NYU Wagner School of Public Service
Urban Planning Student Association
Displaced Migrants Action Group



Post-Crisis Planning
Pre-Crisis Planning
Intra-Crisis Planning

Understanding Urban Planning's Role in Conflict and Genocide



Notes from Panel Discussion (Dec 11, 2025)

Panelists:

Gussai H. Sheikheldin

Lama Shehadeh

Dalia Omer

Reem Abada

Photos:

Rehab Nazzal, from *DRIVING IN PALESTINE*

PANELISTS

Gussai H. Sheikheldin is a senior research fellow with STIPRO, an African think tank based in Tanzania, and an adjunct professor with McMaster University in Canada. Born and raised in Sudan, he worked in the country's public sector - in industrial research and consultancy, which also required working with industries and academia - and has been involved with the collective movements for socioeconomic and political transformation.

Lama Shehadeh is a Palestinian architect and urban planner. She holds a master's degree in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University, USA. Her research focuses on the intersection of architecture and urban planning with identity, spatial justice, environmental and political conflict, and social formation. Lama has worked in city planning departments in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., and is currently working in developing master plans for Palestinian towns and villages within Palestine 48'.

Dalia Omer is an architect who graduated from the University of Khartoum with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture and a master's degree in Architecture and Urban Design from Politecnico di Milano. She is interested in working on existing contexts, from the urban scale to a particular architectural component. Dalia is most enthusiastic about conserving cultural heritage sites and raising the argument for preserving modern heritage, and she aspires to achieve change in her beloved homeland.

Reem Abada is an artist and designer whose research-led practice is grounded in architecture, material processes, and the social, cultural, and political histories of the region. Her work investigates the relationships between materials, space, time, memory, and identity. Working across material exploration, spatial studies, and heritage documentation, she examines how art and design both reflect and shape the human condition.

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

This publication was organized by urban planning students at New York University with a desire to engage more critically with planning and its politics. Here at NYU Wagner, we have personally witnessed the lengths to which academic institutions will go in order to silence anti-colonial voices or to maintain a façade of neutrality amidst the Trump administration's authoritarianism. Examples are frustratingly easy to point to, including the administration's silence as DHS targeted a former NYU adjunct planning professor, their advertisement of employment opportunities at the Tony Blair Institute (whose staff have been actively developing Trump- and Israel-backed reconstruction and relocation plans in Gaza), and their request that our group refrain from publicly using the words 'Palestine,' 'genocide,' and 'colonialism.' Considering this silence-come-complicity, we felt it necessary to organize a discussion connecting our daily studies with the atrocities we continue to witness from afar.

To that end, the Displaced Migrants Action Group and Urban Planning Student Association convened a panel titled Post- (& Pre-) Crisis Planning: Understanding Urban Planning's Relationship with Conflict. We were joined by four esteemed panelists from Sudan and Palestine whose work centers around planning, architecture, and community organizing in two countries that do not receive the time and discussion they deserve, whether the result of a historically implicit silence on African and Arab issues, an explicit repression of the voices of their inhabitants, or the even more straightforward killing of journalists and dissenters. Through their lived experience and research, these panelists provided a critical insight into the multi-disciplinary practice of planning that is often missing from conversations among the students, faculty, and staff who attended the event (including those of its organizers).

This zine, published after the panel itself, is an effort to carry this conversation forward and to prevent our event from remaining a single moment of criticality in a period when sustained reflection, discussion, and action are needed. Through the exceptional contributions of the artists, professionals, and writers found inside these pages, we encourage readers to reflect on the ways they can connect their everyday to the longue durée through organized action. For the planners reading this, we further urge them to pursue a method of practice and study that does not limit itself to bike lanes and building permits. In a field which so tangibly connects politics with the quotidian movement and habitation of people everywhere, we have the opportunity and responsibility to embrace planning's emancipatory potential.

Thank you to the panelists, contributors, organizers, and attendees, without whom this event would not have been possible.

Julian Mura-Kröger & Max Gordy



Trump's Gaza Reconstruction Plan: Advancing Genocide through Urban Planning

Julian Mura-Kröger

In January of 2026, Donald Trump announced the creation of the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), a technocratic board backed by the United States and Israel to oversee Gaza's reconstruction following two years of genocide and during continued IDF attacks at a time of so-called 'cease-fire.' Crucially, this committee is to be guided by a seven-person Executive Board composed of members including such figures as Marco Rubio and Tony Blair, men directly responsible for the abduction of Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil and the United Kingdom's involvement in the Iraq War (Keenan, 2026). Overseeing this "service delivery arm" will be the new 'Board of Peace,' an international coalition approved by UN Security Committee resolution for the steering of the Gaza peace plan (Salah et al., 2026). Rubio understands the board "as an example of what's possible in other parts of the world," a statement which some have interpreted as the beginning to a Trump alternative to the United Nations (Holland, 2026). Its members include Argentina's Javier Milei, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Egypt's Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, and the architect of the genocide himself, Benjamin Netanyahu (Holland, 2026). Trump will serve as the board's chairman, a lifetime appointment giving him ultimate decision making power over the entirety of Gazan reconstruction and any future endeavors the organization takes on (Khan, 2026; Salah et al., 2026).

In short, along with the 58% of Gaza that it currently controls through the IDF, Israel has gained a quasi-legal power over the entirety of the region through the deal brokered by the United States and co-signed by 35 countries (Mansour, 2026). The consequences of carrying out genocide in pursuit of Greater Israel have not been arrests or sanctions, but the rewards of territory and political power which have been sought out continuously through the Zionist project.

Already, Jared Kushner – Trump's son-in-law and another member of the NCAG Executive Board – revealed a 'master plan' for Gaza at Davos. Kushner's presentation revealed numerous fundamental flaws in the master plan, many surely intentional. Ultimately, however, the goals of its authors are clear: the continued dismantling of Palestinian self-determination and history for the purpose of transforming Gaza into a reserve of international capitalism. By treating Palestine as a blank canvas, the Board of Peace does rhetorically what Israel has done physically, to raze the people and land in order to replace Gaza with a new city of their desires.

Consider first the plan's depiction of land use in Gaza, illustrated



above. A report by Mohammed Haddad and Mohammad Mansour in Al Jazeera georeferenced this plan onto existing and historic sites of note in Gaza, revealing the extent of this plan's erasure of Palestinian history (Haddad & Mansour, 2026). In the north, all of Beit Lahiya and Gaza City would be replaced by an 'Industrial Complex, Data Centers, and Advanced Manufacturing' zone, while the neighborhood of Remal – home to several universities and UN buildings – would be buried under new 'Coastal Tourism' areas. In effect, the plan seeks to turn neighborhoods and farms into AI infrastructure, universities into boardwalks, and refugee camps into agricultural areas resembling those occupied by Israel in the West Bank (Abu Saif, 2025).

These designations reveal a further motivation of the Board of Peace to reorient Gaza's land, people, and labor towards the benefit of foreign capital. This is clear in the land use plan's carve outs for tourism areas and data centers (the latter of which are owned in majority by U.S. companies), but what is somewhat more subversive is the designation of the entirety of the Gaza strip as a "special economic zone […] with preferred tariff and access rates to be negotiated with participating countries" (Kushner, 2026; Nicoletti et al., 2025). Although the details of this aspect of the plan are yet to be announced, it closely resembles other proposals broadly conceptualized under Paul Romer's idea of low or no tax 'Charter Cities', including Salvadorean president Nayib Bukele's 'Bitcoin City' or 'Akon City' in Senegal (McDonald, 2021; Négoce et al., 2025). The plan therefore assumes that employment in Gaza will be generated by allowing foreign firms undiluted access to Palestinian land, precluding the collection of taxes which could fund services and infrastructure to serve the Palestinian people. It should also be noted that this aspect of the plan was approved not just by the Board of Peace, but by the UN Security Council (Resolution 2803 (2025), 17). The international community in its grandest form appears unwilling to grant Palestinians the right to economic self-determination in Gaza.

Beyond these visualizations of a hypothetical 'Gaza Riviera' – abhorrent enough already – are the realities of Israel's continued military bombardment of Gaza and the political control of the plan itself. Kushner's plan and the UNSC resolution which approved the Board of Peace both emphasize demilitarization as a prerequisite of reconstruction (Kushner, 2026; Resolution 2803 (2025), 17). Such disarmament remains only loosely defined, forcing us to question whether Israel will continue to define hospitals, universities, and stone-throwing children as military infrastructure and soldiers (Baumgarten-Sharon, 2010; Gunter, 2026; UN OHCHR, 2024, 2025). Furthermore, this requirement ignores the fact that Israel has violated the October ceasefire on 111 of the 129 days between its agreement and February 15 (AJLabs, 2026). How can disarmament be considered when each day one's tent is considered a threat to an occupying force? How can reconstruction realistically take place in Palestine when they are afforded no means of defense against an institution which has spent its entire existence displacing, torturing, and murdering them? Let it be made clear: this claimed need for a one-sided demilitarization has nothing to do with combatting terrorism, as the Israeli state continues to use its weapons in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iran.

Unsurprisingly then, the plan makes little mention of Palestinians outside of their disarmament. The renderings presented at Davos suggest that Gaza's centuries-old neighborhoods are to be replaced by glass towers resembling the luxury housing of other new cities in Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, presumably unaffordable for the two million Gazans dispossessed of their homes and jobs. Rather, what Kushner

left unannounced at the conference are plans discussed by former IDF general Amir Avivi to construct a “big, organised camp” in Rafah with “ID checks, including facial recognition” tracking the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians the facility might hold (Magid, 2026). Analyses from Forensic Architecture, Dropsite News, and Al Jazeera suggest that the camp may be located within the 58% of Gaza that Israel still controls, with the IDF continuing to clear air-striked buildings, greenhouses, and human remains for its construction (Forensic Architecture & Drop Site News, 2026; Mansour, 2026). These plans indicate an expansion of previous systems solidifying Israeli control of building, including the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, an agreement made between the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and the UN in 2014 (UN Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, 2014). By labelling vital building materials as potential military resources, Israel extended its control over Gaza following active bombing through its ability to limit housing development as detailed in the agreement. Today, this passive power to veto construction will be supplemented by an active surveillance of Palestinians in camps taking advantage of digital identification and the Israel military. Through the Board of Peace and Israel, housing is transformed from people’s homes into a tool of dehumanization and pacification. In the midst of a genocide which has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands, it is important to remind ourselves of the depravity of such a practice. Ayed Abu Ramadan, chairman of the Gaza Governorate Chamber of Commerce, does so clearly, affirming that “the people in Gaza are not pieces of furniture that you move from one place to another [; …] they have emotions and attachments. They want to be as close as they can to their destroyed homes.” (Halbfinger et al., 2025).

The ultimate purpose of these various efforts is clear; the Board of Peace and its co-signers seek to erase all memories of Gaza and its people in order to make way for a U.S.-Israeli territory paved by blood, designed by AI, and ruled by the corporation. For two and a half years, we have witnessed genocide executed through the near-complete razing of Gaza’s neighborhoods and buildings, the Board of Peace’s AI-hallucinated designs, and the destruction of entire Palestinian bloodlines. By means of the creative pursuit of planning, Trump and his allies have taken the next step in ushering the world forward in forgetting this destructive period, imploring us to forget what lives and stories inhabited Gaza before its demolition. Planning is the next tool to be used in the brutal destruction of Palestine, nearly as violent and powerful as the tanks and drones which preceded it.

The brutal reality of planning’s ever-growing role in enacting genocide and solidifying its effects contrasts starkly with the depoliticized conception of the field that many of us have developed in order to limit our practice simply to floor area ratios and land use review procedures. As a result, we must undergo a complete reconsideration of what urban planning is and is not, and further, what action and sacrifices our roles as planners require from us. Palestine is a litmus test not only for the field of human rights or our evaluation of politicians, but for planners and our day-to-day facilitation of the politics of the city.

This change must begin in the classroom. Beyond the clear need to resist the organized repression of anti-zionist scholars in U.S. universities (a practice expanded by NCAG Executive Board member Marc Rowan through his role in the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education), there is also the need to expand our preconceptions of planning politically and geographically (Young & Ni, 2025). Decisions to reduce international specializations or course offerings within planning degrees, for example, must be understood not simply as neutral responses to funding environment changes, but as choices with politically charged consequences. This not only confines the imagination of future planners to the United States, preventing practitioners from fully engaging with solutions and theories of change found in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Europe, but also from considering the vital ways in which their local practices intersect with global dynamics. As exemplified so clearly by the Board of Peace’s ‘master plan’ for Gaza, urbanists, architects, and policymakers must reckon critically with the ways their work influences and is influenced by the international.
There is no better way to begin this process than by listening to those already incorporating these ideas into their work throughout their d world. These include the “multidisciplinary team of Palestinian professionals and academics from Gaza, the West Bank, and the diaspora” developing the Gaza Phoenix Plan, a framework for reconstruction centering dignity, community participation, multi-scalar planning, and the lived history the Palestinian people as core principles of their work, inherently denying the Board of Peace’s tacit assumption that Gazans must be denied self-determination in such a process (Gaza Phoenix, n.d.). We might further turn to Sudan’s long and active practices of community organizing in the face of war and repression, including the resistance committees formed during the 2019 revolution, the takaya (communal kitchens) organized by neighbors in Burri during the Rapid Support Force’s (RSF) siege lasting from 2023 to 2025, or the al-Qeyada sit-in spaces of Khartoum where “protestors deliberated, designed, and created their temporal city” in the spring of 2019 (Alhessan, 2026; Bahreldin, 2020; Sheikheldin, 2025). Lessons for planners abound; it is the responsibility of those of us here in New York, the United States, and elsewhere to turn a thoughtful ear and hand to our neighbors should they be realized.

References

Abu Saif, F. 2025. Farming Where the World Looks Away. La Via Campesina.

AJLabs. 2026. How many times has Israel violated the Gaza ceasefire? Al Jazeera.

Alhessan, N. 2026. Burri Under Siege. Middle East Research and Information Project.

Bahreldin, I. Z. 2020. Beyond the Sit-In: Public Space Production and Appropriation in Sudan’s December Revolution. Sustainability 12 (12).

Baumgarten-Sharon, N. 2010. Caution: Children Ahead. B’Tselem.

Forensic Architecture & Drop Site News. 2026. Israel Is Preparing Land in Rafah to Corral Palestinians. Drop Site News.

Gaza Phoenix. n.d. The Roadmap.

Gunter, J. 2026. Israeli soldiers shot a Palestinian boy and stood around as he bled to death. BBC.

Haddad, M., and M. Mansour. 2026. Map shows what would happen to Gaza under the US ‘master plan.’ Al Jazeera.

Halbfinger, D. M., A. Rasgon, N. Odenheimer, and A. Boxerman. 2025. U.S. Plans Compounds to House Palestinians in Israeli-Held Half of Gaza. New York Times.

Holland, S. 2026. Trump launches Board of Peace. Reuters.

Keenan, C. 2026. Who is on Trump’s senior executive overseeing Gaza’s reconstruction? BBC.

Khan, M. 2026. Trump could potentially chair Board of Peace for life. ABC News.

Kushner, J. 2026. The Board of Peace.

Magid, P. 2026. Israel plans large camp for Palestinians in southern Gaza. Reuters.

Mansour, M. 2026. Israeli plans for Rafah ‘camp’ in Gaza slammed as continuation of genocide. Al Jazeera.

McDonald, M. D. 2021. El Salvador Plans Tokenized Bitcoin Bonds and Tax-Free ‘Bitcoin City.’ Bloomberg.

Négoce, N., N. Booty, and J. Griffin. 2025. Akon City: Wakanda-style $6bn project abandoned by Senegal. BBC News.

Nicoletti, L., L. Doan, and D. Bass. 2025. AI Data Center Gold Rush Driven by Thousands of Newcomers. Bloomberg.

Resolution 2803. 2025. UN Digital Library.

Salah, E., H. Tharwat, M. Hosny, and T. Abu Aoun. 2026. Gaza’s phase two arrives. Mada Masr.

Sheikheldin, G. H. 2025. Sudanese Resistance Committees and Insurgent Planning. Post- & Pre-Crisis Planning Conference.

UN OHCHR. 2024. UN experts deeply concerned over ‘scholasticide’ in Gaza. OHCHR.

UN OHCHR. 2025. UN experts appalled by relentless Israeli attacks on Gaza’s healthcare system. OHCHR.

UN Office of the Special Coordinator. 2014. Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism Fact Sheet.

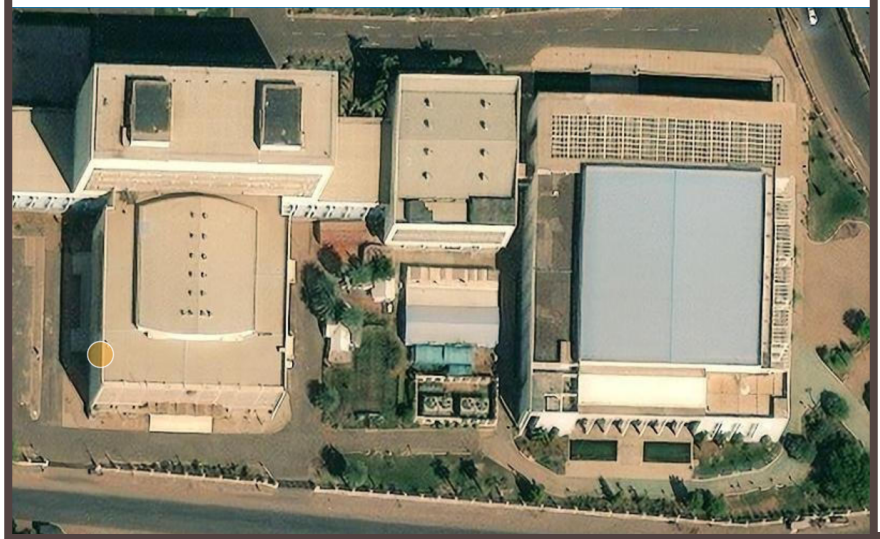
Young, E., and J. Ni. 2025. Marc Rowan helped draft the

Sudan Heritage Monitoring Map

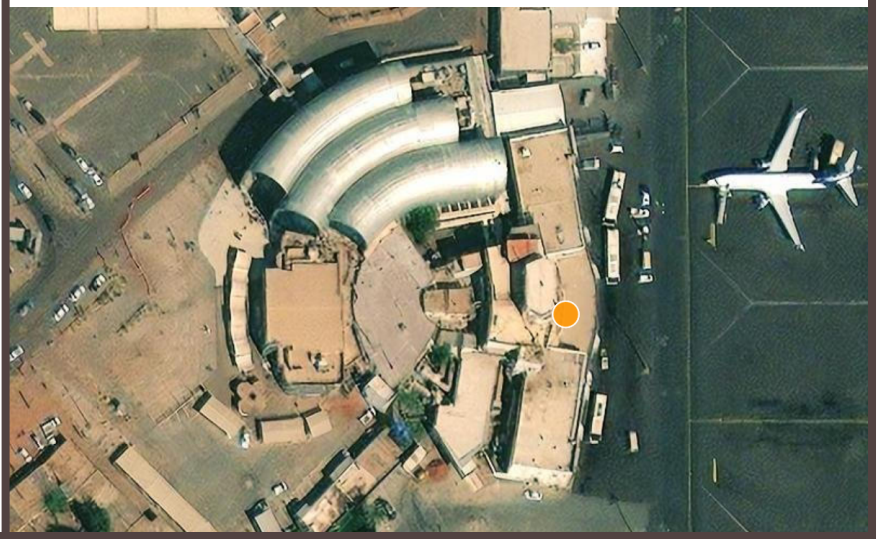
The Heritage Monitoring Map features an interactive platform showcasing Sudan's architectural landmarks, offering detailed information, photographs, and status updates on buildings of cultural and historical significance.

By Mai Abusalih, Mohieldin Gamal, Omer Gorashi, Salma Hani, and Dalia Omer

Note: Project in progress as situation in Sudan is ongoing.

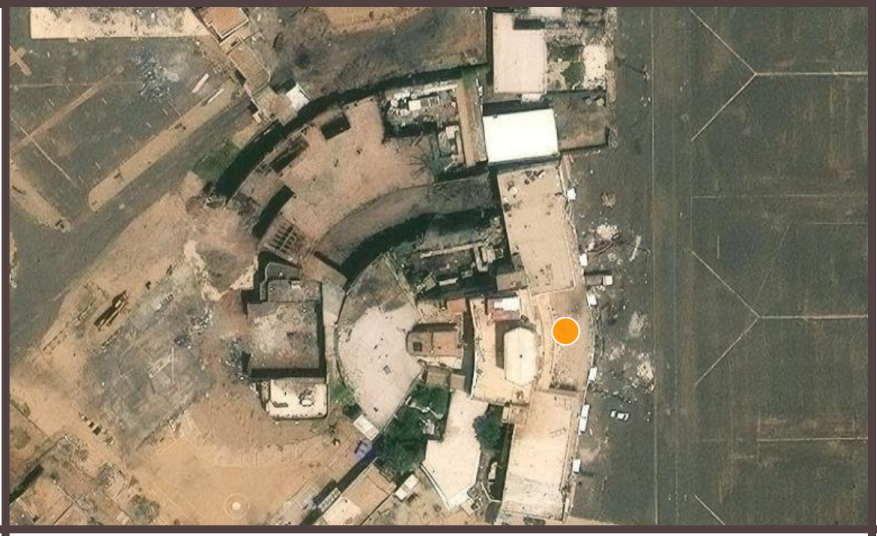


Friendship Hall & Presidential Hall, Khartoum



Khartoum International Airport





Architecture as an Archive: Documenting Sudan's Modern Built Heritage

Mai Abusalih, Mohieldin Gamal, Omer Gorashi, Salma Hani, and Dalia Omer

Modern Sudan Collective

Sudan Friendship Hall (1972)



Introduction:

The skyline of Khartoum offers a glimpse into Sudan's complex history as its architectural landmarks archive the political and social forces that have shaped its development. While there has been some recognition of the importance of colonial-era architecture—though not always coupled with proper conservation—buildings constructed post-independence (1956) have received little attention. This oversight is echoed in Sudan's cultural heritage protection laws on the national, regional, provincial, and institutional levels. The latter three adhere to the 1999 Ordinance for the Protection of Antiquities, which safeguards objects aged one hundred years or older. As a result, significant buildings constructed beyond that time-frame have been vulnerable to neglect and deterioration. To address this gap, the Modern Sudan Collective established the Sudan Chapter of Docomomo International in 2021, a non-profit organization aimed at the Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites, and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement.

Our documentation efforts encompass a wide range of tools, including collecting oral histories, archival research, photography, surveying, and writing. We actively seek collaboration with researchers from around the world as well as university students, photographers and individuals or institutions interested in Sudan's architecture. Defining modernity in Sudan is rooted within its historical and geographical context. To effectively preserve Sudan's modern architectural heritage, it is essential to develop an understanding of its unique characteristics and historical significance and how it evolved through time.

A Built History: Sudan's Socio-Political Development Through Architecture

The architectural style of the Modern Movement was first introduced in Sudan towards the end of the British colonial era, but it wasn't until independence that it became a prevalent style across Khartoum. Like other newly independent African nations, Sudan adopted Modernist architecture as a symbol of political transformation and progress, utilizing it as a tool for nation-building to signify a new era of self-determination. The socio-political development of Sudan is intertwined with the stories of how its buildings came to be constructed and their relationship to each other. Through our Collective's research, we were able to identify specific trends in architecture that took place between the 1950s and 1980s. These range from colonial legacies, stylistic influences, the geopolitics of the Cold War and Pan-Arab project, as well as innovations in building technologies and climatic solutions.
The development of these trends in architecture followed two tracks. In the first track, soft power architecture designed by foreign architects was introduced post-independence. The buildings constructed in this era reflected the shifting dynamics in Sudan's foreign relations during the Cold War. The American Aid programme for example came as a result of Ibrahim Abboud regime (1958-1964) signing an agreement for economic, technical and related assistance from the USA in 1958. Alexandre O. Petermuller, who founded the first private architectural office in Sudan, was commissioned to design many of the American Aid projects such as the Khartoum Senior Trade School (1964) –now the south campus of Sudan University of Science and Technology (Osman 2005). Petermuller also designed the Sudan National Museum (1971) that was supported by the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia launched by UNESCO in 1959, which received contributions from the USA, UK and France.

In a complete political shift, Jaafar Nimery's May regime (1969-1985) adopted socialist policies in its early days and developed diplomatic ties to the Soviet Union and China. The soft power architecture that came as a product of these bilateral relationships merged between aesthetic sensibilities of the architects from these countries as well as some environmental-awareness to Khartoum's context. The Friendship Hall (1976) for example was established as a part of a series of developmental projects executed and funded by the Chinese (Ali and Nimeiri 1976). The building is characterized by the use of sun-shading devices to control the amount of light and heat. This trend continued as North Korea also constructed the Youth and Children's Palace (1977), and the Socialist Republic of Romania constructed the Parliament/National Assembly (1978) in Omdurman. The latter project features sun breakers installed at repetitive intervals that provide shade as well as give the building a brutalist aesthetic resembling projects in Romania (Stroe 2022). Nimery later revised his politics and began to shift towards the Western bloc. The construction of several projects archive this transitional moment including the American Hilton Hotel (1977) and the South Korean Friendship Palace Hotel (1978) (Kim 2002).

In the second track of trends in architecture, the profession became Sudanized with the establishment of the Department of Architecture at the University of Khartoum in 1957. A new generation of formally educated Sudanese architects would go on to shape the country's built environment. El-Amin Muddathir, who graduated in 1961 as a part of the first batch of architects, worked in Petermuller's office during the design of Sudan National Museum and was later commissioned to design the museum's entrance pavilion (Abusalih 2022). Muddathir designed some extensions of the University of Khartoum, most notably the Faculty of Veterinary Science. He also collaborated with Miles Danby–who was teaching at the Department of Architecture at the time–in designing the Home Science building in the Faculty of Agriculture as well as the Sudan Commercial Bank Headquarters (1967) (Kultermann 1999). Muddathir founded the first Sudanese architectural private office, which played a crucial role in nurturing the next generation of architects.

When the Pan-Arab project promoted Sudan as a potential breadbasket for food security in the Arab world, Arab funded projects came to be built by Sudanese architects. Capital rich Arab na-





Sudan National Museum (1971). Photo from Modern Sudan Collective

tions like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were looking to invest in countries with natural resources like Sudan (Ahmed 1995). As a result, Abdalla Sabbar was commissioned to design the headquarters of the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID) (1985). The AAAID's distinct brutalist aesthetic was achieved through its modular interior and the use of sandblasted precast-concrete for the exterior cladding (Bahreldin, Osman, and Osman 2021). At the time, Sabbar was working as an advisor to the Government of Kuwait and had designed the Embassy of Kuwait in Sudan (1976), as well as in Lebanon and Bahrain (Hasan 2022). Sabbar, who graduated in 1964 from the Department of Architecture, used Arabo-Islamic elements in designing the embassy which features arches and sand cement plaster that resembles local architecture. Comparably, KARPLEN Consultants also constructed the Sudanese Kuwaiti Center (1974) for the Sudanese Kuwaiti Building and Construction Company, which consists of four towers that feature modular precast concrete sunbreakers repeated throughout the facades (Abusalih 2024).

Sudan's strategic location as a bridge between the Arab world and Sub-Saharan Africa made it a prime location for an investment hub. Consequently, Khartoum was designated the headquarters of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (1980) which was designed by Abdelmoniem Mustafa. The bank's official objective was strengthening economic, financial and technical cooperation between the Arab and African regions and for the embodiment of Arab-African solidarity (BADEA n.d.). Abdelmoniem Mustafa, who is undoubtedly the most renowned Sudanese architect, was interested in innovating climate-control techniques in his buildings. He designed recessed windows that would allow indirect light into the bank's interior, resulting in a facade that resembles stacked cubes. Mustafa contributed significantly to Khartoum's architectural visual language most famously captured in El-Ikhwa Building (1971) with its iconic terraced balconies that exemplify his ability to create dynamic spatial interplay between solid and void (Akcan 2022). These buildings, among many others, collectively influence our contemporary understanding of Sudan's post-independence history and the process of nation building. Their significance lies in their ability to serve as an archive to pivotal events that have shaped our present as well as highlight the role of architecture as a medium for expressing cultural, social, and political ideas. The recent outbreak of armed conflict in April 2023 has further heightened the urgency of documenting and conserving Sudan's architectural heritage which has already suffered damage in the crossfire.

Heritage Monitoring Efforts:

In response to the on-going destruction during the war, the Modern Sudan Collective launched the Heritage Monitoring Map, a digital archive designed to document the status of architectural heritage. This interactive map serves as a repository of detailed information about culturally and historically significant buildings overlaid on Google Maps. It provides locations, names of architects, construction dates, and up-to-date information on the condition of these landmarks, including any damage sustained during the war. Additionally, direct links to the Modern Sudan Collective website are provided to give some background on their historical significance.

The escalating conflict necessitated the expansion of our heritage monitoring effort from 20th century modernism to encompass older colonial architecture from the 1800s. A Modernity Survey was developed to identify buildings of significance based on criteria such as age, technological innovation, civic, cultural, social, historical, and aesthetic value. The map currently showcases a preliminary survey of over 80 sites, however, further research is needed to cover a wider range of landmarks, particularly those located outside of Khartoum. The development of this map is intended to support efforts to conserve heritage in the challenging context of ongoing conflict. As Khartoum continues to be an active war zone, our heritage monitoring relies primarily on online sources, social media, satellite images and news coverage. At the time of writing this article, significant destruction and damage to important architectural landmarks has already been documented (Hamid et al. 2023). In the first few weeks of the war, video and photographic footage showed fire damage to the Sudanese Kuwaiti Centre and the AAAID. Satellite images of the National Museum reveal damage to two of the external shelters that house some of the recused temples from Nubia (Gunter-Bassett et al. 2023). Pre-independence buildings, including the Omdurman Municipality (Ayin Network 2024) and the Ministry of Finance, also sustained damage during the conflict. The Republican Palace was particularly hard-hit, suffering two instances of damage that resulted in significant destruction of its interior, leaving only the external walls intact. The ongoing destruction of Sudan's heritage is a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of conflict on cultural landscapes. By documenting the damage and raising awareness, we hope to pave the way for the preservation and restoration of these cultural assets.

references on following page

References
(Architecture as an Archive)

Abusalih, Mai. 2022. Interview with El-Amin Muddathir. Phone interview, December 24.

Abusalih, Mai. 2024. Interview with Abdel Wahab Abdel Rahman, co-founder of KARPLEN Consultants. Zoom interview, May 26.

Ahmed, Ahmed A. 1995. "Kuwait Public Commercial Investments in Arab Countries." Middle Eastern Studies 31 (2): 293–306. JSTOR.

Akcan, Esra. 2022. "Decolonize or Redistribute? Abdel Moneim Mustafa and Mid-Century Modernism in Sudan." Canadian Centre for Architecture, May 9.

Ali, Ali Abdalla, and Gaafar M. Nimeiri. 1976. "The Sudan and the People's Republic of China: An Appraisal of Trade and Aid Relations." Sudan Notes and Records 57: 50–71. JSTOR.

Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA). n.d. "Introduction." BADEA official website.

Ayin Network. 2024. "Ayin Network captures the aftermath of the destruction in Omdurman city one year after the war." YouTube, April 29.

Bahreldin, Ibrahim Z., Omer Siddig Osman, and Amira Osman. 2021. "The Work of Abdallah Sabbar." In Architectural Guide Sub-Saharan Africa, vol. 4, edited by Philipp Meuser and Adil Dalbai, 94–96. DOM Publishers.

Gunter-Bassett, Madeleine, et al. 2023. "Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab Rapid Report: Damage to the Sudan National Museum." May 19.

Hamid, Ismail, Mahssin Yusef, Isber Sabrin, and Tomomi Fushiya. 2023. "The Second Report: Cultural Heritage Situations in Sudan." Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative (SHPI), November 2.

Hasan, Suha. 2022. Interview with Abdalla Mohamed Sabbar, founder of Technical Studies Bureau. Zoom interview, July 23.

Kim, Jung-Doo. 2002. "Korea-Sudan Relations During the May Regime." Journal of the Korean Association of African Studies 16: 5–36.

Kultermann, Udo. 1999. Contemporary Architecture in the Arab States: Renaissance of a Region. McGraw-Hill.

Osman, Omer S. 2005. "Sudanese Architecture around Independence." ArchiAfrika Conference Proceedings: Modern Architecture in East Africa around Independence. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, July 27–29, 53–58.

Stroe, Miruna. 2022. "The Parliament of Khartoum, Sudan: Cezar Lăzărescu and the Design Institute Carpați, 1972–1978." The Gift of Architecture: Spaces of Global Socialism and their Afterlives. Conference presentation, University of Manchester, June 13.

****

Docomomo
'Where Do We Go from Here?'

Reem Abada, Dalia Omer, Ammar Azouz, and Talal Afifi

The following excerpts were shared with us from Dalia Omer and Reem Abada, members of the Modern Sudan Collective and do_co,mo.mo who have been facilitating a number of sessions regarding Sudan's ongoing war focused through the lens of the question "where do we go from here?"

Dalia and Reem admit that they "do not yet have the answers [to this question]," instead hoping to "open up a space for reflection and exchange and thinking beyond the mere 'reconstruction' that we see elsewhere." The abstracts below are from speakers invited to their first session titled "Lexicon," during which participants asked "how language itself becomes a site of struggle."



"At another session, Ammar Azzouz, a panellist from Syria, offered a more hopeful perspective. He spoke about the experience of returning to his hometown after 14 years of exile and told us about an initiative of planting trees, called the Fig Trees, founded by Jaber Baker. Each planted tree becomes a living memorial for the life lost. Each tree is taken care of by the family of the disappeared and absent. The initiative recalls the lost lives in order not to forget, and to guide Syrians whilst moving forward towards the future. As we think about the work and future of rebuilding, we can't forget the lives lost. It is a process of rebuilding, but we have to hold space for trauma, loss, and grief in the wake of these acts of violence."

"This contribution to the Dialogue on Post-War Reconstruction in Sudan situates the challenges of rebuilding Sudan within a comparative, historically materialist framework. I take as a point of departure the German experience of the post-1945 era, particularly the process of denazification, to explore how reconstruction can become not merely a technical exercise but a deeply political and cultural project. In Sudan, the task ahead is not simply to restore what was destroyed. It requires critical engagement with the social and ideological forms that underpinned the descent into war. This includes interrogating the language of everyday life, the symbolic weight of urban architecture, and the institutional legacies that structure space and meaning. Reconstruction must therefore be both material and ideological: a process of dismantling the conditions of domination and dispossession, while imagining new forms of collective life. To rebuild Sudan is to construct a future that resists repetition-through new languages, new architectures, and new relations of production and solidarity."

We Rebuild to Restore: Towards a Code of Conduct for Ethical Reconstruction (Excerpt)

Manal Zia

Even as buildings still smolder and fresh bombardments disturb the graves, a flurry of 'reconstruction' plans are being drawn — from donors, municipalities, and by Palestinians dreaming amid the ruins. What does it mean to speak of reconstruction while people are still being buried beneath rubble? What does it mean to design futures for a place whose present is structured by erasure? Gaza exposes the fault lines of international planning, liberal humanitarianism, and the global development industry. In Gaza, planning is not apolitical. Humanitarianism is not neutral. And reconstruction is not recovery; it is often the continuation of war by other means.

The temporal sequencing assumed by most international recovery frameworks where destruction is followed by cessation of violence, political settlement, and then reconstruction does not hold. Gaza exists in a continuous cycle of bombardment, blockade, and rebuilding, where war is not an exception but a structural and spatial condition. This temporal distortion reflects what Mark Rifkin (2017) theorizes as "settler time" a colonial structuring of temporality that erases Indigenous presence and struggles by imposing narratives of closure, transition, and progress that never materialize for the colonized. As such, this contribution examines reconstruction as it unfolds under conditions of ongoing war, settler-colonial domination, and infrastructural siege. In this context, "recovery" is not a linear process but a politically charged and temporally fragmented struggle to assert life, rebuild housing and infrastructure, and reclaim spatial agency in the face of repeated erasure.

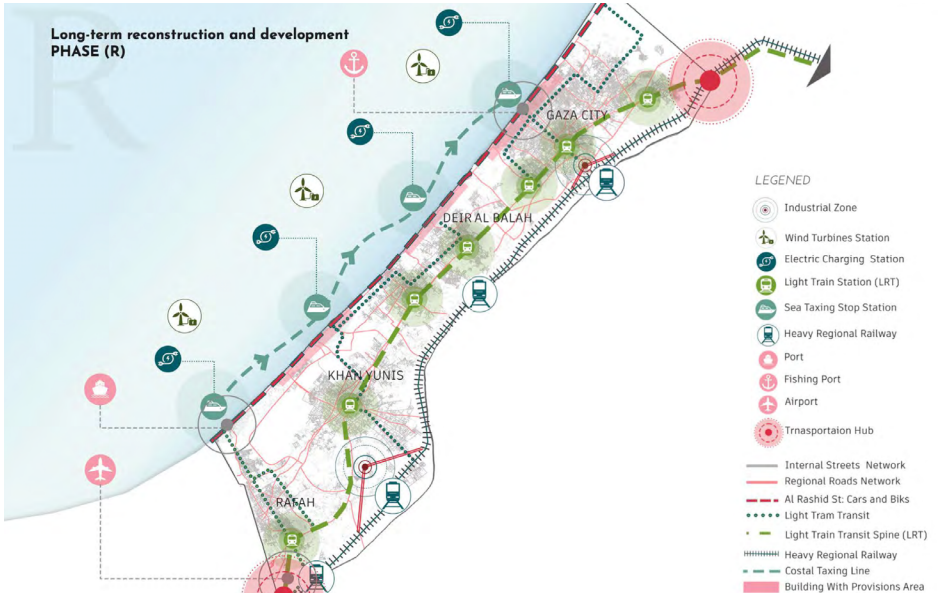
In the face of this fragmentation, imagination itself becomes an act of resistance. As Fedaa Alsoufi, a Gazan student at MIT, puts it: "To imagine a future that is just, sustainable, and inclusive is itself a radical act of defiance… Liberation means reclaiming the right to imagine a life where every Palestinian can live with dignity, joy, and possibility."

What does it mean to reconstruct after the deliberate unmaking of a place not by disaster or accident, but through genocide, siege, and settler colonialism? In the wake of domicide, the intentional erasure of homes, neighborhoods, and entire social worlds, rebuilding is not a neutral act. It is a moral and political decision about whose lives are valued, whose geographies are restored, and whose futures are authorized.

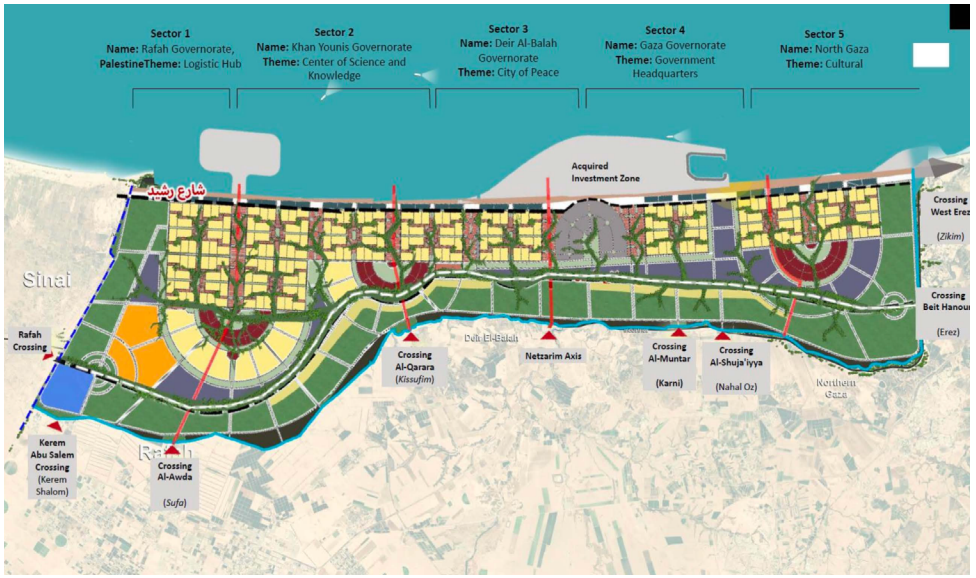
And layered into this devastation is another violence, ecocide — the systematic destruction of Gaza's ecological lifelines and life- worlds. Agricultural lands are cratered, citrus groves incinerated, water aquifers polluted beyond recognition. War poisons the future not only through trauma and displacement, but by seeping into the land itself; salting the soil, choking the air, and turning the sea against its people. Together, domicide, urbicide, and ecocide form a triad of annihilation: the home, the city, and the land itself.

The stakes of rebuilding are not abstract. Written in May 2025 as part of a broader research project on Gaza's reconstruction politics, this text places two of the dozen circulating proposals in direct tension; not for symmetry, but to illuminate the choice between justice and erasure: the Arab Proposal, which is likely to advance, and the Gaza Phoenix Plan, which must.

The Gaza Phoenix Plan authored by a collective of Palestinian planners, architects, and scholars in close partnership with Gazan municipalities and civil society organizations on the ground, centers the right of return and the recovery of Palestinian spatial agency. It links housing recovery to decolonial design, infrastructure to memory work, and spatial form to political vision. Beyond its political vision, the Gaza Phoenix Plan proposes the creation of decentralized "Community Reconstruction Units" (CRUs) embedded within neighborhoods to serve as the operational backbone of recovery. These CRUs are imagined as hybrid municipal-social structures that coordinate rubble clearance, emergency



Long-term reconstruction vision proposed in the Gaza Phoenix Plan.



Masterplan in the Arab Proposal.

shelter, psychosocial care, and participatory planning processes.

Crucially, the Gaza Phoenix Plan avoids the fantasy of a blank-slate future. It affirms spatial continuity by preserving neighborhood patterns, informal systems, and the embedded memory of place. It does not romanticize informality but treats it as a resilient infrastructure, one that withstood siege and collapse, and through which survival was made possible. In doing so, it honors material autonomy. Its phased framework — Emergency, Stabilization, and Reconstruction — reflects not only logistical pragmatism under siege but a refusal to suspend life until peace arrives. Its vision is insurgent and reparative: to rebuild is to refuse erasure, to name displacement, and to design toward autonomy. It plans within war, not after it.

While the Gaza Phoenix Plan does not provide a fully-fledged masterplan with technical implementation details, this absence is not a shortcoming. Rather, the document deliberately presents itself as a flexible reconstruction framework or strategy, developed during the war (starting in December 2023). This intentional under-specification reflects the plan's function as a political and ethical foundation not as a donor-facing execution document or blueprint. It leaves space for detailed planning to emerge later — when conditions on the ground stabilize and when Gazan institutions, rather than external actors, can define the parameters of rebuilding.

The Arab Proposal invokes the scale of statecraft — an approach that centers the authority, coordination and performative power of states in shaping postwar futures. Framed through intergovernmental cooperation, it projects reconstruction as a top-down act of regional benevolence, rebuilding Gaza through monumental infrastructure, ports, and capital-intensive public works. The proposal places Arab governments particularly Egypt at the center of coordination. It calls for a consortium of Arab states to lead reconstruction, supported by an international trust fund and executed through centralized planning bodies. Gaza is positioned less as a space of resistance or autonomy, and more as a political object to be stabilized for regional order.

The proposal's viability is enhanced by diplomatic momentum and its alignment with Western donor interests, particularly in sidelining Hamas in favor of a technocratic Palestinian Authority. Yet its governance model is rigidly centralized, its aesthetic uniformly modernist, and its urban logic abstracted from local rhythms. In doing so, it risks repeating the colonial pattern of designing over, and not with, Palestinian communities. More critically, the proposal fails to address Gaza's psychological and communal wounds. There is no integration of trauma-informed design, participatory governance, or cultural continuity. Instead, modular housing typologies and uniform spatial grids replace the dense, resilient fabrics of refugee neighborhoods transforming spaces of resistance into zones of surveillance and control.

Further critique comes from Forensic Architecture (2025), revealing that the plan perpetuates elements of Israel's "designed destruction" of Gaza including buffer zones, security corridors, and raid routes. Israel's historical practice of destroying the dense, intricate fabric of Palestinian refugee camps and neighborhoods, advantageous for local populations against occupier surveillance, is effectively endorsed by another, the Egyptian Plan. The introduction of uniform housing blocks proposed by the Arab Proposal would instead create easily monitored and invadable spaces. The proposal explicitly integrates Israel's buffer zones, which since October 2023 have involved the systematic erasure of historically significant neighborhoods such as Jabalia and Shuja'iyya, rezoning them for agriculture, investment, and industry further entrenching spatial injustice. The Egyptian Plan also incorporates Israel's newly created security corridors and raid routes, structurally facilitating Israeli military incursions and the fragmentation of the Gaza Strip.

As an outsider-planner, an Indian Muslim woman educated in the Global North, working in solidarity with Palestine, I approach Gaza not as a site for intervention but as a site of listening, refusal, and accountability. My role is not to author futures on behalf of others, but to unlearn imperial planning logics and amplify frameworks that emerge from within. This writing is grounded in critical humility. I do not presume to speak for Palestinians, but to speak with them, and to speak to those who hold power over planning agendas. I engage with Gaza as a site that lays bare the failures and blind spots of international planning paradigms, including those embedded in my own training. This research aims to make space for more just, reparative, and trauma-informed modes of reconstruction that do not reproduce the erasures they claim to undo.

What follows is a Code of Conduct for Ethical Reconstruction: not a universal toolkit, but rather a set of principles rooted in Palestinian liberation, spatial justice, and trauma-informed planning. This code emerges in direct refusal of the frameworks that have dominated post-war reconstruction in Gaza and elsewhere: tabula rasa masterplans, technocratic humanitarianism, and donor conditionalities that perpetuate governance without sovereignty. It insists that ethical reconstruction must be an act of reclamation, not only of land and infrastructure but of narrative, memory, and authorship.

Manal Zia is an urbanist and architect focused on post-conflict reconstruction, displacement, and spatial justice. A recent MIT graduate, her work bridges design and development through a liberation praxis. She is the founder of Zariya, a nonprofit supporting Muslim immigrant and refugee women in the U.S.

I. Recognize Destruction as Violence, Not Collateral Damage

II. Ground Reconstruction in Palestinian Agency and Sovereignty

III. Reject Tabula Rasa Planning and Spatial Normalization
IV. Demand Accountability from International Actors

V. Refuse Technocratic Neutrality and Depoliticized Aid

VI. Center Political Memory and Cultural Continuity in Urban Form

VII. Center Psychosocial Recovery in Spatial Design

VIII. Enforce Legal Protection and Create Mechanisms for Accountability

For full list of principles and references, see article in Dignified Life: Outliving Possible Ecologies.

"If I had the chance to rebuild Gaza, I would start with the schools and hospitals not just because they are essential, but because they represent our right to learn, to heal, and to exist with dignity. Every destroyed classroom is a stolen future, and every damaged hospital is a wound that continues to bleed. Rebuilding these spaces means rebuilding hope itself. But Gaza is not just buildings, it is its people, it's the stories of mothers who carry strength in silence, children who dream even under rubble, and youth who refuse to give up. When I imagine Gaza in 10 years, I don't only see concrete rising. I see a generation rising, proud and free. I hope that one day we live without checkpoints on our dreams, without fear in our homes, and without our voices being silenced. We deserve a future where dignity is not a wish, but a right. A Gaza rebuilt not just in structure, but in soul."

- Waleed Waheed Abd el Wahab (MIT SPOCs1 student from Gaza)

Those Who Pass Between Fleeting Words

Mahmoud Darwish
September 25, 1988

O those who pass between fleeting words
Carry your names, and be gone
Rid our time of your hours, and be gone
Steal what you will from the blueness of the sea and the sand of memory
Take what pictures you will, so that you understand
That which you never will:
How a stone from our land builds the ceiling of our sky.

O those who pass between fleeting words
From you the sword -- from us the blood
From you steel and fire -- from us our flesh
From you yet another tank -- from us stones
From you tear gas -- from us rain
Above us, as above you, are sky and air
So take your share of our blood -- and be gone
Go to a dancing party -- and be gone
As for us, we have to water the martyrs' flowers
As for us, we have to live as we see fit.

O those who pass between fleeting words
As bitter dust, go where you wish, but
Do not pass between us like flying insects
For we have work to do in our land:
We have wheat to grow which we water with our bodies' dew
We have that which does not please you here:
Stones or partridges
So take the past, if you wish, to the antiquities market
And return the skeleton to the hoopoe, if you wish,
On a clay platter
We have that which does not please you: we have the future
And we have things to do in our land.





O those who pass between fleeting words
Pile your illusions in a deserted pit, and be gone
Return the hand of time to the law of the golden calf
Or to the time of the revolver's music!
For we have that which does not please you here, so be gone
And we have what you lack: a bleeding homeland of a bleeding people
A homeland fit for oblivion or memory
O those who pass between fleeting words
It is time for you to be gone
Live wherever you like, but do not live among us
It is time for you to be gone
Die wherever you like, but do not die among us
For we have work to do in our land
We have the past here
We have the first cry of life
We have the present, the present and the future
We have this world here, and the hereafter
So leave our country
Our land, our sea
Our wheat, our salt, our wounds
Everything, and leave
The memories of memory
O those who pass between fleeting words!



@studioAKA

Reconciliation in the Every-dayness

Fauwaz Khan

This is the story of Rwanda. A country that people describe in many ways. The land of a thousand hills. The Singapore of Africa. One of the cleanest and safest countries on the continent. Yet there is another story, one that Rwanda is perhaps most known for and one it cannot fully step away from: the 1994 genocide. It was called the 'hundred days of killing', one of the worst of its kind, a period wahen neighbors turned against neighbors, families turned against each other, and violence unfolded in everyday places such as homes, schools and churches. But what came after is remarkable. Rwanda approached the task of rebuilding and reintegrating its society by relying not only on mechanisms of justice but on a deeper insistence on unity (Clark, 2010).

I visited Rwanda in 2023, volunteering with a Catholic Church that worked towards helping people heal from the wounds of the genocide. It opened me to see how personal the idea of healing can be, and how deeply rooted some of these efforts need to remain even after thirty years. Healing as a nation and healing as individuals are two different challenges, and Rwanda has tried, in its own way, to address both. There are understandable critiques about power and the politics of remembrance, but this piece turns to the smaller lessons, the ones that are felt within communities and in the lived efforts to rebuild their lives. It is in these everyday spaces and interactions that I first began to think about reconciliation, a term often used in policy and in research on Rwanda's post-genocide rebuilding.

But reconciliation itself is understood differently across Rwanda. For some, it takes the form of retributive justice that prioritizes accountability. For others, it is forgiveness and the acceptance of living

together again. For many perpetrators, it is the act of confessing and telling the truth about their actions. The State, meanwhile, often frames reconciliation as peaceful coexistence and political stability (Clark, 2010). Each of these captures a part of the challenge of defining the term, yet they also reveal two broad ways of experiencing it. One is shaped by state-led programs and narratives. The other lives within people and their daily attempts to rebuild relationships and trust.

Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) places strong emphasis on transferring ownership of its initiatives to communities, yet it is built on an absolute idea of truth (Amstutz, 2006). It frames the past through a singular, state-led narrative. In this narrative, the lines between victims and perpetrators are drawn clearly, leaving little room for the more complicated experiences that unfolded, including those of Hutu who were also killed and who, as Wendel (2022) notes, fall under the category of unrecognized victims. By directing reconciliation through one master narrative, the state narrows the space for plural memories, for contradiction, and for a more open expression and engagement with the past (Amstutz, 2006).

And so, dialogue and expression become central for any real healing to take place. One of the earliest sparks of open conversation began in households around 2004, at a time when many communities still carried a sense of muted-ness. Almost ironically, given how radio was once used to fuel hate during the genocide, it was again through radio that a different kind of message began to spread. A fictional soap opera called Musekeweya offered a parallel world that mirrored the tensions, fractures and possibilities within Rwandan society but played them out at a slight distance. Set in two villages separated by a marshland, the story unfolded like an alternate mirror, familiar enough to recognize yet fictional enough to allow people to speak about it. As Staub (2014) note, Musekeweya aimed to support healing by promoting active bystandership and countering the dynamics that once enabled violence. What it managed to do was open up conversations inside homes and communities, allowing people to talk about conflict, fear, trust and the idea of living together again. It also encouraged different social groups to interact and engage in shared, meaningful projects, something that was beginning to take shape across Rwanda at the same time.

Umuganda and N'ubwiyunge are two such examples of shared labor that were unfolding across Rwanda. Umuganda is a monthly practice where community members come together to work on local projects, a way of rebuilding social trust and shared responsibility through collective effort. N'ubwiyunge takes place through community collaborations in agriculture, basket weaving and other cooperative activities that bring people side by side. Both helped to create two important conditions. The first, as Staub (2014) notes, is that real contact is essential for the beginnings of positive connection, and these spaces brought victims and perpetrators into the same work. The second is quieter but deeply significant. When people worked together, they spoke to one another. Women weaving baskets talked as their hands moved, farmers exchanged stories in the fields and neighbors who had once kept their distance found a way to sit in the same space again. In these small conversations, reconciliation began to take shape.

Amid this process of reconciliation, the Catholic Church occupies a complex and powerful position. Rwanda is among the most Christian nations in Africa, with more than ninety percent of its population identifying as Christian, and the Church has long shaped education, social life and political thought through its wide network of parishes, schools and aid centers. Yet its legacy is also fraught. During the genocide, sections of the clergy and laity participated in or remained complicit in acts of violence, a history that Longman (2001) and others have documented. This gives the Church a dual responsibility to acknowledge its own failures and to help guide a broader reformation of the country's moral and cultural life. As one of the primary teachers of morality in Rwanda, the Church now carries the potential to support individuals and communities in moving toward inner healing. It does this not through state policy or legal frameworks but through spiritual pedagogy, retreats, confessions and small rituals of repentance that try to repair relationships and encourage honest expression.

Rebuilding a society after a genocide is often described through national strategies, memorials and large-scale reforms, but much of it takes place in smaller, quieter ways. It unfolds in the routines people return to, in the shared tasks that bring neighbors into the same space again, and in the conversations that slowly reopen after years of silence. These everyday gestures reveal a different side of reconciliation, one that is fragile but deeply human. For planners and practitioners working in post-conflict settings, it becomes important to pay attention to this level of life, to understand the social norms, relationships and community structures that already carry the work of healing. Rather than imposing new frameworks, rebuilding requires a sensitivity to what is present, to the ways people relate to each other and to place. It is in this everyday practice that the foundations of a more honest and lasting reconciliation can begin to take shape.

References

Amstutz, M. R. (2006). Is reconciliation possible after genocide? A theoretical and historical examination. Journal of Church and State, 48(3), 485–516. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/48.3.485

Clark, J. N. (2010). National unity and reconciliation in Rwanda: A flawed approach? Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 28(2), 137–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001003736793

Longman, T. (2001). Church politics and the genocide in Rwanda. Journal of Religion in Africa, 31(2), 163–186. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006601X00084

Staub, E. (2014). The challenging road to reconciliation in Rwanda: Societal processes, interventions and their evaluation. Cambridge University Press.

Wendel, D. (2022). Trauma heritage as memory justice: Sites and dilemmas in Rwanda. Journal of Social Archaeology, 22(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/14696053211069164

Fauwaz Khan is a M.S. Urban Planning Candidate at Columbia University, Class of 2027.



Quaran Ahmad, “I am Free”



Maya Koehn-Wu

Quaran Ahmad is a MUP Candidate at NYU Wagner, Class of 2027.

Maya Koehn-Wu is a MUP Candidate at NYU Wagner, Class of 2026.

Palestine in the Cloud: The Construction of a Digital Floating Homeland (Excerpt)

Hanine Shehadeh

The Gilboa Prison, considered "more secure than the Bank of Israel's safe," is located in the north of occupied Palestine, and was built during the Second Intifada to contain and confine Palestinians during their uprisings. Settler-colonial studies have drawn attention to the ongoing colonial enterprise of incarcerating natives as a form of erasure. These studies have revealed how historical practices such as slavery, assimilation, segregation, exploitation, and violence are reproduced through the modern penal system (Razack 2015; Baldry et al. 2012). On 6 September 2021, six Palestinian prisoners managed to escape the Zionist settler colony's most heavily guarded fort. Equipped with spoons, the prisoners dug a tunnel of several meters from under their cell's toilet. The tunnel led to a road outside the prison. While their escape sparked a massive manhunt by Israeli security forces, for the 6 days after their escape, Palestinians prayed for the safety of the prisoners and praised them as heroes.

The online conversation quickly turned to discussions on how to protect and save these heroes, becoming a national concern. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank went out in celebration, handing out candies on the streets during a day of "joy and pride, when Palestinians have their heads held high" (Times of Israel 2021), as the picture of six Israeli soldiers standing above the hole from which the prisoners emerged was circulating with sarcastic remarks under the hashtag #FreedomTunnel. Online users expressed their admiration for their resilience and, under the hashtag #ShawshankRedemption, comparisons to the classic American movie were made. The spoon emoticon quickly became a powerful symbol of resistance and freedom on social media. Thousands of people added it to their profiles, names, and bios, signaling their support for the escaped Palestinian prisoners. Arab Idol Mohammed Assaf tweeted to his 3.2 million followers a picture of six birds flying out of the prison tunnel with the text: "Freedom has an unsatiable taste. May God protect our prisoners and save them from the jailer's oppression, sooner rather than later." (Assaf 2021) The escape was not only a significant morale boost for Palestinians, but it also shattered Israel's image of strength and invincibility in the face of an occupied people fighting for their freedom.

Across social media, Palestinians in Gaza shared virtual maps to help the escapees navigate to safety in the Gaza Strip, which is considered a haven from Israeli occupation forces. Meanwhile, Palestinians in Israel left water and food outside their homes in case the prisoners needed supplies. In the West Bank, people came together to protect the two prisoners who managed to reach the city of Jenin. However, despite these hopes and efforts, the Palestinian Authority's network of agents, who collaborate with Israel under the guise of security coordination, were instructed to find the prisoners and hand them over to Israeli authorities. Nonetheless, the escape of the six prisoners could not be contained by structure, as much as structures believe they forcibly can harness the bodies and the affects that exceed them. When the captured escapees were brought to court in Nazareth, tens of 1948 Palestinians were chanting: "Huriya, Huriya, la 'Abtalna Huriya" (Freedom, Freedom, To our Heroes, Freedom), in defiance of Israel's oppressive measures (Eye on Palestine 2021).

Although the prisoners did not have access to the Internet, for Palestinians the Internet was the parallel space for collective nation building around the prisoners' escape and ultimately their own escape from settler-colonial confinement. This dialogic structure allowed the participation of community members experiencing similar confinement in different "cages". Subjected to quotidian racialized and violent experiences, they shared the same aspirations of putting an end to Israeli settler colonialism.

On 11 May 2022, Israeli forces shot and killed renowned Al Jazeera veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was covering Israeli raids in the occupied Palestinian city of Jenin. News of Abu Akleh's killing, along with live footage of the moment Israeli forces opened fire, spread rapidly across social media, shocking a region that recognized Abu Akleh, a war correspondent, as an icon of Palestinian resistance. The Israeli occupation authorities immediately denied responsibility, attempting to contain local outrage and international outcry. As Shereen Abu Akleh's body was transported from Jenin to Jerusalem for burial, Palestinians poured out into the streets to bid her farewell. Her convoy stopped in almost every city and village along the way as people wanted to pay their respects. Her body became a symbol of Palestinian pride and aspirations for freedom, both online and offline. Tens of thousands of Palestinians, including those with Israeli citizenship, participated in her funeral procession, with Palestinian flags covering the skies of Jerusalem. This scene, unprecedented since the establishment of the Zionist state 75 years ago, was quickly dubbed the "Liberation March" on Palestinian social media. In the process of deconstructing and reconstructing settler-colonial conceptions and boundaries, Palestinians were able to create a space in which postcolonial subjects can belong, even as they move through and reside in geopolitical spaces that would marginalize or exclude them. Over the past two decades, Palestinians have gradually constructed a virtual floating homeland, which enables them to redefine their homeland beyond colonial imaginaries and boundaries. The realm of cyber-activism has provided Palestinians with modes of resistance against colonial subjugation. This digital floating homeland allows for the envisioning of a decolonized relationship with the land, which guides their new online and offline activism. Through new media technologies, the digital floating homeland "Palestine in the Could" is the entire homeland that was stolen from them, the virtual space where Palestinians can meet, exchange, talk, share trauma, and find ways to heal and reconnect.

Hanine Shehadeh is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Humanities at New York University (NYU) in Abu Dhabi. She is a Research Associate at the Maroun Samaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon. She is the cofounder of the "Fighting Erasure: Digitizing Gaza's genocide" project.

Read the full article here.

A Poem for Gaza' (2011)

by Remi Kanazi

I never knew death until I saw the bombing of a refugee camp
Craters filled with disfigured ankles and splattered torsos
But no sign of a face, the only impression a fading scream
I never understood pain
Until a seven-year-old girl clutched my hand
Stared up at me with soft brown eyes, waiting for answers
But I didn't have any
I had muted breath and dry pens in my back pocket
That couldn't fill pages of understanding or resolution

In her other hand she held the key to her grandmother's house
But I couldn't unlock the cell that caged her older brothers
They said, we slingshot dreams so the other side will feel our father's presence
A craftsman
Built homes in areas where no one was building
And when he fell, he was silent
A .50 caliber bullet tore through his neck shredding his vocal cords
Too close to the wall His hammer must have been a weapon
He must have been a weapon
Encroaching on settlement hills and demographics

So his daughter studies mathematics
Seven explosions times eight bodies
Equals four Congressional resolutions
Seven Apache helicopters times eight Palestinian villages
Equals silence and a second Nakba
Our birthrate minus their birthrate
Equals one sea and 400 villages re-erected
One state plus two peoples...and she can't stop crying
Never knew revolution or the proper equation
Tears at the paper with her fingertips

Searching for answers
But only has teachers
Looks up to the sky and see stars of David demolishing squalor with hellfire missiles

She thinks back words and memories of his last hug
before he turned and fell
Now she pumps dirty water from wells,
while settlements divide and conquer
And her father's killer sits beachfront with European vernacular
She thinks back words, while they think backwards
Of obscene notions and indigenous confusion

This our land!, she said
She's seven years old
This our land!, she said
And she doesn't need a history

Remi Kanazi is a Palestian-American poet, writer, and editor based in New York City. He is the author of Poetic Injustice: Writings on Resistance and Palestine (2011), a collection of a diverse mix of unabashed resistance poems that reflect searing indictments of occupation, ethnic cleansing, and war in Palestine.



A Note on the Photographer, from *Driving in Palestine* at the People's Forum

Rehab Nazzal is a Palestinian-Canadian multidisciplinary artist and scholar.

At great personal and physical risk, between 2010 and 2020, Nazzal traveled throughout Palestine to create a body of work in photography and video so expansive that it may be one of the most consequential artistic productions of our time.

Nazzal employs a deliberate documentary approach to urgently record what many have been prevented from seeing and hearing: the images and sounds of Palestine under military occupation.

During the production of this work, Nazzal was shot in the leg by a sniper while photographing the Israeli Defense Forces in operation in Bethlehem, deploying their infamous "Skunk" truck that sprays a chemical compound made to smell like sewage and rotting corpses. Despite being an apparent target, she persisted with her project for another five years to document as much of the Palestinian land as she could. Tens of thousands of photographs, videos, and audio clips were captured, constituting not only an important oeuvre but also an invaluable archive.

The exhibition "Driving in Palestine" is a catalyst for political change, giving agency and legitimacy to the Palestinian cause, which is so often misconstrued or ignored by the mainstream media, which often succumbs to the excessive and unrelenting campaigns of the Zionist lobby, erasing any critical or truthful representation of the occupation.



Further Reading:

Alhessen, N. (2026, February 11). Burri Under Siege—How War Remade Everyday Life in a Sudanese Neighborhood. Middle East Research and Information Project.

Barclay, Ahmad, and Majd Al-Shihabi. "Palestine Open Maps." Jadaliyya.

Bahreldin, Ibrahim Z. 2025. "Khartoum before the War: The Public Spaces That Held the City Together." The Conversation, June 12.

Craze, J. (2025). Sudan's World War. NLR/Sidecar.

Driving in Palestine - Rehab Nazzal

Destruction and Reconstruction - DAAR

Dignified Life: Outliving Impossible Ecologies - The Mosaic Rooms

Fadel, M., & Sender, H. (2026, February 11). Rebuilding Gaza from the Ground Up. Middle East Research and Information Project.

Petti, A., & Sahour, B. (2016, June). Destruction and Reconstruction. DAAR.

Reconstruction. (2019, August). DAAR.

Revolution Neither Starts Nor Ends - Until Everyone is Free

Shehadeh, Hanine. 2025. "No Place for Ismael: Christian and Jewish Zionism and the Liquidation of the Gaza Ghetto." Political Theology 0 (0): 1–21.

Shehadeh, Lama. 2024. "Urban Planning and the Struggle Against Israel's Spatial Domination - MERIP." Middle East Research and Information Project, January 31.

Sheikheldin, Gussai H., and John F. Devlin. 2015. "Community Development as Double Movement." International Journal of Community Development 3 (1): 1–16.

Sheikheldin, Gussai H. 2015. "Ujamaa: Planning and Managing Development Schemes in Africa, Tanzania as a Case Study." Journal of Pan-African Studies, January 1.

Please contact wagnerplanner@nyu.edu with any questions about this publication or if you would like to be involved with future events.

Displaced Migrants Action Group

Urban Planning Student Association

The Wagner Planner
wagnerplanner@nyu.edu

NYU Wagner School of Public Service

