



Production of Urban Space in Conflict Areas- Contested Binaries and Spatial Injustice in Palestine

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ABSTRACT

A continuous debate exists over whether politics shape the direction of urban planning or if urban planning itself influences political dynamics. In conflict areas, however, politics utilizes urban planning as a tool for domination and control. In Palestine, the colonial Israeli political apparatus has used urban planning to create conflicting urban spaces that have impacted the Palestinian social, economic, legal, and temporal aspects of daily lives. The research aims to assess how this conflicting urban space has created multi- and inter-layered contested binaries by answering the research question of how colonial urban planning has been used to produce an urban space characterized as contested binaries in Palestine. This shall be addressed using thematic qualitative and spatial methodologies, and by covering four different spatial perspectives influenced by colonial urban planning which have created countering impacts on peoples. The first is on urban settlements and how conflict hinders the development of one urban area while enhancing imposed new urban settlements creating conflicting urban identities in the same place. The second is on the frames and boundaries of existence and perishing where elements of segregation such as the Segregation Wall and the checkpoints create zones for existence and others for expendable life. The third is on spacio-temporal dynamics of infrastructure and how two levels are produced: one facilitating the lives of one group of people while disrupting the lives of another people and therefore affecting the loss and gain of time in everyday life. The last perspective accentuates at times of friction and confrontation, where the binaries are vertically reflected on urban resilience and urban warfare whether produced underground or aboveground. Analysis of these four perspectives shall provide some insights on how these binaries create a state of spatial injustice and drain available resources with ecological costs on the environment.

1. Introduction

There is constant tension between urban planning and politics as to whether politics control the trajectory of urban planning or whether urban planning impacts politics. The intersection between the urban and geopolitical discussion could be reflected on many levels. Urban planning might be affected

by internal politics on the national level, especially when there is competition for investments. In many cities, such dynamics cause gentrification where poorer residents might be forced to be relocated for the construction of homes and businesses for the middle class and wealthy population. In other cities with an ethnic composition of the society, political trajectories could be directed towards the benefit of one ethnic group over the other and this could be reflected in planning of urban areas. Anderson [1] discusses how segregation still impacts racial inequality disadvantaging African Americans in segregated neighborhoods in America, affecting urban decay, poverty and lack of jobs, and calls for social integration. Avila [2] confers how decisions of infrastructure construction within the highway program in American cities deeply affected communities of color turning many apart and leaving them in devastating conditions that affected their everyday life, where communities responded in creative strategies of protests. In conflict areas, however, the relation of politics and planning could extravagate especially in settler colonial cases. Despite the different approaches, urban planning has been used as a tool for domination and control of the colonized population whether in past or ongoing cases, especially evident in infrastructure and colonial settlement construction. Baruah et al. explores colonial legacies and the complex relationship between historical governance systems and the spatial organization of urban environments in Sub-Saharan Africa. Their research explores the contrasting urban spatial structures of Anglophone and Francophone cities. Anglophone cities exhibit less intense land use and more irregular layouts due to the British policy of indirect rule, which allowed for decentralized development without coordinated planning. In contrast, Francophone cities are more spatially compact, with intense development at the center and a grid structure, reflecting the French emphasis on centralized governance and standardized planning. These colonial legacies continue to shape urban layouts today, affecting factors such as efficiency, pollution, commuting times, and social interaction [3]. Studies of Nairobi's history, as an example, reveal its spatial development mirrors a British colonial blueprint, with limited African involvement despite their majority population. Colonial policies favored Europeans in land ownership, shaping the city's structure. Urban planning experts attribute Nairobi's development primarily to the colonial era, noting its European-influenced physical form. Spatial segregation based on social hierarchy was enforced, with Europeans at the top and Africans marginalized. The colonial city featured distinct European and native districts, reflecting the imposition of colonial ideologies on the urban landscape [4].

Further geopolitical and urban planning intersections are more evident in settler colonial cases. Velednitsky et al. [5] review recent literature in infrastructure and planning expanding the focus to include settler colonial studies, revealing how urban planning perpetuates territorial dispossession and racialized power dynamics. They explore how scholars are rethinking the urban as a locus of indigenous erasure and displacement, advocating for the recognition of indigenous histories and spaces within cities. This discourse challenges traditional urban geopolitics by exploring the intersection of urbanism and geopolitics, emphasizing the need to redefine the urban itself within settler colonial contexts. Concepts like the "settler city" are introduced to capture the unique socio-spatial formations arising from settler colonialism, prompting scholars to distinguish between colonial and settler colonial cities. This interdisciplinary approach merges urban geography, political geography, and settler colonial studies to offer new insights into the production of urban space and governance dynamics [5]. Deborah Cowen [6], in her article on infrastructure construction in Canada, explains how infrastructure's role in shaping urban spaces reveals the imperial and colonial contexts of city formation and expansion, reinforcing systems of white supremacy and racial hierarchies. By focusing on the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) as a case study, she highlights how infrastructure shapes and

perpetuates power dynamics, including Indigenous dispossession, the transatlantic slave trade, and unfree migrant labor regimes. The CPR's construction facilitated settler colonial expansion, establishing a network of "railway towns" that fueled genocide and land exploitation. The narrative of national progress propagated by infrastructure projects like the CPR that obscures the violence and exploitation inherent in their development [6].

In the ongoing Israeli Zionist settler colonial case, the Israeli political apparatus has used urban planning to create conflicting urban spaces that have impacted the Palestinian social, economic, legal, and temporal aspects of daily lives. The Zionist case has in fact benefited from the previous settler colonial cases and advanced its spatial strategies of control over Palestinians, and thus created an urban space with contested binaries. The research aims to assess how this conflicting urban space has created multi- and inter-layered contested binaries by answering the research question of how urban planning has been used to produce an urban space characterized as contested binaries in Palestine. The development of such binaries has a historical trajectory since the end of the 19th century.

The planning of the Zionist Israeli settler colonial settler project started since end of the 19th century, with the announcement of the idea of the creation of "homeland" for Jews in Palestine during the Basel meeting in 1897. In 1917 and after the end of the Ottoman Rule of Palestine, the British Government publicly issued the Balfour Declaration supporting the establishment of a "national home" for the Jewish people.

During the British period – the British Mandate - which lasted until 1948, the planning system was centralized, and significant urban planning influences were exerted that enormously impacted the socio-political landscape. Land surveys, ownership restructuring, planning ordinances, master plan drawings of cities, and substantial infrastructural and urban development were undertaken. However, the changes under the British planning unevenly favored the accommodation of the influx of Jewish immigrants, facilitated land purchase and settlement construction, and imposed restrictions on Arab Palestinian development. This caused the development of binaries of urban divisions that reflected colonial control dynamics, and reinforced Zionist interests at the expense of Palestinian land.

After the 1948 War, Palestine was divided by the green line with the West Bank of Jordan River under Jordanian control including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip under Egyptian rule until 1967 when all Palestine became under Israeli control. Within the context of Israeli settler colonialism different policies and strategies were employed to dominate Palestinian people, space and time. Several scholars have discussed the settler colonial aspect of the Israeli state and its practices, each focusing on different dimensions whether from the conceptual interpretation of settler colonialism or to specific case-studies within the Palestinian territory [See 7-12, among others].

Since 1967, Israeli colonial domination has taken several methods to control people and land including the use of urban planning as a tool for subjugation and control. This has taken many forms whether in the confiscation of lands, planning of urban areas, invention of new urban policies and laws, construction of infrastructures of segregation like the Segregation Wall or the installations of checkpoints, demolition of houses and structures, as well as many other. The use of urban planning reflects the spatial power dynamics on the different levels and locations within the whole of historic Palestine.

2. Methodology

This research is based on a thematic qualitative methodology focusing on spatial analyses. It examines how physical spaces and their arrangements, influenced by urban planning, impact people's

experiences, their everyday life and behaviors. Within the settler colonial context, colonial urban planning is when “the colonizer organizes and re-organizes spaces through its apparatus according to its own interests and at the expense of the colonized local inhabitants” [13]. The produced spaces create countering impacts between colonial and colonized peoples.

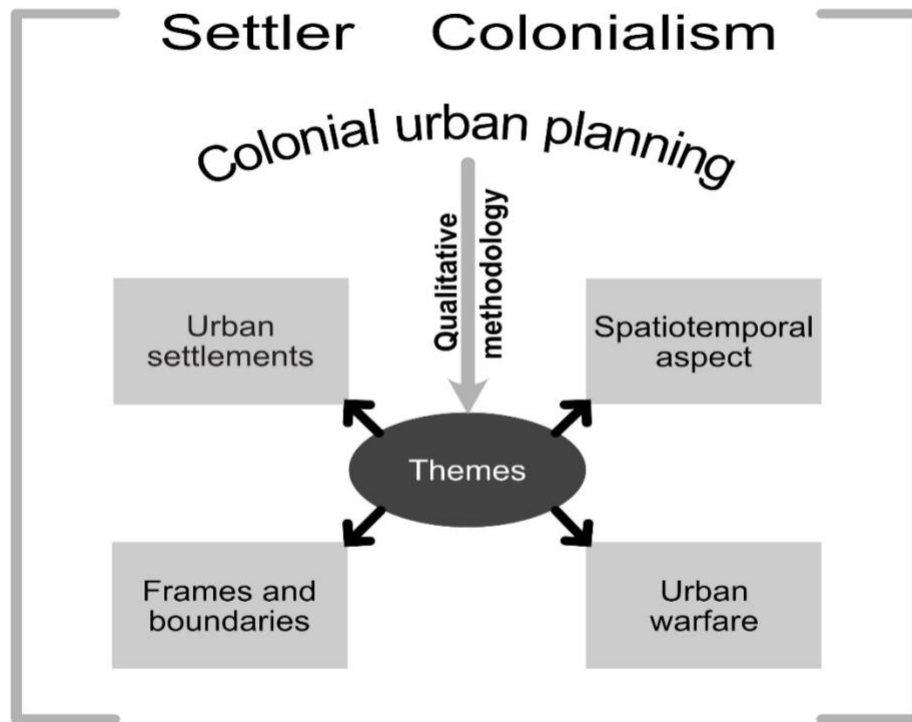


Fig. 1. Thematic Qualitative Methodology

The impact of such spatial perspectives is categorized into four themes. The first includes *urban settlements* in which colonial urban planning influences urban development and urban identities. While new colonial settlements are imposed, development is hindered in existing urban areas. Such urban arrangements alter the urban landscape to create conflicting urban identities within the same locations. The second includes *frames and boundaries* that impose segregation within urban areas. Such frames and constructed boundaries include Segregation Walls, checkpoints that create zones that determine where people can move, and when their mobility is restricted. They separate communities and perpetuate inequalities. The third includes the *spatio-temporal* aspect which examines how colonial infrastructure impact people’s everyday lives over space and time. It explores how mobility within such colonial infrastructure, facilitates the life of one group making lives more convenient while another have disrupted lives causing inconvenience and difficulties in managing everyday tasks and needs. Such infrastructures can affect how people spend their time, how some gain time through efficient means while the others lose time through imposed colonial infrastructures of control. And the fourth includes *urban warfare*, which is intensified in times of friction and confrontation causing more conflicts and tensions. This is reflected vertically in spaces aboveground and underground, affecting the spatial physical and social fabric of colonized space, thus shaping space in new ways.

In summary, the research aims to explore how these four spatial perspectives, influenced by colonial urban planning, create countering impacts on people's lives in the context of conflict and urban development in Palestine. By analyzing these perspectives on the created binaries and their impact on space and people, it thus seeks to understand the countering complexities and nuances of urban life

including the produced dichotomies and tensions, identity, and colonized peoples' resilience within the context of Israeli settler colonization.

While the research investigates these urban perspectives, each one shall be analyzed within one or more territory within historic Palestine including Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the 1948 lands.

3. Discussion and Results

Israeli colonial urban planning has been influenced by previous settler colonial projects in different territories in the world, where colonial urban settlements and infrastructures of control have been constructed, and where segregation, surveillance, boundaries building has been key to control people, space and time [14]. The paper highlights four urban perspectives within the Israeli settler colonial context. The following are the four spatial perspectives:

3.1 Urban Settlements

Israeli colonial urban planning has gained experience from historical settler colonial projects that have been implemented worldwide. These projects have systematically established colonial urban settlements and infrastructures of control, emphasizing segregation, surveillance, and the creation of boundaries to regulate people, space, and time. The Israeli context is no exception and in fact an advanced version, with urban planning serving as a tool to assert control over contested territories and populations.

Understanding Israeli settler colonial urban planning requires examining the broader context of settler colonialism in the region. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Israeli government has pursued policies aimed at consolidating Jewish control over the land, at the expense of Palestinian rights and sovereignty. This has involved the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 war.

The roots of Israeli colonial settlement initiatives, a cornerstone of Israeli colonial policy, can be traced back to the early 20th century, initially designed to accommodate Jewish settlers. However, the pace and scale of settlement construction significantly escalated after the 1967 war, when Israel enforced colonial control over the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Various settlement plans have been proposed and implemented over the years, each aiming to consolidate Israeli presence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Allon Plan, introduced in 1967 by Israeli politician Yigal Allon, envisioned dividing the West Bank into sections connected by Israeli-controlled roads, with a corridor separating it from Jordan. Settlement construction focused on strategic areas like the Jordan Valley and the Judean Desert. The Drobles Plan, presented in 1977 by Matitياهو Drobles of the World Zionist Organisation, called for settlement expansion throughout the entire West Bank, aiming to establish a continuous Israeli presence across the territory. The Sharon Plan, proposed during Ariel Sharon's tenure as Minister of Agriculture (1977), represented a more aggressive approach, advocating for widespread settlement building across the West Bank, excluding densely populated Palestinian areas.

According to Peace Now [15], there are currently 147 authorized Israeli settlements and 151 outposts in the West Bank, accommodating approximately 478,600 settlers. Al Jazeera reports [16-17] that more than 700,000 settlers reside in these settlements and outposts. Outposts, unlike settlements, are built without government authorization and can range from small shanties to communities of up to 400 people. The establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements have profoundly transformed the urban landscape of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These settlements often occupy elevated positions, strategically located to overlook Palestinian communities, thereby subjecting them to constant surveillance and control (See Figure 2). In Jerusalem, and to maintain a Jewish majority,

Israeli authorities have systematically expropriated lands to build Israeli Settlements, in addition to applying zoning and planning policies that impact the rights of the Palestinian population [18].

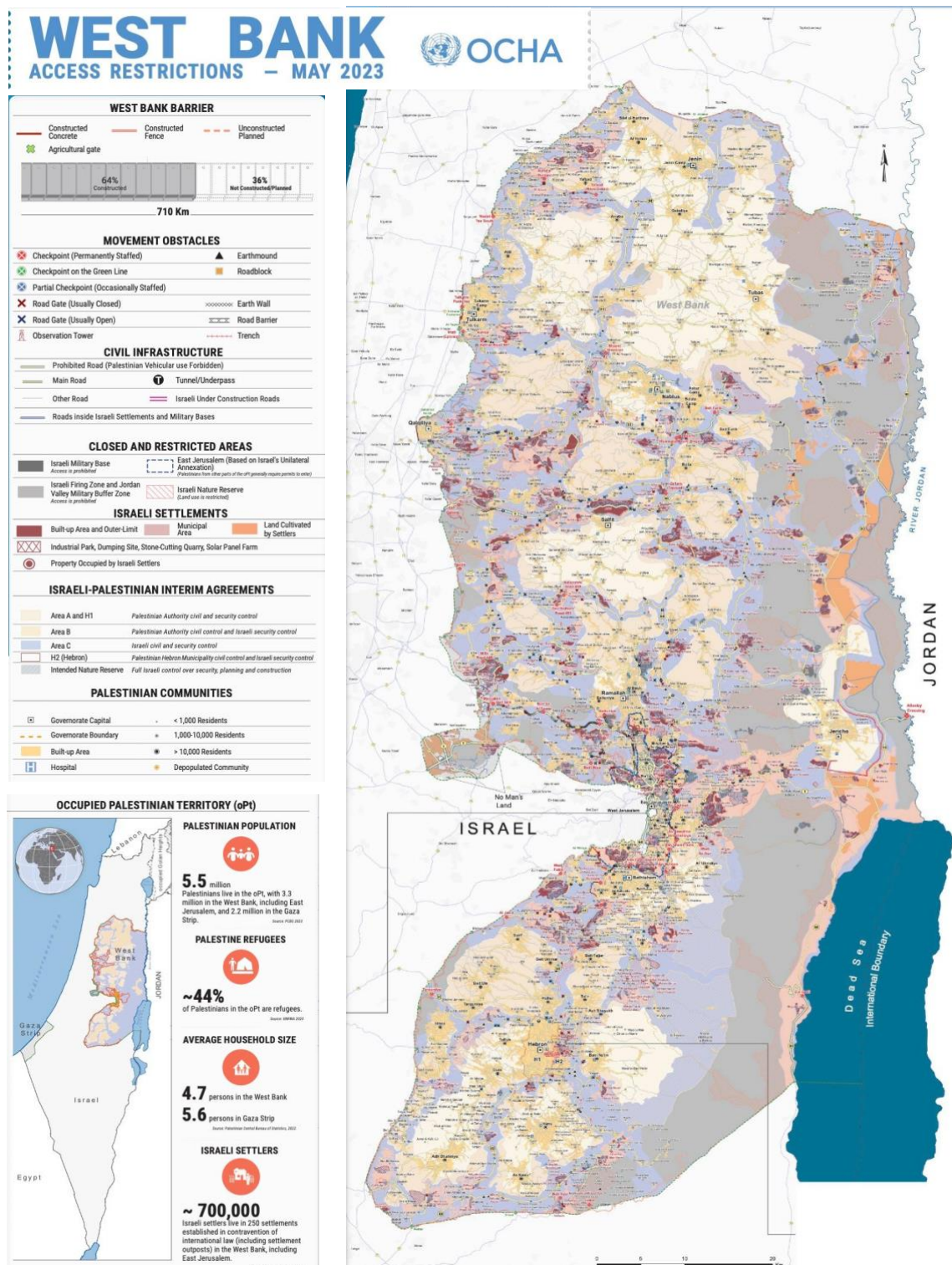


Fig. 2. West Bank Access Restrictions- May 2023, Source: OCHA-OPT [19], rearranged by author

This has led to the creation of a stark contrast between the planned morphology of Israeli settlements and the organically developed Palestinian areas. While Israeli settlements benefit from planned infrastructure, public spaces, and amenities, Palestinian areas face restrictions on development, land confiscation, and limited access to resources. Furthermore, the confiscation of land

surrounding Israeli settlements for future expansion has hindered the growth of Palestinian urban areas, leading to urban stagnation. This stagnation has resulted in densification, overcrowding, and inadequate infrastructure, negatively impacting the daily lives of Palestinians.

The disparity in urban planning priorities between Israeli settlements and Palestinian areas is also evident in the development of public spaces, green areas, and recreational facilities. Israeli settlements prioritize the creation of vibrant public spaces and amenities, fostering a sense of community and well-being among residents. In contrast, Palestinian areas have experienced a reduction in such spaces due to land confiscation, movement restrictions, and limited resources. This disparity became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when movement restrictions allowed Israeli settlers to access public and green spaces, while Palestinians, especially in East Jerusalem, faced limitations.

The construction and expansion of Israeli settlements within the framework of colonial urban planning serve to amplify the dominance of settler urban areas while stifling the development and growth of Palestinian urban areas. The Israeli settler colonial project in Palestine, facilitated by urban planning strategies, perpetuates a system of segregation, surveillance, and control that undermines Palestinian rights, sovereignty, and quality of life. Such clear dichotomies show how using the construction of Israeli settlements within colonial urban planning enhances the imposed urban settler areas and hinders the development of Palestinian urban areas. This dynamic creates conflicting urban identities within the same geographical space, exacerbating tensions and inequalities in the region.

3.2 Frames and Boundaries

The second spatial perspective focuses on the frames and boundaries that dictate existence and perishing within the Israeli settler colonial context. Key elements of segregation, such as the Segregation Wall (See Figure 3) and checkpoints, serve as instruments to demarcate zones of existence for Israelis and zones of expendable life for Palestinians. These physical and symbolic barriers not only separate communities but also transform urban landscapes, turning vibrant urban nodes into dead ends from both sides [20]. Everyday thousand of people are obliged to cross the checkpoints to reach their destinations [21] especially to places of work, education, health, worship or others.



Fig. 3. Segregation Wall near Qalandia Checkpoint, March 2024, Photo taken by author

Beyond the checkpoints and Segregation Walls, various other elements are strategically constructed or planted across different areas to further delineate boundaries and impose mobility restrictions on Palestinians. These include earth mounds, road gates, roadblocks, trenches, and barriers, each serving to reinforce the divisions and constraints imposed on Palestinian communities. The

impact of these barriers is multifaceted, affecting public spaces, residential areas, economic viability, social ties, and overall mobility (See Figure 4). According to OCHA [22], there are 654 movement obstacles in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Hebron H2 area, including 49 constant checkpoints, 139 occasionally staffed checkpoints, 304 roadblocks, earth-mounds and road gates, and 73 earth walls, road barriers and trenches. Over half of them have severely impact Palestinian everyday life mobility to and restricting access to main roads, urban centres, services, and agricultural areas. And above all of these, the 712 kilometre-long Israeli Barrier (65% of which is built) restricts access of farmers to their lands, where access is through 69 gates which are most of the times kept shut.

MOVEMENT AND ACCESS IN THE WEST BANK

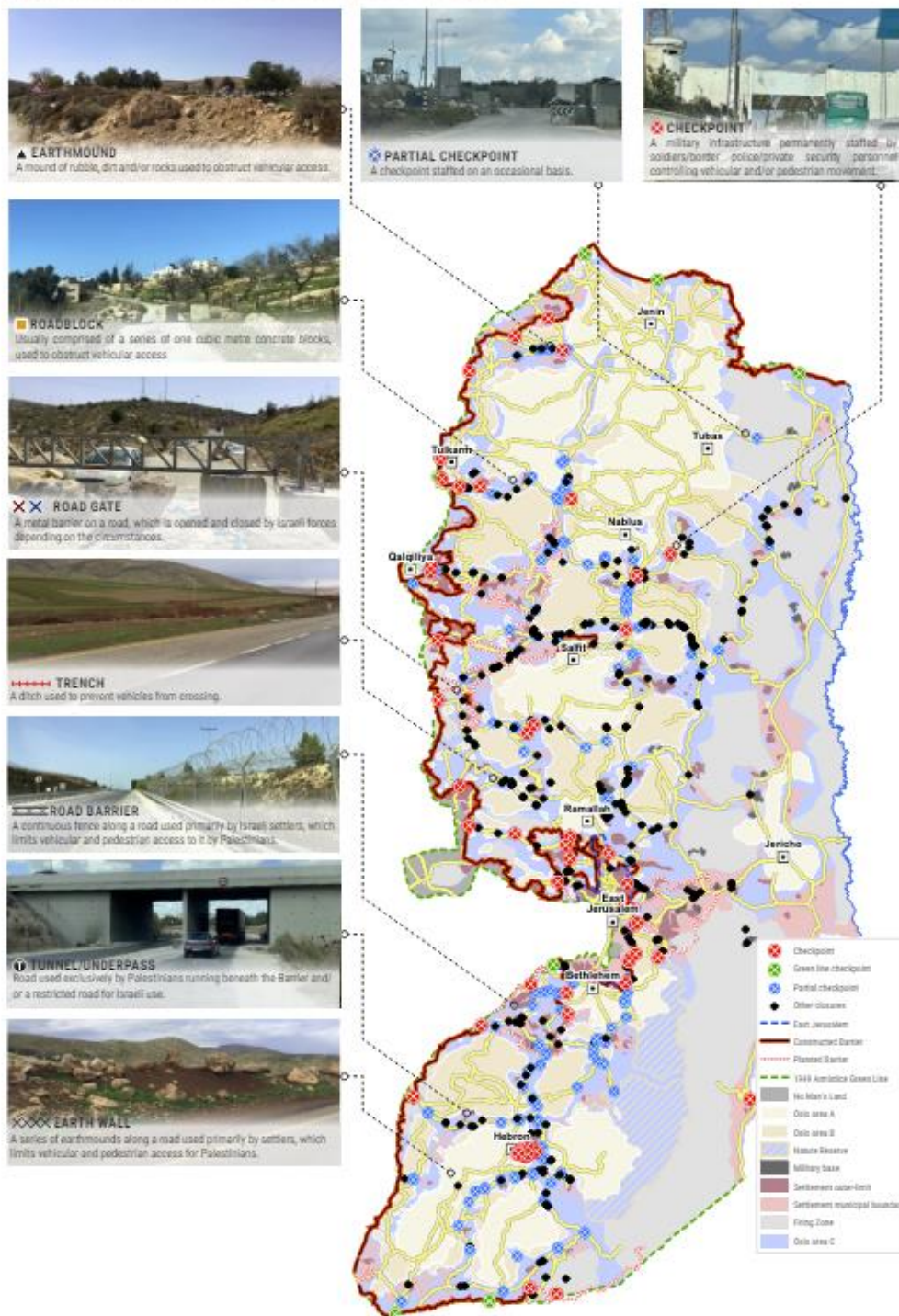


Fig. 4. Movement and Access in the West Bank, August 2023, Source: OCHA-OPT [24]

Palestinian neighborhoods often find themselves cut off from essential services including health and education, separated from family and community ties, and restricted in their daily movements. These movement obstacles therefore affect the lives of people on the social, economic, psychological as well as the environmental levels. Different categories of society suffer from these restrictions in different ways. Tens of cases of pregnant women were obliged to give birth at checkpoints, children face humiliation while being fetched at crossing points, old people are sometimes forced to walk long distances to cross checkpoints or other obstacles, young people face unemployment, due to accessibility restrictions. Access to Jerusalem for Palestinians from the West Bank is further restricted and prohibited except when achieving an access permit from the Israeli Authority. Such restrictions are exacerbated when a “security threat” is sensed by the Israeli soldiers, often resulting in the killing of Palestinian individuals at the checkpoint [23]. These produced frames and boundaries, manifested through walls and checkpoints, fundamentally alter the fabric of urban spaces, creating zones that are either thriving or neglected based on identity and privilege. In contrast, Israeli settlements are seamlessly connected to infrastructure that links them to other Israeli-populated areas, further exacerbating the disparities in access, mobility, and quality of life between Israeli settlers and Palestinians.

3.3 Spatio-temporal Dynamics

The third spatial perspective is the spatio-temporal dynamics of infrastructure within the Israeli settler colonial context. Infrastructure serves as a crucial element in shaping the lived experiences of the Israeli colonizers and the colonized Palestinians, but in markedly different ways. Colonial urban planning has produced a dual-level infrastructure system that remarkably affects the temporal dynamics of everyday life. For a short distance that needs 15 min drive, due to the existence of checkpoint, sometimes the duration of waiting and crossing the checkpoints takes two or three or even four hours (See Figure 5).

Colonial infrastructure is planned in such a way to facilitate the lives of Israeli settlers while disrupting the lives of Palestinians. This disparity is further intensified by elements of segregation, such as the Segregation Walls and checkpoints, which create distinct spatial and temporal patterns for the colonizer and the colonized.



Fig. 5. Cars in que at Qalandia checkpoint, and Segregation Wall on the right side, photo taken by author, 2024

In areas of the West Bank and Jerusalem, for Israeli settlers, mobility is often taken for granted, seamlessly integrated into their daily routines through settler bypass roads and highways that allow for long-distance travel in minimal time. This equation of time, rather than distances, reflects a temporal spatial increase for settlers, where time is gained through efficient infrastructure. This not only enhances their quality of life but also allows them to focus on other aspects of daily living, beyond mere survival. In stark contrast, Palestinians experience a temporal spatial decrease, facing long travel times for short distances due to colonial infrastructure. Waiting for hours at checkpoints or navigating through segregated roads impacts their overall quality of life, depriving them of autonomy over their time and perpetuating a high level of uncertainties in their daily lives. People need to wake up very early in the morning to face the difficult routine of waiting at checkpoints on the way to work, school, health services, religious sites or visiting family. Planning a day is not an easy task as one is often faced with the need to plan b or c depending on checkpoint conditions. Such waiting times deprive people of having any time for leisure or relaxation but are constantly struggling and spending time on the road.

This dichotomy in infrastructure extends beyond surface-level roads and checkpoints, with two layers of infrastructure, including the use of tunnels and bridges, further exacerbating tensions and creating contested binaries between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. These contrasting experiences highlight the dialectic contrast between the colonizer and the colonized, manifesting in the uneven distribution of time, mobility, and quality of life. The disparities in infrastructure not only reflect but also reinforce the unequal power dynamics inherent in the Israeli settler colonial system but perpetuates inequalities in spatial and temporal dynamics.

3.4 Urban Warfare

The final perspective emphasizes the dynamics of warfare and urban resilience during times of friction and confrontation within the context of Israeli settler colonialism. The produced binaries within the warfare context are vertically reflected in the spatial strategies employed both underground and overground, particularly evident in the Gaza Strip. Here, the stark contrasts between Israeli airstrikes targeting Palestinian urban areas and Palestinian resistance efforts, such as the building of tunnels underground, create a fourth dimension of spatial perspectives that profoundly impact the binaries of life and death.

The vertical binaries of action manifest in the form of urbicide, where Israeli airstrikes devastate Palestinian urban areas, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives, homes, and infrastructure. In the Gaza Strip, in 2008-9, 2014, 2021 wars, 3,425, 11,000, 2000 housing units respectively were totally destroyed, apart from the other housing units which were majorly or partially destroyed. In the current 2023-4 war the numbers jumped to hundreds of thousand totally destroyed housing units [24-26]. After 200 days of war on Gaza, 380,00 housing units, 412 schools and universities, 556 mosques, 32 hospitals, 53 health centres, three churches, 206 archeological and heritage sites were damaged or destroyed [27]. Destruction is also reflected to a lesser degree in Refugee camps in the West Bank especially in the Northern districts of Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarem.

In response, Palestinian resilience is demonstrated through the construction of underground tunnels, as in the whole of the Gaza Strip, serving as vital lifelines for survival and resistance against overground urban warfare. This juxtaposition reveals a dynamic of existence and persistence, highlighting the resilience of communities under siege – in the case of Gaza since 2006 -- and the devastating impact of warfare on civilian populations.

It also raises critical questions about spatial justice, sustainability, and the ethical implications of urban warfare, when the overall population is left exposed and vulnerable to unabated war crimes and genocidal practices as in the case of Gaza. On another level the underground, through an intense network of tunnels becomes a sanctuary of the resisting people against aboveground violence.

In this dissected urban space, spatial injustice becomes glaringly apparent during times of confrontation, as communities are subjected to genocidal tactics that threaten their very existence and livelihoods. The contrast between underground urban resilience and overground urban warfare underscores the ongoing struggle for survival and dignity in the face of overwhelming adversity. It calls for a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between urban planning, political conflict, and human resilience.

4. Conclusion

Settler colonial policies and practices enormously affect the colonized. Jamal Nabulsi [28] describes the fragmentation that happens from settler colonial practices as an earthquake. While settler colonial policies and practices affect across scales and dimensions on land, time and bodies, this research has explored four spatial perspectives within the Israeli settler colonial context, shedding light on the complex dynamics of urban planning, infrastructure, and warfare that shape binaries of lived experiences of Israeli settlers and Palestinians. The horizontal and vertical binaries identified in these perspectives reveal the multifaceted nature of spatial injustice, creating contested spaces, exacerbating and perpetuating cycles of inequality and creating killing zones, characterized by destruction, control, and resilience, particularly evident in different refugees in the West Bank and in the whole of the Gaza Strip especially in the current ongoing war.

The analysis of these perspectives provides valuable insights into how these binaries contribute to the draining of resources and ecological costs on the environment. In the first two months of the current war as an example, and majorly due to Israeli bombardment in most areas of the Gaza Strip, the planet-warming emissions were more than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations, equivalent to burning at least 150,000 tons of coal [20]. This number have largely increased since after 200 days of the war, Israel's military has "dropped 75,000 tonnes of explosives on the Gaza Strip, turning the infrastructure to rubble" [27].

In conclusion, this research highlights the inter-connectedness of spatial dynamics, ecological impacts, and temporal inequalities within the Israeli settler colonial context. It calls for a transformative approach to urban planning and governance that recognizes and addresses the complexities of spatial injustice, promoting resilience, justice, and dignity for all the colonized communities affected by the infrastructures of domination and control. The contextual dualities of spatial injustice underscore the urgent need for addressing these disparities and reimagining urban spaces as sites of existence and better quality of life, particularly in the reconstruction phases in the post-war stage.

This study advocates for the colonized to have control over their own space and time, free from colonial manipulation, to foster a fair and autonomous future within a dynamic of spatial, temporal and environmental justice.

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