7

Current activities aimed at conservation of the built cultural heritage in the Palestinian Territories are viewed within a broad sociopolitical and economic context. The longstanding conflict over control of historically significant spaces has led to the deliberate destruction of heritage places. In the face of a variety of threats and challenges to cultural heritage protection, a number of specialized local agencies have developed programmes at both national level and in individual towns. The successes and constraints of these programmes are summarized. Finally, the potential role of cultural heritage in promoting economic recovery (through job creation and appropriate re-use of buildings), and social development is discussed.

[SUAD AMIRY AND KHALDUN BSHARA]

Political conflict and recovery of cultural heritage in Palestine

Palestinian cultural heritage in the heart of the political conflict

Nationally contested places in Palestine have been the subject of claims and counter-claims between the Israeli occupying force and the Palestinians struggling against this occupation. This conflict led to gruesome encounters and consequently to the destruction of parts of the valuable built heritage. Targeting cultural heritage in armed conflicts is by no means a new phenomenon. Studies of spaces of memory have so far focused on the hegemonic forces of the state, both colonial and indigenous, and illustrated how states physically construct their visions of the national community (Volk and Bshara forthcoming). These forces influenced not only the built heritage but also public spaces which were re-organized to facilitate control or to convey a political message. Good examples are the British Mandatory Palestine (Benvenisti 2000) and the city of Algeria during the French colonization (Celik 1997).

Palestine has been an intense case of political conflict, destruction of built heritage and involuntary change to landscape (Benvenisti 2000; Amiry 2004: 164–6; Volk and Bshara forthcoming), anticipating a spatial reality yet to come (Segal and Weizman 2002: 43–6). Direct obliteration or claiming the spaces of memory were the tools in this brutal conflict; hundreds of villages were levelled to the ground after 1948 (between 1948 and 1952) and cities were reorganized or claimed by new owners, for example Jerusalem (Benvenisti 1998), alongside the excessive production of material reminders of the past such as archives, textbooks, museums and public monuments to construct a new national identity (Nora 1996: 1–20).

In a recent confrontation (the Aqsa Intifada of September 2000), the historic centres in Palestine (such as Nablus, Hebron and Bethlehem) were under direct Israeli army assault, causing in some cases irrecoverable damage (Fig. 35). Some valuable monuments were hit such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and others were totally destroyed such as the soap factories in Nablus (Amiry and Hadid 2002: 30–4; Amiry 2004: 164–6).

FIGURE 35 Old City of Nablus, destruction in April 2002 (photo: Rula Halawani).

The discussions about what is to be done in the vacant space created as a result of the destruction have not ended; ideas of reconstruction, erecting new buildings, and memorials are among the scenarios (Bshara 2005a).

The purpose of heritage destruction is not, as claimed by the Israelis, an attempt to uproot the Palestinian resistance but rather to change the towns' spatial organization so as to serve the Jewish settlers' needs rather than those of the Palestinian local communities (as the case of Hebron shows). The weakening of the Palestinians' relationship to their familiar space and history is meant to demoralize them, and hence to diminish resistance to Israeli occupation. As worldwide experience has illustrated, policies of this kind have failed in most cases (Ascherson, this volume).

The ICCROM Forum in 2005 stressed the role of cultural heritage in promoting recovery, rather than as a target in conflict. It is rather difficult to think of such a concept in the present Israeli-Palestinian context, at a time when Israel still sees and uses the remains of the past as a source for its national collective identity and a claim for physical connection with the land (Silberman 2001: 306). Nevertheless, the Forum drew attention to positive examples. In the divided city of Nicosia, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot administrations have restored heritage buildings of the other (a mosque and a church, respectively, which lie under the juris-

diction of the other side). So too, there are similar positive initiatives in the Palestinian-Israeli context: that of the 'Ein al Deyouk Synagogue in Jericho (under Palestinian jurisdiction) and the 'Hawa House, an Arab house in Acre under Israeli jurisdiction.

As a result of the Oslo Peace Agreement (1993), the Israelis handed back to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) two ancient synagogues located in the Jericho district. The Israelis were concerned for the synagogues' future. Ten years later, 'Ein al Deyouk synagogue has undergone two restoration and protection projects. The Palestinian Department of Tourism and Antiquity preserved the Jewish Synagogue in a sensitive and respectful way, and has allowed free access to the site. In turn, the Israeli Department of Antiquities has restored and rehabilitated the 'Hawa House which belonged to the al-Tawil Arab family which was expelled from its home town of Acre during the 1948 War. The building is currently been used as an elderly people's centre for the original Arab residents of the town.

Perhaps these extremely rare examples give us hope that spaces of memory in the Holy Land can become healing agents, rather than generating conflict, thus strengthening the notion of Cultural Heritage in Palestine as opposed to Palestinian Heritage vs Israeli Heritage.

Threats and challenges facing the cultural heritage in Palestine

The protection of cultural heritage in Palestine faces a number of threats and challenges:

- The lack of a national agenda for the protection of heritage. Cultural heritage is still seen as a liability rather than a valuable source of economic and social revitalization.
- The lack of awareness at the local as well as the political decision-making levels of the need or importance of saving the heritage.
- The absence of appropriate laws for protection. Only archaeological sites are considered of value—the existing law protects only sites and buildings constructed before 1700 A.D.

- Historic centres (towns and villages) are located in the heart of A and B areas (under Palestinian National Authority jurisdiction according to the Oslo Agreement of 1993). These densely populated areas constitute only 7% of the West Bank. The urbanization of these areas has caused tremendous pressure on historic centres as well as on historic buildings.
- Most archaeological sites are located in C areas (under Israeli jurisdiction according to the Oslo Agreement of 1993), and, in the absence of monitoring and guarding systems, looting and illegal digging are major threats.
- The lack of human resources in the area of conservation and cultural heritage management remains a prime challenge.

Cultural heritage agencies in Palestine

Immediately following the Oslo Agreement (1993), Palestine witnessed substantial efforts to protect and conserve both the tangible and the intangible cultural heritage. These efforts were manifested in the establishment of many motivated agencies and in the execution of large-scale cultural heritage projects.

As it stands today, there exists a number of cultural heritage agencies in Palestine: the Moslem and Christian Awqaf (Endowments); Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation (1991); the Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program (OCJRP, 1995);

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA, 1995); Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (1996); Nablus Old Town Conservation Committee; and the Bethlehem 2000 Committee (later known as the Bethlehem Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation).

Except for the Awqaf, which concentrate mostly on religious buildings, all other heritage agencies deal mostly with secular public buildings as well as private residential areas. While (as their names indicate) most of these agencies work in a specific town, the Awqaf, Riwaq and MOTA work on a national level.

A quick review of these agencies and their conservation work of the past two decades indicates that undoubtedly the main objective of these activities was to resist the continuous attempts by Israel to confiscate or have control over these areas. The conservation projects (especially in the case of Hebron and, to a lesser extent, Jerusalem) could be seen as manifesting a Palestinian determination to protect properties, land and history (Bshara 2005b).

The Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program (OCJRP)

Restoration activities of the OCJRP have been restricted to the Old City of Jerusalem. This agency won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2004. Since 1996 it has concentrated its work on the rehabilitation of residential areas and public buildings in the Old City of Jerusalem (Fig. 36).
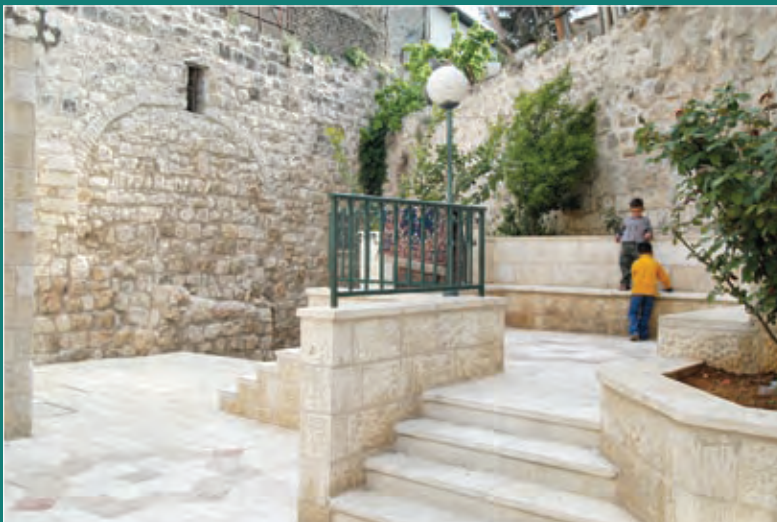

FIGURE 36 Hosh al Hilu residential courtyards rehabilitated by the OCJRP (photo: Aga Khan photo archive).

FIGURE 37 Hebron Old Town, rehabilitated quarters (photo: Riwaq Archive).

The two main challenges for the OCJRP have been those of working on a UNESCO World Heritage Listed site (inscribed in 1981) whose jurisdiction lies within the Israeli Municipality of West Jerusalem, and the poor and almost slum conditions of many residential areas in the Old City.

In many cases, the main driving force of conservation projects has been political, i.e. encouraging Arab residents to continue living in the Old City so as to prevent continuous attempts to take over abandoned buildings. Hence, conservation practices have been often restricted by the practical needs of the inhabitants. The urgent need for spaces to live in, rather than choosing the appropriate use for historic buildings, has set the guidelines for restoration.

The Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC)

The work of the HRC, established by a Presidential Decree in 1996, has been one of the largest in scope and perhaps the most impressive. This agency (also a winner of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, in 1998) works in the Old Town of Hebron, the most politically, socially and economically problematic area in Palestine. In spite of continuous attempts to halt or hinder the HRC's work, it managed to rehabilitate major parts of the Old Town of Hebron (Fig. 37).

Perhaps one of the most impressive of the HRC's achievements has been the way it handled the delicate and extremely complicated issue of fragmented ownerships. Through making use of the traditional roles of elders in the community, the Committee managed to convince owners of properties to give the Committee the rights to renovate and to sub-let properties to tenants for a minimum of ten years, after which the owners would get back their renovated property. In addition to its conservation and rehabilitation works, it undertook infrastructural works and (in partnership with Riwaq) the preparation of a protection and development plan.

On the ground, the HRC managed to renovate and rehabilitate more than 600 units (apartments) and hundreds of stores along the commercial Casabas.

One of the major shortcomings of the rehabilitation works implemented by the HRC (whether consciously or unconsciously) was the attraction of a new social system and a new spatial organization that the Old Town offered. The Old Town is becoming a safe-haven for low-income families (some 4,000 newcomers) who will sooner or later become a burden on the Old Town. Nonetheless, the Committee, striving to rehabilitate the historic quarters, was obliged to divide the residential courtyards (built originally for extended families)

into small apartments. This meant in practice the new division—for purposes of privacy—of historically interesting open spaces. The introduction of new services and the provision of contemporary infrastructure within a vernacular fabric in many cases resulted in the loss of homogeneity and character.

As in the Old City of Jerusalem, the survival and revival conservation activities were politically motivated, in this case in response to the Israeli settlers' attempts to live in the midst of Arab neighbourhoods.[1]

Bethlehem and Nablus

The rehabilitation of the Bethlehem Prime Zone was a commitment by the world community towards Christ's birthplace, while also a political commitment towards the Peace Process. One of the important initiatives of the Bethlehem 2000 Committee was the establishment of the Bethlehem Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation, whose main activity was to follow up and supervise conservation projects initiated by the Committee. It later became a semi-governmental agency initiating and promoting cultural heritage, conservation and community outreach programmes, mainly in the area of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahur (Fig. 38).

The only city in the West Bank that witnessed conservation work for no apparent political or religious reasons was Nablus. Nablus Municipal Council was keen to upgrade the infrastructure in the Old City market (*al-Qasaba*) to attract local tourists,

FIGURE 38 Bethlehem vegetable market, rehabilitated in 1998 and destroyed in 2002 (photo: Matthias Konsgen/Riwaq Archive).

---

1   In the case of Hebron there are 250-400 Israeli settlers living among 150,000 Palestinians.

especially Israeli Arabs, to shop in the most viable commercial centre in the West Bank. Unfortunately, infrastructural works which were meant to improve the living standards of the Old City often resulted in the destruction of archaeological sites older than two thousand years.

Nablus was also devastated by the Israeli military operation of 2002, resulting in the total or partial destruction of important historic areas and buildings. The loss was so massive that it will take the city a long time to recover, if it ever does (Fig. 39).

RIWAQ: Centre of Architectural Conservation

Unlike other agencies Riwaq works on a national level. The majority of Riwaq's projects are located in rural areas rather than major towns.

Through its Conservation Unit, Riwaq has renovated dozens of historical buildings. The main objectives of these projects are to set up technically and professionally good models of restoration and adaptation. They are intended to be model cases for the local communities to imitate or follow. Since these villages are not the scene of direct Arab-Israeli conflict, the short-term aim is professional rather than political.

In 2002, Riwaq initiated the *Job Creation through Restoration* projects (Fig. 40). This project aims at contributing to poverty alleviation through providing jobs for the unemployed. Due to the difficult political situation, specifically checkpoints, the unemployment rate had reached 50%. In addition to their economic value as job providers, undoubtedly the projects contribute to cultural heritage protection. The project that started in 2002 (with funding for another three years) restored more than thirty historic buildings, with a budget of some US$ 2.5 million and created more than 75,000 working days. Ironically, the deteriorating political and economic situation actually facilitated the always difficult mission of raising the necessary funds for cultural heritage restoration.

Riwaq has been organizing a number of workshops for architecture students, engineers and workers in the field of conservation. Its work also includes: the compilation of its National Registry of Historic Buildings which includes some 52,000 historic buildings; community awareness campaigns and community participation; facilitating a draft for a National Law for the protection of cultural and natural heritage in Palestine, associated with protection plans for major historic centres; and publishing a Monograph Series on the Architectural History of Palestine.

Cultural heritage protection and cultural heritage development

Even though the initial incentive for the conservation of the cultural heritage was politically motivated, as it stands today, there is a real interest in the protection and development of heritage for its own merits as

FIGURE 39 An Israeli tank in the Old City of Nablus, April 2002 (photo: Rula Halawani).

FIGURE 40 Job creation through restoration projects, 2002–6 (photo: Khaldun Bshara/Riwaq Archive).

well as for the potential role that cultural heritage may play in the economic and social revitalization of the community.

It is important at this point to state that most, if not all, of the conservation and rehabilitation projects implemented by the cultural heritage agencies described here lie within the scope of protection rather than development of the cultural heritage. It is crucial to differentiate between the two complementary concepts of cultural heritage protection and of cultural heritage development (recovery). Although the two concepts are closely connected, they differ and are often implemented by different sectors of society.

Cultural heritage protection is mainly concerned with the protection of historic buildings/areas through mechanisms such as legislation and national and local planning (protection plans at the national level through the Higher Planning Council and/or at the local levels through municipal and village councils). Heritage protection is also achieved through the physical conservation (whether preventive or comprehensive) of monuments, group(s) of buildings, and archaeological and natural sites located within or around the clearly delineated and defined architectural fabric of historic centres.

Preventive conservation is certainly an effective method to prolong the life of a building until a comprehensive conservation and utilization becomes possible. Past experiences have illustrated that preventive conservation, combined with work on open spaces (streets and plazas, pavements, planting, lighting etc.) as well as infrastructure works, significantly improve the environment and act as an important catalyst in the process of development[2]. For example, it can change historic village centres from run-down areas into economically and socially viable areas.

It goes without saying that the protection of cultural heritage, particularly the physical conservation, is labour-intensive and hence results in the creation of many jobs, particularly for the local communities. The appropriate reuse of the renovated buildings also results in the partial economic and social development or revitalization of that particular building.

However, the economic and social development and revitalization of a town/village as a whole is a much more complex and challenging process. It entails the involvement of both public and private sectors since it requires an economically viable initiative.

Realizing that the development of the cultural heritage is the responsibility of the different sectors of society (complementing cultural heritage expertise), it is for cultural heritage agencies to play the role as a catalyst in identifying the different sectors of the society and in specifying or clarifying their potential roles.

This can be achieved through a number of economic initiatives, based on the idea of restoration as a substitute for new construction:

- Housing: the re-use of buildings for the same functions for which they were initially built (i.e., help the owners/residents both financially and technically to renovate their own houses). This could be done through developing financial incentives such as housing loans and/or grants etc.
- Community facilities: the re-use of buildings for new functions such as village councils, cultural centres, clinics, women's centres, schools and kindergartens, etc. (Fig. 41).
- Educational facilities: renovate a whole town to be used by universities, accommodating certain departments as in the case of al-Qasem Palace in the village of Beit Wazan (renovated for al-Najah National University's Department of Architecture).
- Tourist amenities: since tourism constitutes an important component of the Palestinian economy, tourist visits (cultural tourism) to cultural heritage places other than prominent religious monuments should be developed to include rural cultural heritage places and cultural activities.

FIGURE 41 Recovery under fire: community activity in the renovated building of Beit Reema Cultural Centre (photo: Maher Saleh/Riwaq Archive).

---

2   Good examples of this approach are the Qaytun and al Sheikh neighborhoods in Hebron, and the infrastructural and pavement works in Nablus Old City.

Conclusion

Despite its conflictual characteristics, cultural heritage in Palestine is being conceived, seen and acted upon (by government agencies and cultural heritage NGOs) as part of state-building, i.e. as part of the solution rather than as part of the conflict. Cultural heritage represents the hope for a viable state where tourism plays a major role in the development of the Palestinian economy. Being labor-intensive, cultural heritage could provide many jobs and hence help alleviate poverty.

In addition to its economic value in state/nation formation, in a rapidly changing environment and a violated landscape, the built heritage—particularly historic buildings—could be an important reminder of the past. Undoubtedly, the built heritage is expected to be the core of a collective narrative in the emerging Palestinian identity.

As to the conflictual aspect of heritage, the built heritage, regardless of its location, should be the responsibility of the opponents (Israelis and Palestinians) who, subject to a future political solution, are bound to become more conscious that heritage belongs to generations to come and should not be a hostage to a disputed past.

The nationalist and chauvinist approach (exhibiting exclusivity and selectivity) in the choice of what is to be restored is no longer accepted or justified in a globalized world which is increasingly characterized by objectivity and openness.

Biography

Suad Amiry is the founder and Director of Riwaq: Center for Architectural Conservation (1991) in Ramallah, Palestine. She studied architecture at the American University of Beirut and the Universities of Michigan and Edinburgh. She has been living in Ramallah since 1981 and taught at the Department of Architecture at Birzeit University. From 1991 to 1993 she was a member of the Palestinian delegation at the peace talks in Washington, D.C. and in 1996 was appointed deputy Minister of Culture in the first Palestinian Government. Her Ramallah diaries entitled *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* have been translated into more than fifteen languages and won the Italian Viareggio-Versilia Prize.

www.riwaq.org
Contact: suad@riwaq.org

Khaldun Bshara is the Director of the Conservation Unit in the Riwaq: Center for Architectural Conservation, Ramallah, Palestine. He has a BA in Architectural Engineering from Birzeit University, and MA in Conservation of Historic Towns and Buildings from the R. Lemaire International Centre for Conservation/Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. He is the author or co-author of a number of books and articles, including *Ramallah, Architecture and History*, and helped develop Riwaq's Guidelines for Maintenance and Restoration of Historic Buildings in Palestine.

http://www.riwaq.org
Contact: khaldun@riwaq.org

References

Amiry, S. (2004), *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* (Granta Books, London).

Amiry, S. and Hadid, M. (2002) (eds), *Earthquake in April* (Riwaq Centre and Institute for Jerusalem Studies, Ramallah).

Benvenisti, M. (1998), *City of stone: the hidden history of Jerusalem* (University of California Press, Berkeley).

—(2000), *Sacred landscape: the buried history of the Holy Land since 1948* (University of Berkeley, California Press).

Bshara, Kh. (2005a), 'What next? Scenarios for the treatment of vacant space resulted from armed conflict in Palestine', in Maniscalco, F. (ed). *Mediterraneum. Protection and valorization of the environmental and cultural heritage.* Istituto per l'Arte e il Restauro, Naples: 63–8.

— (2005b), 'Job creation through restoration towards sustainable community', in B. Biondi (ed) *Proceedings, First International Research Seminar of Forum UNESCO–University and Heritage on Architectural Heritage and Sustainable Development of Small and Medium Cities in South Mediterranean Regions,* Dipartimento di Tecnologie dell'architettura e Design Pierluigi Spadolini, Edizioni ETS, Pisa: 707–16.

Çelik, Z. (1997), *Urban forms and colonial confrontations: Algiers under French rule* (University of California Press, Berkeley).

Nora, P. (ed.) (1996), 'General introduction: between memory and history', in *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past* Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions (Columbia University Press, New York).

Segal, R. and Weizman, E. (2002) (eds.), *A civilian occupation. The politics of Israeli architecture* (Haaretz-Graphoprint, Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak).

Silberman, N. A. (2001), *Digging for God and country. Exploration, archeology, and the secret struggle for the Holy Land 1799–1917*, Arabic translation by F. Hatkar (CADMUS, Damascus, 2001). First English edition 1990 (Doubleday, New York).

Volk, L. and Bshara, Kh. (forthcoming 2006), 'Spaces of memory and practices of restoration', in *Proceedings of the Mediterranean Programme, 7th Mediterranean social and political research meeting,* Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Florence and Montecatini.