



# **Contested Terrain:**

How the Israeli Occupation's Spatial Violence Shapes Palestinian  
Resistance in Masafer Yatta

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# Abstract

This thesis examines how Palestinian grassroots resistance in Masafer Yatta, the occupied West Bank, is affected by Israeli military occupation and how this reshapes the emotional geographies of the region. Focusing on space and territory, it analyses how Israeli state and settler strategies of displacement, surveillance and fragmentation are met by Palestinian community practices of Sumud (steadfastness) built on situated knowledge. Based on fieldwork, including spatial data, visual documentation and interviews with residents and activists, the research explores resistance against intensified dispossession.

Israeli settler colonialism in Masafer Yatta is viewed as a structural project aiming for territorial control and elimination, using spatial violence like land reclassification, demolitions and hindering of movement. Decolonial methodologies and theories are applied to analyse how everyday acts like maintaining presence, adaptive domesticity, strengthening social cohesion, and counter-narration resist settler-colonial strategies. The occupation creates landscapes of fear, but fear becomes pragmatic caution and embodied spatial literacy coexisting with steadfastness. By centring Palestinian voices, the thesis highlights occupation as profoundly spatial and emotional and resistance as continually enacted through collective practice and reclamation.

Key words: Settler-colonialism, Palestine, tactics of ethnic cleansing, social cohesion, resistance methods.

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I am especially grateful to my supervisor, Anders, for your steady support and intellectual generosity and for giving me the freedom to follow the complexities of this research where they needed to go.

To my friends and family, thank you for your patience, encouragement and dinners you've cooked.

This thesis is dedicated to those who continue to imagine and fight for liberation, even when the world looks away.

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“The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life - or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be - indeed, often are - contests for life.”

Patrick Wolfe, *Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native*, 2006

# 1 Positionality

In the summer of 2024, I travelled to Palestine for the first time, after years of following the political situation and considering volunteering with a solidarity organisation in the region. Following the attack on October 7 and the Israeli retaliation, this consideration became more urgent. I eventually joined the International Solidarity Movement - the ISM (appendix 1). I spent seven weeks in the West Bank, where I witnessed and experienced events that profoundly impacted my personal and academic life.

During my time in Masafer Yatta, I witnessed the Israeli military arbitrarily detain young boys and men, often without reason, and I was present at several house demolitions. I saw Israeli settlers destroy olive groves, attempt to steal Palestinian livestock and attack unarmed, peaceful Palestinian villages and people. My initial reactions were disbelief and anger, but as the weeks went by, I began noticing patterns, spatial and temporal, associated with the violence I was witnessing. I observed specific plots of land and families targeted by particular settlers, GPS jammings occurring just before fighter jets flew above us and the strategic placement of outposts, settler farms and roadblocks hindering movement between villages. I began to understand how both Israeli state actors and settlers used time and space as tools of control. Once I recognised these patterns, it became impossible to ignore the spatial tactics involved in the occupation and the resistance against it. This realisation led me to gather spatial data on settlements and settler attacks, hoping to uncover patterns that could shed light on these practices.

My experiences have deeply influenced how I approach research on settler colonialism and Palestinian resistance and have deepened my awareness of how research itself can either contribute to or hinder the liberation efforts of Palestinians. My knowledge of the area and the fact that I have met and built trustful relationships between myself and several local inhabitants and leading activists, have allowed me access to knowledge, fears and reflections of the most knowledgeable people.

As an activist, my initial focus was on providing solidarity. Turning to an academic approach has emphasised the importance of ethical research practices, particularly when engaging with communities living under constant violence. I am committed to producing work that

respects the agency and dignity of the people whose lives and resistance I document and analyse. This personal journey is reflected in the approach taken in this thesis. By centring Palestinian knowledge and spatial practices of resistance, although also referencing Israeli scholars (appendix 2), I aim to challenge the hegemonic narratives that continue to marginalise and dehumanise Palestinians and to contribute to the broader struggle for justice and self-determination.

My experiences have affected how I approach the topic of settler colonialism, settlers, the indigenous and the narratives sent out by various involved actors. It has also affected my understanding of why and how research can potentially do harm while trying to add to the liberation efforts of the Palestinians between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

## 2 Introduction

Since October 7th, 2023, activists, scholars and humanitarian organisations have been calling for the world to keep its eyes on Gaza - and although Gaza has received too little attention, the escalating ethnic cleansing and forced displacement in the West Bank have happened almost unnoticed.

Settler violence, house demolitions, theft and displacements have intensified drastically, and after the now broken ceasefire deal was signed, several cities in the West Bank were invaded, leading to tens of thousands being displaced, hundreds of arrests and administrative detentions, and dozens being killed. But where military invasions of area A are rare, a permanent presence of the military and settlers is everyday life in area C.

### 2.1 Aim and Research Question

This thesis will zoom in on Masafer Yatta, the southernmost region of the West Bank, engaging with theoretical arguments on settler colonialism and the resistance towards it through analysing empirical data on the lived experience from the area. The thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of Palestinian resistance to the ongoing military occupation and how this shapes the emotional landscapes in which it is situated. It will seek to answer the questions: How do the spatial and violent strategies of the Israeli occupation affect Palestinian forms of resistance in Masafer Yatta?

1. How do the actors of the military occupation and their strategies affect the social and spatial conditions of resistance?
2. Which strategies do local activists and residents use to reclaim or protect space, communities and mobility?
3. How are emotions such as fear expressed in the physical and mental landscape?

### 2.2 Scope and Limitations

Colonial violence affects various aspects of livelihood in all of Palestine, housing is demolished, bombed or confiscated, arrest numbers are soaring, and the death toll is rising. This development is a continuation of a long history of colonial domination, ethnic cleansing and generational oppression. More than ever, the development in Palestine is also a tremendously polarising topic on a global scale.

This thesis will focus solely on Masafer Yatta, a finite geographical area with a relatively small population. As it engages with specific strategies in a particular context, it cannot be directly transferred to other regions or populations.

A methodological choice was made to focus on the lived experience of the local population in Masafer Yatta. Therefore, document and policy analyses from Israeli sources are not included, although these could have presented a different perspective on the strategies of occupational actors.

## 2.3 Disposition

Chapter 1 describes the author's positionality in relation to the research. Chapter 2 introduces the topic and its relevance, presents the research question, and describes the limitations and scope of the study. Chapter 3 presents the geographical context needed for understanding the field and presents the region of Masafer Yatta. Chapter 4 reviews previous literature on the topic and identifies gaps in the research. Chapter 5 addresses the thesis's theoretical framework. It seeks to cover the theories that have been foundational to the understanding and analysis of colonial violence in Masafer Yatta and the resistance to it. Chapter 6 explains methodological considerations and choices made in the process. It describes the ontological and epistemological stance, the methodological approach to research design, and ethical reflections along the way. At last, it describes the limitations of the final research design and its methods. Chapter 7 analyses and discusses the findings in relation to the research question. It focuses on the occupation actors and their strategies, how these influence resistance in the region, how they affect emotional geographies, and how they create landscapes of fear. It further identifies topics needing further research. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis.

# 3 Background

## 3.1 Palestinian Geography

Palestine's geography is heavily influenced by its colonial history, as described in Appendix 3. The following section describes the geographies of Palestine relevant to Masafer Yatta.

## Geography of the Southern West Bank

The southern West Bank is characterised by a rugged landscape of hills, valleys and desert terrain, extending from Bethlehem in the north to the South Hebron Hills in the South. This area is home to significant Palestinian cities, including Hebron and Yatta, rural villages and Bedouin communities. The region also faces extensive geopolitical fragmentation due to Israeli control mechanisms, including settlements, checkpoints, segregated roads and military zones.

### Administrative Divisions: Areas A, B and C

The Oslo Accords of the 1990s divided the West Bank into three administrative categories: Area A, B and C. Area A (approximately 18% of the West Bank) is under complete Palestinian civil and security control and is home to the populous cities in Palestine, such as Jenin and Nablus in the North, Ramallah in the centre, and Hebron and Bethlehem in the South. Area B (around 22% of the West Bank) falls under the civil control of the Palestinian Authority, but Israeli security control leads to security restrictions and development prohibitions for its inhabitants. Area C (approximately 60% of the West Bank) is under complete Israeli control and encompasses rural areas, including the South Hebron Hills, and agricultural land (Anera, n.d.). Around 300,000 Palestinians live in area C, alongside at least 400,000 Israeli settlers (Anera, n.d.). The separation of the West Bank into three distinct administrative zones was supposed to be valid for a five-year transition period only. Despite this, the West Bank is still governed under this spatio-legal fragmentation.



Figure 1: Administrative map (Anera, n.d.)

### Settlements and Their Impact

The settlements continue to expand and fragment Palestinian land and access routes, often leading to the displacement of local Palestinian communities. Israeli settlements in the West Bank

have been growing in size and absolute numbers for decades. In the 90's around 200.000 settlers lived in the West Bank. Today, depending on sources, the number is between 500.000 (Peace Now, 2025a) and +700,000 (OHCHR, 2025). The vast majority of the settlers live in Area C, the area inhabited by the fewest Palestinians. Increasingly, settlements encroach on land in both Areas A and B.

Overall, two kinds of settlements exist: official settlements, legal under Israeli law, and outposts, illegal under Israeli law. Both are illegal under International Humanitarian Law. There are currently around 365 settlements and outposts in the West Bank (Peace Now, 2025a). Since October 7th, the number of settlements, land grabs, and settler attacks has exploded. Prior to 2023, the highest number of outposts established in a year was 22. These were established in 2002 at the height of the second intifada. The average number of new outposts between 1996 and 2023 was seven (Peace Now, 2025b). During 2023, the Settlement Administration was founded under the Ministry of Defence, led by Bezalel Smotrich. The same year, 26 new outposts were established, and the legalisation of 15 outposts was advanced. It was also a record year for planning new units in settlements, with over 10.000 housing units being promoted either for depositing or validation in the West Bank and over 20.000 in East Jerusalem (UN OCHRC, 2025). In 2024, the settlement expansion accelerated again with 59 new outposts, five new settlements (legalisation of outposts) and an additional five outposts being legalised as 'neighbourhoods' of existing settlements. 70 illegal outposts were recognised as eligible for funding and infrastructure developments, and authorities have begun building infrastructure and connecting them to various utilities. 24.258 dunams of land were declared state land. Massive public investments have been made in the Department of Settlements. Just under USD2 billion was invested in road development for settlements over the next five years, and around USD 20 million has been allocated to funding outposts. At the same time, power has been transferred from the Civil Administration under the Israeli army to a newly created Civilian Deputy working under the Ministry of Defence (Peace Now, 2025b).

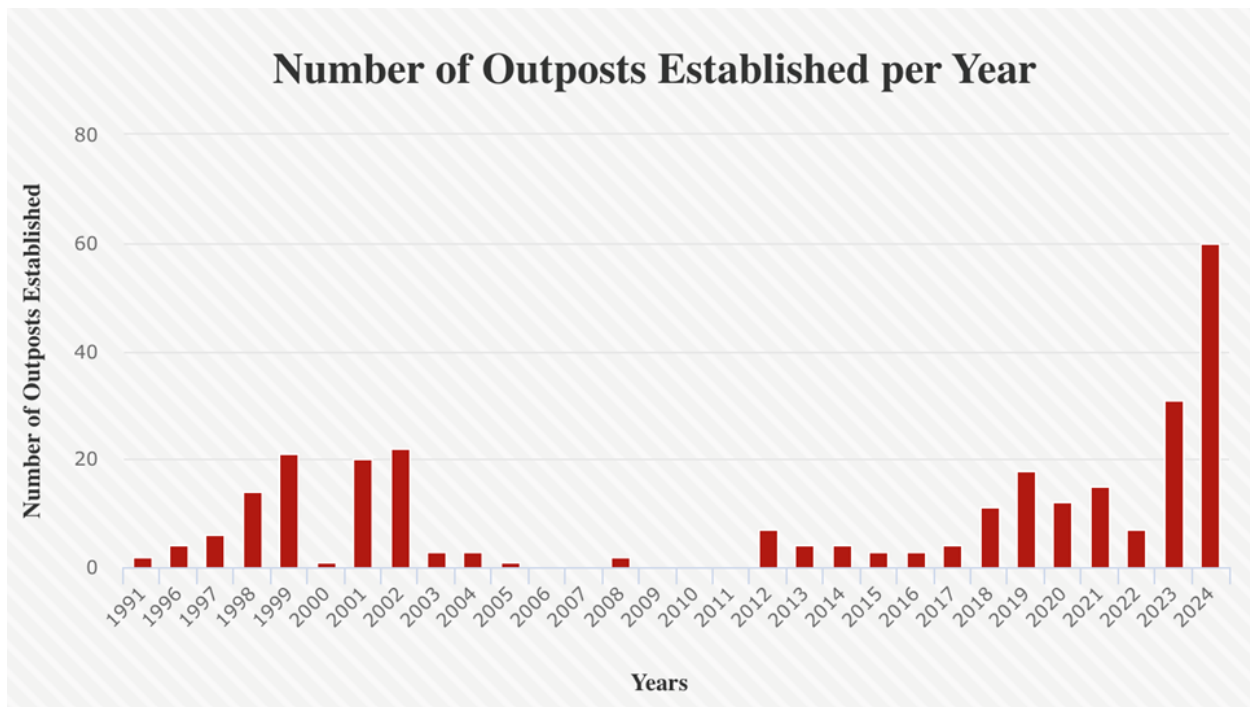


Figure 2: Number of outposts established yearly (Peace Now, 2025a)

Similar trends can be identified in e.g., the number of settler attacks (at least 1420 from October 2023 to the end of 2024) and destruction of Palestinian property. Trends can also be identified in the number of house demolition orders and stop work orders, although the correlation is less clear. In the period, 1065 structures were demolished, an additional 452 were demolished in military operations, in the West Bank, and zero building permits were approved in Area C. As a result, at least 47 Palestinian communities have been forcibly displaced since October 2023 (Peace Now, 2025b).

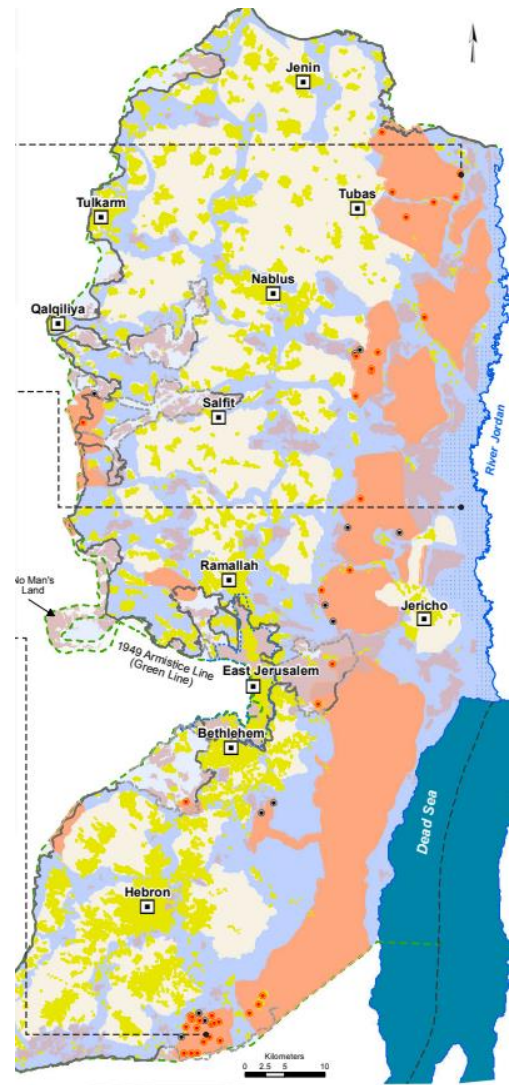
## Checkpoints and Segregated Infrastructure

Movement in the southern West Bank is heavily restricted by Israeli checkpoints, roadblocks and bypass roads built for settlers. Segregated roads, such as Route 60, link settlements to Israel while bypassing Palestinian towns, further restricting movement. Palestinian roads are often closed off by permanent or temporary checkpoints or roadblocks, leading to long detours and delays, impacting Palestinian economic and social life (appendix 4).

## Closed Military Zones: Wet and Dry

The first closed military zones were established in the 1970s. Officially, their purpose is to ensure land military training. In reality, as Ariel Sharon, Minister of Agriculture at the time and later Prime Minister, stated "as the person who initiated the military fire zones in 1967, they were all intended for one purpose: to provide an opportunity for Jewish settlement in the area" (Abraham, 2022). Israel has designated over 18% of the West Bank as a closed military zone, the vast majority of this land in area C. More land in the West Bank is thus designated for military training than is controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

The closed military zones fall into two primary categories: 'Dry' military zones are areas declared off-limits for Palestinian civilians but used for settlement expansion or security purposes. 'Wet' military zones are areas used for live-fire training, often overlapping with Palestinian agricultural and grazing lands, leading to evictions and land confiscation.



### Map Legend

- Palestinian Community in Firing Zone
- Israeli Settlement Outpost in Firing Zone
- Barrier: Constructed / Under Construction
- Barrier: Planned
- Firing Zone (Closed Military Area)
- Buffer Zone (Closed Military Area)
- Palestinian Community
- Israeli settlement (inc.cultivated land)
- Area A / B
- Area C & "Wye River" Nature Reserves

Figure 3: Military Zones (OCHA, 2012)

In 2012, around 5000 Palestinians lived in a firing zone and these populations, mostly Bedouin and shepherds, are some of the most vulnerable Palestinians with the highest humanitarian needs and no service infrastructure. Between 2010 and 2012, 45% of demolitions

in Area C occurred in firing zones. Despite the high rates of demolitions, the ten outposts, placed in part or in whole, in firing zones rarely face demolitions (OCHA, 2012). Most of the Firing Zones are in the Jordan Valley or the South Hebron Hills, and 12 of the villages in Masafer Yatta are in Firing Zone 918.

## 3.2 Masafer Yatta

Masafer Yatta is in the southernmost part of the West Bank and as the name indicates, the closest city is Yatta. It has a population of around 1500 people living in various villages. Masafer Yatta is in the Governorate of Hebron and is cartographically demarcated by four lines, each dating back to a specific spatio-legal territorial demarcation. The first demarcation is the Green Line marked by the 1949 Armistice Agreement and currently acts as the de facto border between the West Bank and Israel. The second is the borders of area C, which puts Masafer Yatta under Israeli military and civic jurisdiction as per the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Agreement under the Oslo Accords, 1993-1995. The third demarcation is the Closed Military Zone (Firing Zone 918). The fourth demarcation line is the apartheid wall, which defines the frontiers of Israel (Butmeh, 2022).

Masafer Yatta has, along with the rest of the West Bank, been occupied since 1967. In 1980 Israel declared a large part of the land as Firing Zone 918. When a firing zone is established, the Palestinians no longer have the right to be or build in the area. Therefore, every solar cell, house, well, irrigation system, roads etc is under threat of demolition as they no longer have the correct permit. Of the 5000 Palestinians living in a Firing Zone, around 1000 live in Masafer Yatta where approximately half the land area is in Firing Zone 918.

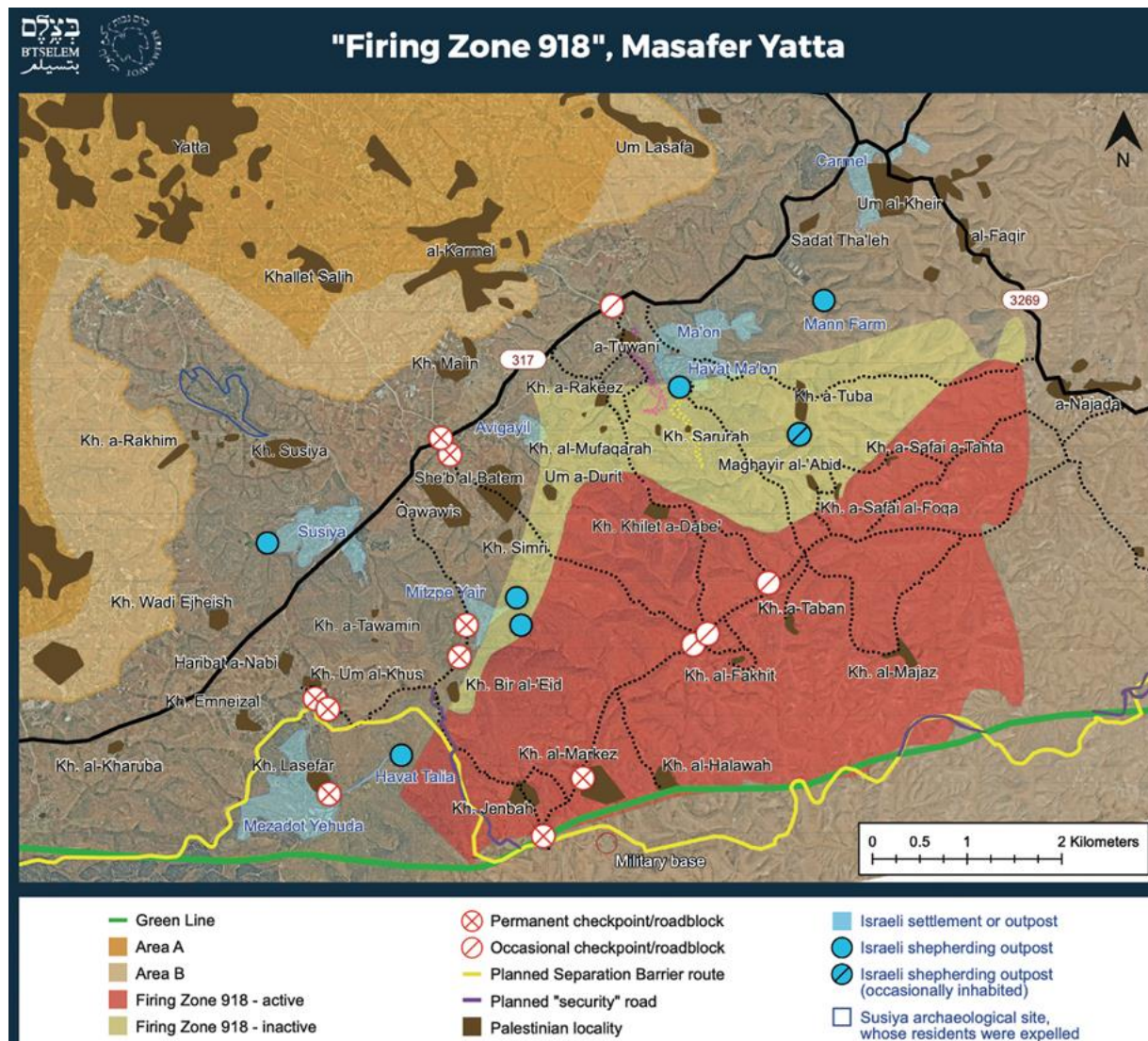


Figure 4: Map of Masafer Yatta and Firing Zone 918 (BTselem, 2022)

Most of the population have been displaced several times. Most families in Masafer Yatta were originally displaced during the Nakba of 1948, then again by 1967 and since then many residents have been displaced internally in Masafer Yatta by the establishment of settlements etc.

Historically, Masafer Yatta has been serving the role of the 'food basket' of the South Hebron region. Prior to 1948, the people of the area were semi-nomadic, neither Bedouin nor settled people, moving after the seasons. In the summer the people were in Yatta, harvesting figs and grapes. From late summer to early spring was used in Masafer Yatta, grazing livestock and cultivating the land. In spring the shepherds moved south into the Negev, where they grazed their

flocks while living in temporary tents (Butmeh, 2022). This cyclical rhythm was based on the economic opportunity each season and location presented. The culture developed with limited influence from the nation state, which was different from the situation from the people of i.e. Yatta, whose lives were directed more by British Mandate Palestine (Butmeh, 2022).

After the occupation began, especially after the 1967 six-day war, the way of life was no longer possible. With the establishment of settlements, restriction of movement, the introduction of military rule and the Firing Zones the geography of the geobody changed. Despite a 22 year long court case seeking to revoke Firing Zone 918, the Firing Zone still stands (Butmeh, 2022). According to UN OCHA (2022), the residents of Masafer Yatta are one of the most vulnerable population groups in Palestine.

## 4 Literature Review

The relationship between colonial violence, spatial control and resistance in Palestine has become a central concern in settler colonial studies, critical geography and decolonial theory. With the development of these intersecting fields, scholars have increasingly focused on how occupation restructures not only space and governance but also the affective and relational dimensions of everyday life (Butmeh, 2022; Joronen, 2016; Veracini, 2018).

Approaching Israel-Palestine through a settler-colonial lens highlights the ongoing project of elimination and replacement that defines the Israeli occupation. Veracini (2019) argues that settler colonialism is not a past event but a continuing structure, producing spatial and legal regimes that work to erase Indigenous Palestinian presence. This logic is evident in the geography of military occupation, which fragments land, community and time. Penic et al. (2024) demonstrate how proximity to Israeli military infrastructure weakens social cohesion and affects resistance motivation. In her analysis of Firing Zone 918, Butmeh (2022) outlines how forced displacement and militarised spatial control generate 'temporary geographies' that simultaneously restrict and provoke new forms of domestic and political life. These geographies are marked by precarity but also by the endurance of place-based practices. (Bier, 2014) complements this view by showing how Israeli mapping practices create segregated landscapes that serve to naturalise occupation and erase Palestinian spatial knowledge.

This structural erasure is mirrored in temporal and emotional registers. Joronen (2017) describes how Palestinians are held in 'spaces of waiting', where bureaucratic and infrastructural delays become tools of domination. Handel (2014) concept of the 'gated/gating community' further illustrates how settlements do not merely house settlers but operate as systems of exclusion carving the West Bank into disjointed and surveilled zones. Falah (2003) charts the material contraction of Arab land, showing the cumulative effects of land seizure, legal manipulation and military violence. In contrast, Joronen (2016) examines resistance as a form-of-life, refusing to be defined solely through victimhood or violence, where survival, care and community become acts of political resistance.

Surveillance adds an intensifying layer to this spatial regime. Penic et al. (2024) argue that surveillance practices not only repress collective action but reconfigure the conditions of its emergence, driving it underground or into symbolic forms. Thien (2005) argues that emotional geographies are central to understanding political life and that in the West Bank, the intensification of occupation has produced pervasive landscapes of fear that shape how people move, relate and resist, embedding affect into the materiality of space.

My research builds on this interdisciplinary foundation by analysing how colonial violence, dispossession and apartheid in Masafer Yatta affect not only strategies of resistance but also people's lived relationship to the land. I explore how colonial strategies affect resistance and how these shape affective geographies. I draw on and expand Butmeh's spatial reading of Firing Zone 918 by situating it within broader processes of land governance and social life. I also critically engage with Penic et al. (2024), questioning the assumption that proximity to military infrastructure universally constrains or changes resistance. This research brings together perspectives from various fields, including geography, psychology and anthropology, in analysing how fear, endurance, anger and hope circulate within spaces of occupation and contribute to the shaping of both everyday life and political imagination.

## **5 Theoretical Framework**

The Israeli occupation of Palestine, particularly in areas such as Masafer Yatta, exemplifies settler colonialism in its modern form. The expansion of settlements, settler violence and the declaration of Palestinian land as Firing Zones constitute mechanisms of both static and actual displacement that actively restructure Palestinian spatial realities. This chapter examines

key theories relevant to the research question and is structured around three interrelated concepts: settler colonialism, production of space and resistance.

## 5.1 Settler Colonialism

Patrick Wolfe (2006) characterises settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event, highlighting its inherent logic of elimination. Unlike extractive colonialism, settler colonialism seeks to replace the indigenous population rather than merely exploit it. In Palestine, this manifests in multiple forms, including settlement expansion, land appropriation and bureaucratic measures designed to render Palestinian existence untenable (Wolfe, 2006). The Israeli occupation follows this pattern through the systematic expansion of settlements and the use of legal frameworks to justify displacement.

Ethnic cleansing in Palestine, as seen through policies of house demolitions, forced evictions and the establishment of restricted military zones, aligns with Wolfe's (2006) argument that settler colonialism necessitates the removal of the indigenous population. In Masafer Yatta, the designation of Firing Zone 918 serves as a legal pretext for forced displacement, reinforcing a system of static displacement where residents are subjected to recurrent eviction threats while remaining in a prolonged state of impermanence (Butmeh, 2022). To understand the lived implications of such policies, Butmeh introduces the concept of static displacement, which refers to a condition where communities are not forcibly removed through direct eviction but are rendered immobile and isolated through spatial enclosure, surveillance and mobility restrictions. In this framework, displacement is not only about removal but also about enforced stasis, where people are effectively trapped within constrained geographies, stripped of viable economic, social and ecological relations. Static displacement reframes how occupation operates beyond visible violence, revealing its temporal and infrastructural logics.

## 5.2 Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad, consisting of spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces, offers a foundational framework for understanding how space is actively produced through social, political and symbolic processes. In the context of occupation and resistance, space is not merely a backdrop to events but is constituted through the interplay

of physical arrangements (roads, checkpoints, enclosures), dominant spatial imaginaries (maps, zoning plans, legal frameworks) and lived, emotionally charged experiences of place.

Building on Lefebvre, scholars of affective geography (Thien, 2005) emphasize that space is also produced affectively through emotions such as fear, hope, anxiety, grief, and resilience. These emotions are integral to how space is experienced and contested, especially in environments marked by control, surveillance, and dispossession.

Foucault's (1978) concept of biopolitics, the governance of life through regimes such as health, movement and population control, helps articulate how spatial production under settler colonialism becomes a means of managing Palestinian life. Through permits, surveillance, infrastructure and legal geographies, biopolitical techniques seek to regulate where and how Palestinians can live. Yet, in contexts such as Masafer Yatta, where life is not just governed but routinely exposed to precarity, Achille Mbembe's (2003) theory of necropolitics becomes crucial. Necropolitics refers to the power to determine who may live and who must die or who has to endure slow violence, immobility and existential uncertainty. In this sense, space is produced through both affective atmospheres of fear and resilience and political technologies that differentially value life, enabling what Mbembe calls 'death-worlds', zones where populations are kept in a state of suspended dispossession.

Together, these frameworks illuminate how space is not only materially produced but also affectively charged and politically saturated, constructed through control and experienced through the body and its emotions.

## 5.3 Resistance

The Israeli occupation's spatial control mechanisms, including settlements, checkpoints, surveillance infrastructure and roadblocks, profoundly shape the emotional landscape of Palestinian communities and their capacity for collective resistance. Penic et al. (2024) argue that proximity to these spatial structures fosters fragmentation and undermines community cohesion, thereby weakening non-violent resistance, which often depends on mass participation and collective emotional endurance. In contrast, violent resistance, which may require less community-wide coordination, becomes more likely in contexts where social cohesion is eroded (El Kurd, 2022; Gade, 2020).

In areas such as Masafer Yatta, where communities face sustained exposure to occupation, resistance is often grounded in an emotional and political ethic of Sumud [steadfastness]. As Meari (2014) describes, Sumud is not merely passive endurance of violence but an embodied, culturally embedded form of resistance enabling individuals and communities to persist, assert presence and maintain rootedness despite constant threats of displacement. It reflects a refusal to be emotionally and politically erased.

Strong social cohesion is central to sustaining such resistance. Drawing on Putnam (2007) cohesive social networks foster trust, mutual obligation and political participation, allowing communities to mobilise collectively even under intense repression.

Narration itself also becomes a crucial site of resistance. As Saïd (1984) argues, to narrate is to reclaim agency, history and subjectivity. In a context where Palestinians are frequently spoken for or silenced, the act of telling one's own story, whether through oral history, testimony, counter-mapping or cultural production, serves as a political and cultural assertion of existence. Through narration, individuals resist epistemic erasure and assert their belonging and identity in contested spaces.

Together, these dynamics highlight how resistance is emotionally charged, socially embedded and spatially produced - shaped not only by state violence but by the collective capacities and intimate practices through which Palestinians confront and endure occupation.

## **6 Methodology**

This research utilises various qualitative methodologies, seeking to centre the experiences, knowledge, and resistance practices of Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta. Drawing on decolonial frameworks, these methodologies centre decolonial geography and oral history, prioritising the voices and knowledge of local inhabitants. As a researcher with direct experience in the field, I have combined my own observations and semi-structured interviews to explore the spatial dimensions of Palestinian resistance in the context of Israeli settler colonialism.

### **6.1 Decolonial Methodology**

Which narratives are hegemonic is a critical battlefield of resistance to the Palestinian occupation. Said (1984) argues that Palestinians have been systematically denied the 'permission

to narrate' their history and experiences, leading to a dominant discourse that marginalises their perspective. This narrative suppression perpetuates stereotypes and justifies the ongoing occupation. Within a decolonial methodology, this relates to ontological and epistemic violence.

Ontology, the study of being and existence, plays a crucial role when discussing Palestine, as the way a group is perceived to exist directly shapes how its members are treated, recognised as rights-bearers or erased altogether. Ontological violence occurs when certain groups are denied full recognition as legitimate beings with agency and rights. In Palestine, this manifests in the framing of Palestinians as a problem to be managed, rather than as a people with sovereignty, rights and historical continuity. This reduces the Palestinians either to mere victims of violence or to perpetrators of violence, often following a narrative of terrorism. Both contribute to their erasure, delegitimise their struggle for self-determination and reinforce a status quo in which their oppression is normalised.

Epistemology, the study of knowledge, has similarly been a powerful tool of colonialism. In the context of Palestine, epistemological violence occurs when Palestinian histories, narratives and lived experiences are marginalised or dismissed as subjective or politically motivated, while Western, Orientalist or Zionist perspectives are presented as neutral and authoritative. According to Saïd (1984), the Zionist discourse has reached a 'narrative monopoly' status - it has become hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971). Where Zionist narratives are normalised, Palestinian existence, knowledge and narratives are, as a result, perceived as biased or illegitimate, resulting in a structural censorship of Palestinian narratives Saïd (1984). Hegemony, according to Gramsci, requires a balance of coercion and consent so that people choose to accept narratives as they are perceived as natural or morally superior. Saïd (1978) further argues that the dominant discourse referring to Palestinians is that of Orientalism, which, through its cultural hegemony, shapes norms and assumptions to create binary opposites between the 'rationality' and 'superiority' of the West in contrast to the perceived inferior irrationality of the East.

In this thesis, I acknowledge Gramsci's (1971) notion that academia, as a part of civil society, is a site which simultaneously manufactures and contests hegemonic ideas. Building on this, Said proposes a task for Palestinian writers, academics and their allies in disrupting and challenging these hegemonic norms and thereby adding to the restoration of agency of the colonised and dispossessed peoples.

As Saïd, building on Gramscian and Foucauldian theory, concludes that imperialism is upheld by coercion and culture, and that resistance must be political and cultural. In response to Said's call for counter-narration, this thesis will follow a decolonial narration which centres both Palestinian experiences and narratives but also uses a decolonial vocabulary. As this work aims to produce knowledge which affirms Palestinian historical and contemporary realities, it seeks to challenge hegemonic narratives. I will therefore be avoiding terminology such as the Israel-Palestine conflict or war and instead use, e.g. Israeli occupation of Palestine or the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

## 6.2 Fieldwork and Ethnographic Method

The author's initial involvement in Masafer Yatta was as an activist, not as an academic. However, there are similarities between the role taken on by the international activist and that of an anthropologist conducting ethnographic research.

Ethnography is a methodological approach aimed at generating immersive, holistic insights into social life. It typically involves extended periods of participant observation, often spanning several months or more, alongside in-depth interviews with diverse participants. At its core, ethnography seeks a nuanced understanding of a community's lifeworld: its social relationships, cultural norms, power dynamics, rhythms, and everyday practices (Rogers et al., 2013).

International activists spend long periods in the community, ranging from three weeks to three months, and live locally with a small group of families in different villages. In this period, relations are built with family members supported by the general trust between locals and activists, built over decades of constant activist presence. I spent 6 weeks in Masafer Yatta, from mid-July to the end of August 2024, with only a few visits to other regions and cities in Palestine. Following the same group of individuals for weeks gives an insight into the lifeworld of the Palestinians of Masafer Yatta.

In Masafer Yatta, I stayed the night in five villages and shepherded and performed rapid response duties in several different areas.

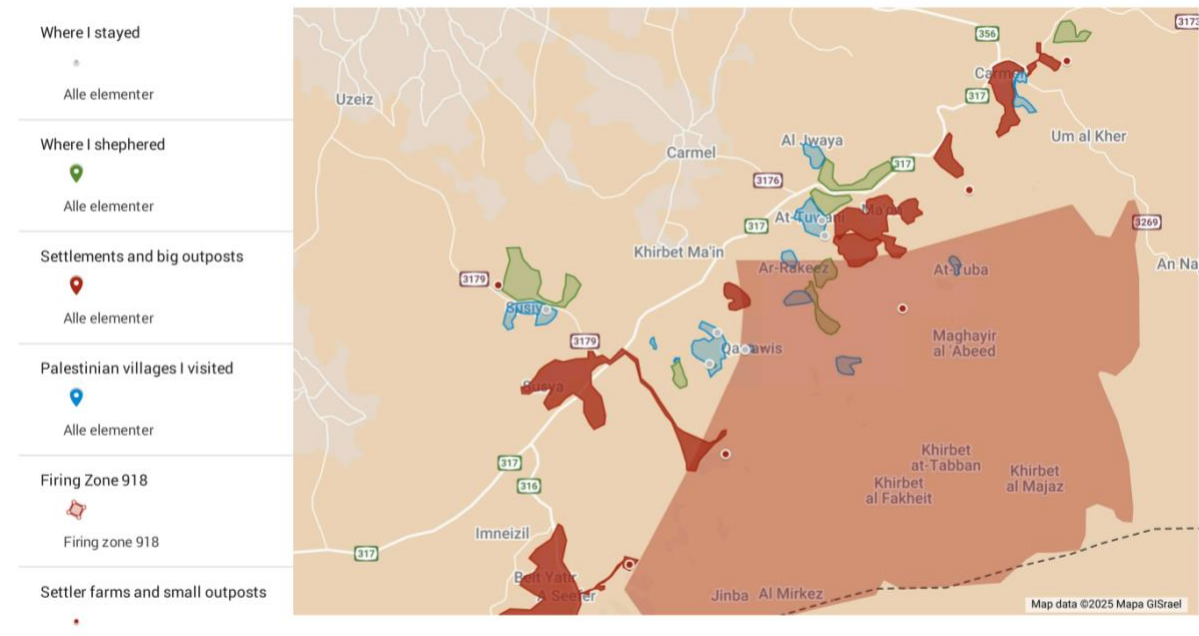


Figure 5: Author's own presence in Masafer Yatta by author

The activities of international activists vary depending on need and context, but constant activities include shepherding and spending the night at the family home. This is done to prevent settler attacks or at least document them when they happen.

A primary task of the international activists is to document violence, leading to the gathering of a substantial archive of film and photos of, e.g. settler attacks and incursions, arrests and detentions by Israeli police and military. As geography influences the workings of both settlers, the army and Palestinians, I began collecting spatial data for future use. Initially, the data points gathered were mainly to make movement easier, as checkpoints and roadblocks make movement hard. Still, it evolved into mapping violent incidents I had been present at, either during the violence or immediately afterwards, as a part of the rapid response teams, and spaces perceived as inaccessible.

Due to the nature of activist presence in the region, these data sets do not have a singular and coherent focus. They encapsulate various aspects of living and my interpretation of the situation. They include scores of video clips and photos of settler activities, expansions of outposts and arrests, along with voice recordings of phone calls with the Israeli military and police. But they also include videos and photographs of the everyday life of activists and Palestinians, including playing with children and listening to music in checkpoint queues. On top of the (audio-) visual media I gathered, I made written diary entries soon to be substituted with diary-style audio recordings describing my impressions, experiences and feelings in the area.

Originally, I did not think to include any of these as empirical data to be used in this thesis, but I was persuaded by Katz's (2013) argument that

"Rather than a single monographic narrative that airbrushes—when it does not obscure entirely—what it means to be 'in the field' in an embodied way, written in the sanctioned language of social science, which can make it all seem straightforward, clean and deliberate, these other records exposed the anxiety, discomfort, muddled thinking, bafflements, exquisite joys and stunning beauty of doing research. (Katz, 2013, p.768)"

Not only did these give an insight into the residents' lives, but the documentation of cheese production processes, grazing shepherds, children mixing cement, cooking, and well-digging also presented several aspects of Palestinian resistance. Due to the sensitive nature of parts of the diaries and audiovisual media, certain pictures and videos were excluded, and sections of the diary transcriptions were omitted. Similarly, specific dates are not mentioned. This has been done to anonymise both people and communities who have not consented to be part of this research.

My familiarity with the region and the communities gave this research a unique access point. This soft ethnographic approach not only allowed me to describe my own experiences and observations but also allowed me access to a group of local Palestinian activists who wanted to participate in interviews.

## 6.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a widely used qualitative data collection method that balances structure with flexibility. As Bernard (2006) described, they involve using a predetermined interview guide consisting of open-ended questions, while allowing the interviewer to probe and follow new topics that emerge during the conversation. This approach is efficient for exploring the meanings people attach to their experiences, beliefs, and practices, making it especially well-suited to ethnographic and anthropological research.

Unlike structured interviews, which rigidly follow a fixed questionnaire, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to adapt questions in response to the interviewee's answers, encouraging depth and nuance. Bernard emphasises that this method allows for interview comparability while capturing rich, context-specific insights. The flexibility of semi-structured

interviewing is beneficial in field settings where the researcher must remain responsive to the conversation's dynamics and the participants' cultural context.

The original plan was to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with several community members in Masafer Yatta, representing different key villages. This ended up not being possible. I contacted eight Palestinians, six of whom agreed to be interviewed. The seventh and eighth did not respond, possibly due to a settler assault occurring a few hours after I reached out, directly affecting one, who was hospitalised, and indirectly affecting the other, who was a neighbour.

Only three of the six remaining interviewees were interviewed. All agreements on interviews, both the successful and the unsuccessful, were rescheduled several times. The rescheduling happened due to three of the potential interviewees receiving house demolition orders, a community member being shot by a settler, a neighbouring village being almost demolished, and delays in transport due to road closures and checkpoints.

Of the three interviews, one preferred receiving the questions and recording voice notes in response. The two remaining were conducted online on Zoom. Two of the interviewees were from At-Tuwani, and the third from Tuba. The initial intention of ensuring a geographical representation of the area did not happen, although both a village inside and outside the firing zone were represented. The interviewees' ages ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties.

I have met all the interviewees, although one of them only briefly. This familiarity allowed for easier access to participants, and the interviews were shaped by pre-existing trust and understanding between us. Our prior familiarity furthermore changed the dynamics and my considerations regarding the extractive nature of research. As I have contributed a month and a half of activist presence before the beginning of this research, the standard considerations about extractive practices change. Rather than primarily focusing on giving back to the community, I have been focusing on avoiding the Palestinians feeling obligated to participate, since a notion of indebtedness to international activists could exist.

Many ethical considerations went into the interview process, both before, during and after the interviews themselves. Before the interviews, I sought opinions on whether to conduct the interviews from local Palestinian contacts and international activists currently on the ground. However, one of the strategies taken by the local Palestinians is to document and expose violence through all means of communication, including social media, interviews, documentaries and

scholarly work. Furthermore, the feedback I got was that it was good for the community to be asked for interviews, as it signifies interest from the international community.

The second consideration was regarding the anonymity of the interviewees. As the interviewees live in a dangerous territory and speaking publicly about their oppression can present an added risk, my initial thought was to anonymise the participants. However, the situation in Masafer Yatta is dangerous for every inhabitant, and the tactical choice has been to be as public as possible, as seen through their social media presence and participation in journalistic work, most prominently through the Oscar-winning *No Other Land*. Though public visibility puts a target on the back of activists, withdrawing from publicity also presents a threat, as retaliatory attacks are more likely to go unnoticed. In recognition that the interviewees are more capable of assessing the consequences of being anonymised versus not being anonymised, they have been able to choose themselves. All participants opted not to be anonymous. Interviewees were asked explicitly whether they wanted personal information, such as surname and location of home, to be anonymised, and they all confirmed that they did not want to anonymise any information. Given the constant threat of violence and displacement, participants were fully informed about the nature of the research and had the option to withdraw at any time.

The interviews focused on residents' lived experiences under occupation, including their daily encounters with violence, the impact of settlement expansion and military zones on their lives and strategies of resistance. The semi-structured interviews were designed to be open-ended, allowing participants to share their experiences and views in their own words. Thus, the interviews developed in the direction emphasised by the interviewee. The questions were designed to illuminate aspects of the research question, building on the theoretical framework. Examples of this include 'can you tell me about a time your community came together to face a threat or attack?' drawing inspiration from theories on community cohesion and resistance or 'when settlers or the army come close, do you feel like you have to change how you organise daily life?' drawing on theories on settler colonialism and adaptive domesticity (Appendix 5).

The collected data was stored in CryptPad, an encrypted and password-protected server. Transcription was done through Good Tape, an AI transcription software that follows GDPR laws, deletes all files after transcription, and never uses transcriptions for machine learning.

## 6.4 Cartography

Cartography has traditionally been regarded as an objective, scientific practice of accurately representing spatial realities. However, critical and decolonial scholarship has profoundly challenged this assumption, revealing how cartographic practices have historically been entangled with projects of domination, colonialism and epistemological violence (Harley, 1989). Rather than being neutral mirrors of the world, maps actively produce particular visions of space, erasing indigenous presence, legitimising colonial claims and enforcing hierarchical knowledge systems.

From a decolonial perspective, maps are recognised not as impartial artefacts but as political instruments that encode and reproduce power relations (Bryan, 2011). Classical cartography, often associated with European imperial projects, positioned itself as a universal method of spatial understanding. Yet, this perceived universality masked the violent imposition of Western ontologies of space over diverse indigenous ways of knowing and relating to land (Harley, 1989; Turnbull, 2007). Traditional maps silenced plural geographies and privileged the view of the settler, the state, or the capitalist enterprise through projection choices, toponymy and symbolic hierarchies.

The emergence of radical and critical geography in the late 20th century marked a significant shift. Scholars like Harley (1989) and Wood (2010) advocated for the 'denaturalisation' of maps, exposing their ideological underpinnings. Critical geographers argued that maps must be understood as social texts, shaped by particular contexts, interests and worldviews. This critique laid the groundwork for counter-mapping practices, where oppressed communities produce their own cartographies to resist dominant spatial narratives (Peluso, 1995). Counter-mapping, alongside embodied and affective mapping techniques, seeks to reclaim the map as a tool for emancipation rather than subjugation.

Based on the spatial data I collected while in Masafer Yatta, I have developed maps based on my own experiences. The first maps were created as aids for visualisations of the author's presence in the region, commutes between villages and which fields were used for grazing, as these aspects are not visible through any other map. Lastly, I developed a map portraying the perceived inaccessibility of land. In the development (appendix 6), I used a situated, decolonial

cartography, drawing methodological inspiration from counter-mapping, embodied or experiential cartography and autoethnographic mapping.

The inspiration from embodied mapping includes the focus on the role of memory, emotion and sensation in the making of place, aligning closely with the concerns of emotional geography. Emotional geographers argue that space and place are physically and emotionally constructed, with maps offering opportunities to express relational and affective attachments to land (Davidson and Milligan, 2004). Moreover, this method resonates with the principles of counter-mapping practices, where subjective experiences are mobilised to resist dominant spatial narratives and assert alternative forms of spatial meaning (Peluso, 1995). Lastly, the situated, decolonial approach takes inspiration from autoethnographic cartography by seeing maps as a form of storytelling, in this case informed by diary entries and spatial impressions gathered during my time in the region. Through this approach, I was able to chart how space is experienced and negotiated under conditions of occupation, expanding maps from representing patterns of movement to how and why people move, avoid, or dwell in particular areas. As Peterle (2024) argues, autoethnographic maps become a medium through which the geographer's body and voice re-enter geography, challenging the illusion of objectivity that dominates traditional cartographic practices.

## 6.5 Data Analysis

An abductive approach was used in the analysis of the data. The interview data were coded to identify recurring themes related to the spatial experiences under settler colonialism, production of space and resistance, corresponding theoretically and thematically to the research question. Subtopics were identified and coded under these three main topics (appendix 7). This approach allowed the narrative to stay close to the language of the interviewees. Special attention was paid to spatial practices, such as mobility (e.g., roadblocks, outposts locations), emotional geographies (e.g., fear or defiance in relation to space) and the effects of settlement expansion and settler attacks on daily life. NVivo was used for the coding.

The maps were read as more than cartographic tools, they were analysed as embodied expressions, providing a visual dimension to my own and the interviewees' experiences. In this way, the maps were analysed as forms of storytelling

## 6.6 Limitations

Due to university policies, I could not return to Masafer Yatta to gather data. This restriction meant that interviews had to be conducted online, affecting the methods' immediacy and depth. While online methods allowed for continued data collection, the absence of direct, in-person engagement reduced the effectiveness of interviews and mapping activities.

This also meant that, although the author has kept up with the situation, the situational awareness and mindful approach have been harder. Interviews took longer to organise, and the rigid form of online interviews didn't allow for interpretation of body language and emotions and fine-tuned adaptations of questions and focus of the interviews.

It also affected which maps could be produced. In this thesis, I developed maps based on my experiences and interpretations of patterns of movements. I do, however, not have the same insight into the movement and restriction of movement, the emotional geographies, etc., as the local population. While I might correctly have concluded specific fields and areas were avoided, I ultimately do not know whether this is due to fear of settler attacks or whether the particular field had a considerable population of Palestine vipers, which can kill livestock. While seeking to verify own impressions through the interviews, an in-person participatory approach to mapping would have been more appropriate and accurate in its results. I considered conducting online participatory mapping exercises, but as I could not find a way to do it, I abandoned the idea in favour of mapping my own experience.

Another key limitation is that the interviews were conducted in English, due to a lack of Arabic translation and interpretation. As many Palestinian activists in Masafer Yatta speak English, this did not hinder their participation, although they might have been more confident in their first language. However, it restricted the involvement of local shepherds and villagers as the majority do not speak English. This has also contributed to interviewees mainly being educated, and possibly of higher-class status, which again influenced focus, priorities and experiences.

## 7. Findings - Analysis and Discussion

This thesis investigates how the spatial strategies of the Israeli occupation affect the Palestinian forms of resistance in Masafer Yatta. It furthermore seeks to understand how the Palestinian resistance reacts and reorganises itself in the face of various forms and stages of occupational structures.



This section seeks to situate the actors of occupation in relation to their spatial influence and strategies.

### 7.1.1 State and Non-State Actors

In Masafer Yatta, several actors, with differentiated levels of authority and training, serve various purposes. Overall, the actors can be categorised into two main groups: state actors and non-state actors. The distinction between these two has gotten increasingly obscured, as will be discussed below.

As the West Bank has been under military rule since 1967, and Areas B and C fall under Israeli security control, the Israeli army is the state actor that both Palestinians and international activists engage with the most in Masafer Yatta. The police also have a presence, albeit not as constant as the army. Thirdly, the civil administration has jurisdiction.

#### The Civil Administration

The civil administration has, since 1981, been working under military order No. 947, which describes their task as to:

“administer the civilian affairs in the region in accordance with the directives of this Order, for the wellbeing and good of the population and in order to supply and implement the public services and taking into consideration the need to maintain an orderly administration and public order in the region.” (Kuttab and Shehadeh, 1982)

In reality, the civil administration is rarely present. As Hafez from At-Tuwani explains “But even the matak [the civil administration], they never come... [if they come] you know, they lie ‘this is state land’ or whatever. They have so many lies to do it.” (00:40:07). The quote reflects both their rare presence and also highlights their role as an actor primarily concerned with land deeds and judging whose ownership is valid. As neither my own experiences and observations, the interviewees, nor the grey literature emphasise the civil administration as a key actor affecting the means of resistance, these are excluded from the analysis.

#### The Police

Contrary to the civil administration, the police is a state actor that all three interviewees talk about. The police are most often responsible for arrests, but also sometimes show up after settler attacks - usually after the arrival of the army.

Hafez (00:38:25) explains that before October 7th, the police would generally react to calls from Palestinians within half an hour. However, after October 7th, their response time has, at best, become longer, but often they do not show at all. He furthermore states that where the police used to follow the law, the settlers now set the tone. "The Israeli police, at least they used to do their job. I mean, to follow [the law] - not 100% but at least like 70%. But after the 7th of October, it was completely clear that we now are ruled by - by whom? By the settlers." (Hafez, 00:18:30) Musahb corroborates Hafez's experiences and further explains that "before they [police] arrive, they have a call between them [settlers and police] and they ask the settlers to leave there, and [then] the police are coming. Then they tell you, the most they can tell you is 'we can look around', 'where is he' or something like that. Not any more." (Musahb, recording 3, 00:38)

These experiences correlate with my own experience. Palestinians asked me three times to call the police to report a settler incursion or an active settler threat. Once, the police arrived after the settlers had threatened several villagers, destroyed around sixty young olive trees and left the area. In this instance, the police opened a case. Still, they refused to take statements or receive documentation and insisted that the Palestinians should go to the police station in Hebron the following day. An approach often taken by police, which, according to Ali (01:08:44), is both time-consuming and exhaustive.

The two other times, the police refused to recognise Palestinian villages and fields as places and therefore stated that they could not come. As they explained, the settlements were the only places they could see in their system. Even when prompted to receive GPS coordinates, they would either not show up, show up inside the settlements or several kilometres from the described point. Most often, the police require police presence at the location of the settler incursion to make a case.

Despite the less-than-warm feelings towards the Israeli police, a local explained to me during my stay that the police are the lesser of the evils, as they generally know the laws they enact, in contrast to the soldiers.

## The Army

The last category of state actors is the soldiers. The soldiers serve several roles in the area, from following court decisions ordering them to escort children to school to protect them from settlers to demolish houses. Contrary to members of the civil administration and the police, who choose to work there, soldiers do not choose to be members of the army as Israel has

mandatory conscription, lasting 32 months for men and 24 months for women (IDF, n.d.). Additionally, every person who has served in the military and is under 40 is theoretically eligible for the military reserve force.

Almost every Israeli has been, is or will be in the army for a minimum of two years, making the painting of all soldiers with one brush an oversimplification. Almost all the Israeli activists I met in Masafer Yatta have been in the army.

The experiences amongst the interviewees, however, are pretty straightforward. The army is seen as a system which “don't care even to shoot and to kill” (Hafez, 00:27:47) and an entity which oppresses you (Musahb, recording 4, 01:15). Through the interviews, what is associated with the military is choosing to stop escorting children despite court order (Ali, 00:12:32), confiscating cars (Ali, 00:18:09), blocking roads and creating checkpoints (Musahb, recording 6, 01:03), demolishing housing and infrastructure (Hafez, 00:52:28) and arresting innocent Palestinians and blocking ambulances (Hafez, 00:36:31).

Just as with the police, the Palestinians have seen a significant change in the workings of the army since October 7th. Hafez (00:22:07) points to the most critical difference being who the soldiers are. “Because the settlers rule everything. We can feel it and we can see it every single day. That the soldiers, I mean the official soldiers, [we] almost can't see official soldiers like before.”

### Settlers and Settler-Soldiers

What Hafez refers to is that following October 7th, Israel needed more active soldiers to continue the ongoing genocide in Gaza and invade Lebanon and Syria (Middle East Monitor, 2024). Therefore, many soldiers from the West Bank were reposted, and reservists, many of them settlers, were called in to replace them. Just like the soldiers, various types of settlers exist. In the West Bank, there live over 500.000 settlers, some are extreme religious or ideological settlers, but many others live in settlements due to the inexpensive nature of subsidised life there, including superior schools to those in the area occupied in 1948, cheap and high-quality roads and transport etc (Epstein, 2025). A minority of the settlers antagonise and attack Palestinians, but after 7th October, these have not only grown in numbers, they have also grown more emboldened (Killing et al., 2024). As the confrontative and violent settlers are the only group of settlers who interact with local Palestinians, these are the focus of this section.

Before October 7th, the interviewees describe the settlers as being the primary source of violence, or at least the instigators, leading to police and/or military violence. Despite settlers arguing that the attacks are retaliatory against ‘uncivilised’ Arabs, preventative measures or acts of self-defence, the interviewees talk about the role of the settlers exactly as Patrick Wolfe describes the role of the settlers in his work on settler colonialism. “Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.” (Wolfe, 2006, p.288). Hafez, who is a resident of At-Tuwani in his mid-fifties, describes the development of the settler attacks as becoming increasingly violent but never changing its objective of stealing land (Hafez, 00:05:05). For decades, the settlers have acted as an agent of land appropriation and forcible transfer by various means such as throwing stones at Palestinian people and homes, destroying olive trees and other agricultural property, theft of livestock, burning of crops and targeted destruction of vehicles. This corresponds with Wolfe’s (2006) theory on the ‘frontiere rabble’ - a violent group serving as the primary agent of territorial expansion. However, as the settler, as well as other instances of the frontiere rabble, is a non-state actor, state officials can therefore afterwards “express regret at the lawlessness of this process while resigning themselves to its inevitability” (Wolfe, 2006, p.392).

After October 7th, the intensity, frequency and severity of the settler violence escalated. In Masafer Yatta, two Palestinians have been shot by settlers since October 7th - one leading to an amputation (Hafez, 00:29:37) and one leading to four abdominal surgeries and a partial pancreas resection (Hafez, 00:28:34). Both were shot with dum-dum bullets, which are illegal under the Geneva Convention. Other settler attacks and intimidations - not resulting in Palestinians being shot - happen daily (Hafez, 00:23:32).

The biggest change and the change emphasised the strongest in all three interviews is the militarisation of some settlers and the quasi-militarisation of the rest. As Hafez describes it “[the] settlers who used to attack, to steal the land and to do all these things - now officially they became soldiers and we, as Palestinians, have to deal with them as a military.” (Hafez, 00:19:09). This means that the people who used only to be able to act as the rabble (Wolfe, 2006) now have the rights of a state actor, including the right to arrest.

The conflation between state and non-state actors happens at several levels. Firstly, the cooperation between state agents (police and army) and the settlers is both felt by local Palestinians and documented by former soldiers. As discussed above, Musahb describes active

coordination between police and settlers (Recording 3, 00:38). Ali also has assumptions of collaborations between the army and the settlers, explaining how “the army tried to confiscate my car many times, but there was not enough excuse to confiscate it. So, the settlers said, 'We will do it.' That's how I assume.” (Ali, 00:19:58). Additionally, Basel Adra states that “almost all of the soldiers in our area are settlers from the outposts and the farms,” (Adra in Killing et al., 2024). A member of Breaking the Silence, an organisation for former soldiers who oppose the occupation of the West Bank, agrees that the settlers and the soldiers are close, explaining how settlers have dinner at army bases and soldiers go to settlers' homes for meals. Likewise, the settlement security team, a private entity and the army train together. He also confirms that many soldiers are settlers themselves (Givati in Killing et al., 2024). There are therefore strong indications of personal ties, coordination and overlapping members of the army and the settlers.

More than the links between settlers and soldiers, which have existed for many years, a new phenomenon is the militarisation of the settlers, known locally as the settler-soldiers. The settler-soldier is a quasi-soldier who is recognisable primarily through the absence of a full military uniform (Hafez, 00:22:35), i.e., lacking bulletproof vests, army-issue boots, helmets, or knee pads, or by wearing dirty uniforms.



*Figure 7: Settler, soldier and settler-soldier in At-Tuwani by author*

As seen in figure 7, the settler, settler-soldier and soldier appear together and talk (left picture) prior to the settler-soldier, recognisable through the lack of kneepads, helmet, and bullet-proof vest, checking the passport of an international activist (right picture). This is one example where the settler-soldier acts as a state representative, here by checking passports and visas of international activists, while soldiers are present.

In my experience, settler soldiers cannot consistently be recognised from their uniforms, as they wear almost or entirely the full army uniform. In these cases, they can often be recognised by the size of their group, smaller numbers than when soldiers arrive, and how they move around, frequently in civilian ATVs or cars instead of army vehicles.



*Figure 8: Settler-soldiers in Susiya by author*

In Figure 8, what appears to be a soldier runs after a Palestinian. He wears almost a full army uniform, including a helmet, bulletproof vest, and boots - except for knee pads. He is identifiable as a settler-soldier due to his means of transportation, in this case, an ATV, and the fact that only two individuals were present.

Since 1971 Settlement Emergency Squads have existed. These have since then been quasi-military groups consisting of civilians from settlements and outposts, trained and equipped by the Israeli military. Legally, the squads work under Israeli military command and can only act defensively. The Israeli military does however not have full insight into the actions of the Settlement Emergency Squads (Kubovich, 2023). The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Initiative (ACLED) have documented that the members of the squads increasingly wear whole or partial military uniforms and at other times are dressed in civilian attire while wearing military issue weapons, such as the M16 rifle, which cannot be acquired by civilians. ACLED has, since October 7th, documented several dozen violent events perpetrated by settlers in uniforms (Khdour, 2024). In November of 2023, Haaretz, an Israeli newspaper, stated that in the South Hebron Hills, where Masafer Yatta is located, the Settler Emergency Squads control the area (Levy and Levac, 2023).

In Masafer Yatta, harassment and attacks by settler-soldiers, sometimes escorted by soldier-propers, have led to the forcible transfer of entire families - several from Susiya (B'Tselem, 2025a) and one from Um Dhorit (from own conversation with family). The whole village of Khirbet Zanuta, home to 250 people, were forced to leave after weeks of settler and settler-soldier attacks on the 27th of October 2023 (B'Tselem, 2025a). According to Human Rights Watch, there is evidence "that armed settlers, with the active participation of army units, repeatedly cut off road access and raided Palestinian communities, detained, assaulted and tortured residents, chased them out of their homes and off their lands at gunpoint or coerced them to leave with death threats and blocked them from taking their belongings (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

The residents of Masafer Yatta hardly differentiate between settlers, settler-soldiers and soldier-propers anymore. They see it all as a part of the same state strategy. As Basel Adra explains, "the physical attacks and the physical violence... we believe it's the state's strategy. The state's agenda is ethnic cleansing. It's to make us live in fear." (Killing et al., 2024). From my stay in the region, I tend to agree. There is clear communication and familiarity between settlers and soldiers, and every reservist settler can detain and arrest just like a soldier, with or without uniform. The settlers who are not reservists are still armed with rifles, and since you do not know who is in the reserve army and who is not, they can still detain you, and upon arrival of the military, they will finalise the arrest. Settlers and especially settler-soldiers are thus acting as an arm of the state.

The actions and approaches taken by the settler-soldier raise the question: When are settlers civilians? According to international law, despite settlements being unlawful and the Fourth Geneva Convention (ICRC, 1949) prohibiting transfers of civilian population from the occupying power into land it occupies (article 49 (6)), the unlawful status of the settlements and the illegality of population transfers does not affect the civilian status of the settlers. Therefore, they cannot be targeted in attacks and only lose this right if they participate in hostilities. In contrast, soldiers in the Israeli army are not civilians.

Further research should look into what the legal status of settler-soldiers is and when civilians become non-civilians in the context of settler-soldiers in the occupied West Bank and elsewhere. Because, as Hafez summarises the current situation in Masafer Yatta, “we are fighting against a very organised militant militia that is supported by the government. It means there is no accountability for all those crimes that are committed by the settler.” (Hafez, 00:29:37)

### 7.1.2 Strategies of the Occupational Actors

“Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal” (Wolfe, 2006, p.387)

As discussed in the former section, settler colonialism is about territorial expansion and control. Masafer Yatta is a key example of strategies of settler colonialism, as “I think the occupation has tried every single colonial policy in Masafer Yatta” (Ali, 00:45:26).

As described by Hafez (00:06:30), the Zionists’ plan for Masafer Yatta is to ethnically cleanse the Palestinian people and forcibly displace them into the city of Yatta, thereby succeeding in colonising the land historically used by the Bedouins to herd their livestock (Butmeh, 2022).

Ariel Sharon, current agricultural minister, stated in 1981 that to “quickly create a settlement buffer zone that will separate between Mount Hebron and the Jewish community in the Negev” (Sharon in Aderet, 2020) was key to keeping control of the area. This ‘ethnic border’ should prevent Palestinians from reaching the area around Be’er Sheva.

The following section will present the various spatial strategies used to achieve this goal. As concluded in the former section, most actors collaborate in their strategies, which is why they are discussed jointly.

## State Land, Archaeological Sites and Firing Zones

“We are punished just for being alive on our own land.” Hafez (00:48:52)

Wolfe (2006) argues that a distinction between murder and persecution because of who you are and where you are is redundant when it comes to indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts, as the indigenous people are who they are because of where they are. They can do nothing to mitigate this fact except for not existing on the land.

In the context of Israeli settler colonialism, the state uses various bureaucratic categorisations of land to displace Palestinians, namely state land, archaeological sites, or military firing zones. They function not merely as a bureaucratic exercise but as a deliberate spatial strategy aimed at the dislocation and erasure of Palestinian presence. In Masafer Yatta, these designations have played a critical role in the fragmentation of territory and the constriction of Palestinian life.

The Israeli state has systematically designated extensive areas of the West Bank as state land, particularly from the late 1970s onwards. These declarations are grounded in a selective and politicised interpretation of Ottoman, British Mandate and Jordanian land laws, which are mobilised to argue that land not under continuous cultivation reverts to the state. In practice, these legal mechanisms have been deployed almost exclusively to dispossess Palestinians of communal agricultural and grazing land, while simultaneously facilitating the expansion of Israeli settlements and outposts (B'Tselem, 2021; Kedar and Yiftachel, 2006). In Masafer Yatta, the implications are severe: residents are denied permits to build, cultivate, or develop on land historically used by their communities, rendering them vulnerable to home demolitions and displacement.

The Israeli state's management of archaeological sites has further entrenched the spatial logic of settler colonialism. In areas such as Susiya, archaeological excavations have been instrumentalised to support a singular, ethnonationalist narrative that emphasises ancient Jewish continuity while systematically marginalising or erasing the long-standing Palestinian presence (Mizrahi et al., 2016). The transformation of Susiya into a national heritage and tourism site has coincided with the displacement of Palestinian residents and the demolition of their homes and infrastructure. This mode of heritage production, while presented as apolitical or scientific, functions as a powerful settler-colonial tool legitimising territorial claims and reconfiguring landscapes in ways that privilege Israeli sovereignty and erase Palestinian histories.

The village of At-Tuwani offers a salient example of how archaeological classifications have been used to reverse gains made through legal resistance. Hafez, a resident of At-Tuwani, recounted that in 2012 the community won a legal case that resulted in the approval of a “master plan” covering approximately half of the village. This plan, recognised by the Israeli Civil Administration, granted residents the ability to legally build within its boundaries — a rare occurrence in Area C of the West Bank. However, in 2021, roughly half of the master plan area was re-designated as an archaeological site (Hafez, 00:54:34). This reclassification immediately revoked the legal capacity to build, imposed severe restrictions on land use and enabled the state to issue demolition orders under the pretext of protecting ‘heritage’ - a subjective and politicized term (The New Arab, 2025).

A direct consequence of this re-designation is the issuance of a demolition order against the guest house in At-Tuwani, which hosts international activists. The guest house, a vital hub of international solidarity and civil society support, now faces demolition. This illustrates how archaeological zoning is not only used to control Palestinian building and mobility, but also to disrupt networks of resistance.

Perhaps the most draconian spatial intervention in Masafer Yatta is the designation of approximately 30,000 dunams as Firing Zone 918 by the Israeli military in the early 1980s. Although the area has been inhabited by Palestinian communities for generations, its classification as a military training zone has enabled the state to prohibit construction, limit access to essential services and pursue forced evictions. In 2022, the Israeli High Court upheld the legality of evicting over 1,000 residents from the area, prompting widespread condemnation from international human rights bodies (United Nation Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), 2022). While military training is seldom conducted, the designation remains in place, functioning primarily as a mechanism of population control and land seizure.

The strategic intent behind the establishment of Firing Zone 918 was explicitly articulated by then-Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon in 1981. In a meeting, Sharon expressed concern about “the spreading of the Arab villages on the mountainside toward the desert” (Sharon in Aderet, 2020) and proposed the firing zone “in order to keep these areas, which are so vital, in our hands” (Aderet, 2020).

Ali is one of the around 1,000 in Masafer Yatta living in Firing Zone 918. As he describes life in Tuba, it is deeply affected by the Firing Zone. All the buildings have demolition orders

(00:14:08), means of transportation routinely get confiscated by the military if they are not registered correctly (00:17:40), and aid workers, activists and lawyers cannot enter the area without permission from the military (00:18:55).

These three spatial strategies, state land designation, archaeological intervention and military zoning, form a coherent and interlocking regime of control. They do not operate independently but reinforce one another within a broader project of settler colonialism aimed at the de-Palestinisation of space. Braverman (2009) argues that the management of land, nature and heritage in settler-colonial contexts often masquerades as neutral or technocratic governance, while in reality facilitating the erasure and replacement of indigenous geographies.

### House Demolition

In Masafer Yatta, demolitions are not exceptional events but a routine mechanism of spatial domination, enabled by legal and administrative regimes that criminalise Palestinian life and presence. Due to the long-standing occupation and the bureaucratic reclassification of land into state land, nature reserves, archaeological sites and firing zones, almost every built structure in Masafer Yatta carries a standing demolition order. In Area C of the West Bank, where Israel maintains full military and civil control, less than 1% of Palestinian permit applications for construction are approved (between 2016-2021), rendering nearly all construction "illegal" in the eyes of Israeli authorities (BIMKOM, 2022). As a result, basic acts of building a bathroom, a water cistern or a school are routinely met with demolition.

"If one tries to build a small thing like a bathroom, they bring a bulldozer and they demolish the bathroom. Like he didn't have a right to have a bathroom in his home or in his cave" (Musahb, Recording 6, 00:30).

This bureaucratic violence is accompanied by a settler-colonial discourse that frames Palestinian existence as a demographic and geographic threat. Right-wing Israeli politicians such as Gideon Sa'ar have referred to Palestinian building as "geographic terrorism", claiming it will "determine the future borders of the country" (Abraham, 2023). This discourse has translated into escalating demolition campaigns. The day after I interviewed Ali, on May 5, 2025, the Israeli military conducted the most extensive demolition in Masafer Yatta in over a decade (Shezaf, 2025). In Khallet al-Dabaa nine houses, six caves, ten water tanks, four barns, 11 toilets, seven wells and hundreds of meters of agricultural fences were demolished. The community centre, the central electricity station, the internet system and camera surveillance were also destroyed.

Leading to the displacement of at least 50 people and leaving the community without access to power, internet or water (OCHA, 2025).

I witnessed several demolitions during my visits to the area. These were among the most harrowing experiences I have encountered: the terror began as soon as the bulldozers were spotted, typically several kilometres from Masafer Yatta. From that point, the community sat on the edge of their seats, waiting to see which villages or houses were targeted that day. The psychological violence of waiting, of not knowing when and where the next demolition will occur, feels like a tool of control in itself.

Once the demolitions started, the grief of families watching their homes and lives torn apart was tangible. Residents ran to their houses, tents or caves to save as many personal belongings as possible before they were buried under rubble.



*Figure 9: Demolished house in Jawaya by author*

These practices are not merely incidental but central to the spatial logic of occupation. They align with Foucault's (1978) concept of biopolitics, wherein the state manages and disciplines populations through regulatory power. But it also extends into Achille Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics, where the state's power to expose specific populations to conditions of death or social unviability. In Masafer Yatta, house demolitions operate at this necropolitical threshold: they do not immediately kill, but they destroy the material and symbolic foundations of life.

### Pastoral Colonialism and Static Displacement

Grazing sheep and goats and cultivating the land are the main sources of income and livelihood in Masafer Yatta, and the vast majority of the residents are engaged with either agriculture or shepherding on a daily basis.

Pastoral colonialism, a term introduced to me by a Palestinian shepherd and activist, is therefore one of the most effective means for displacement and territorial expansion. Pastoral colonialism is either agricultural or shepherding activities and practices of the occupational actors, which destroy or obstruct the agricultural or shepherding activities or practices of the Palestinians. It is similar to green colonialism, which in Palestine has led to, e.g. the planting or releasing of invasive alien species (i.e. eucalyptus (Anani, n.d.) or wild boars (Samamreh, 2022)) to serve various purposes, such as obscuring evidence from the Nakba displacements, drying out agricultural lands or destroying crops.

In Masafer Yatta, pastoral colonialism is a tool used daily. The most common strategy is for settler-shepherds to herd their flocks into cultivated Palestinian fields, as the sheep and goats will eat almost everything growing from the soil. All interviewees refer to this, and Basel Adra explains how "almost none of the families picked their olive trees, almost no one ploughed their land and now no one is allowed to graze their sheep" (Adra in Killing et al. 2024). Ali explains that the process often starts with settlers building agricultural and shepherding outposts on settler-leased state land (00:55:57).

These expansions of settler-controlled land are often marked with either Israeli flags or the Star of David to symbolise ownership of the land.



*Figure 10: Israeli flag on outpost, courtesy of David Lombeida*

From the establishment of agricultural outposts, Hafez explains, “they bring their own sheep, in front of the houses of the Palestinians. It's really far, you need about one hour to go from the settlements and outposts to reach [those] places. All the villages, all the cultivated land, the farms, olive trees. Wherever there are trees or [agriculture], they take their sheep and destroy” (00:42:03). From time to time, the Palestinian fields and food storages will also be set on fire (Ali, 00:03:25)



*Figure 11: Settler herding sheep into olive grove, courtesy of Ali Awad*

Musahb adds that during harvesting season, the Palestinians experience more settler attacks to prevent harvesting (recording 2, 01:55). It is a well-known fact among international activists; therefore, special campaigns are made to mobilise international activists to be present during the olive harvest season.

A second method of pastoral colonialism is the theft of livestock. I witnessed two tactics aiming at stealing animals; the first being, often masked, settlers armed with metal pipes, guns or rifles, chasing after shepherds, international activists and animals, to try to grab animals physically and the second being settler-shepherds seeking to mix the flock of the settler with that of the Palestinian. The Palestinians fear that if the settler shepherd succeeds in blending the animals, they will call the army and say that the Palestinian has stolen his animals. Once the army arrives, the fear is that they will permit the settler to walk away with all the animals. Ali adds another method of the settlers which is to approach the animal pens at night or in the early morning and lead all the animals into the outpost or the settlement (00:41:46). The first time I met Ali, his foot

had just been broken by settlers the same day, as he and other villagers managed to get the sheep back before the settlers reached their destination.

These strategies of ruining livelihoods lead to the Palestinians struggling to live self-sufficiently, and combined with Israel revoking 150.000 work visas following October 7th, it has left many West Bank Palestinians without any source of income (S., 2025). But more than attacking the livelihood of the residents, pastoral colonialism also attacks the way of life of the people in Masafer Yatta. As Ali explains:

“I think the occupation has done a big crime by destroying the lifestyle of the shepherding life in Masafer Yatta. People of Masafer Yatta were very good friends of nature and the environment. And destroying such a lifestyle is, I don't know.. Maybe a shepherd from Masafer Yatta that used to [raise] sheep that would balance the environment - if he loses his job, he will start to burn smoke in a factory.” (Ali, 00:59:11).

Despite the residents still being on their land, their lifestyle is forced to change, thereby statically displacing them (Butmeh, 2022)

### Hindrance of Movement

“They know the cars are a good source of movement that helps us stay and live here, so they want to destroy them.” (Ali, 00:14:08)

The restriction of movement in Masafer Yatta operates both as a logistical obstruction and as a settler colonial tool to control, fragment and dislocate Palestinian life from its rooted geographies. Through vehicle confiscations, infrastructural neglect and settler violence, movement itself becomes politically regulated both through direct barriers and through psychological governance of fear and danger. These restrictions shape daily routines, communal ties and access to basic services.

The targeting of vehicles is a strategy used by settlers and state officials in Masafer Yatta. The army or the police often confiscate vehicles due to registration errors, which are hard to fix as the process goes through the Israeli system. Especially in the designated firing zones, the confiscation of cars happens frequently. Even when the cars cannot be confiscated, they are still targeted. Ali tells in the interview how Israeli soldiers had attempted to confiscate his car on several occasions, but when unsuccessful, “the settlers burned the car because the military couldn't confiscate it” (Ali, 00:18:55). Whether coordination between army and settlers happened

or not, this incident is indicative of a larger pattern whereby both state and settlers work to sever the infrastructural lifelines of rural Palestinian villages.



*Figure 12: Burning of Cars, left: B'Tselem, 2025b; right: by author*

Following the burning of the car on January 25, 2025, as pictured above, Tuba is left with no cars, making the village grow increasingly isolated from the surrounding villages. Life becomes more expensive as the residents now must pay taxi drivers to take them shopping or to the hospital. Before the burning of Ali's car, "it was the ambulance driver, it was the taxi, it was the grocery delivery for the whole village" (00:15:30). At least two other instances of settler-inflicted damage, often by fire, have happened in other villages since October 7th. Michel Foucault's (2010 [1978]) notion of biopolitics finds clear resonance here: the management of Palestinian life through mobility control is a form of state regulation that ensures life persists only in precarious, surveilled and fragmented ways.

These mechanisms of control extend into the domain of health and education. Multiple reports document how ambulances are delayed or turned away at military checkpoints. Residents describe being forced to prove the extremity of their condition before being allowed passage. This bureaucratic violence enacts a slow attrition on Palestinian life, where state-sanctioned policies and informal settler violence converge to make access to medical care uncertain and potentially lethal (Doctors Without Borders, 2023).

Access to education is affected in similar ways. Ali (00:04:43) describes how children from Tuba used to attend school in the neighbouring At-Tuwani. Due to a court order, the children of Tuba were escorted through the outpost of Havat Ma'on from 2004 until October 7th. Despite soldiers often neglecting their duties (Operation Dove, n.d.), this system allowed the pupils to attend school. After October 7th, all schools in the West Bank were closed, and when they reopened, the soldiers did not show up to escort the children. Therefore, the Palestinians needed to drive the children to school, taking the route from a 20-minute (2km) walk to a 40-minute (13km) primarily drive on non-existent roads.

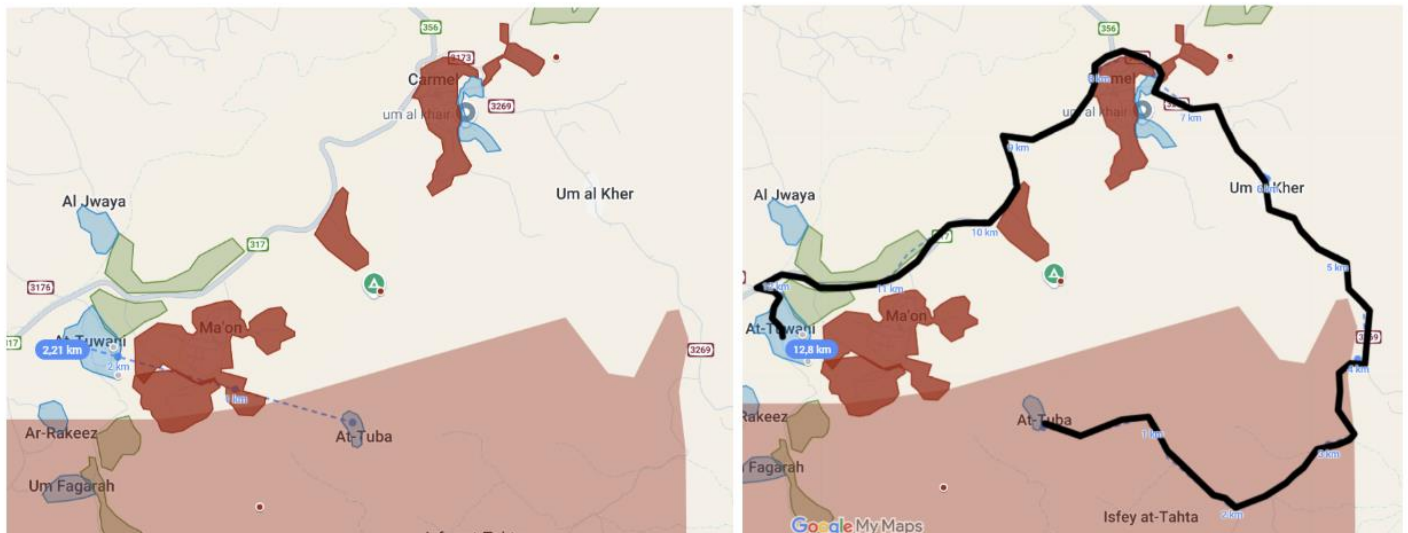


Figure 13: School routes from Tuba before and after October 7th by author

Currently, the children from Tuba have had to change schools. Their new school is in the Firing Zone, which means that it is threatened by demolition orders, but the children don't have to pass settlements and outposts to get there.

## Management of Death

While the Israeli occupation of Masafer Yatta is often enacted through slow violence, administrative coercion and bureaucratic fragmentation, it is followed by more explicit strategies and technologies of death and destruction. These are not merely collateral elements of a securitised regime, but central instruments in the broader project of settler colonialism. Within the framework of necropolitics, defined as the sovereign power to decide who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2003), these tactics reflect the routine exposure of Palestinian life to death, dispossession and bodily harm. The deliberate poisoning of water sources and the targeted use

of violence against civilians are not anomalies but structural features of a regime that manages and legitimates death to secure demographic and spatial dominance.

Water has long served as a frontline in the settler colonial control of Masafer Yatta. In a semi-arid region where access to water is critical for survival, Israeli forces and settlers have systematically targeted Palestinian wells and cisterns. These include both physical demolitions and, more insidiously, acts of contamination and sabotage. Reports from residents detail instances where settlers have poisoned wells with dead animals, concrete, or waste materials, rendering them unusable and forcing communities into reliance on expensive, externally sourced water (Breaking The Silence, 2008; Nawajah, 2014). This destruction is degrading the environment but is also necropolitical control through deprivation, deliberately exposing Palestinians to death by thirst, disease, or economic collapse.

The most visible and traumatic expression of necropolitical power manifests in pogrom-style settler attacks. These raids involve the mass destruction of homes, crops, olive trees and livestock. Often, as seen in the example from Zanuta discussed above, pogroms follow prolonged periods of targeted settler attacks.

In tandem with environmental and structural violence, direct bodily violence against Palestinians takes place. Instances of settler shootings, beatings and stone-throwings are well documented in both NGO and grassroots testimonies (International Solidarity Movement, 2023; Amnesty International, 2025). Shootings, even when non-fatal, function as disciplinary mechanisms — reminders of the settler's power over life and death. As Foucault would argue, this is the modern sovereign logic of biopolitics: life is administered through exposure regulation, where some are allowed to live only insofar as they do not obstruct the settler colonial project (Foucault, 1978). But in the occupied West Bank, this logic exceeds biopolitics and enters necropolitical terrain. The refusal to allow ambulances passage, the indiscriminate nature of settler fire and the lack of legal consequence all affirm that Palestinian life is, in Mbembe's terms, rendered disposable (Mbembe, 2003).

The convergence of these tactics, poisoning, pogroms, shootings, and beatings, cannot be understood through security discourses or narrow frames of conflict. Instead, they must be situated within the broader settler colonial framework in which death itself is instrumentalised. Mbembe's necropolitics offers a vocabulary to articulate this logic: a sovereign power that not only disciplines life but produces death as a condition of rule (Mbembe, 2003). Meanwhile, Wolfe's

thesis that settler colonialism functions through the “elimination of the native” helps explain why such tactics are not marginal excesses but central pillars of control (Wolfe, 2006).

### 7.1.3 Effect on Social and Spatial Conditions of Resistance

The Israeli occupation in Masafer Yatta is not a singular military imposition but a multi-scalar apparatus, executed through a complex web of actors and strategies. These occupational actors do not function autonomously but are structurally interconnected. Together, they constitute what can be described as a settler-institutional complex, where bureaucratic, ideological, and material powers converge to reshape the landscape.

As shown in section 7.1.1, the interaction, coordination and overlapping membership between the actors of the occupation make it hard to distinguish between them. Although the actors have seemingly heterogeneous functions, the quasi-militarisation of the settlers has blurred the line between state and non-state actors. Residents still experience different actors performing different acts of violence. Still, since October 7th, the impression is that the settlers have become the actors controlling the area both through acts associated with that of the rabble - burning cars, attacking shepherds, etc. - and acts associated with the state - detentions, checking visas, etc.

Section 7.1.2 examined the strategies for spatial domination of the actors. These include the use of land designations (state land, archaeological sites and firing zones), house demolitions, pastoral colonialism and the restriction of mobility through permit regimes and vehicle confiscations. These strategies are not reactive but premeditated, forming a systematic infrastructure of control. Rather than merely enforcing a status quo, these interventions actively produce new spatial realities, increasingly fragmenting Palestinian territory, eroding communal continuity and installing a de facto annexation of land under the guise of legality and security.

This matrix of actors and strategies reshapes the social and spatial conditions of life in Masafer Yatta. It operates not through a singular authoritarian decree but through what Weizman (2012) calls the architecture of occupation. In this regime, geography, law and violence converge to render Palestinian presence increasingly untenable. The spatial strategies of the occupation have led to a systematic undermining of the social, cultural and spatial fabric of Palestinian life, resulting in decreasing social cohesion. As Penic et al (2024) is a prerequisite for non-violent resistance, the chosen resistance strategy in Masafer Yatta.

## 7.2 Local Strategies Resisting Occupation

As documented above, the settlement policy is dangerous to Palestinians as well as fundamentally changing and disrupting patterns of movements, livelihoods and community cohesion. These changes affect how Palestinian local communities resist the occupation. Many years ago, the residents of Masafer Yatta collectively chose non-violent resistance as their strategy in response to ongoing occupation and displacement (Musahb, recording 3, 00:00). This approach has become a defining feature of the community's resilience and refusal to be silenced.

Sumud, meaning steadfastness or perseverance, is a central concept in Palestinian political and cultural life, especially under conditions of prolonged occupation and dispossession. It embodies a form of resistance rooted in the refusal to leave the land, endure oppression and maintain daily life despite constant threats. Sumud first emerged as a popular term after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, offering an alternative to militarised struggle by emphasising resilience and survival (Allen, 2012)a. What has been considered acts of Sumud have changed over time. Palestinians displaced during the Nakba, either to refugee camps in neighbouring states or to other parts of historic Palestine, describe their survival as Sumud. The boycott campaigns of the first Intifada were known as the Sumud economy. During the Second Intifada, the crossing of checkpoints became acts of Sumud. Imprisoned Palestinians refusing to confess during interrogations as an act of Sumud. Sumud cannot be reduced to a single, fixed practice. It takes as many forms as there are Palestinians-in-Sumud. Its power lies precisely in its unformulated, lived expressions (Meari, 2014).

Despite Sumud's undefined features, two main modes exist: static Sumud and resistance Sumud. Static Sumud refers to the determination to survive and remain on the land, often framed as passive endurance. It involves continuing life in its place; staying in one's home, cultivating the land and maintaining family and community cohesion despite daily oppression (Dakkak, 1988). Resistance Sumud extends beyond survival, encompassing deliberate acts of nonviolent resistance, civil disobedience and strategic self-reliance. It includes rebuilding demolished homes, escorting children to school, participating in protests and developing grassroots institutions as part of an organised struggle (Ali, 2019).

This conceptualisation has been applied to the analysis of the interviews, leading to the understanding of Sumud as a continuum, a lived mode of resistance that blends the personal, political, material and affective. Whether expressed in daily acts like not grazing sheep, staying in your home, tending olive trees or through more direct protests such as rebuilding demolished

buildings, protesting or cutting down barbed-wire fences, it is rooted in the conviction that to exist is to resist.

In Masafer Yatta, both forms of Sumud take place. Families who remain in the caves and tents on their ancestral lands despite demolitions and continue to herd their sheep embody static Sumud, while those who organise international campaigns and challenge military orders practice resistance Sumud. Crucially, these are not discrete categories but point on a continuum of everyday resistance under conditions of extreme structural violence. Prior to October 7th, much resistance took the form of resistance Sumud, but in the current context, you “have to be a bit smart enough not to sacrifice for nothing” (Hafez, 00:28:34). But all interviewees agree that staying put is the only solution.

“To be honest, Alhamdulillah, leaving is not a choice for us. It's not something we think about. We don't feel that we deserve to leave our homes and our land. But we deserve to not being attacked in our homes and in our land” (Ali, 00:48:24)

The following chapter will analyse and discuss the tactics of the Sumud-strategy in Masafer Yatta.

### 7.2.1 Adaptive Domesticity

Two discrete geographies exist within the same geobody in Masafer Yatta: the linear geography of the military occupation and the circular geography of the traditional Palestinian way of life (Butmeh, 2022). Part of the logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006) is to disrupt the way of life of the native. Being forced from the original cyclical lifeform to the linear geography of the military occupation constitutes not only direct efforts of ethnic cleansing - the forced displacement of particular residents - but also a static displacement where ways of living are prohibited and people are forced to change their livelihood (Butmeh, 2022).

Adaptive domesticity, the preparedness to adjust home and family life to continue living under settler colonialism, is a tool used by the residents of Masafer Yatta. It includes many aspects, what is cooked and how childcare is organised, but the two points underlined in the interviews are sleep schedules and place of living. Ali explains, “I usually watch all night until early in the morning, sometimes [until] sunrise. I keep watch around the houses and the village. Since so many settler attacks happened after October 7th and around the beginning of this war against our village, I decided that I have to watch.”

During my time in Palestine, most nights spent in homes in Masafer Yatta, I only once saw a Palestinian man sleep. Despite some nights staying up until 2 AM and constantly waking up between 5-6 AM for morning shepherding, the men always slept later and rose earlier. Many men would sleep in the animal pens to be present if nightly raids targeted their animals.

The second point from the interviews is the preference of moving back into caves over leaving the land, opting to return to living without access to water or electricity in the caves (Musahb, recording 6, 00:00). Young people told me during my stay how they, as teenagers, had moved into the Firing Zone to fix caves and make them liveable so that they could host families whose homes had been demolished (Youth of Sumud, n.d.).

### 7.2.2 Agricultural and Livestock Practices

As agriculture and livestock are the key activities in the area, practices and rhythms surrounding these have had to change to adapt to the occupation.

Livestock practices changed from being individual work of the shepherd to being communal between several shepherds in the village (Butmeh, 2022) and/or under the presence of international activists. Along with shepherding in pairs, grazing patterns changed: “most of the Palestinians kept their own sheep very near and very close [to] their villages. They don't go to graze their sheep as before,” (Hafez, 00:24:33). This means that most shepherds will not take their flocks grazing far from their pens. Following settler attacks, the shepherds usually do not go further than 100m from their houses. While this keeps the animals safer, it increases the reliance on expensive animal feed.

Apart from spatial changes in livestock patterns, Palestinian shepherds tend to mark their animals with coloured paints to make them identifiable. Another advantage of the Palestinian shepherds is their expertise. Most Palestinian shepherds, in contrast to the settler-shepherds, have been grazing and shepherding their entire lives. This makes them skilled shepherds and is the primary explanation for how Palestinians reclaim stolen animals, if they are intercepted before arriving at outposts, as happened to Ali (00:41:46).



*Figure 14: Palestinian shepherds working, left: courtesy of Ali Awad; right: by author*

Agricultural practices were harder to fit under military rule, as thriving agriculture is visible. Working the land had to be done unnoticed, as it can prompt settler violence (own observations) or is illegal, as in the Firing Zone (Butmeh, 2022). Two tactics were developed: nocturnal labour and slow labour. Especially in the Firing Zone, but also elsewhere in Masafer Yatta, working at night has been used to cultivate fields. It has likewise been used for other development and construction efforts, such as digging wells when building permits are unreachable (Butmeh, 2022; own observations, 2024). Despite happening in the day, slow working follows the same idea - to work in a way that is hard for both settlers and soldiers to notice. This can include bringing, but not immediately using, water hoses, shovels and other farming equipment, or having lunch in a spot where you pick weeds while eating. Both methods are inefficient and slow down the cultivation process. This has meant that Masafer Yatta has gone from acting as the bread-basket of the Hebron governorate to not being self-sufficient (Butmeh, 2022; Ali 00:27:09).

### 7.2.3 Community Cohesion

“We started organising ourselves. At that time we worked hard to make unity among the Palestinian villages here. Because we [are] all targeted and we have to be united to face this policy [of ethnic cleansing].” (Hafez, 00:12:45).

After the mass displacement of the inhabitants of the Firing Zone in 1999, the people started organising across the villages. Hafez explained how half the people displaced from the Firing Zone were hosted in the village of At-Tuwani for a year before they could return to their land (Hafez, 00:11:44). Since then, the villages have had committees sharing information and discussing the situation (Musahb, recording 2: 03:07).

Social cohesion has been shown to strengthen political participation and foster a sense of collective efficacy (Putnam, 2007). A growing body of research emphasises that such cohesion is a key foundation for enabling nonviolent civil resistance (Cunningham, 2013; El Kurd, 2022). Unlike violent resistance, which can be carried out by a few actors, nonviolent civil resistance depends on widespread participation, coordination and mutual support, conditions made possible through strong social ties (El Kurd, 2022). When these bonds are weakened and collective coordination becomes difficult, violent resistance is more likely to emerge as the dominant strategy (El Kurd, 2022; Gade, 2020). According to all interviewees, the residents in Masafer Yatta have strategically chosen non-violence as their approach to resisting the occupation. Therefore, strong social ties are pivotal.

Currently, the cooperation and solidarity between the families in the villages and between the villages have been strained by the hindrance of movement and the general hardship of the situation. However, the cooperation in families, between families and villages is prioritised, and mutual aid is valued. Ali describes how “the good thing about the community is we are a social community[...] if we are a family of 20 and someone is working, or we have like few sheep [for sale], the salary of the one will be for the grocery of the whole family.” (00:40:33). In similar ways, resources are distributed between all the villages or all the villages in the Firing Zone.

The villages have ongoing contact with each other in WhatsApp groups, where the location of settlers, army movements are communicated, and other details are shared (Hafez, 00:33:08). When attacks happen, the surrounding communities react collectively and physically come to the site of the attack. An example of this is the shooting of a 60-year-old Palestinian man on April 17th, 2025. Hafez describes how it’s “not only to document [the incident]. We have to act because

the event is still going on; it means you have to intervene, you have to act. When the settler shot [him] and [he] was bleeding, everyone wanted to help like him.” (Hafez, 00:34:26).

The local Palestinians also refuse to leave their homes and lands to protect neighbours who would otherwise be on the front line. Musahb (recording 4, 01:15) says, “you can’t leave your home. My home isn’t far from the settlement, just 20 meters now, and I have a lot of oppression from the settlers, from the military, from the police. But if I leave, they will come closer to other homes in the village.” Staying put is therefore both not to lose your own land and to prevent settlements from expanding, but it is also to protect other members of the community, indicating not only affection for the community but also a willingness to put yourself in precarious situations to protect community members.

#### 7.2.4 (Counter-)Narration as Resistance

Saïd (1984) positions narration as a form of resistance as it reclaims agency, history and subjectivity. To narrate is to exist politically and culturally. Understood through this lens, it becomes visible that many tactics chosen - media conferences, social media presence, journalistic work, are not only to gain attention but to counter the hegemonic narrative. Hafez describes (00:13:53) how the dominant Zionist narrative has portrayed the Palestinians as terrorists instead of people defending their rights.

They apply a plethora of tactics to counter this narrative. The region has produced many journalists and photographers who aim to reclaim the right to the narrative. They both document and describe what is happening from their perspectives, as seen in the Oscar-winning *No Other Land*, but also directly confront Israeli media allegations of Palestinian violence in the South Hebron Hills (Abraham and Adra, 2022). In addition to classic journalism, several locals have large social media platforms where they share history lessons, educate about nature, and explain the way of life in Masafer Yatta. These are also platforms for sharing documentation of settler violence, arbitrary arrests, etc. (Musahb, recording 3, 01:25).

The tactics of counter-narratives also expand into the realm of semantics and symbolisms. The vocabulary used when describing the occupational force and its means seeks to counter Zionist narratives. This includes using ‘Israeli Occupation Force’ instead of ‘Israeli Defence Force’, ‘rubber-coated bullet’ instead of ‘rubber bullet’, and ‘settlement’ or ‘outpost’ instead of ‘Jewish communities’.

### 7.2.5 Legal Action

The evictions of 1999 removed 700 residents from the firing zone. A legal campaign resulted in ensuring the residents the right of return, despite them only being allowed to live in caves and fields, as all construction and development was prohibited, including cultivation thereby resulting in Masafer Yatta becoming “a hotel for sleeping and dwelling only.” (Butmeh, 2022, p.381). This partial success became the beginning of using court cases against the occupation forces as a tactic. Some victories have been won through the Israeli court systems, such as the master plan of At-Tuwani in 2012, while others have been lost, including the case seeking to deem Firing Zone 918 illegal (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022).

After October 7th a petition on settler violence was brought to the Supreme Court (Ali, 01:08:44). For this court case, documentation of settler violence and other illegal acts filed as police reports are crucial for the legal team and many local activists therefore use much time documenting, filing reports and transporting people to and from the local police station. Since October 7th, Ali has been involved in filing around 40 legal cases, almost exclusively from attacks happening in Tuba (Ali, 01:09:52). As all cases need documentation, Palestinians and international activists spend a large part of their time filming and photographing. Similarly, several local activists spend time working in and for human rights organisations, including B'Tselem and Al Haq, who also raise court cases.

### 7.2.6 International Presence

Since a few years after the villages began organising collectively in the late 1990s, international activists have been invited to the region to document and have a protective presence. A large part of the international activists' workings consists of living in the villages, depending on the season, accompanying children to school, shepherds to their grazing destination and helping with harvesting efforts and other tasks deemed a priority by the residents (more on ISM in appendix 1). The idea is that with internationals - primarily Europeans, Americans and Israelis - present, violence can be deterred and, when not deterred, mitigated and documented. Interviewees have varying judgments on how effective the protective presence is. On the other hand, Musahb points out that in periods where internationals are not present, settler expansion spikes. During “the time of the intifada, the time of corona, [they used it] to build new outposts. Because there's no activists, no internationals to show the world and to make complaints.” (Musahb, recording 1, 02:00). A more critical view is presented by Hafez, saying that

“the international activists and Israeli activists have a kind of protective presence, which does not work much, because when the settlers attack, they don't care about anyone even a little bit. But at least the protective presence of the international and the Israelis reduces the level of the violence[...] without them, the attacks will be more bloody. So that's why we do our best to have internationals and Israelis in the most targeted villages and the most isolated villages.” (Hafez, 00:26:45). Where Musahb points towards international presence having a deterring effect, at least on settler expansions, Hafez argues that it more takes the form of mitigation of violence.

From personal experience, the presence of internationals can also attract the interest of settlers or settler-soldiers. Once, while staying in the village of Susiya, settler-soldiers arrived shouting and pointing weapons at the residents. As the interaction was in Arabic and Hebrew, I only later realised that the settler-soldier answered “because of them” - pointing to myself and my partner when asked why he was there.

I stayed in the homes of all three interviewees and four other homes. In all homes, we were welcomed with open arms, despite several of the households having had international guests, often not speaking their language, for weeks, months, or years. Most nights, there was a larger demand for international presence in the villages than there were activists available. This indicates that many residents view the presence of internationals as a deterrent or mitigation of violence.

### 7.2.7 Conclusion on Strategies of Local Resistance

In response to the violent disruptions caused by settler colonialism in Masafer Yatta, residents and activists have developed a diverse and dynamic range of strategies to protect and reclaim their spaces, communities and mobility. Central to these efforts is Sumud, a multifaceted concept of steadfastness that manifests in both the act of remaining and resisting.

Through adaptive domesticity, residents reorganise family life, change sleep patterns and return to living in caves to stay on their land. Their agricultural and pastoral practices are reshaped to minimise visibility and risk, exemplified by nocturnal labour and communal shepherding. These adjustments aim to ensure continued presence on the land, even when conditions make traditional livelihoods unsustainable.

Community cohesion within and across villages underpins collective survival and resistance. Networks of mutual aid, coordinated communication systems and a deep sense of interdependence sustain social resilience and political solidarity. Legal action and documentation serve as another vital front, allowing residents to challenge occupation through the court system and assert their rights despite the structural bias of the legal apparatus. These efforts are bolstered by strategic media engagement and the crafting of counter-narratives that reclaim Palestinian subjectivity and disrupt dominant Zionist framings.

Finally, the presence of international activists, while imperfect, plays a role in deterring and mitigating settler violence. It also amplifies local voices on a global stage, reinforcing the interconnectedness of local resistance and international solidarity.

Together, these strategies form a layered and adaptive mode of resistance rooted in a refusal to be displaced, a commitment to community and a determination to assert the right to live on the land.

## 7.3 Emotional Geographies and Landscapes of Fear

The increasing intensity and frequency of settler violence, land annexation and the destruction or theft of means of livelihood not only undermine the material foundations of Palestinian life but also reconfigure the emotional and affective geographies of Masafer Yatta. These spatialised experiences of fear, paralysis and resistance are not merely by-products of violence - they are central to how power operates within settler colonial landscapes. The first section will discuss and analyse these transformations through the lens of emotional and affective geographies, particularly drawing on concepts of fear, spatial restriction and the weaponisation of space. The second will present, analyse and discuss mapping geographies of fear.

### 7.3.1 Emotional and Affective Geographies

As traditionally understood, emotional geographies focus on how feelings such as fear, grief, hope, or belonging are produced, experienced and articulated in relation to place (Bondi, 2005). In contrast, affective geographies explore the subtle, often unconscious feelings and energies that move between people and places (Anderson, 2006; Thien, 2005). However, rather than treating these as distinct domains, this chapter follows Thien's (2005) call to consider their

entanglement. In Masafer Yatta, affective atmospheres and emotional narratives converge to produce a terrain marked by visibility and invisibility, movement and stasis.

One of the most pervasive emotional geographies in Masafer Yatta is the geography of fear. However, it is crucial to nuance the term 'fear' in context. The residents of Masafer Yatta have lived their entire lives under military occupation. For many, fear is not a constant, overwhelming emotion, but a deeply internalised awareness of threat that becomes part of the background of daily life. It is a form of affective knowledge, learned over time, that guides behaviour, caution and movement. As Musahb describes, "Since the 7th of October we have had a lot of problems. We have a lot of attacks. We have danger everywhere. We start to not like travelling from our homes. Like [keeping movement to] one time per week, just to buy some important stuff or go to the hospital" (Recording 2, 00:00). While the danger is real, the emotional response is shaped by habituation, experience and resistance. This produces not panic but what could be described as pragmatic caution - a spatial navigation where necessity is constantly measured against risk.

This affective geography, where danger renders spaces inaccessible even without physical barriers, operates as a colonial technology (Thien, 2005). Settler outposts function as anchors of (the threat of) violence, exerting affective pressure across the area. As Hafez notes, "It [armed settlers] has affected the connection between the villages because [the settlers] are moving all over the area and on every single hill they built an [outpost]" (00:22:35). These affective intensities, the sense of being surveilled and threatened, reshape the geography of daily life through altered psychological relations to the land itself.

These perceptions are not irrational. They are grounded in tangible and repeated experiences of violence, impunity and abandonment. The Israeli military's blind eye to, or active support for, settler aggression normalises and legitimises this fear. The necropolitical logic described by Mbembe (2003) is clearly visible here: power is exercised not solely through death but through the exposure of populations to slow, structural violence, denying them access to safety, healthcare, education and livelihood.

Hafez articulates that "we are not, like, afraid of them. But we're sort of thinking [that] they took advantage of the war on Gaza and everyone is focusing on Gaza and what's going on [there]. But in the West Bank, as you see and hear, every single day they are killing people - shooting - but the media don't speak much about that" (00:27:47). His words underscore the coalescence of

fear, marginalisation and abandonment that structures the emotional geography of the area. This fear is not only collective but also personal. As Musahb recounts: “There's a lot of places around me [that] I cannot use. I cannot go there because it's so dangerous. [...] all these fields, I cannot use, my olive trees and my land I cannot use[...] You cannot use it for planting the barley, the wheat and grazing the sheep in [the] fields.” (Recording 1, 01:07). The dispossession is not abstract—it is felt in the rhythms of daily life, in the grief of unused land and in the quiet violence of being severed from one's environment.

These narratives resonate with my own experiences in Masafer Yatta. However, I was often afraid. But the nature of this fear differed from that of the residents. As someone who had not lived under the prolonged conditions of occupation, I had not developed the affective knowledge that shapes everyday Palestinian life. While I tensed up at every gunshot, residents around me remained calm, often able to estimate the distance and likely direction of fire with uncanny accuracy. Similarly, I reacted anxiously to the sound of every approaching vehicle. But even young children could distinguish the type of vehicle - whether it was an army jeep, a settler's quad bike or the familiar sound of a local activist's car - long before it became visible. Their reactions were grounded not in constant fear, but in a deeply embodied attunement to their environment. For them, fear has become a form of spatial and social literacy. It is not that Palestinians do not feel fear, but that it does not dominate in the same way for those who have been forced to normalise violence as part of daily life.

While pragmatic caution or fear constitutes a substantial part of affective geographies, they shape them alongside other mechanisms like steadfastness, humour, and care. The counter-geographies of resistance, acts of movement, shepherding, and documentation constitute what some have called an affective politics of presence (Smith, 2008).

### 7.3.2 Mapping Landscapes of Fear

As described above, physical restrictions, such as roadblocks, checkpoints or burned vehicles, are not the sole determinants of spatial experience in Masafer Yatta. Affective geographies of fear, caution and familiarity profoundly reshape how the land is navigated, avoided, or reclaimed. To further understand these dynamics, this section presents a map I developed using a situated, decolonial cartographic approach that resists dominant spatial representations.

The map draws on several critical cartographical methodologies, resulting in a map challenging not only Israeli state cartographies but also the often depersonalised and technocratic maps produced by NGOs and international human rights organisations. It visualises where Palestinians *do not go*, not because they are told not to, but because experience has taught them not to. In this understanding, the maps are not produced as documentation or visual aids but as tools to identify spatial displacement and dispossession patterns. They act as a supplement to the data on fear and patterns of movement collected in the interviews.

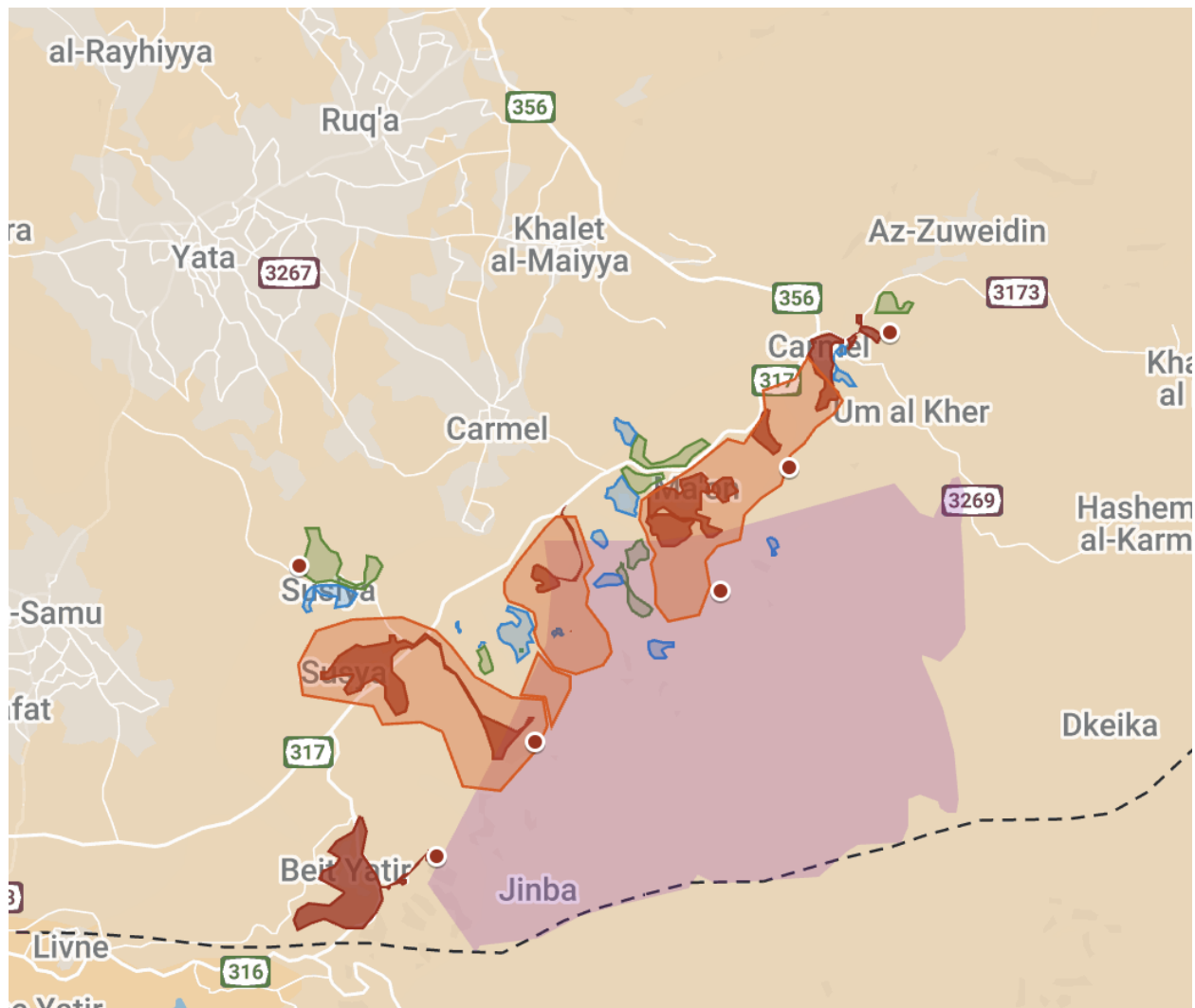


Figure 15: Map of perceived inaccessible land by author

Despite being drawn (with blue representing Palestinian villages visited by the author, green representing grazing land, dark-red representing settlements, outposts, and settler-controlled roads, light red representing areas experienced as inaccessible, and purple

representing the firing zone) from memory and affective encounters with the land, the boundaries and spaces of caution I mapped align closely with journalistic cartographies developed by the Financial Times (Appendix 8).

Most maps documenting settlements tend to focus on marking the locations and names of settlements and outposts, and potentially their expansions over time. With this situated and decolonial approach, the map takes a different analytical approach to de-centre the settlements and re-centre around the lived experiences of the local Palestinians. This analytical change shows how Palestinians lose access to more land than the settlements appropriate, and the settler-controlled zones expand relatively more than the settlements do. Opposed to a *de jure* demarcation of settlements or outposts, it pictures the practical and affective loss of land due to violence, restriction and fear. In contrast to legal or administrative boundaries, this cartographic representation captures the dispossession and fragmentation as it is felt. These are not 'official' zones of Israeli control, but land lost through affective dispossession.

This approach to mapping furthermore shows how the fragmentation affects the land. During the first several weeks in Masafer Yatta, I struggled figuring out how big an area Masafer Yatta was, as time and distance needed to go from village A to village B tells little about the absolute distance, as discussed earlier with the example of Tuba and At-Tuwani, due to the spatial fragmentation.

Layered over maps of Firing Zone 918, the affective map reveals how settler or army-controlled areas function as a strategic barrier. The settlements, outposts and their expanded areas of control combined with Firing Zone 918 effectively form a wall - not of concrete but of violence - which cuts off access between Palestinian cities, such as Yatta and Hebron, from the Bedouin communities stretching from Masafer Yatta, across the green line to Beersheba Valley and Arad Valley in the Northern Negev and the Negev Highland (B'Tselem, 2021, p.11).

As described by Ariel Sharon (Aderet, 2020), the creation of this 'ethnic barrier' should keep Palestinians from moving south. But as the locals experience the spatial policy, it is understood as a "plan to ethnically cleanse all the Palestinians from the Masafer Yatta area. To force them to leave this area and to push all the people to the city of Yatta." (Hafez, 00:06:30).

By visualising zones of settler control rather than merely marking formal settlements, the presence of this barrier becomes visible. Very few gaps remain through which Palestinians can move, making mobility dangerous and uncertain.

In contrast to this decolonial cartography, Zionist counter-maps erase Palestinian life altogether. Maps, such as the one produced by the One Israel Fund (appendix 9), generally omit to show Palestinian villages or cities, the Green Line, checkpoints or Palestinian infrastructure. Palestinian areas are either rendered invisible. In some cases, these counter-maps could almost serve as reverse evidence to the map I developed, as the areas I mapped as being outside of settler control are labelled as 'hostile areas'.



*Figure 16: Zionist counter-map (Yehuda Infantry Regiment, 2023)*

This inversion highlights how power and fear are spatialised differently depending on one's positionality. These settler-aligned cartographies construct a spatial reality where only Jewish-Israeli presence exists.

The map presented here offers a different way of seeing and feeling Masafer Yatta. It foregrounds emotional and affective knowledge, challenges dominant cartographies and makes the land's lived fragmentation visible. By engaging with how fear, memory and embodied experience shape space, this mapping contributes to a broader understanding of how colonial power is both exerted and resisted on the ground.

### 7.3.3 Lands of Caution: Concluding on Emotional Geographies

Fear in Masafer Yatta is not an ephemeral emotion but a structuring force that is both deeply embodied and spatially inscribed. It manifests not only through the physical fragmentation of the land but also through the psychological and affective disintegration of space. Fear is expressed in the avoidance of roads, the abandonment of agricultural fields, the cautious calculation of every movement and in the silences that hang over places once familiar but now inaccessible. These expressions are not merely reactions to violence - they are produced by it, cultivated through repeated encounters with impunity, surveillance, and threat.

However, fear in this context is not paralysing in a conventional sense. Instead, it becomes a form of knowledge, an awareness that shapes how bodies move, how decisions are made and how lives are lived. This affective literacy is born from occupation and sustained through survival. As such, the emotional geography of fear is simultaneously a cartography of absence, of lands no longer used, of roads no longer taken, and of presence, of life lived in defiance of erasure.

Through counter-mapping and embodied testimony, these emotional geographies challenge legalistic and settler-colonial visions of space. They reveal how fear is navigated with resilience and how emotional landscapes, far from being passive, become terrains of struggle. Thus, fear becomes a symptom of colonial domination and a critical lens through which the lived effects of spatial violence and the enduring practices of resistance can be understood.

## 8 Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate how the spatial and violent strategies of the Israeli occupation affect Palestinian forms of resistance in Masafer Yatta and how this resistance adapts and reorganises in response. By centring Palestinian voices and drawing on decolonial and critical geography frameworks, the research offers insights into how the military occupation affects the strategies and tactics of grassroots resistance within the context of Israeli settler colonialism.

This project is advanced through various strategies employed by state actors (the army and police) and non-state actors (settlers). The distinction between these actors has become increasingly blurred, particularly since October 7th, with settlers acting in concert with or appearing as extensions of the military and police (settler-soldiers).

The study reveals that occupational strategies are multifaceted and deeply spatial. In the face of these relentless occupational strategies, Palestinian resistance in Masafer Yatta is deeply

embedded in daily life and takes diverse forms. A central concept is Sumud [steadfastness], understood not just as passive endurance but as an active, embodied practice of persistence and rootedness. It also includes various other non-violent forms of resistance.

The research highlights the critical role of space and geography in this dynamic, not merely as a physical setting but as a site of active production and contestation. Occupation strategies aim to control, fragment and erase Palestinian spatial presence, while resistance practices actively seek to reclaim, protect and reaffirm connection to the land. The study demonstrates how the intensifying occupation reshapes the emotional and affective geographies of the community, creating pervasive landscapes of fear. Mapping these affective geographies reveals how areas become inaccessible or dangerous due to physical barriers and the felt presence and threat of settlers and the military.

By focusing on Palestinian residents' lived experiences and voices, the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how occupation is profoundly spatial and emotional and how resistance is continually enacted through collective practice, memory and everyday acts of steadfastness and reclamation. It underscores that in Masafer Yatta, existence is a form of resistance. The struggle for liberation is intrinsically linked to the contestation and reclamation of space and narrative in the face of a settler-colonial project designed for elimination.

While this research provides significant insights, limitations, such as university travel restrictions necessitating online methods and potentially limiting the immediacy of ethnographic engagement and diversity of interviewees, acknowledge the challenges of conducting research in volatile contexts. Future investigation could explore the legal status of settler-soldiers in more detail or engage in deeper participatory mapping to capture a broader range of local spatial knowledge and affective experiences.

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# 10 Appendices

## Appendix 1

### **The working of the International Solidarity Movement**

The ISM is a Palestinian-led solidarity movement which fights against the ongoing oppression and dispossession of the Palestinians. It works in two ways: direct action and documentation. Direct action includes participating in demonstrations, accompanying children to school and shepherds and their flocks to grazing areas and residing in houses and villages threatened by eviction or demolition. Documentation includes documenting settler attacks, demolitions and arrests to aid legal cases, writing reports and giving interviews to local and international media outlets, updating social media accounts and giving report-backs upon arrival in their country of origin. ISM activists are primarily European and American.

In all its work, ISM adheres to four core principles: Palestinian-led, nonviolence, consensus and anti-oppression.

- Palestinian-led does not mean that there are Palestinian leaders, but that the ISM does not work in areas or actions where Palestinians have not invited it and cannot act against the wishes of the local community. All ISMers are expected to respect Palestinian culture.
- Nonviolence means that the ISM is dedicated to nonviolent resistance, and therefore, ISM activists do not commit any act of violence—physical or verbal. It does not mean that the ISM seeks to dictate how Palestinians resist, but it acknowledges that the consequences of violent action committed by international activists will have greater effects on the Palestinian communities than on the ISM activists themselves.
- Consensus refers to the decision-making process. It guarantees full participation and ensures that no activist is forced into a situation where they do not feel safe.
- Anti-oppression is a commitment to non-discriminatory behaviour. All ISM activists are expected to adhere to non-discriminatory behaviour and specifically to speak up against Zionist, Islamophobic or antisemitic behaviour.

The ISM seeks to provide a protective presence, which entails internationals who seek to deter, mitigate, and document potential violence. Therefore, most activists spend most nights in Palestinian villages, living communally with families, sharing daily duties, meals, and sleeping quarters.

## Appendix 2

### **Call for Academic Boycott**

Academia is neither objective nor apolitical.

Israeli academic institutions have for generations aided the occupation and annexation of Palestinian land. This happens through various mechanisms, including - but not limited to:

Academic institutions' support of the Israeli army: Through technological research and product development, the universities have supported the Israeli army in upholding its occupation, i.e., through the need for fewer people in the army at checkpoints, control towers, surveillance efforts, etc., freeing soldiers from controlling occupied land and seizing more. Simultaneously, this technology has been marketed for sale to foreign countries' armies and police forces, thus generating a direct income for the Israeli army.

Examples are the D9 remote-controlled bulldozer and methods for detecting underground tunnels. Universities such as Technion directly collaborate with private military-industrial companies such as the Israeli Elbit. Likewise, Tel Aviv University has, as of 2009, had 55 joint technological projects with the Israeli army, specifically on electro-optics and robotics. Bar-Ilan University cooperates with the Israeli army on developing AI for unmanned combat vehicles. Many other joint programmes and projects exist, although many are obscured by the involvement of private companies and projects originally independent from the army but later used therein.

Support for Israeli forces: Grants and scholarships exist specifically for soldiers and reservists. Moreover, laxer rules for absence, free additional classes and recognising army training as credit are procedures at several Israeli universities. Often, the perks get better if you have been a combat soldier or in an elite unit. During conflicts such as the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead, Ben Gurion University made special grants for reservists joining the army, where several other universities had academic benefits on top of their conscript benefits. During other tense periods, the universities have made grants of 1500 NIS for students on reserve duty in combat units.

Discrimination towards Palestinian students: While the favouritism towards Israeli military members is visible, so is the discrimination towards Palestinian students. There exist documented cases of colleges shutting down programmes, as too many Palestinians had signed up for studies. Usually, discrimination towards Palestinians with Israeli citizenship is more subtle. This happens through bureaucratic measures aimed at denying Palestinian students benefits and accommodation. Although Arabic is a national language of Israel and the first language of around 20% of Israeli citizens, no academic institution provides courses where the language of instruction is Arabic. In 2009, Palestinian Israelis were three times less likely to get accepted into an Israeli university than Jewish Israelis. This results in an underrepresentation of Palestinians in Israeli universities.

Today, these structural issues are true to a higher degree than ever before. Additionally, most educational institutions in Gaza have been levelled since October 7th, which has obstructed or hindered the education of the Gazan population. Following the attack on October 7th, schools in the West Bank were closed for months and in the following ten months, 67 students were killed, 367 injured, and 159 students arrested. In total, there were 69 attacks on schools, and 58 schools faced partial or total demolition orders

In light of the ongoing scholasticide in Gaza and the attacks on educational facilities, students and teachers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, I call for Lund University to cut all ties with Israeli institutions, whether that be scholarly collaborations between departments, student exchange programmes or investments in Israeli companies.

## Appendix 3

### **Palestinian History**

The history of Palestine is deeply entwined with colonialism, displacement and resistance. Rashid Khalidi (2020) contextualises the situation in Palestine as a prolonged settler-colonial project supported by external imperial forces. This brief historical introduction builds on this historic understanding and seeks to provide an overview of key events and periods that have shaped Palestinian history, from the British Mandate to contemporary struggles over land and sovereignty.

#### **The British Mandate (1917-1948)**

The origins of modern Palestinian dispossession can be traced back to British imperial policy. With the Balfour Declaration of 1917, Britain committed to supporting the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” (Balfour, 1917) in Palestine, even though the majority of the population at the time was Arab. Despite the declaration stating that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”, the declaration became the starting point of the disregard of the rights and political aspirations of the Palestinian people, setting the stage for future conflicts.

The British Mandate (1920-1948) facilitated Jewish immigration and land acquisition while repressing Palestinian resistance. British authorities enacted policies that favoured Zionist institutions, such as the Jewish Agency, while undermining Palestinian political movements. In response, Palestinians staged numerous revolts, most notably the Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939), which was met with British military repression. During this period, Palestinian nationalist leaders were often imprisoned, exiled or assassinated, weakening their ability to organise resistance effectively. Khalidi argues that British policies laid the groundwork for Zionist state-building at the expense of Palestinian self-determination (Khalidi, 2020).

#### **Partition (1947), the Nakba (1948) and the Arab-Israeli War (1948-1949)**

The formation of the state of Israel was the culmination of decades of Zionist political efforts and British support, followed by international backing. In 1947, the United Nations proposed the Partition Plan in Resolution 181 (United Nation General Assembly, 1947), which recommended the division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem designated as an

international city. While Zionist leaders accepted the plan, Palestinian and Arab leaders rejected it, arguing that it disproportionately favoured the Jewish minority, who owned only a small percentage of the land but were allocated 55% of the territory.

Following the UN resolution, violence escalated between Jewish and Arab communities. Zionist paramilitary groups, such as the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi, launched military campaigns to secure territory, leading to massacres. On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel. The following day, neighbouring Arab states intervened militarily, leading to the first Arab-Israeli war. The war, fought between newly declared Israel and surrounding states, resulted in the destruction of over 500 Palestinian villages and the mass displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes, becoming known as the Nakba [Arabic for catastrophe]. By the war's end in 1949, Israel had expanded its control to 78% of historic Palestine, far beyond the areas allocated by the UN partition plan (Khalidi, 2020).

The Nakba was not merely a consequence of war but a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing, as argued by historian Ilan Pappé (2006). Palestinian refugees were forced into neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, as well as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which came under Egyptian and Jordanian control, respectively. After the initial displacement, Israel passed laws, such as the Absentee Property Law, to prevent refugees from returning and to seize their abandoned properties. The Nakba remains central to Palestinian national identity and their ongoing demand for the right of return, a principle enshrined in UN Resolution 194 (General Assembly UN, 1949).

The conflict resulted in armistice agreements between Israel and neighbouring Arab states, but it presented no resolution for the Palestinian refugees, who remained stateless and displaced.

### **The Aftermath of the 1948 War (1949-1967)**

Following the 1948 war, the region entered a period of political instability. The West Bank was annexed by Jordan in 1950, while Egypt assumed control over the Gaza Strip. Israel, meanwhile, continued to implement policies that prevented Palestinian refugees from returning and solidified its new borders. Tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbours remained high, exacerbated by Palestinian guerrilla raids, Israeli military retaliations and regional power struggles. During this period, Palestinian nationalism evolved in response to ongoing displacement and statelessness. The formation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964 marked a significant

development in Palestinian political organisation, as it sought to represent the Palestinian people on the international stage (Khalidi, 2020).

### **The War of 1967 and Israeli Occupation**

In 1967, the Six-Day War dramatically altered the political landscape. Israel launched an attack against Egypt, Jordan and Syria, swiftly capturing the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. The war not only led to further Palestinian displacement but also marked the beginning of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Gaza, which continues until today.

The construction of Israeli settlements began soon after, with the explicit goal of creating "facts on the ground" to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. Palestinian resistance took multiple forms, including civil disobedience, armed struggle and diplomatic efforts. The First Intifada (1987-1993) was a widespread uprising against Israeli occupation, characterised by protests, boycotts and clashes with Israeli forces. Israel's response included mass arrests, home demolitions and the use of live ammunition against demonstrators (Said, 1992).

### **The Oslo Accords and Territorial Fragmentation**

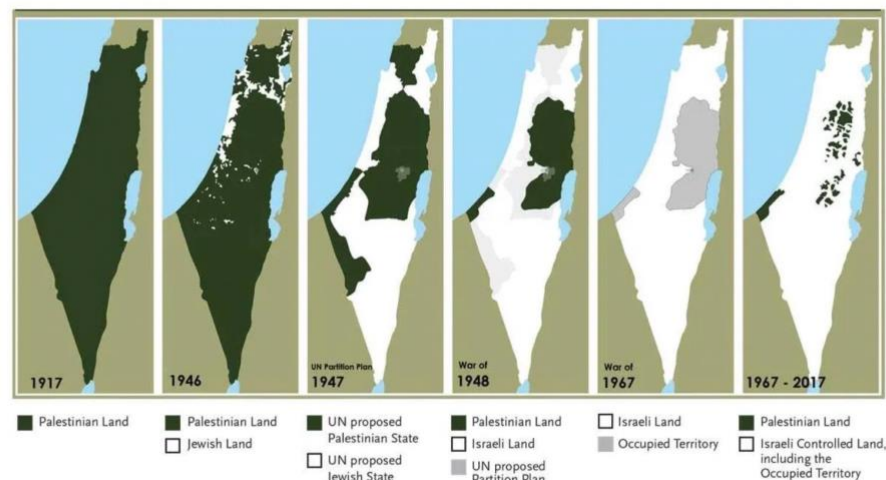
The 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords were presented as a temporary pathway to peace, yet they ultimately entrenched Israeli control over Palestinian land. The accords established the Palestinian Authority (PA) and divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C, with Israel maintaining complete control over 60% of the territory (Area C). Instead of leading to a sovereign Palestinian state, the agreements fragmented Palestinian land and governance, creating a

system where Palestinian leadership had limited autonomy. At the same time, Israel retained significant control over borders, resources and security (Khalidi, 2020).

### The Second Intifada (2000-2005)

The Second Intifada erupted in 2000 following the collapse of peace negotiations and increasing Palestinian frustration with Israeli occupation. The uprising was sparked by Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a site of immense religious and political significance. Unlike the largely non-

Palestinian Loss of Land Over Time



*Changing Control of Land, 1917-2017. Credit: BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights*

violent First Intifada, the Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, saw intensified armed confrontations, Israeli military incursions and suicide bombings carried out by Palestinian militant groups.

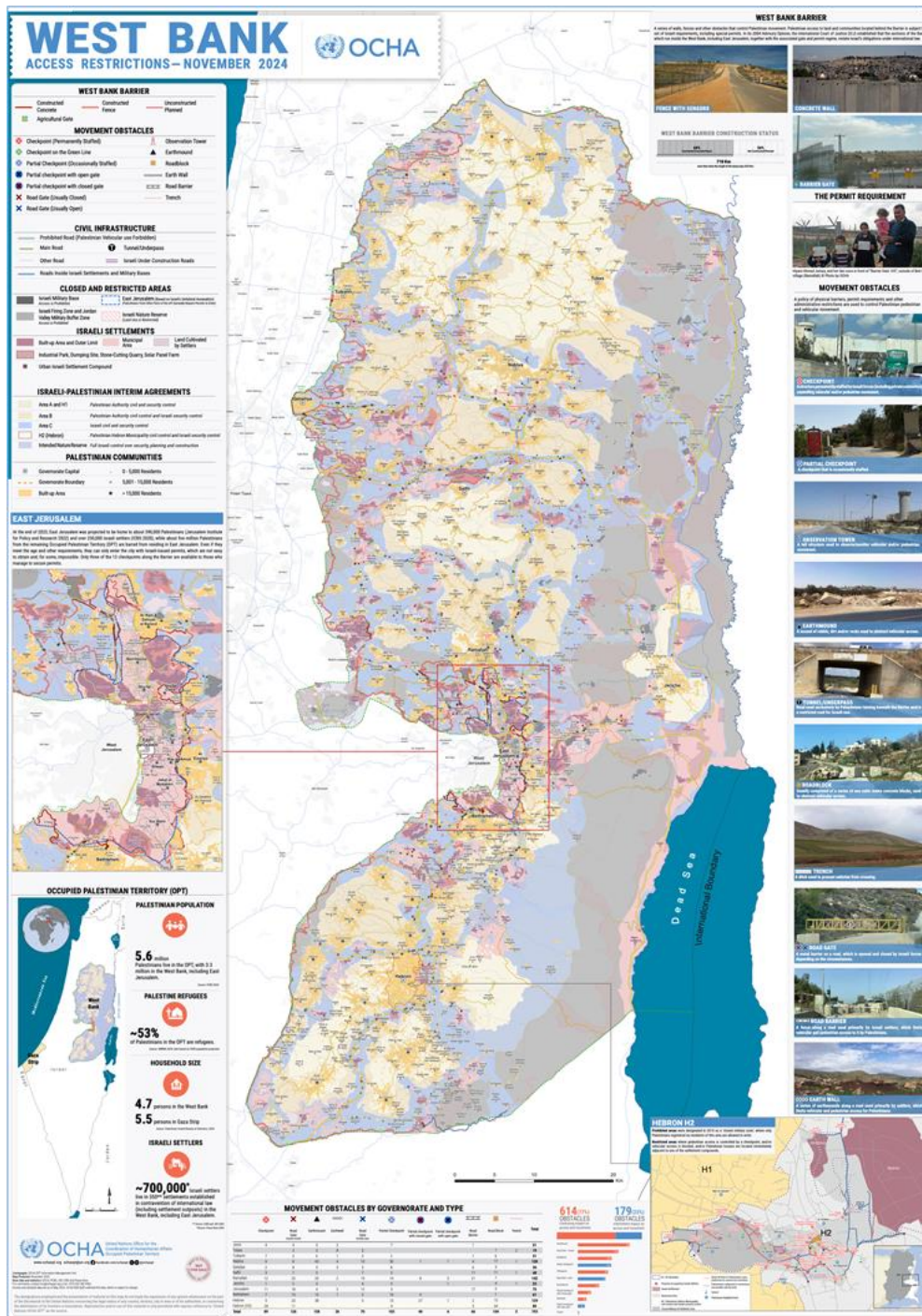
Israel responded with heavy force, launching large-scale military operations in the West Bank and Gaza, including the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and the reoccupation of major Palestinian cities. The Israeli military also began constructing the separation wall, further restricting Palestinian movement. By the time the violence subsided in 2005, thousands had lost their lives, and the Palestinian territories were left further fragmented (Khalidi, 2020).

The Palestinian struggle for sovereignty has for decades been and still is an ongoing battle against settler colonialism, military occupation and political marginalisation. The historical trajectory from

British colonial rule to the current Israeli occupation reveals a pattern of systematic dispossession and resistance.

Understanding this history is essential to any meaningful discussion of justice and peace in the region. As Khalidi and other scholars emphasise, the conflict cannot be resolved without addressing the root causes of Palestinian dispossession and ensuring their rights to land, self-determination and return.

### Access Restriction Map of West Bank (OCHA, 2024)



## Appendix 5

### Interview guide

| Theory                                       | Question                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (Opening question)                           | Can you describe your daily life here? What do you do each day?                                                                                                                                |
| Emotional geographies                        | Are there places around you that you avoid or places you feel safer in? Why?                                                                                                                   |
| Geography of military occupation             | How close is the nearest settlement or army point to your home or village? What kind of presence do they have?                                                                                 |
| Biopolitics                                  | Has your movement or your family's movement changed over time? What caused the change?                                                                                                         |
| Emotional geography and resistance           | When movement becomes difficult, whether because of restrictions or fear, how do you and the community respond?                                                                                |
| Resistance                                   | How do you resist being displaced from your land? What strategies do you use?                                                                                                                  |
| Community cohesion and resistance            | Can you tell me about a time your community came together to face a threat or attack? What happened? What did you do?                                                                          |
| Resistance, sumud                            | Do you think just living here, staying on the land, is a form of resistance? Why?                                                                                                              |
| Community cohesion and resistance            | When settlers attack or there is a house demolition, how do people respond - immediately and in the days after?                                                                                |
| Settler colonialism and adaptive domesticity | When settlers or the army come close, do you feel like you have to change how you organize daily life - like grazing, building or gathering with others? How do you change your everyday life? |
| Emotional geography                          | Do you feel resistance changes your relationship to the land? How?                                                                                                                             |

|                                                            |                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Situated- and embodied knowledge, emotional geographies    | What kinds of knowledge or skills are important to survive and stay here - about the land, settlers, or police/military?      |
| Community cohesion                                         | How do different villages or families in Masafer Yatta cooperate in resistance?                                               |
| Resistance strategies and Geography of military occupation | Does resistance become harder or easier depending on how close you are to settlements or the army?                            |
| Emotional geography                                        | If someone new came and wanted to understand what resistance means here, what would you show them? Where would you take them? |

## Appendix 6

### **Map Development Process**

The maps used in this thesis were developed using Google MyMaps. The mapping process was an integral part of the research, enabling a visual representation and decolonial analysis of the spatial dynamics in Masafer Yatta.

Areas in which I shepherded, villages I visited or stayed in, the boundaries of Firing Zone 918, Israeli settlements, as well as land perceived as inaccessible due to fear were all delineated using polygons. Specific sites of conflict, including settler attacks, house demolitions and arrests, were marked with points, as were Israeli outposts.

The primary data source for these maps was my memory (inaccessible land) and the spatial data I collected during my time in Masafer Yatta (outposts, settler attacks, house demolitions and arrests, villages, grazing fields). The only exception was the mapping of Firing Zone 918, for which I used data from B'Tselem's publicly available region map.

## Appendix 7

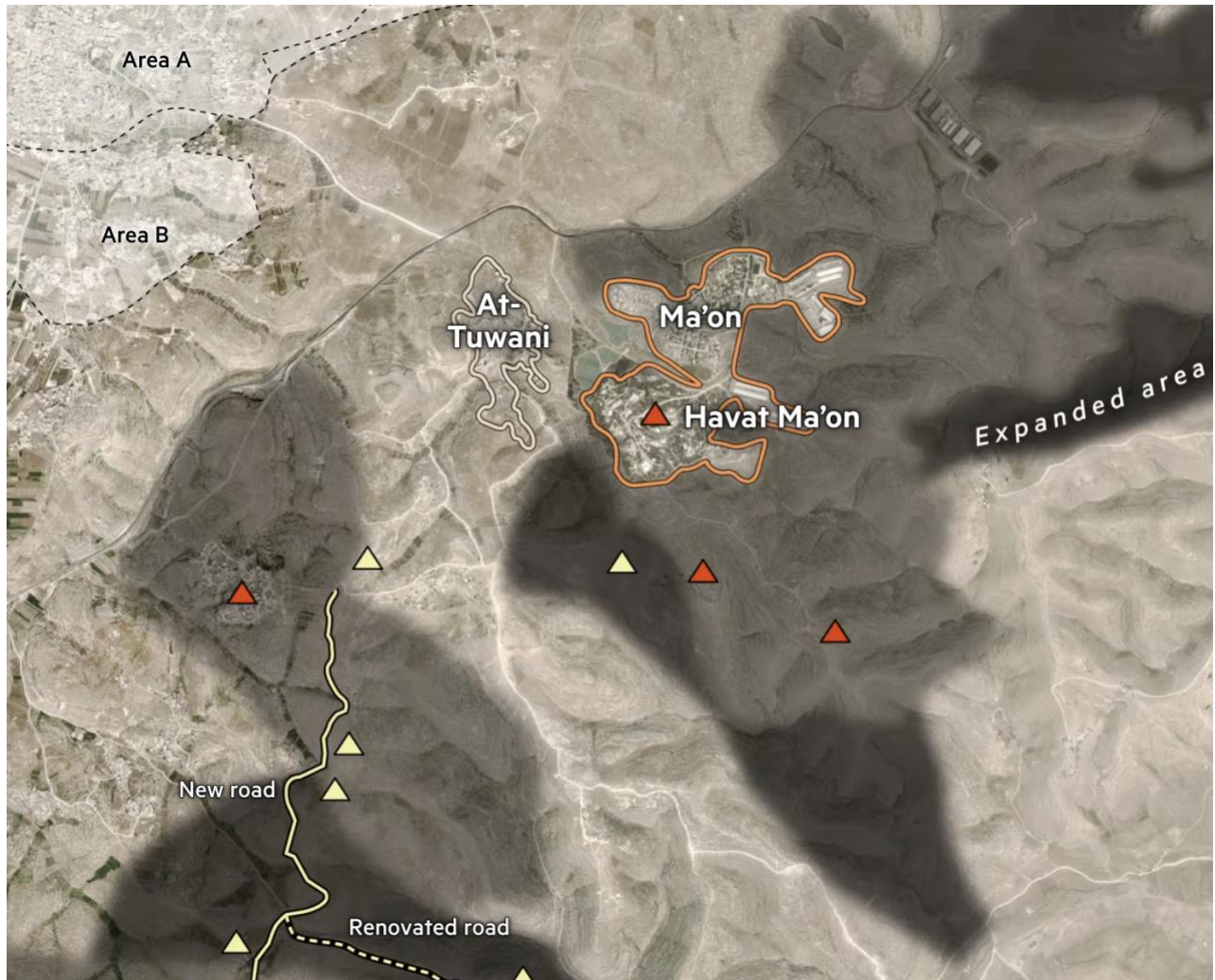
### Coding matrix of interviewees distributed on theoretical topics.

Coding matrix

|                                                  | Ali, Tuba | Hafez, At-Tuwani | Musahb, At-Tuwani |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>1: Producing Space; Sovereignty and Death</b> | 48        | 38               | 11                |
| <b>1.1: Biopolitics</b>                          | 15        | 9                | 1                 |
| <b>1.1.1: Education</b>                          | 4         | 0                | 0                 |
| <b>1.1.2: Health</b>                             | 3         | 1                | 1                 |
| <b>1.2: Emotional Geography</b>                  | 5         | 5                | 1                 |
| <b>1.2: Necropolitics</b>                        | 11        | 17               | 6                 |
| <b>1.2.1: Pastoral Colonialism</b>               | 5         | 3                | 4                 |
| <b>1.2.2: Settler Violence</b>                   | 5         | 4                | 3                 |
| <b>1.3: Production of Space</b>                  | 24        | 11               | 3                 |
| <b>1.3.1: Displacement</b>                       | 0         | 1                | 0                 |
| <b>1.3.2: Movement</b>                           | 15        | 1                | 3                 |
| <b>1.3.3: Symbolic ownership of Land</b>         | 4         | 3                | 0                 |
| <b>2: Resistance</b>                             | 29        | 27               | 16                |
| <b>2.1: Adaptive Domesticity</b>                 | 8         | 2                | 1                 |
| <b>2.2: Counter-narratives</b>                   | 3         | 6                | 4                 |
| <b>2.1: Documentation</b>                        | 1         | 2                | 4                 |
| <b>2.2: Legal Resistance</b>                     | 8         | 3                | 4                 |
| <b>2.3: Sumud and Solidarity</b>                 | 14        | 15               | 12                |
| <b>2.3.1: Farming and Grazing</b>                | 1         | 0                | 4                 |
| <b>2.3.2: International activists</b>            | 2         | 4                | 4                 |
| <b>2.3.3: Intervillage solidarity</b>            | 6         | 9                | 2                 |
| <b>3: Settler colonialism</b>                    | 12        | 14               | 0                 |
| <b>3.1: Geography of Military Occupation</b>     | 3         | 2                | 0                 |
| <b>3.2: Logic of Elimination</b>                 | 10        | 13               | 0                 |
| <b>3.3: Static Displacement</b>                  | 3         | 1                | 0                 |

## Appendix 8

### Map of settler-controlled land (Killing et al., 2024)



## Appendix 9

Map of the Southern Hebron region, still from virtual video tour of Ma'on (One Israel Fund, n.d., 03:35)

