



## Concrete punishment: Time, architecture and art as weapons in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Time  
Architecture  
Military  
Israel  
Demolition  
Art  
Monument  
Weapon

### ABSTRACT

Since 2015, the Israeli military has been implementing a series of new counter-insurgency tactics in Palestinian territory in which urbanism and architecture are its main weapons. Of these diverse procedures, so-called “concrete sealing” stands out as one of the most controversial punishments: it consists of pouring concrete into the house of a Palestinian attacker, rendering the domestic space useless for its inhabitants.

In the following essay, we will investigate the complexity of this new deterrence tactic that has already filled nearly 1000 square meters of Palestinian domesticity. The essay is accompanied by the first published photographs of this new practice, from the residences of Mu'taz Hijazi and Udai Abu Jamal. We will examine the historical background and precedents of this punitive action, as well as breaking down concrete punishment into its most fundamental features (communication, affect, monumentality and domesticity) in order to prove the hypothesis that the resulting architectural object represents a more refined tactic than those seen previously because it uses art and aesthetic result as tools to transform time and durability into an effective weapon and reinforces the pre-existing asymmetry of space/time relationships of Israeli and Palestinian populations.

### Introduction: concrete flooding

A passer-by would notice nothing unusual about this house in East Jerusalem. Its exterior certainly showed signs of use, but it was comparable with other buildings in the vicinity. The sitting room was cramped and gloomy for sure, with a single bare bulb to shed its weak glow against the evening dark, but that was nothing out of the ordinary. Only the doorframe to the left, whose warped wood no longer stood flush with the wall around it, revealed this house's peculiar feature: it has been filled up with cement. Israeli authorities pumped in more than 90 tonnes of concrete through the window of one of the rooms.

The room was once the bedroom of Mu'taz Ibrahim Khalil Hijazi, a Palestinian attacker who was killed after an alleged assassination attempt on a right-wing Israeli activist. See (Fig. 1).

On 29 October 2014, the rabbi Yehuda Glick led a conference entitled “Israel Returns to the Temple Mount” at Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem. According to witnesses, while loading leftovers into his car after the lecture, Yehuda Glick was approached by a man and shot in the chest four times (Hasson, 2014). A few hours later, Israeli forces presumably identified Mu'taz Ibrahim Khalil Hijazi as the gunman and arrested him in the Abu Tor neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. During the arrest, he was fatally shot by one of 20 bullets fired at him. Seven months after his death, Israel's High Court ruled to

seal the home of Mu'taz (Máan News, 2015). The house was not owned by Mu'taz, but by his brother.

While the case of Mu'taz Ibrahim Khalil Hijazi is not unique, it is a key example of the new methods of collective punishment being used to support the Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) counter-insurgency tactics. Seven cases of concrete sealing as a punishment for murder were reported and documented from January 2015 to March 2017 (B'Tselem, 2018); in all of these instances, the concrete sealing was carried out after the suspect was detained or murdered; only in one case did the suspect survive the arrest ('Abed Mahmoud 'Abd Rabo Dwayat). In four of these cases, the suspect was not the owner of the house; thus, the accused's family members were the ones punished by the IDF: 46 people were left homeless (9 of them minors); 8 houses were flooded, and nearly 1000 square meters were submerged in cement. Concrete sealing is a clear and atrocious violation of human rights, as well as a violation of Article 33 of the 4th Geneva Convention, in which “collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited” (1949).

All of the locations where concrete sealing was applied were in East Jerusalem. When Israel took control over the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, this area was annexed to the city of Jerusalem. Israeli legislation was immediately applied, and the Palestinian population living in the 7000 ha-area were granted “permanent resident” status. Since then, the

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.08.012>

Received 19 July 2017; Received in revised form 7 August 2018; Accepted 17 August 2018  
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Fig. 1. Mu'taz Ibrahim Khalil Hijazi's bedroom and bathroom. Source: reproduced with permission from the photographer Jacob Burns.

Israeli government has used various tactics to reduce the Palestinian population of the zone (B'Tselem, 2017), such as restricting building permissions, declaring the surrounding areas national parks, or creating infrastructure shortages. In this sense, the process of urbanisation is used as a deterrence tactic and a population control measure (Graham, 2004) in which concrete sealing plays a key role.

The article aims to expose the mechanisms in which concrete punishment is sustained and how they work with older tactics of urban and architectonic governance in order to unpack what seems a plain and unsophisticated tactic. The focus is placed on studying the apparatus that is being activated rather than the recent and abstract experience of it because eliminating its invisibility is the first step towards further analysis. We have chosen this approach because, when dealing with innovations on the disciplining of population, it is in the interest of the powerful to hide the conflict while power flows in the realm of the subliminal and infraordinary (Dovey, 1999) complicating to consciously reflect about it. Despite the acknowledgment of the symbol's proportionality to the vulnerability of the regime, concrete punishment is analysed from the Israeli governing practices, but throughout the article, the totalitarian role of architecture is put into question and understood as a constantly reiterated, reinforced and reinterpreted entity (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011), despite its brutality. We investigate the effects of this practice on the Palestinian population and try to give material evidence to organize the grief that it entails, as well as to facilitate a common effort to overcome it (Renan, 1882) (Wick, 2011). Ultimately, this research method strives to show that “on the map of the city, we can most acutely observe that governance is not a question of imposing law on people, but of regulating things so that individual conduct situates itself within a determined frame of possible actions.” (Segal, 2012, p. 157). In our case, the urban context is highly controlled to make it actively influence the governing structure of Israel by producing some architectonic pieces that strengthen the dominance over Palestinian daily life.

Simultaneously, concrete punishment makes this system of dominance and its outcome more undetectable by being part of quotidianity. Therefore, the goal of the article is to explore the extent of this network through its most recent example in order to give a clearer picture of how Israel is using art, architecture and time to control Palestinian population. To do so, in the first part of the article, we study the role of architecture, urbanism and the evolution of classic counter-insurgency methods –demolition and sealing–until the use of concrete



Fig. 2. 'Udai 'Abed 'Ali Abu Jamal's kitchen. Source: Reproduced with permission from the photographer Jacob Burns.

sealing in the conflict to understand how these tactics are used to produce certain environments that increase in complexity and coercive power through the manipulation of space, time and speed. In the second part, the differential features of concrete punishment are dissected in order to construct a diverse roadmap that examines several features: its communicational role as a new part of the Palestinian public landscape, its aesthetic component that makes it more effective and unconscious, its affective power to extend the impact to a larger population, its monumentality approach to rebuild collective memory and the intricate use of domesticity as a weapon that goes beyond perpetuation of the status quo or its destruction. See (Fig. 2).

### Power vs architecture: multimodal and diverse

Counter-insurgency tactics rely on a form of power that it is not completely visible but perceived, and “tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its own ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault, 1980). This implies that in order to uncover its complexities, we have to focus on Israeli governing practices, despite the risk of framing the inhabitants in question with less agency than they already have (Harker, 2009) (Robinson, 2003) (Leshem, 2015).

Within this framework, the temporal vector is explored in depth throughout the whole text as the first impulse is to understand that the IDF's counter-insurgency “innovations” are focused on the spatial transformation of the Palestinian territory; however, we argue that they have extreme consequences over the time variable. We want to extend the spatial vision of architecture and territoriality (Malmberg, 1980) and investigate the spatiotemporal assemblages of all of these practices (Massey, 1994) (Harvey, 2000) (Brighenti & Kärrholm, 2016) (Virilio P., 2006).

The very definition of counter-insurgency is temporal and implies that the use of power is focused on controlling the future: i.e., forthcoming violent actions must be deterred. In many cases, architecture is the tool used for this control of the population because of its spatial and temporal power. In this regard, the work of Kim Dovey is particularly useful because of his focus on power as capable of manipulating time. He defines “power over” as “the power of one agent (or group) over

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