Chapter Seven

Beyond Compensation: the Post-War Reconstruction Battles of 'Aita al-Cha'b

Abir Saksouk Sasso, Nadine Bekdache and Ismael Sheikh Hassan

To Begin: A Village After A War

Occasional visits to Southern Lebanon two years after the end of the 2006 war show how the Southern Lebanese are still engaged in the reconstruction of their villages. The repercussions of Israel's 33-day bombardment of Lebanon are still shaping the everyday lives of the Southerners. In 'Aita al-Cha'b, unplanted gardens, unfinished flooring, painted houses still under construction, and the few renovated stone houses next to grandiose new architecture are just a few marks of post-war reconstruction in the physical space of the village.

After the war, 'reconstruction' and its related projects dominated the scene. But behind the term 'reconstruction' lay national schemes, politically-motivated funding sources, and pragmatic abstractions of losses in the form of damage assessment lists and numbers and letters marked on the walls of demolished homes. Reconstruction schemes introduced a particular reading of the village of 'Aita al-Cha'b; accordingly, the adopted process altered the meaning of 'home' by referring to a household as a 'unit'. It changed the architectural meaning of the house by disengaging its surface area from its typology. It also resulted in the construction of new houses on agricultural land to accommodate for the number of 'unit houses' that had emerged.

The power to redefine the village lay in the hands of new actors with both the capital for reconstruction and the political backup from the main political authorities in 'Aita. Decision-making became a materialization of this power and rendered reconstruction a disruptor of social geographies (Ghandour and Fawaz, 2008) rather than a process of recovery. Practiced as such, reconstruction adds yet another layer of distortion to that of the damage caused by the Israeli acts of destruction and aggression.

There is no doubt that post-war reconstruction conditions present particular political dynamics of their own that are urgent and exceptional and that introduce new actors and factors to the process of formation of space in every context. However, in 'Aita al-Cha'b, as in all the other villages of Southern Lebanon that were targeted and destroyed, the post-war condition also presents a continuum of important factors, tendencies and policies that existed prior to 2006 July War. We cannot ignore the fact that the emergency-conflict factor was the predominant climate in which 'Aita lived, developed, built and expanded over the past sixty years as it is a village located on one of the most volatile frontiers of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Nor can we ignore Israel's occupation of Southern Lebanon from 1978 until 2000, or the insignificant role of the Lebanese state as an actor in the recovery of 'Aita al-Cha'b after its liberation.

'Aita is predominantly a rural village and its economy is primarily agricultural. Its main produce is tobacco, which is planted on 80 per cent of its agricultural land. The village was a centre for the collection of tobacco by the Regie Company, excluding of course the period when tobacco-collecting was prohibited during the Israeli occupation.[1] The village lies on the range of 'Amel Mountains, just 300 metres from the Southern Lebanese border. It is a large village of 11,000 registered residents, of whom 6,000 are generally considered full-time residents. Even after the liberation in 2000 and the increase in construction by 50 per cent required to accommodate the returning inhabitants, 'Aita was able to preserve its agricultural identity; it is still one of the three largest tobacco growing villages in the previously occupied strip of Lebanese land (figure 7.1).

During the 2006 war, 'Aita al-Cha'b gained media and popular attention/ recognition as a 'resistance village' which managed to resist the occupation of the Israelis despite thirty-three days of bombardment and ground fighting. The Israeli Army tried to invade it from four entry points, and demolished an entire neighbourhood with its military D-9 Caterpillar bulldozers. The old village has a strategic military location and role in the country's history as it had previously resisted the Israeli occupation until 2000. It was from its dense urban fabric that the resistance fighters in 2006 sought shelter and

Figure 7.1. View of agricultural lands after a rainy day on 2 February 2007.

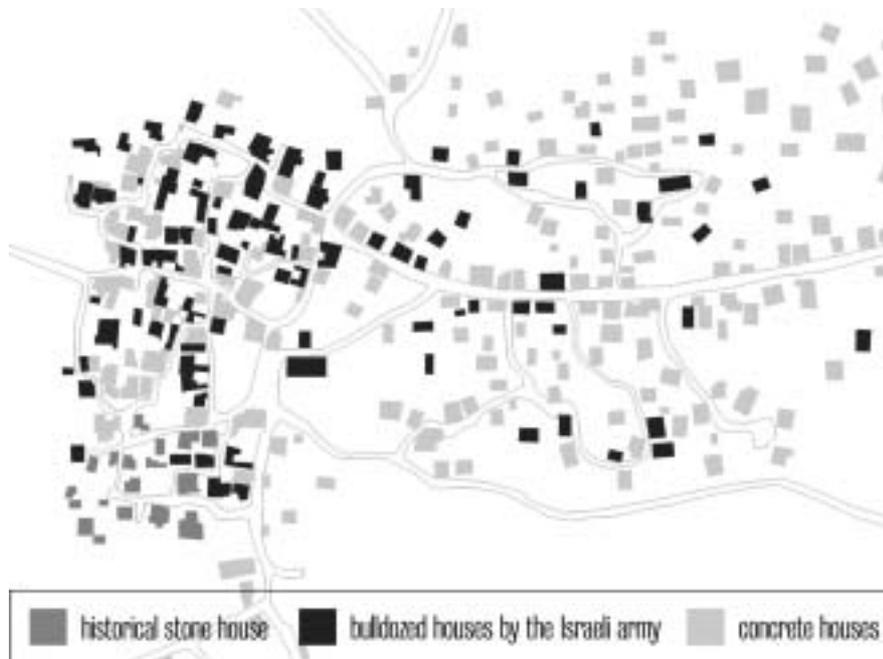historical stone house   bulldozed houses by the Israeli army   concrete houses

Figure 7.2. Map showing the historical houses and the bulldozed historical area.

conducted guerrilla urban warfare. The old village on the hilltop consists of two neighbourhoods, Hara Tahta and Hara Fawqa, both of which constituted the soul of the village for more than 250 years. Hara Tahta was mostly levelled to ground by Israeli bulldozers, while Hara Fawqa was harshly bombed (figure 7.2).

Israel, however, could not occupy 'Aita. The old town resisted the Israeli invasion and 'Aita became the symbol of pride despite the harsh wounds that it sustained. 'Aita lost all its public buildings, enduring drastic damage to its infrastructure and road networks: 600 of its 1,100 houses were destroyed. In addition, its historic core was bulldozed, and its agricultural harvest for the year was almost entirely lost (figures 7.3 and 7.4).
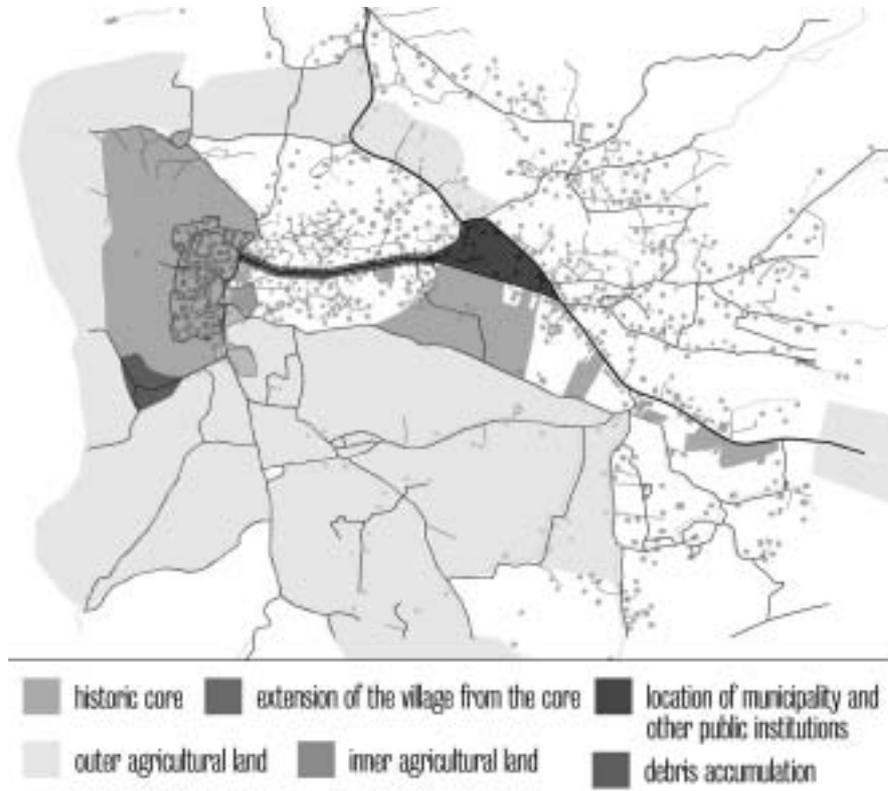
historic core | extension of the village from the core | location of municipality and other public institutions

outer agricultural land | inner agricultural land | debris accumulation

Figure 7.3. Map showing land use and zones.

Figure 7.4. Map showing heavily destroyed areas.

Story of the Authors...

With 'Aita

We met the Mayor of 'Aita al-Cha'b by coincidence towards the end of the war in the southern city of Tyre, when we both hid under a large tree while Israeli drones were hovering above. 'Most of the people have left 'Aita, only a few remain and they are injured and can not leave – the International Red Cross does not go there', said the Mayor. The Mayor travelled through the south, despite the fact that it was under constant aerial bombardment, seeking aid and supplies for those who remained and for displaced families of 'Aita. We exchanged phone numbers and parted when the drone moved elsewhere. We did not expect to meet again. (Samidoun Volunteer)

The Israeli aerial strikes on Lebanon were sudden and massive. They overwhelmed the Lebanese state, which did not have the capacity to respond to the emerging humanitarian crisis. A while elapsed before the international organizations mobilized to respond to the needs of over one million refugees who were steadily flowing into the capital city of Beirut. Various civil society initiatives and local NGOs hastily tried to fill the gaps left by the state. Dozens of volunteers eventually came together to form Samidoun,[2] a spontaneous initiative and network that worked on diverse relief and solidarity tasks both during and after the war.

At the end of the war, about thirty of Samidoun's volunteers decided to head to the southern border village of 'Aita al-Cha'b to help with the return of the villagers to their homes and to assist with the rebuilding of the village. The group was critical of contemporary attitudes and the practices of relief agencies and wanted to provide a different model of solidarity through their physical presence and everyday living in the village, using their diverse skills and resources to assist the village in the post-war period. We, the authors of this chapter, were among the first group of six volunteers to arrive to 'Aita al-Cha'b, and we decided to focus on the issue of reconstruction.

Given the scale of destruction and Lebanon's experience with post-war reconstruction, particularly in recent times,[3] it was difficult to conceptualize without the negative and predictable outcomes. Our decision to get involved stemmed from our faith in change. As citizens, we believed in playing an active role in the shaping of our built environment. As designers and planners, we drew on the practices of our disciplines and thereby reflected on our desire to be actively involved in the revival of Lebanon. Our presence in 'Aita al-Cha'b was, as such, an exploration of the relationship between us and our ability to influence the reconstruction process. It emerged from the conviction that by suggesting processes that were marginalized within the

agendas of the actors, we could posit new demands and challenge top-down practices. It was also, for our part, an investigation of the role of communities in a process of change and reconstruction.

On our arrival in 'Aita, on the night of 15 August 2006, the place was a ghost town. During the day, the residents would 'fix' their houses, dig out objects from beneath the rubble while others did their laundry and swept the floors. The owners of the first house we resided in, Ali KS and his wife, had another primary residence in Beirut. At night from their house, located on the hilltop near the historic core, we could see houses and buildings on both sides of the street which were barely distinguishable as homes for people. Their distorted, unrecognizable shapes and lack of any sign of human life gave the impression that they were an inseparable part of the natural landscape, as one would consider mountains or valleys.[4]

The next morning, we walked to the lower part of the historic core. There, we found eighteen piles of rubble in the place of former houses. They were razed one by one by an Israeli bulldozer which had entered 'Aita during the battle and made its way to the upper part of the historic core. The same bulldozer remained on display for weeks after the war, and the upper historic core, heavily bombed yet not bulldozed, stood witness to the bulldozer's inability to complete its task the moment the ceasefire took effect (figure 7.5*a* and *b*). The historic core became a fixed reference for almost all the work we carried out in 'Aita. It was from the historic core that we made sense of many issues and relationships while compiling the knowledge required for the intervention in the context of the village; and it was precisely this location that the Israelis wanted to eradicate.

Photographs, wedding videos and stories recollecting 'Aita just before the 33-day war helped us put together an image of the village, yet also raised the concern that we needed to guarantee continuity during the reconstruction process in order to maintain the village's historic past. When one of the owners of a historic stone house, Hajj AD, voiced fears that his house had been assessed and marked for demolition, the urgency of the matter was brought to our attention. Hajj AD had to deal with a local contractor who was hired to clear the rubble and who did not give him the time, or even the choice, to pack his belongings and bid his house farewell. This was when the nature of our work became clear.

While in 'Aita al-Cha'b, we tried to advocate transparency and participatory methods among the stakeholders in many ways; we documented the destruction of the village and its effects, and we sought to assist and contribute to local community demands and actions. Attempting to make the project more feasible, we volunteered to aid in reconstruction efforts

Figure 7.5*a* and *b*. Panoramic view of the bulldozed Hara Tahta and the Israeli D9 Caterpillar found in the area.

within the Municipality, pushing for a bottom-up approach and bringing the Municipality and the residents closer with regard to their demands for reconstruction.

Within the Municipality, a 'Reconstruction and Planning Unit' was founded and managed by our group. The permits required to allow construction to begin were, in principle, to be issued by the unit, especially those concerned with houses located in the historic core and the environs. We devised a system of urban guidelines which were negotiated with the members of each household. At many points we found ourselves designing the house through the members' involvement in the process, a process that helped convince them of the applicability of the guidelines to their needs. The 'Reconstruction and Planning Unit' also arranged public meetings between municipal representatives and the families. During those meetings, updates were given and concerns were raised. The Unit also tried to write a periodical pamphlet

(two pamphlets were issued and distributed) in which information about the status of reconstruction and matters in debate would be shared.

The Purpose and Content of the Chapter

We lived in 'Aita al-Cha'b for an entire year after the war. We made friends, were involved in the pains of war, and we understood our new context. By way of our involvement, we sensed how the village was burdened with reconstruction procedures and decisions instead of being supplied with the means to retrieve losses. In this chapter we will discuss the causes, workings and effects of this situation and its impact on the human and physical landscape of 'Aita. However, this chapter remains a personal account and interpretation of the war, the reconstruction process and 'Aita al-Cha'b. It does not attempt to speak on behalf of anyone other than ourselves. Yet we were affected, and our visions were shaped by the various stories and people in 'Aita. We inevitably became involved in the politics of reconstruction. The chapter is the outcome of this professional and political involvement.

This chapter focuses on how the logic behind the compensation scheme negatively affected all other aspects of the post-war recovery phase of 'Aita al-Cha'b. The purpose is to analyze the reconstruction process of 'Aita, primarily through the mechanisms put forth to fund it: the compensation process. The compensation scheme, including damage assessments, classification of aid and conditions for releasing funds dominated the reconstruction of the village. We will argue that such a compensation scheme was the primary tool in altering social, political and spatial relations in the village. As such, our main concern became more complex with the transformation of the post-war condition from what could have been a dignified recovery to a struggle over private interests and delayed compensation. The residents of 'Aita were denied a socially dignified means of recovering from war, and they sensed that the tools of recovery were taken from their hands.

Our aim then is to discuss the key contradictions in the compensation method and its tools of operation. This will be achieved by exposing the pragmatism attributed to a categorical normalized compensation scheme when it crosses with livelihoods in 'Aita al-Cha'b. We will present our argument in three sections: first, by setting the scene of the geographic, political and historic context of 'Aita al-Cha'b to better understand the post-war power dynamics that came to shape the reconstruction of the village; second, by exploring the procedural aspects of compensation within a broader discussion of the politics of aid; and third, by describing reconstruction practices, told mainly through stories from the field, and how they impacted the social and

spatial production of 'Aita at the level of the village, neighbourhood and household. Finally, we will attempt to assess our role and intervention within a wider reflection on war, activism and achievement.

Setting the Scene

The Border Condition

Some important historical events shed light on the current geographical condition of 'Aita el-Cha'b. According to Chibli Mallat (1988), two geographic signifiers in the region explain the troubles to come. First is the division of the historic Galilee region, of which 'Aita was a part. The partition drawn north of Haifa was arbitrary, and so in 1920, relatives suddenly found themselves under the authority of a state boundary that entailed different citizenships, allegiances, and fates (Hof, 1985). The second signifier is the 1948 French and British division of the area according to the 1916 Sykes-Picot plan.

'Aita al-Cha'b was among the villages that were abruptly attributed to a Lebanese state. Little did these villages know that existing social and economic relations with Palestine would be disrupted, specifically after the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This was made especially acute since numerous villages in Palestine also ceased to exist due to massacres and depopulation.[5]

Tantoura was one such village.[6] Abed Hussein Tantoura was a survivor who lived in silence, in the now border village of 'Aita whose people attributed Tantoura's name to his village of origin. He was appointed natour el mazrou'aat (guardian of the crops) and he lived through the break of the major social and economic relations between 'Aita and Palestinian villages.

The occupation of Palestine had major impacts on daily practices and familial/economic relations in 'Aita. According to many elderly people residing in the village, prior to 1948 some of 'Aita's major social and economic relations were with Palestinian villages and cities. For example, much of the stone for building houses was brought from Palestine, carried on camels. The women of 'Aita recount how Palestinian women taught them how to produce Laurel soap. The trade relations with the Palestinian city of Haifa were stronger than those of the nearer Lebanese city of Tyre (Interview with Hajje S, September 2006).

This division was aggravated by the economic marginalization of the whole region (Mallat, 1988). Though the area was destined to flourish, Southern Lebanon had overnight turned into a periphery. Aggravated by an international situation that placed it at the heart of the regional conflict,

Figure 7.6. Map showing location of 'Aita with neighbouring villages.

'Aita al-Cha'b was transformed into a very weak link. It was bordered on two sides by Israel and on the other two by the Lebanese villages of Rmaish and Qawzah.[7] (Figure 7.6) Today's old village of 'Aita, namely Hara Tahta and Hara Fawqa, used to be the perimeters of 'Aita until the early 1950s. The village could no longer extend west and then southwards, towards Palestinian towns after 1948, but rather east and northwards towards Jabal 'Amel and Beirut.[8]

As a result of these historical geographical conditions, 'Aita turned into a border village that was militarily vulnerable.

Power Changes and the Current Political Dynamic

The years 1976 and 1977 marked the beginning of Israel's control over Southern Lebanon. The people of 'Aita recount that these were the worst years: being trapped between the Israeli army to their south and villages under Saad Haddad's control to their north and west.[9] The 'Litani Operation' of 1978 marked the actual occupation of the South.[10] Local governance during the Israeli occupation was a form of '*Idara Madaniyya*' or civil administration imposed by the state of Israel. The members of this administration were residents of the village who were given privilege by the occupying to exercise power state on the rest of the residents; this exercise of power included curfews, circulating permits, taxes, confiscation of land to build institutions for the civil administration and so on.

'Aita al-Cha'b was liberated in 2000, with the liberation of Southern Lebanon. The Municipality of 'Aita al-Cha'b was established in 2004 after a considerable political battle between the different families and political parties spurred by the municipal body elect, which won with around 50 per cent of the votes. Some therefore perceived the win as not representative of the majority of the population (Interview with NM active resident in 'Aita, August 2006). The newly elected post-liberation Municipality did not address the many confiscated rights, including many families' land during the Israeli occupation. The social and economic setup which had been formed during the occupation was not acknowledged. These issues continued to haunt many of the social and political relations in the village. The stories during the 2004 municipal elections merely reflect this. The eventual exclusion of the local population's voice from the reconstruction process following the 2006 war therefore came as no surprise. It was necessary to understand the setup that developed during the occupation to appreciate the current social and political relationships and practices in the village.

The Mayor persistently postponed – week after week – our proposed town hall meeting with the residents of the historic core of the village. He finally succumbed to our repeated requests and promised to provide an electric generator for the town hall on the agreed upon evening. On that evening, the villagers eagerly arrived as the night fell on the village. Eventually it became painfully clear that the Mayor was not going to appear and talk to them nor provide the generator in hopes of cancelling such a meeting and avoiding facing a critical public. By candlelight, we presented to the frustrated homeowners what we knew about the latest developments of the reconstruction of the village.

It comes as no surprise that the war and the responsibilities of reconstruction were a shock to the unprepared, disputed upon, and fragmented Municipality. The Municipality of 'Aita al-Cha'b had at the time a weak and overwhelmed mayor, abandoned by a Municipal Council whose members were living and working outside 'Aita. These conditions made it easier for actors in the reconstruction process to bypass the Municipality throughout the decision-making process. The local community also bypassed the Municipality and opened channels with more influential actors, such as representatives from the donor country, political party members, or members of influential families within the village.

The manner in which the Municipality was undermined by all actors – the dominant political party, the donor country, and the NGO's – can be seen as a form undermining of the local community's participation. The mounting criticism and pressure that the local community put on the Mayor caused him to withhold information, as he feared and avoided confrontation and/

or discussion with the public. Hence the local community, with its complex history and inability to appreciate the public realm, was unable to participate in the project through the conventional and hierarchical methods of an elected body.

Indeed, the period of liberation between 2000 and 2006 constituted a missed opportunity for the re-establishment of the role of the state in the development of the formerly occupied South. However, Southern Lebanese villages and towns were still considered peripheral territories which lacked integration and which remained unregistered or surveyed in the state's Land Registry Department – a task we eventually had to undertake with a surveying engineer in 'Aita. Matters of decision-making and governance remained in the hands of powerful political parties, all monitored by the state with no complaint or substantial intervention.

Procedures and the Politics of Aid

In post-war 'Aita al-Cha'b, the main actors were the Municipality, which is controlled by Hezbollah, the donor country, which is the state of Qatar, and the local residents. Between the three actors, opinions circulated and fluctuated, as negotiations were divided between recognized Hezbollah representatives and isolated members from the 'grassroots' organizations. Members of these grassroots organizations arrived with the intention of allowing other voices to be heard and of exercising the right to examine privileged relations between Hezbollah and Qatar.[11]

The decision-making process of compensation schemes was implemented by the government. However, the damage assessments and distribution, which eventually proved to be crucial, involved actors beyond the Municipality and the donors, namely the Council of the South.[12] In fact, the negotiations surrounding the damage assessments were never institutionalized, but instead were revealed in public instances, largely after the intervention had been launched.

The nature of the procedures and conditions of compensation and damage assessment imposed by the abovementioned actors paved the way for the transformation of the post-war condition, but the recovery was far from dignified. The compensation mechanism, from initial categories, to surveys and to markings on the walls of affected houses, all tended to abstract space, living conditions and social structure into numbers and predisposed definitions. This was the most negative factor in the reconstruction project in 'Aita al-Cha'b. In the following sections, we will discuss how a home was defined as a housing unit, numbered, and how numbers were then sprayed on house walls.

Assessments

As described by a NRC-PRDU report, assessing the level of damage done to individual houses was one of the most important elements in the compensation process (Barakat and Zyck, 2008, p. 14). The government designated the following assessment method: to involve Council of the South as the formal body responsible for carrying out the assessments based on the designations of:

1. totally destroyed;
2. Partially destroyed;
3. severely damaged (*Ibid*., p.15).

However, in parallel, Jihad al-Bina', an NGO affiliated with Hezbollah, conducted another assessment. The damage assessments carried out by the Council of the South, whose criteria were preset by the Lebanese government, quantified each affected house into a number of units. A housing unit was loosely defined as 140 square metres of area that was to be registered in the name of an individual who in turn was entitled to the compensation.

The Council of the South was the first to arrive in 'Aita to carry out damage assessments. The Council possessed a list of homeowner's names, and they accordingly sprayed coded numbers on walls of houses (figure 7.7). Homeowners in 'Aita complained that the Council fieldworkers barely looked at assessed houses and many times categorized them without even entering the house. Jihad al-Bina' then conducted another assessment with a new set of coded numbers, marking the walls. In most cases, the assessment results differed drastically (from discussions with the Mayor, and the donor country, which had access to both surveys).

While the differences were partially due to technical reasons related to the qualifications of the assessment team, there was also a significant political dimension involved. The Council of the South was a state agency dominated by Amal, while Jihad al-Bina' was affiliated with Hezbollah. Hence, party politics, influences and favours influenced the classification and assessment of damages from the very beginning.[13]

Qatar

Immediately after the ceasefire, the Gulf States proudly announced pledges worth tens of millions of dollars to aid Lebanon's reconstruction. The state of Qatar launched fascinating reconstruction and outreach campaigns with the

Figure 7.7. Numbers sprayed on walls during assessment of damage.

help of advertising banners conveying Qatari efforts and generosity. Qatar chose to fund the rebuilding of four villages in Southern Lebanon which were considered the most affected and the most symbolic during the war given their resistance against the Israeli bombardment: Bint Jbeil, 'Ainata, Khiam and 'Aita al- Cha'b.

Most other donor countries funded the physical reconstruction of Lebanon by transferring the funds to the Lebanese government. Qatar, on the other hand, chose to deal with municipalities and to compensate affected homeowners directly through its representatives on the ground. It sought to take advantage of its donation to promote itself as an emerging hands-on geopolitical actor in the Middle East, one that has the capacity to approach and negotiate across the global political spectrum.[14] In Southern Lebanon, the Qataris set-up a local office in Bint Jbeil to coordinate their efforts in the different villages, where their representatives and engineers worked with concerned residents. To manage this involvement in the reconstruction project, the Qataris hired a local Lebanese consultant.

The Qatari involvement, we believe, eventually made apparent the complex social and political makeup of the local community, and the consequences of the mechanisms of the Council of the South and Jihad al-Bina's damage assessments. The Qatari representatives were confronted with

an enormous number of unexpected complaints by angry homeowners who claimed unjust assessments, corrupt house listings and unclear compensation criteria. The Qatari team was unable to reconcile the two different assessment reports and decided five months into the process that it would conduct its own damage assessment in 'Aita al-Cha'b by commissioning a private firm. Though the Qataris had previously decided to deal directly with the local municipality instead of the state, arguing that it would allow them to skip timely bureaucratic procedures, they did not take the Municipality's recommendations seriously and as such did not consider them binding. As a matter of fact, the Qataris bypassed the Municipality on all compensation procedures, from assessment surveys to the delivery of compensation to homeowners.

The Qatari's delegation of this important task (of damage assessment and compensation distribution) to private companies and consultants added yet another dimension of dissociating citizens from processes that shaped their environment. When, during one of our meetings with him, we asked the Qatari representative in Lebanon, Khaled al-Hitmi, the reason behind the eventual bypassing of the Municipality, he replied saying: *'Fi Qatar, el nas wal hokom wahed, ma mitil Lubnan'* meaning, *'In Qatar, the people and the government are one, unlike Lebanon'.*

The residents of 'Aita strongly recall the moments that they stood in line for hours in one of the public schools in 'Aita on a given Sunday to receive their quarterly compensation cheques from the Qataris.

Awaiting the Qatari representatives to appear on a given Sunday was an event for the village. They came on Sunday to post sheets with names of owners who were due to collect their first compensation cheque; however the date was not clearly indicated. Hence, from Sunday to Sunday, the owners would wait for the Qataris to show up. And when they did, the location was the public school in 'Aita. The Qatari representatives used one of the classrooms and homeowners in 'Aita stood in line for long hours to receive their compensation cheques if their turn came up or their name was shouted. (Observations of 'Aita Group)

Indeed, the Qataris' welfare approach in assuming the role of the professional and expert 'saviour', reminds us of the attitude of the Western engineers in Abdul Rahman Munif's book, *Cities of Salt*. In it, the author tells the story of the transformation of the Arabian Peninsula spurred by the oil boom, narrating how Wadi al-'Uyoun was disrupted by the arrival of Western oilmen and the 'economic, social, and psychological effects of the promise of immeasurable wealth drawn from the deserts of nomads and oasis communities'. (Theroux, 1987, p. 629)

In the end, frustrated owners of destroyed houses lost faith in the technical assessment of their homes since the same buildings were being assessed and classified differently by the various surveying teams. The flawed assessments and compensations haunted the Municipality and the entire village throughout the reconstruction process. This misunderstanding of 'Aita's social space, in parallel with the conflicting and confusing damage assessment procedures, transformed the post-war discussion in 'Aita from one about the future collective recovery of the village into one about lists, names and delayed payments.

Reconstruction Practices and their Impacts: Stories from the Field

Two weeks after the war ended, Hajj M removed the rubble, broken glass and furniture from his house. He sealed the windows with plastic sheets, preparing for the incoming winter. His house was sprayed with bullets and hit by a mortar on the second floor, but it remained intact. His house was on the eastern side of the historic core of the village and it was built by his grandfather during the earlier part of the twentieth century, complete with large Roman masonry blocks which they had found under their land. Hajj M and his entire family were sheltered during the 33 days of aerial raids, protected by the one metre thick stone walls of his house, which they remained in to protect themselves from the invasion. Yet, two weeks after the war ended, the salvation of his home and past was threatened. Hajj M was ordered by a subcontractor hired by the Council of the South for 'rubble removal' – to empty his house by the morning as it was designated to be bulldozed. Hajj M did not know that he could say no to bulldozing his house – would he be denied compensation if he refused? He cherished his house, it had in fact saved his family's life during the war… Broken spirited Hajj M and his family rushed to pack the remainder of their belongings before the arrival of the bulldozer in the morning. (Excerpt from an interview with Hajj M conducted by the Group, August 2006)

After the war, every home had to face its own battle, whether internally within the family, among neighbours, with contractors, bulldozers, municipal representatives or others. The outcomes of these conflicts varied. Hajj M's house was categorized for demolition by the Council of the South. A contractor was hired by the Council for the task and was paid according to the weight of rubble removed; thus, he had a financial interest in bulldozing as many buildings as possible. The contractor had an additional interest in bulldozing historic stone houses so as to sell pre-cut stones, which were in high demand in the market. Without proper guidelines, the contractor therefore had the power to change a house's category from 'damaged' to 'demolished' by simply bulldozing it.

The Municipality was very excited and eager to have us provide it with a master plan for the reconstruction of the village. It instructed the local contractor hired by the Council of the South to provide us with the list of buildings classified as demolished and due to be removed. During the coordination meeting the contractor (A.S.) arrived without the requested list. He proudly offered the following: 'Look, you just tell me which roads the master plan wants widened, and I will demolish these buildings for you…', as he explained to us face to face.

From the point of view of the residents, the varying assessments, the amount of compensation, as well as the unknown future of their place of residence, especially with the arrival winter, produced a situation of uncertainty, insecurity and vulnerability. It resulted in displacement on the level of the household and that of the entire village. We found that this affected people's sentiments about the war and the process of recovery, in the sense that it is quite different from the feeling of victory and pride that was predominant at the end of the war.

The situation created by the conflicting assessments and by the lack of a clear and transparent compensation practice put the historic houses of the village in danger of demolition (figure 7.8). As such, the focus on devising an alternative strategy for compensating historic houses was established by the Group. Along with it came assistance from preservation experts, the search for restoration craftsmen, private meetings with household members and public meetings to discuss the flexibility of restoration in our modern lives, as well as manifold meetings with representatives from the donor country.

The most crucial of these meetings dealt with the final assessment criteria that were developed in an attempt to save the historic houses. Several meetings had been conducted before where the case was presented through thorough presentations; the donor's response was always a positive and encouraging one. However, it depended on a promise:

So you agree to give people with stone houses that are classified for demolition the complete demolition money sum even if they choose not to demolish their home, and opt to restore it instead?

Qatari official: Yes, yes. Don't worry.

 Can we write a letter to that effect?

Qatari official: Just tell the people I said so don't worry. No need for a letter.

Sir, people will not believe by word of mouth, there are hundreds of rumours going around. We need an official letter signed in your name.

The meetings arranged with the influential actors always concluded

Figure 7.8. Map showing the condition of houses in the historic core (Hara Fawqa and Hara Tahta) in March 2007.

remaining historical stone houses	remaining concrete house
bulldozed area by Israeli army	area in reconstruction
razed area due to categorization as 'totally destroyed' in the damage assessment	

with informal promises. There were efforts on our part, along with others,[15] to dissipate information to the families on the process of reconstruction, negotiation, alternatives, and decisions being made. Making the information public documented the informal promises made by influential actors in different meetings. Thus, it was an attempt to bind them to their words, as many other projects and initiatives depended ultimately on such a promise.

Despite these efforts the assessment procedures were never transparent. All three assessments conducted were eventually subject to the same corrupt practices. This happened consistently, as assessment reports were neither published nor scrutinized in a public validation process. Hence there was no

mechanism for monitoring, or more importantly, there was no form of public accountability. The only way to learn of assessment, and then to object to and/ or change the results of the assessment of one's home was by way of political favours, familial connections, bribery or joint interest with the various assessment teams.

The Impact on Social Ties

The combination of corrupt practices and inappropriate assessment categorizations created an antagonistic environment between neighbours, as they all wished to increase their number of units and change the categorization of their homes to 'demolition'. This environment was coupled with non-transparent and centralized decision-making. The manner in which information was (or was not) dissipated merely added to the confusion, allowing for vested interests during the reconstruction process. Instead of discussing the development of the village and public interests, the debate was mainly confined to the compensation problem. This affected a deeper social structure of 'Aita, as it had an impact on internal family relations as well:

Hajj G, his brother and parents owned an old stone house on the Northern slopes of the historic core. During the 'Aita al-Cha'b battle, two teenagers who had remained to defend the village sought refuge in this house during which time they left this note behind: 'We have used your house. We would like to apologize for using two pairs of socks, half a jar of honey and two jars of marmalade. We promise to return them when this is over. Thank you. T and J'. Upon returning to 'Aita after the end of the war, Hajj G found that his house had been hit by a missile through the northern façade, killing the two teenagers. After discovering the note, he decided that he could not demolish the house. It was not its heritage value that influenced his decision. Hajj G. felt that the house was not his anymore due to the martyrdom of the two teenagers. He felt that the parents of the martyrs owned the house as well and that they were part of his family now. He decided to restore the house, and gave the key of the room where the young men died to their family as a sign of respect and solidarity. Hajj G requested a restoration plan for his house, set aside the money for it and found a stone mason to commence the work. A few days before work was to start, Hajj G's brother bulldozed the family house without consulting anybody. This way he was sure to receive more compensation and could then reconstruct 'his unit' on another private lot.

Over the past 250 years, the old town of 'Aita has witnessed irregular informal spatial development due to the transformation of familial and land ownership patterns. For example, according to Tristan Khayat (2003, p. 1) 'few assets are as valued as land, and few properties are as synonymous to wealth

as land'. Analysis of land ownership maps shows that neighbourhoods were organized according to families and lots according to family ownership. The houses, or what the compensation scheme define as 'units', as well, fall under a specific logic of ownership and extension. Almost every house became the site of further building and extensions made in response to demands such as more services, and growth of family (figure 7.9). The typology of the
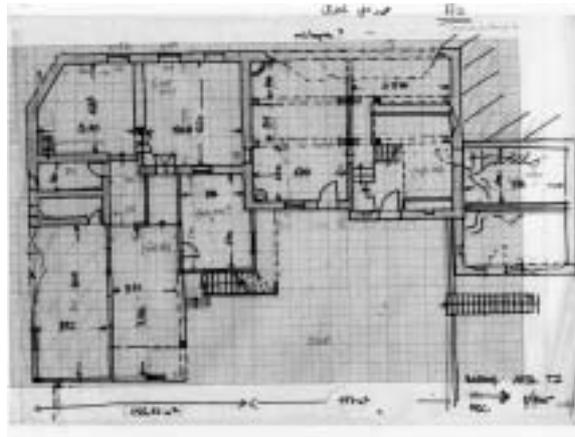

Figure 7.9. Plan documenting a historical house with later concrete additions, and map of land parcels in the historic core.

house and the organization of land explains the complexity of the situation when dealing with compensation and when reducing a household to a single 'housing unit': the logic of the compensation process disregarded the historical development of the household architecturally and in terms of the number of family members, and divided each house into a number of 'units'.

Thus the compensation criteria for ownership and house classification spurred an internal conflict in every household in 'Aita al-Cha'b: conflict as to who owned which unit or conflict on whether to keep the house or demolish it. Even if an entire family wished to restore their home, one disgruntled family member could, for example, create problems merely by asking an eager bulldozing contractor to demolish the house for free. The contractor would simply have to register the demolition in return for compensation from the Council of the South. Families generally preferred to demolish their historic home, splitting the compensation money among multiple owners or partners. Houses became arenas for conflict, as opposed to a place of reconciliation. And as the historic core had suffered the most destruction, contained the densest extended family homes and the highest concentration of stone houses, it became the scene of communal conflict in 'Aita al-Cha'b, representing the change in important aspects of its social, cultural and spatial heritage.

Impact on the Urban Fabric

The spatial production of most neighbourhoods in 'Aita was based on informal laws and socially accepted practices that guided building activity without rigidly dictating its form. Houses originated from a two-room quarry stone construction unit dating from the early 1930s, with some coming into existence much earlier. Buildings were typically constructed to the edge of their small plots and adjacent to their neighbour's, thus allowing for the traditional *hakoura*, an open space within the private plot. All houses were one or two storeys with a courtyard that was spatially and programmatically central to the residence: courtyards typically became the space of several activities and the space that all members of the family occupied, including social gatherings with neighbours and visitors. Sometimes adjacent private spaces were joined to form a larger semi-public common space which served agricultural practices well, especially those related to women (figures 7/10*a* and *b*, and 7.11).

The 140 square metre housing unit did not take account of the traditional typology of buildings. Homes in 'Aita al-Cha'b were typically extended family structures which were inherited and jointly owned by several related families, as discussed in the previous section. Such a practice brought about

tremendous changes in the urban fabric of neighbourhoods and led to a deterioration in the quality of space. For instance, as families divided the units of compensation among themselves, where each compensated unit necessitated the construction of a separate house, they started to build on agricultural land which they owned around the village. Thus, the compact

Figure 7.10*a* and *b*. Hara Tahta, plan and section showing open spaces created by the urban fabric and relation of houses to *hakoura* and water wells and Hara Fawqa, sections showing relation of houses to *hakoura* and water wells.

Figure 7.11. Hara Fawqa, sections showing relation of houses to *hakoura* and water well.

fabric of 'Aita which was concentrated between two hilltops began to spread across the fertile valleys that surrounded it. One resident pointed out that within one year, 'Aita al-Cha'ab sprawled more than it would have over the next twenty years, had the war not happened. Given that the assessment lists remained open to adjustment until one year after the end of the war, the number of units in 'Aita increased significantly. The Qataris started to decrease the sums originally allocated to public projects and infrastructure in order to sustain private compensations. Through our work in the Municipality, we observed the increase in the number of units resulting from the issuing construction permits and guidelines for the homes to be reconstructed. One particular case was the home of Hajj H, which was located in the historic core and which previously consisted of two floors. Hajj H managed to obtain compensation for four units and requested a building permit to construct four floors.

Changes in the fabric spurred by the introduction of buildings of up to four floors as well as detached entailed disruption at the social level. H.S. decided to leave the neighbourhood to build elsewhere: the single- and two-storey houses that surrounded him grew higher and much larger in scale, the privacy of the *dar*, or inner core of the house, was violated. A rift grew between the spatial practices of these families and the layout of modern houses. The fundamental qualities of the urban fabric in the historic core began to change significantly.

The unregulated construction impacted the formation of both private and public space in 'Aita al-Cha'b. It also impacted agricultural production. In addition to the urban sprawl onto agricultural land and the changes made

to house typologies, the majority of home owners started to make use of the extra units by making their homes on the second floor, so freeing the ground floor for commercial use. Such transformations were also inherently linked to a donor and compensation process that focused on rebuilding the physical environment of the village but that provided no support for socio-economic recovery. The agricultural village, which had lost its crops and farm animals during the war and which was offered cash compensation to build bigger concrete areas, slowly transformed into a more urbanized space dependent on a more commerce-based logic of production. Little by little, the social use of streets changed, with the rural quality of the village slowly disappearing; 'Aita al-Cha'ab began to look and function morle like a city.

To Conclude: Assessing Oneself

In the context of 'Aita, we understood our intervention as a space in which planning could open up possibilities for a change that acknowledges history and does not deny continuity. We saw our involvement as a challenge to pre-set methods and operations that denied the people their right to plan and to take non-burdened decisions related to their lives in their village. Our involvement in 'Aita al-Cha'b also explored the relationship between the designer, planner and researcher on the one hand and an unfamiliar context on the other. Attempting to articulate a link between one's perceived role and the space of intervention, our approach was grounded on the conviction that the residents of 'Aita themselves were the heart of any investigation.

Amr: Ya Nadine, we have failed!

Nadine: Shou failure?! It's not a matter of failure or success!!

Between the occasional need to assess oneself in terms of failures and successes, and the recognition that the struggle for change is an accumulative process arises a crucial predicament: how do we assess our intervention in 'Aita al-Cha'b? Do we highlight success stories, or do we recognize that the conditions at play were far more powerful than a one-year intervention?

BJ excitedly invited me into his newly renovated stone house – today a landmark among the newly constructed concrete homes that surrounded it. 'People come from neighbouring villages to see how we restored our stone house. All my neighbours wanted me to tear it down! But I said NO! And now they all come to see it!' (figure 7.12)

Ultimately, the historic core was almost entirely bulldozed; urban guide-lines[16] based on the previously existing urban fabric were not implemented by the Municipality; and attempts to involve the community in conceptualizing

Figure 7.12. A house under restoration in Bint Jbeil.

the future of their built environment never materialized. Somehow ironically, but not unexpectedly, our efforts to reconstruct the physical fabric of 'Aita reached a dead end. The materialization of our experience in 'Aita had little to do with physical reconstruction. By merely living in the village, we were the subject of much debate on the part of the people of the village. Our presence challenged preconceived visions of reconstruction and planning, and opened great discussion of what heritage was, why the historic core needed to be preserved, and how. Despite the fact that we exerted diverse efforts in involving the community through workshops, debates and leaflets, the most measurable aspect of our 'success' was achieved in the form of an economic project that supported the agricultural livelihoods of 'Aita's rural economy.

The Laurel Soap project began with a discussion with one of the farmers and agricultural experts in 'Aita; in short, it can be described as a project to support an already existing agricultural production. 'Aita al-Cha'b is famous for its fruitful and numerous Laurel trees. It is a local production in which the women of 'Aita, who produce the Laurel soap, are traditionally immersed. The aim of the project was to improve the organization and quality of the production of Laurel soap in addition to providing it with a better marketing potential so that it could become a sustainable source of income for the villagers. As a result, and because all those involved were keen on maintaining the communal aspect of the soap production, groups of women friends were formed and worked together on an upgraded process of efficient production. The result was an active group of women who made contacts and built networks to expand their market and sell their product; in turn, the women built a base for economic and social recovery from the war.

It was easy to assess and quantify the success of the project, which was funded by several NGOs and which lay within our broader aim to support the agricultural means of production fundamental to 'Aita's urban and social relations. However, in a context where many of our strategies and actions took

on various forms of 'damage control' – assessing our role and its impact was not always so clear. Some of us felt that the project begged more questions than it yielded answers.[17]

Because we saw 'Aita, ate its food, walked its streets and acknowledged our differences *vis à vis* the village, we were able to envisage the possibility of another relationship between this 'unfamiliar' place and ourselves. As such, our presence in 'Aita laid the framework for further interactions and allowed for a variety of social narratives to emerge. Spending time in 'Aita el Cha'b is testament to this. In this book, which falls within the planning discourse, we discuss it under the banner of resisting and fighting top-down planning in a post-war reconstruction context. We went to 'Aita for many different reasons. For the Lebanese, Palestinians and various international volunteers, it was to discover that border of a previously occupied Lebanon, the border of an occupied and denied Palestine. Yet we all knew that a large part of 'Aita's ability to captivate our imagination was its specific situation: a place that had acquired and accumulated different forms of resistance, with a visible historical interaction with Palestine, thus it brought us closer to our search for new possibilities.

Notes

1. Tobacco is a state subsidized produce that the Regie Company manages. Based on the High Commissioner's decision issued in 1935, Regie was assigned the management of the monopoly of procurement, manufacturing and selling of tobacco. It was registered under the name 'Société Anonyme de Regie Co – Intéressée Libano-Syrienne des Tabacs et Tombacs'.
2. *Samidoun* is Arabic for 'Steadfast'. Samidoun was a non-profit coalition of young volunteers and civil society groups which emerged during the Israeli war on Lebanon. Starting with a sit-in held in solidarity with the people of Gaza scheduled on the very first day of the war in Lebanon, the coalition turned into one of the most active relief campaigns that took place in Beirut during the 'emergency' phase. It provided humanitarian aid to displaced people hosted in some thirty public schools around the city and in the Sanayeh Park. Capitalizing primarily on the resources and skills of its volunteers, Samidoun carried out tasks of donation collection, relief provision, medical assistance, media advocacy, mapping of the destruction, and the running of various refugee centres in parks and schools in Beirut.
    The group of some thirty volunteers, who worked in relief during the war headed to 'Aita directly after the cease-fire. The organization, which took on the name Samidoun 'Aita, was a multidisciplinary group of people from various backgrounds and professions, including journalists, historians, development workers, architects, planners, construction workers, graphic designers and others. Though the volunteers were of different nationalities, they were predominantly Lebanese and Palestinian. Throughout their first weeks on the ground, they implemented a comprehensive strategy which included emergency relief, social activities support for the reconstruction process, in addition to solidarity activities with inhabitants. According to the specificities of the projects being implemented, some of the team's members lived in the village full-time, while others went for a few days a week. During all of these activities, they tried to follow participatory and empowering approaches.

3. A famous example is the reconstruction of downtown Beirut at the end of the Lebanese civil war by a private real-estate company Solidere, which transferred land ownership into shares, thus entirely transforming the social structure of the centre of Beirut.

4. The intimidating pre-set regulations and codes of an urban society, especially for an outsider, were not active within the physically distorted war-stricken village. In some ways, this gave us a feeling of belonging to the village right from the very beginning and an attachment which fuelled the work. It was also reciprocal: it would have been more difficult for a diverse group of people to be accepted within the social codes of 'Aita under different circumstances. That is, however, not to dismiss that our 'belonging' to the village was always an issue for the residents and that our motives were continually questioned.

5. More than 400 Palestinian villages were depopulated, emptied and bulldozed by the newly formed State of Israel.

6. In 2001, Israel attributed eighty-nine bodies to the massacre of Tantoura.

7. These two villages were predominantly controlled by the pro-Israeli Sa'd Haddad and Lahed armies.

8. This was further aggravated by the fact that the occupying army had confiscated almost 2000 square kilometres of land from 'Aita

9. To the east of 'Aita el Cha'ab, the towns of Bint Jbeil and Maroun al-Ras were under the National Resistance, while the village of Yaroun remained neutral. The collaborators with Israel in Southern Lebanon were very active, producing new identification cards that belonged to 'The Free State of Lebanon' (*Dawlet Lebnen el-Hor*). At the time that the massacre of 'Tal el-Zaatar' took place, a massacre in Hanin, a nearby village, was also perpetrated and its houses demolished (October 1976).

10. During this period, the residents of 'Aita were split between supporters and non-supporters of the occupation. Many young men were forced to flee the village to avoid the risk of being either persecuted by the Israelis and their collaborators, or forced to join the newly formed South Lebanese Army (known as Lahed Army). Families were expected to offer at least one of their members to this army (from several informal talks with residents).

11. Qatar showed a lot of support for Hezbollah during the 2006 war.

12. The Council is a state agency, but is also affiliated with the political party of Amal, headed by Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament. Amal was formerly a long-term rival of Hezbollah in the Southern political scene, until the 2004 municipal elections when they formed a political alliance with the Party of God, against the Lebanese Communist Party.

13. Other NGOs and aid agencies played a part in distorting the townscape of 'Aita. Premiere Urgence, an international development NGO, offered to provide partial aid to the residents if the Municipality posted its stickers around the village. South for Construction, a Lebanese construction and contracting company, working in development in a manner similar to that of the Council of the South, promised to deliver money to many residents of the village, but later distanced itself for political reasons. South for Construction set up a huge banner with their logo at the entrance of the village. Save the Children, another international NGO, also compiled lists of children and made sure to include a sticker with their logo on every piece of furniture donated to the schools.

14. Hence the Qatari intervention as an arbitrator and rebuilder in Eastern Yemen; or in the Darfur Conflict in Sudan; or its leading role as an arbitrator declaring the Doha Agreement in 2008, which brought about the creation of a so-called national unity Lebanese government, bringing an end to an eighteen month long political stalemate in Lebanon.

15. This was done formally through leaflets issued by the Municipality's Reconstruction and Planning office, and through occasional town meeting/workshops.

16. We proposed urban guidelines for the historic core of 'Aita to which newly reconstructed buildings needed to conform. The guidelines strove to maintain the spatial quality and logic of the previous fabric despite the change in the form of construction and its

architectural language. The guidelines would guide all reconstruction permits issued by the Municipality.

17. Our partner in the 'Aita's experience, 'Amr, wrote: 'What do you know and what do I know about 'Aita al-Cha'b? There is a huge void inside of me that I never actually realized during the war or immediately after. During the war, you were occupied with a thousand different things. The war ended, and now we can think, and sense with a different rhythm. However, post-war reconstruction carried the same fast pace of development and destruction as the war itself, but you still did not feel that huge, echoing void. You did not have the time to behold it, to wake from it. In the first house we lived in, we spent a lot of our time under a hole created by a missile in the roof. I was able to see the sky, the sky of 'Aita whose night stars were so close that seeing the void was not possible. Suddenly, it awakened you and your ear began to distinguish the sounds, little by little you began to see the way. Before that you only thought that you knew.

Throughout different stages you made decisions, with confidence and based on a belief in knowledge, and then another void appeared: the absence of a home, of people, of a feeling or a homeland. With our knowledge we can count the number of houses, the numbers of the dead and the injured, and the large areas of destruction. Through the process of writing this text, I felt that I am ignorant of what I have written. Throughout several lectures on reconstruction prepared on power point, with many maps and coloured photographs, I felt that I was becoming even more ignorant. However the echoing void inside is something different. When you hear it – you ask yourself what is knowledge anyway? And what remains of knowledge without communication?

The story is not easy and it is full of contradictions even if your vision and knowledge expands, expands a lot! There is a Sufi saying: "as the vision expands, expression becomes more limited". The place of knowledge is not here, it is not in talk. A wise Chinese once said "Say your word and walk with it", "meaning live it or else you will not know. And if you find out, it does not mean you can transfer that knowledge without real communication".'

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