with whom I lived had fared a little better, being a middle-class family of educated professionals and shop owners, those who had stayed behind to hold on to the old family compound were the elderly and the youngest or poorest members of the family.

The Second Intifada had taken a heavy toll on Nuha and her family as well. Her youngest brother was a *shahid* (martyr) killed by a stray Israeli bullet in the early 2000s at a time when simply walking around in the Old City meant mortal danger. During my fieldwork Nuha was unemployed because the HRC had hired her on a temporary project basis, as is increasingly the case under the new structure of this organization. Nuha was desperately looking for work. This was of course out of necessity: she had to take care of her elderly mother. Her remaining brother was trying to save up to get married, although without much success: not many respectable women from the New City up the hill—the kind of women his mother was looking for—seemed willing to move to the Old City to join him, and he had no money to build a new house elsewhere. But for the unmarried Nuha, work was also a way to get out of the sometimes claustrophobic environment of the Old City, a way to meet and interact with people, to grow and be active and have a full life of her own—something she had studied hard for, including a distance-learning degree in administration completed while she was working. For Nuha, work was chiefly about encounters and mobility, and also about

dignity, which is precisely what is denied to Palestinian women of the Old City. After the blood and the closures, women and young girls are placed under pressure, and are often asked: Why do you study? For what? In order to die? Yet some, like Nuha, refused to renounce the desire to live differently.

For Nuha, the occupation, especially as it developed in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, meant the shuttering of her familiar horizons. A lively historic centre turned into a violent and militarized space: a dead space, in her own words. A familiar landscape evacuated —one's former shops and schools shut down, one's friends and family now departed for a better life elsewhere. It was probably only thanks to the HRC, which had renovated her house and provided services to her neighbourhood, that Nuha and her family were still able to live next to the Haram. This was also true of the entire *hara*. The HRC indeed continues to be a crucial institutional presence in the Old City; in fact it is the only Palestinian institution there, apart from a police station staffed by unarmed officers. Residents refer to the HRC for all matters: when the street in front of their house needs repair, when services are down, for rubbish collection, but also for their health insurance or residency certificates. Yet many voiced criticism of the HRC, which in their view was not doing enough, was not responding to people's needs, and was never able to live up to its promises. Rumours of corruption also circulated.

Residents frequently felt alone on the front line of the national conflict, a front line which was nothing less than their homes, which would be easy prey for settlers if left uninhabited and unprotected. It is indeed a sense of protection that Old City people like Nuha feel towards their old mansions. 'We do not leave more than a couple of days because we want to hold on to here, if we leave for more our house will be lost ... because it is a *valuable* place,' explained Nuha to me once. While her English was not very strong, she used the English word *valuable* in the middle of our chat in Arabic, putting a certain emphasis on it. This is a keyword of contemporary heritage discourse, referring to historic properties significant enough to be deemed worthy of protection and preservation. In spite of the frequent complaints, then, the HRC is capable of shaping not only the built environment itself, but also the ways in which people perceive it.

An acquaintance of Nuha's and a famous Hebron personality, Suad was an unconventional, strong-willed woman in her early 40s, with a strong commitment to the Old City and its traditional life. A former English teacher, she now ran a kindergarten for Old City children, and provided guidance and logistical support to foreign journalists, political activists and volunteers during their stays in Hebron. She was also very proud of patrolling and of

taking to school children at risk of being attacked by the settlers. 'I am the one responsible for reopening the Ibrahimi School next to the Haram,' she proudly told me on several occasions. During our first encounter she made a point of telling me that she walked alone at night in the suq, emphasizing that she was not scared because she had been born and lived all her life in the Old City. Suad had a very strong sense of her right to live in dignity and freedom in the city of her birth, but she was also convinced that, at least under the present circumstances, this right had to be fought for by daily practice. Indeed she lived on the front line of Hebron's ethno-national struggle, right by the famous Shara Shuhada, once a thriving commercial artery, now taken over by the settlers and emptied of life. Her smashed windows, the fences around her balconies, as well as the frequent visits of soldiers' and settlers' patrols, were the most obvious signs of life on the battlefield. During another of my visits, the settlers were celebrating a religious festival on the streets, and soldiers had taken over her rooftop, ostensibly to protect the celebrants; in spite of the danger, Suad insisted that we challenge the soldiers and go onto the roof, which she had just turned into a roof garden for her kids to play in, reviving the old tradition of using rooftops for social purposes. Suad related her rights practice to a deep sense of 'commitment to the Old City and its people'. In her view such commitment stemmed from her lifelong attachment to the Old City, and also from a form of reciprocity that obliged her to take care of the city's children so as to 'return the favour' the Old City had done by allowing her to live close to the Haram.

Figure 3: Old City's roofs (Photo courtesy Chiara De Cesari)



The HRC had deeply affected Suad's life too, particularly the contours of her physical and social environment, the very fabric of her local community. The vast majority of the original inhabitants—those who could afford it—had left for a life away from the settlers. The few who had stayed, and those who had arrived since the start of the rehabilitation project in the mid-1990s, were predominantly low-income families. They were and are still attracted by the favourable living conditions offered by the HRC: free housing, free water and electricity provision, free health insurance, tax reductions and, since the Second Intifada, food donations from the Red Cross. Thus while urban regeneration around the world is often tied to gentrification processes, in Hebron the end result of the HRC's work is the opposite. 'The Old City is becoming a slum, and this is no good development,' emphasized one Palestinian heritage practitioner who had worked with the *lajna* and was otherwise very positive about its work. While for NGOs professionals like him the predicament of the Old City now was its social homogeneity—the 'issue of having only one class moving there'—for Suad and other long-time residents as well as several HRC employees, the problem was one of cultural heterogeneity and lack of social integration and social cohesion. Most agreed that social relations in the Old City were tense, and they tended to frame this as the 'problem of the newcomers'. Although she was ambivalent towards the HRC, Suad's ideas concerning the newcomers were very clear indeed:

I am very glad for the rehabilitation of old buildings, so that they do not collapse, but I am sad for the Old City itself, for the people and history that have been changed by bringing in new people ... who do not fit here ... They [the HRC] are mixing up the population, the fabric of the Old City, which used to be one big family because we consider ourselves all related by intermarriage. I am against the change in the structure of the society living here, and the abandonment of the family structure [she is referring to the traditional kinship-based pattern of residential arrangement] ... Now everybody is from a different village, from a different point of view, and we are becoming like the Jews, the Israelis who are from many different cultures and social backgrounds ... Sometimes I am a stranger in the Old City, and I do not fit ... With the original residents I have many things in common, especially the old memories ... But when I talk to somebody from Yatta<sup>ii</sup> ... I mean, they are not from here. They [the newcomers] are from a village, we are from the city. We are not from the same place ... They corrupt this place because they are strangers. ... They keep complaining about the Old City, and I tell them: no, you shouldn't, it is beautiful here. They do not know nor care about the Old City. (Interview, Hebron, November 16, 2006)

By renovating their homes and providing a basic infrastructure of service provision and other forms of support, the HRC has allowed people like Suad to stay in the Old City, thereby fostering their sense of duty to defend and hold on to it. The HRC, however, has also contributed to a substantial change in the composition of the community inhabiting Hebron's core—although not at all in an intentional or planned way. (In fact, as we will see below, they were almost caught by surprise.) It has contributed to creating something close to a slum. Of course, the expanding colonization and the power asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians plays a major role in the social dynamics of this divided town. But it is precisely the combined effects of these opposing if uneven forces (colonization or dismemberment versus restoration or re-membering) that produce the Old City as a tense and fragmented field marked by an ambiguous temporality.

### **Colonization, Segregation and the Return of 'Tradition' in the Old City**

The Palestinian occupied territories have been the object of a large-scale settlement project since their invasion by the state of Israel in 1967—in violation of international law and against the grain of UN Resolution 242. The Oslo Agreements did not bring an end to Israeli settlement. On the contrary, settler numbers have more than doubled since the early 1990s, today standing at approximately 500,000.<sup>iii</sup> Under the Oslo 'interim' arrangements—which in practice were never superseded, because final status negotiations failed to take place—the settlements are under Israeli jurisdiction, and Israel controls movement within, into and out of the territories. These colonies are widely regarded as one of the major obstacles to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The growth of the settlements, and of the network of Israeli-only bypass roads that connects them, has turned the West Bank into a series of enclaves that some analysts have compared with South African Bantustans under apartheid (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2005); many commentators are sceptical that such disconnected enclaves could ever become a viable sovereign polity (e.g. Halper 2000; Hilal 2007).

Israeli occupation has had a more severe physical and social impact on the Old City of Hebron than has been the case in other Palestinian towns. While colonization elsewhere in the West Bank usually takes place around Arab towns, in the case of Hebron it has occurred within the Palestinian urban fabric itself. This is because of Hebron's religious significance and symbolism as the site of the Tomb of the Patriarchs, as well as because of the ancient presence of a Jewish community in the city before the latter was forced to leave after a massacre in 1936. Like Jerusalem, Hebron has been a key target for Israeli colonization by the religious-nationalist settler movement—which has received direct and indirect support from the Israeli government—and its colonies are now a stronghold of Zionist

fundamentalist organizations (AIC 2004; Zertal and Eldar 2007: 16ff). Hebron can therefore be seen as a highly condensed microcosm of the conditions that characterize the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a whole.

The Oslo Agreements intensified the segregation of Hebron under the terms of the 1997 Hebron Protocol, which partitioned the city into two districts: the New City under Palestinian administration, and the Old City under Israeli military control (so-called H1 and H2).<sup>iv</sup> The Protocol established a dual legal regime in the Old City: settlers are subject to Israeli civil law, while Palestinians are subject to both PA civil law and Israeli military law.

With 4,000 soldiers stationed to protect approximately 600 Israeli settlers, the urban space of Old Hebron today is characterized by militarization, segregation and the proliferation of borders. This amounts to a form of imprisonment, with restriction of movement and routine abuse, and the chief effect is a condition of structural fear and humiliation for the Palestinian population (B'Tselem 2007). Palestinian life in the Old City has been rendered almost unbearable, and most former residents have fled. In the late 1960s the Old City had 7,500 inhabitants; by 1996, just before the establishment of the HRC, this number had dwindled to a mere 400.<sup>v</sup> Socio-economic conditions deteriorated dramatically for the inhabitants who remained. Despite the HRC's successful restoration of ruined historic buildings and its attempts to bring Palestinian families back to live there, the middle-class Palestinians who left the Old City en masse have not returned. Thus both partition and the hybrid technologies of civilian occupation have organized the Old City's urban geography along not only ethno-national but also class and gender lines. Colonization, or what I call the project of dismemberment, has militarized the city and infected it with the disorder of the border,<sup>vi</sup> thereby turning a once vibrant urban community into what Achille Mbembe (2003) and Hebron's inhabitants alike call a 'death-world'.

'Death-world' is right: segregation has turned the Old City into a ghost town. The word 'sterile', used by the Israeli Defence Force to refer to streets closed to Palestinian traffic, chimes with Palestinian residents' perceptions of the lifelessness of the Old City. Its economic life has been devastated by the closure of 77 per cent of its shops and commercial activities (B'Tselem 2007: 30). The suq was once so teeming with people and activity that, according to my informants, it would take you more than an hour to get from the Ibrahimi Mosque to the end of the Old City; now it is so empty that you can cover the same distance in less than five minutes. Fear is the feeling that most strongly characterizes residents' relationship with their city, particularly for women. This is not (or not only) a simple fear of harassment by soldiers or settlers, but a fear arising from the spectral and deathly qualities of

places themselves. 'Aren't you scared of going to the suq?' asked my landlady one day as I was preparing to leave for an interview in the central market area. Her question astonished me, but it highlighted how the busiest places of the Old City had become uncannily strange and frightening for those who had once known them best.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, this emergent urban geography is fractured along multiple lines, including divisions among Palestinians themselves. Indeed the New and Old Cities of Hebron are increasingly two different towns, divided along class lines. As Nuha's and Suad's stories have shown, the mass departure of those who can afford higher property prices elsewhere has produced a form of dismemberment whereby the Old City has become the space of the poor and the disenfranchised. Almost all of the New City residents with whom I spoke said that they had not been to the Old City in years, despite the fact that most of them had been born in the Old City and still owned property there. New City residents no longer make traditional family visits if they involve going into the Old City; and as the story of Nuha's unmarried brother suggests, there are fewer and fewer marriages between New and Old City residents, because of the stigma attached to the Old City, and because women do not want to live there. Middle-class Palestinians indeed imagine the Old City today as a space of danger, criminality and even backwardness. This stigmatization of the Old City and its dismemberment from the New have now become so extreme that the HRC has devoted a great deal of energy in recent years to organizing workshops and activities on the theme of social cohesion.

Gender is another powerful line of segregation. Women of the Old City have been made unemployed by the economic crisis and live in the midst of a dangerous militarized environment. These women—with no income and no Israeli permit to leave the enclave—are increasingly confined to their own homes and their immediate neighbourhoods; many only leave the house to go shopping in the new suq or visit relatives in the New City, usually accompanied by a male relative. The women with whom I worked in the Old City used to proudly show me tons of photographs of past trips to Jericho, to the Tel Aviv beach, or even to destinations outside of Palestine/Israel, looking back with longing to the relative freedom of movement they once enjoyed. These women's feelings of imprisonment became increasingly bitter as they yearned simply to go for a walk and get a breath of fresh air.

Thus dismemberment is not simply a question of divisions between Israelis and Palestinians, but is also taking place within Palestinian society. Hebron is being broken into multiple cities, each with its own spatial and temporal regime. Several of my Old City informants complained of this, lamenting the hardening class barriers and the loss of

nationalist cohesion. They felt that they had been left by their fellow Hebronites to struggle on the front lines of resistance by themselves, and would often draw a distinction between the social cohesion of the recent past and the situation of the present. One such informant told me:

Before, during the First Intifada, if there was a curfew, it was affecting everybody, both the Old and the New City were affected, we were together. We were like a family. *Now we have gone backwards. We were all together, Palestinian brothers. The entire city was one.* We did not suffer hunger because we were helping each other; we did not have or need policemen and did not have security problems. I used to leave the door of my house open. Now it is the opposite. There is polarization. There is dissent and sedition. (Conversation with author, Hebron, November 2006)

This informant was a former teacher who lived on the outskirts of the Old City. His words here look back to the First Intifada as a celebrated period of national unity and mass mobilization, and contrast it with the current dissolution of the social fabric of both Hebron in particular and Palestine in general. They also describe a process of change along three dimensions, spatial, social and temporal: not only is the social disaggregation of the city mapped onto its spatial divisions, but that socio-spatial fracturing is in turn also a temporal fracture, a move backwards in time.

The dialectics of dismemberment and restoration produces an inverted temporality. One very widespread discourse about Hebron, which appears in sociological discussions and everyday talk alike, represents it as the antithesis of modernity. For sociologists, Hebron is not-really or not-yet modern and not-yet urban (Taraki and Giacaman 2006); for many Palestinians, it is a place of tradition and backwardness. But this 'tradition' is itself something new, or at least deeply shaped by the contemporary politics of space, heritage and governmentality in the Old City. As the words of my informant suggest above ('we have gone backwards'), there has been a movement *towards* backwardness: it was not always already there.

A concrete example of this remaking of 'tradition' can be found in the use of customary law in conflict resolution, a trend which has been accelerated by the PA's increasing disintegration from 2000 onwards. These are the words of an Old City policeman:

According to the Hebron Protocol, Palestinian policemen stationed in the Old City have to be unarmed. I do not have equipment, like arms and cars. I have nothing to

enforce the law. Because of this, I cannot use the modern way, I have to use the tribal way if I want to be effective in my operations. I cannot use the force of the modern state, and therefore I have to refer to customary law. My family is from the Old City, I am the head of my family, and because of this I can be effective in what I do here. (Conversation with author, Hebron, November 2006)

While the unarmed policeman is a sign of the non-sovereign state, the phenomenon of the *mukhtar* policeman shows that tradition itself can be both a tactic and a product of the modern state—or rather of its failure and informalization. Whether this be in the form of conflict resolution, the gendering of space, or the production of heritage, this re-turn to ‘tradition’ is an effect of the intertwined spatio-political dynamics of occupation and resistance (for interesting parallels, see Yacobi 2009). In the uncanny space of Hebron, heritage and modernity do not simply coexist, but also mutually reproduce one another.

### **Government through Heritage**

I cannot see the cultural heritage side without the political; I like old houses very much, and I want to protect them from decay and settlers. (Conversation with HRC architect, November 2006)

European donors involved in the HRC tend to take it for granted that ‘culture’ and ‘politics’ are two separate domains, and that they should remain so. For the professionals working at the HRC, on the other hand, no such clean separation is possible: their daily experience is that culture and politics are two sides of the same coin, impossible to think or do separately. Indeed the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee and the project of the rehabilitation of the Old City simultaneously fulfil several functions: heritage conservation, anti-colonial resistance, and local government.<sup>vii</sup> It was therefore no surprise that the question of the relationship between cultural heritage and its political dimensions came up several times during my fieldwork with the HRC.

The HRC is a heritage project that works to restore and conserve the historic fabric of the Old City of Hebron and operates according to international scientific standards. Its adherence to those international standards and to best practice in heritage conservation is crucial to HRC, and to the self-perceptions of many of its employees: in 1998 the HRC won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, and it is a flagship heritage conservation project in the region. At the same time, however, it cannot help but also be a deeply *political* project, in the fullest sense of the term. Forms of resistance are always inevitably shaped by the forms of

domination they oppose. In the case of Palestine, this form of domination has been an 'everyday occupation' (Makdisi 2008) in which repressive power has successfully assumed the qualities of diffuseness and capillary motion, inserting the military into everyday life. Palestinian resistance also operates diffusely across multiple terrains, including that of culture (Allen 2008; Hammami 2004). In the Old City of Hebron this resistance has crystallized around a project of conservation that seeks to counteract both the material and the ideological effects of the Israeli colonization by reclaiming the city and restoring its historical identity.

According to the HRC's mission statement, the organization was established 'in light of the Palestinian Authority's aspiration to preserve Hebron as a historical Arab Palestinian town, in order to safeguard its cultural and architectural heritage against the threat of a takeover by extremist Israeli settlers'. Its objective is twofold: '*to preserve the city's cultural heritage* in an extensive sense, by safeguarding the constitutive elements of its old buildings and ultimately save its entire architectural and social identity', and '*to revive the Old City*, by consolidating its bond with its inhabitants, reclaiming abandoned buildings, rehabilitating the infrastructure, providing social services to the population and connecting it to other city neighbourhoods'.<sup>viii</sup> The HRC is explicitly a project of anti-colonial resistance that aims to block the expansion of Israeli settlement in Hebron by rebuilding and repopulating it as a Palestinian city.

On a more mundane level, the HRC effectively runs the administration of the Old City. It is my core argument in this paper that the HRC operates as programme of public housing and local government, administering the Old City on behalf of a PA whose operations are hampered by the Israelis' military control of the Old City. This situation is the product of the peculiar history of the Oslo and post-Oslo years, and of the complex macro- and micropolitics of recent, makeshift forms of governance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. To understand these complexities we must understand the history of the *lajna*.

Figure 4: Before and after restoration (Photo courtesy HRC)



قبل الترميم BEFORE RESTORATION



قبل الترميم BEFORE RESTORATION



بعد الترميم AFTER RESTORATION



بعد الترميم AFTER RESTORATION



•CHOSEN SITES AFTER RESTORATION **مواقع مختارة بعد الترميم**



The story of the HRC mirrors that of wider political events in Palestine/Israel. It began in the late 1970s, when the newly elected municipal council set out to repair the old buildings and to provide basic services such as water and electricity.<sup>ix</sup> These efforts were quickly cut short as the councillors were dismissed and sent into exile, and the council was replaced with an Israeli-appointed municipal body. Meanwhile Israeli settlement of Old Hebron, which had begun 'illegally' in 1979, was officially authorized by the government in 1980 (AIC 2004). In 1984 the settlers published a master plan for Hebron that explicitly included the gradual displacement of Palestinian residents from the Old City and the reclamation of allegedly Jewish properties that had been abandoned in 1929–36 (Sellick 1994: 74–75). In the late 1980s a group of scholars and architects from Hebron Polytechnic conducted an architectural and social survey of the Old City, and began to discuss a plan for its rehabilitation (79). In the wake of the mass mobilization of the First Intifada there emerged a passionate grassroots movement to rescue the Old City, at a time when the city was being abandoned by its inhabitants and vacant buildings were potentially easy prey for settlers.

However, this passionate impulse to rescue the Old City did not materialize into a fully fledged organization until 1996, when Yasser Arafat directly intervened to create the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee. It is said that Arafat took a keen personal interest in the issue, and according to urban legends he would make undercover visits to the Old City to support its cause. The board of the HRC comprised local political figures, who were close to Arafat, and the people who had started the works in the late 1980s became the HRC's engineering team. Arafat and the Fatah cadre at that time were making deliberate efforts to co-opt grassroots initiatives into support for the Oslo process (Hammami 2006), and the establishment of the HRC must be seen in the context of that wider strategy. Hebron was a thorny issue in the ongoing Oslo negotiations: it was excluded at the last minute from the 1995 Oslo II Agreement because the presence of the settlers made Israel very reluctant to redeploy; Arafat's tactical objective in Hebron was therefore to increase the number of Palestinians in the city's Israeli-controlled areas. Apart from the Bethlehem 2000 project, the rehabilitation of Hebron's Old City is the only heritage project to have received full institutional and financial support from the Palestinian Authority; while Bethlehem was the PA's flagship project—the site of Palestinian rebirth and a renewed centre of global tourism—Hebron was one of the PA's key battlefields. In other words, the HRC was established in advance of, indeed as a function of, negotiations that were yet to come.

The HRC focused its initial efforts on areas it designates, with military language, the 'first circle': zones that lay immediately adjacent to Israeli settlements, and which the HRC sought to repopulate quickly. In these early years the HRC worked to refurbish dilapidated

buildings, set up a new infrastructural network including street lighting, and provide basic services. This subsequently developed into a more comprehensive approach and a concern with more socio-cultural aspects of urban renewal, including what the HRC calls the 'sustainability of life' in the Old City. In light of the isolation of the Old City discussed above, the HRC has also recently begun to work in the so-called 'second circle', in areas that lie further from Israeli settlements and which therefore have the potential to act as bridges to reconnect the Old and New Cities.

One of the major problems encountered by the HRC in the course of its work has been caused by multiple ownership of the old houses it restores, which belong to extended families. This often means that a house has more than 50 owners, most of whom live outside the Old City, and many of whom may indeed no longer live in Palestine/Israel at all. The most common solution adopted by the HRC in these situations has been a double-lease system. The HRC negotiates a contract with the owners according to which the organization leases a building for free for a period of five years. Once the renovation is complete, unless the original owners intend to return (which they very often do not), the HRC then lets the various apartments for free for another five years. When those five years are up, the tenant is entitled to keep the apartment by signing a new rent-controlled contract with the owners.

Thus Old City residents today have access to extremely favourable rents. They also have access to multiple free services (including electricity, water and health insurance) and tax reductions. These benefits are all intended as measures to counteract the previous mass departure of Old City residents, as incentives to stimulate the repopulation of the area, and as rewards for the service to the Palestinian nation being performed by those who live on the front line of struggle. Since the Second Intifada, families living in the Old City have also been entitled to monthly food packages from the International Committee of the Red Cross, which are intended to alleviate the effects of worsening socio-economic conditions and rising unemployment. In this way the HRC has successfully brought an estimated 3–4,000 people back to live in the Old City.<sup>x</sup> In the last formal population survey, conducted in 1999, between 60 and 75 per cent of Old City residents were living below the poverty line; only two households reported an income higher than US \$1,000 a month.<sup>xi</sup> This trend continues until today.

The 1999 survey also yielded revealing figures about housing in the Old City. More than half of residents (58 per cent) owned their accommodation, and 42 per cent were renting from absentee landlords. The percentage of tenants has increased in the context of developments since 2000: in 2007 almost 60 per cent of the population of the Old City were

tenants,<sup>xii</sup> thanks to the continuous haemorrhaging of native Hebronites and the influx of impoverished newcomers. In 1999 the majority of tenants either originated from Hebron or had immediate family there; there was also a substantial number of returnees, former militants and Palestinian Liberation Organization personnel who had returned to Palestine to work with the PA, and for whom living in the Old City often amounted to a national duty. An increasing trend among newcomers to the Old City today, on the other hand, is the arrival from the villages around Hebron of families whose main breadwinner has lost his job in Israel because of the recent closures. In other words, recent immigrants tend to be people who have no previous relationship either to the political struggle and formal political structures or to the Old City itself.

As Nuha's and Suad's stories have already shown, despite this widespread perception as a undifferentiated community of poor people, the Old City is in fact deeply divided: the social division between original inhabitants and newcomers is particularly sharp, especially in relation to the poorest newcomers who live in the areas immediately adjacent to the Israeli settlements in the suq. Original inhabitants like Suad often reiterate these social divisions, speaking of the newcomers as strangers; stigmatization sometimes tips over into active discrimination against the newcomers, or even violence. This internal division within the Old City community echoes Upper Hebronites' and middle-class Palestinians' stereotyping and stigmatization of the Old City residents as a whole. It reveals the frictions and fractures within Hebron's own social fabric—the workings of dismemberment from within.

The HRC's architects and social workers are deeply concerned with the problem of social cohesion. They are also concerned with raising awareness: they want the residents to feel a sense of commitment to the Old City, to understand that the place where they live and its history are important to the Palestinian nation and the wider world. In recent years the HRC has shifted its focus from restoration, repopulation and basic service provision to the broader problems of fragmentation and social erosion, and has launched a new series of initiatives to restore the social life of the Old City and reconnect it to the rest of Hebron. In other words, it has moved to a comprehensive developmental approach to guarantee its own sustainability. To this end the HRC has set up a legal department, a social centre, a research unit, and a diverse programme of social development activities, including vocational training for women and the unemployed, children's entertainment, outreach activities such as lectures and seminars about heritage and social integration, and a series of school trips to the Old City to educate those who live outside it about its importance. The HRC has also prepared a conservation master plan for the Old City with measures for its social and economic revitalization, including both the preservation of its historic neighbourhoods and its

preparation for future tourist development (HRC and Riwaq 2002). Most recently, it has submitted a nomination file to UNESCO to petition for the Old City's inscription on the World Heritage List as part of humanity's outstanding heritage—which amounts to a Palestinian declaration of sovereignty over the city but also a way to secure both attention and funding.

The master plan for the Old City highlights the paradox that lies not just at the heart of the HRC, but at the heart of Palestinian governance in general. The preparation of a master plan is a function of local government; in Hebron's case, however, that function is being carried out, with international funding, by a semi-governmental organization for heritage conservation. Indeed, as we have seen, the HRC fulfils a whole raft of local governmental functions in relation to legibility (surveying, mapping, statistics), control (planning, surveillance, the granting of residency certificates) and welfare (housing, health insurance, counselling and advice). Yet, it has been able to do all this not in spite of, but *because of* its resemblance to a heritage NGO: organizations like the HRC are both governmental and non-governmental at the same time, or rather are governmental precisely by virtue of being non-governmental. Since its establishment the HRC has undergone a progressive NGO-ization as it has become increasingly detached from and independent of the PA, thereby taking on progressively more governmental functions. The HRC's funding infrastructure, originally based mainly on PA and Arab donations, has also become considerably more diverse, as the organization's good reputation has attracted increasing contributions from European donors since the late 1990s. Recently, the role of PA sponsorship has drastically decreased. Laïdi-Hanieh (2006) has already pointed out that moves towards NGO-ization and independence from the PA are usually prompted by the need to attract better funding; however, it is also worth noting that such moves also often enable not just greater flexibility, but also greater continuity of operations. NGOs enjoy a steadier influx of funding because international donors often use a carrot and stick approach with the PA. This became apparent during the protracted public-sector strike that paralysed the new Hamas-dominated PA in 2006, which provided a graphic demonstration of the HRC's ambiguous status in relation to the 'government': its newly semi-governmental status meant that work on some of the HRC's projects could still continue despite the strike. The paradox of governance, both in Palestine in general and in Hebron in particular, is that organizations that are non-governmental—at least on the surface—'govern' better than governmental institutions. 'Traditional' social arrangements can be equally effective, especially in contexts where state or quasi-state infrastructures are being dismantled.

## Conclusions

I do not care only about buildings and infrastructures. *I also have to care about the humanitarian aspects, about the human beings!* This means providing entertainment, creating cultural centres, and social centres to study the problems of the Old City. (Conversation with HRC architect, May 2006)

The engineers and architects of the HRC are juggling multiple things at once. They are simultaneously restoring Palestinian national heritage, fighting the expansion of Israeli settlements, repopulating a ghost town, preserving its Palestinian identity, and managing and developing the Old City. This multiplicity that characterizes the HRC's activities demonstrates the flexibility of the technology of heritage. In Hebron's case it is a technology of life in the face of urbicide and politicide (Kimmerling 2003), the daily dismemberment whose symbol is the bulldozer razing large tracts of urban fabric and multiple layers of history. The technology of heritage is also a spatio-political technology, restructuring social relations through their spatial forms, and a modern technology for the production of 'tradition'. As an HRC engineer once said to me, 'Rehabilitating houses is rehabilitating social life.' As a technology through which relations between people and between people and things are transformed, heritage in Hebron represents a deeply political attempt to retrace the contours of a devastated urban community.

Yet the ambitious scope of the HRC project was largely unintended by those who set up the organization. The HRC had expected that its own role and operation would be a temporary phase before independence. As with other institutions created under the Oslo framework, however, its temporariness became long term. One HRC employee explained the peculiar temporality of the organization as follows: 'All that we do, like the contracts, are counted in five-year periods, because when we began we thought that we were going to work this way only for a temporary period, namely five years, until the establishment of the state; the state, however, never came ...' (Interview with HRC employee, Hebron, November 2006). The perpetuation of what were meant to be temporary arrangements has led to the normalization of emergency, makeshift conditions. The HRC has shifted, from a militant action to restore and repopulate the core areas of the town in support of ongoing negotiations (when sustainability of life was not an issue), to a form of 'humanitarian government' (Agier 2010) informed by the discourse of heritage-based development. It is in this context that reinvented traditional arrangements and heritage as spatio-political technology provide handy solutions to the problem of precarious government in places where the state does not exist or has been destroyed. Yet, as Old City residents' complaints reveal,

under such permanently temporary humanitarian arrangements, issues of democracy and local participation easily slip from view. Deprived of basic rights, from free movement to work, residents are increasingly dependent on the services provided by the committee and various charitable organizations, while the memories of the time of political mobilization in the 1980s and 1990s slowly fade away. In other words, under the conditions created by the indefinite protraction of the occupation, the Old City's residents are made into aid beneficiaries, constituted as subjects dependent upon humanitarianism, rather than the militant citizens of the state-to-come.

By *cultural governmentality*, I refer to new rationalities of government of the urban through culture and NGOs that are currently proliferating across the globe under conditions of globalization (cf. Yudice 2003). Heralded by agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank, it is my core argument that heritage is a crucial site and conduit for these rationalities of government—thanks to the flexibility and adaptability of this language. In Hebron, heritage conservation provides the makeshift infrastructure for some form of service provision and positive regulation of Palestinian life to take place in the Old City.

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<sup>i</sup> The material in this section, as well as all quotes, come from interviews I carried out with local residents in the Old City of Hebron during fieldwork between September and December 2006. All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>ii</sup> Yatta is a large village to the south of Hebron. Many of the newcomer families who have moved to the Old City in recent years come from this or other villages in the Hebron district.

<sup>iii</sup> For updated statistics, see [http://fmep.org/settlement\\_info](http://fmep.org/settlement_info).

<sup>iv</sup> For the full text of the Hebron Protocol, see

[http://www.tiph.org/en/About\\_TIPH/Protocol\\_concerning\\_the\\_redeployment\\_in\\_Hebron/](http://www.tiph.org/en/About_TIPH/Protocol_concerning_the_redeployment_in_Hebron/); see also *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 3 (1997), pp. 131-145. For a critique of the agreement, see Said 1997.

<sup>v</sup> PCBS (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics), *The Demographic Survey of the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (Ramallah: PCBS, 1997).

<sup>vi</sup> This phrase is modified from Ghassan Hage's 'invasion of the order of the border': see Hage 2003: 86.

<sup>vii</sup> The HRC is one of several, mostly non-governmental, Palestinian organizations dedicated to the preservation of the recent vernacular past in Palestine, particularly the urban landscape and traditional houses. Elsewhere I have called this the new Palestinian Heritage Movement (De Cesari 2009, 2010). The past with which these organizations are concerned is different from that which has traditionally been the object of archaeological interest in Palestine/Israel and the Middle East, which has been dominated by the Bible and pre-Islamic monumental sites and has often been functional to colonial projects (Abu El-Haj 2001; Whitelam 1996). The new Heritage Movement forms part of the broader grassroots Palestinian culture of remembrance revolving around the *Nakba*, the catastrophe of 1948. While the *Nakba* itself saw the dismemberment of Palestinian society, the preservation of its memory constitutes an act of national survival in a project of *re-membering* (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007). Thus although heritage-making in Palestine might superficially seem to be primarily about lifeless objects—old stones, mortar and arches—on a more profound level it is really about living people and spaces, survival and resistance.

<sup>viii</sup> See <http://www.hebronrc.org>.

<sup>ix</sup> This narrative of the history of the HRC is based on my extensive interviews during 2006 with both the HRC's director and some of its longest-serving engineers. For information about the political history of the city I thank the journalist Hisham Sharabati for two very intensive conversations in December 2006.

<sup>x</sup> These estimates are based on the number of families enrolled in the HRC's various programmes at the time of my fieldwork in November 2006.

<sup>xi</sup> See Tamari 2001: 3. Another salient feature of life in the Old City is the low degree of mobility out of the area. Forty-two per cent of residents say that they rarely see relatives who live outside the Old City, and they report a strong feeling of confinement and isolation.

<sup>xii</sup> According to the HRC's social unit, in November 2007 358 families in the Old City were tenants and 244 families owned their accommodation.

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