

# Dialectics of place attachment in the Palestinian traditional village dwelling- A phenomenological approach

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This research uses the phenomenological approach to explore place attachment in the Palestinian village dwelling. The research explores this attachment through inside-outside dialectics and their representations on the architecture of the dwelling.

**Study design/methodology/approach:** Place attachment is an important aspect of the relationship between people and their built environment. People are usually attached to their dwellings more than any other place. This attachment represents the bond between people and their dwellings. This bond and sense of belonging extend beyond the space of the dwelling and become important anchors for the attachment of people to the area around the dwelling that extends hierarchal to include the different spatial levels of the built environment around the dwelling and form the sense of patriotism. The Palestinian village dwelling represents place attachment in a distinguished manner affected by the ontological value of land in Palestine and the special aspects of the life world in Palestine under occupation. This study explored the dialectics of this attachment in the Magara (cave) dwellings in Al Khalil (Hebron) district using phenomenological interpretative analysis.

**Findings:** The Palestinians could represent their attachment to their Magara dwellings in a distinguished phenomenological representation that gave the Magara great value and meaning.

**Originality/value:** This study is the first of its type to deal with the phenomenological aspects of architecture in Palestine and it opens the door for future work to deal with this important issue.

**Keywords:** Palestine, dwelling, phenomenology, space, attachment.

## 1. Introduction

The dwelling represents an objective existential phenomenon of our life world. Heidegger was the first to introduce the philosophy of dwelling into phenomenology. He linked the existential nature of the dwelling to life world or the world of daily life. The phenomenon of the dwelling has existential reality which all people perceive in the same way. And it has architectural realities that people differ in their perceptions because of the differences in their emotional and sensational contents. And because of the many meanings and ideas that are used in architectural productions. This is in addition to the specialties of human subjective frameworks such as culture, society, and ideology.

Man has been associated with the dwelling since the dawn of history, from the days of his cave settling. He looked for a place in the space that extended before him. He began making the place of the dwelling by choosing a specific location of land to be suitable for establishing the new shelter. This choice and preparation were not merely mechanical or environmental though it had these characteristics. It was the sense of place which led to the decisions of where and how to delineate this place. The search for meanings responding to what he wanted to see and learn and what he wanted to know and explore. There also were the feelings and emotions for making the place to be loved, looking good, and seemed viable. This initial stage

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was then followed by the creation of the architectural space of the dwelling. He built his first primitive structure not only as a shelter. He didn't just come out of the cave to make a shelter. Shelter, refuge, and protection were fulfilled in the cave without adding architectural elements to it. They were also fulfilled in other forms of dwelling. But he wanted to express his being in this world. He wanted to interact with the vast space and respond to the interactions of feelings and emotions in his heart, and thoughts and visions in his mind. From here, the dwelling and its organic connection to man was created. It is not possible to look at the emergence of architecture without a careful understanding of this relationship before looking at its material components (Maveety, 2008).

### 1.1. Phenomenology of the dwelling and sense of place

The dwelling represents the most important type of human interaction with the environment and the life world. It is the basic form of being-in-the-world as invented by Heidegger. Despite the many studies that dealt with the dwelling from its cultural, social, psychological, and engineering aspects, few dealt with the basic philosophy of the establishment of the dwelling and the symbols and meanings associated with each dwelling that distinguish it from the others. Among the many approaches that dealt with this subject, the phenomenological approach stands out in its ability to explore what is behind the physical structure of the dwelling in terms of these meanings and indications. According to Heidegger, the dwelling establishes the relationship between the cosmological world, the anthropological man, and the structure of the dwelling. This relationship includes various transformations in man's relationship with the world of the dwelling: from existence to presence, from presence to settlement, from settlement to place, from place to dwelling, and from dwelling to place. In his book: *The Present - Language - Place* (2009), Christian Norberg-Schulze showed that limiting the dwelling to the quantities of materials used in its construction is limiting its value to the mere walls, ceilings, and floors that make it up, emptying it of the spirit of place, and the absence of the meaning of being. Edward Ralph believes in his book *Place and Nowhere* (1976) that a dwelling loses its meaning if it cannot have a sense of place in the location in which it originates. (Gonabadi et al, 2020).

### 1.2. Dwelling and the attachment to the place

People are attached to their dwelling places more than any other place. Attachment to the place is defined as the emotional bond between people and place. It is the sense of place that makes people feel the places around their dwellings differently (Qazimi, 2014). It is the spirit of place that penetrates between the dwellings and through them, between the alleys and around the corners. It is the atmosphere that gives the place a title and sign (Rajala, 2020). From the point of view of phenomenology, the place is defined as a focal point in which people experience meanings and actions, gather spatially and temporally, interact, respond, and create social and cultural spirit that spread through the place (Seamon, 2018).

The place is a hierarchical spatio-temporal formation that extends in different spatial and temporal layers depending on the size and location of the place and the times through which it is used (Foote and Azaryahu, 2009). In contradiction to the private interior space or spaces of the dwelling, this place is communal, and open. It can be around the hearth in front of the dwelling or the gathering place a little apart. Or it can be the village square on a larger scale. The place, and its physical and human contents differ in each one of the spatial levels and its associated temporal connections. But all of them are strongly attached to the dwelling which represents with other dwellings the built mass that encloses the place and gives it its existence and spatial and physical identity. These dwellings house the residents who use the place and fill it with life and activity. The dwellings also are the temporal controllers and space organizers of the place depending on the social and cultural settings of the community that regulates the relationship between place and the dwellings. The spatial and temporal levels of the place are classified according to the meaning they disseminate and the functions they provide. They can be safe, communicative, progressive, livable, and meaningful.

However, regardless of the spatial, temporal, or physical classifications of the place, the fact remains that the phenomenology of place is more than all of this. The true meaning and the highest value of the place stem from people associated with it and the waves of meanings, feelings, and ideas that penetrate through and blow the place with its special spirit. Phenomenology helps to understand the qualities, values, and the spatio-temporal settings of place through three important aspects of people-dwelling-place interconnections (Seamon, 2000).

### 1.3. Comprehensiveness of dwelling-people-place association

Describing these interconnections between Dwelling, people, and place requires appropriate language. The minimization of the relationship between any of these three components to be understood separately regardless of the others is a minimization of life world within which they exist. The main characteristic of the interconnections between these elements is the comprehensiveness of their organic unity. They cannot be deconstructed or separated from each other. They form a system that cannot be disassembled. Dwelling is connected to place and people are attached to each one of them separately, and to both as a unit. Place attachment cannot be understood without people and people cannot have a place without dwellings. Therefore, all social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental orders of people need to be considered. This in addition to the psychological aspects with emotions, feelings, inspirations, and aspirations. Phenomenology provides a unique approach with a common language for understanding these three elements and the system they compose and its effect on place attachment (Seamon, 2014).

### 1.4. Dialectics of daily life and dwelling place

The human relationship with the place, despite the complexity and overlapping that characterize it, is not a linear, straight, continuous relationship. Also, it is not a circular or spiral relationship that is flexible, smooth, and regular. This phenomenological relationship usually contains contradictory and opposing arguments.

Seamon 2014 provided an intersecting account for the contradicting relationships between people and their places and the different dynamics that govern them. He introduced 2 concepts for these dialectics, movement and rest, inside and outside. Inside outside dialectics will be used in this research with reflection on dwelling space then to applied to traditional Palestinian village dwelling.

### 1.5. Inside and outside

The place at the origin of its being contains the dialectical relationship between the inside and the outside, as the beginning of its existence arises from the enclosure of an inner void. When this enclosure occurs, the dialectical relationship between the inside and the outside starts. If the place is the village square, then outside is the structure of dwelling masses or other building types depending on the spatial level of the place, and the movement spaces among them. When the place is the hearth place then the outside is cognitive space beyond the boundaries of the people's activity around the hearth. Through inside outside relationship, the attachment to the place is strengthened on the one hand, and on the other hand, its features are crystallized through the meanings, ideas, and feelings that arise from this relationship. The inside is part of the outside and vice versa. There is a similarity between them, but they differ in size, area, shape, formation, materials, and details. And they are different in the function that each of them performs and the function that people perform in each of them. They are also different in the expressions that are associated with each of them. Despite these differences and contradictions that they generate, it is not possible to imagine the existence of one without the other.

## 2. Methodology

The research problem of this study is to find out how the Palestinian villagers represented their place attachment through the architecture al Magara. This research depends on the narrative phenomenological of the architecture and spatial setting of one type of the Palestinian village dwelling which is the Magara (cave) in the Al Khalil (Hebron) District (to be abbreviated as AKD).

Narrative research was used because the research depends on the analysis of images of the dwellings to understand the experience of the Palestinian villagers and their life in the Magara dwellings (Clandinin and Huber, eds. 2010). The phenomenological descriptive research was used in order provide deeper understanding of the lived experience of the residents of Magara. Phenomenological research was also used to explore the meanings of place attachment in the architecture and design of the Magara (Alhazmi, 2022). In particular, the phenomenological epoch concept was used to prevent any bias from the researcher as a Palestinian. towards the analysis of the place attachment of the Magara. Phenomenological reduction was used in order to describe the lived experience of place attachment of the Magar. In this regard tow concepts were specifically used. The texturing of architecture and spatial settings of the Magara and the structuring of the place attachment meanings in them (Gonabadi et al., 2020). Images of these dwellings were collected from Riwaq- Registry of Historic Buildings (2023). The work was part of the course Palestinian Architecture taught by the author at the Department of Architectural Engineering, the Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine. Several districts of Palestine were studied including AKD. The villages were chosen arbitrary without any sampling criteria to give examples of authentic original Palestinian architecture. This research does not consider any phenomenological exercises directed to the students' experience of such architectures. Although their discussions and comments provided interesting insights.

The phenomenological narrative approach necessitates the application of the Epoch concept which means that the researcher abstains from any bias towards the phenomenon in consideration and cuts off all previous relationships with it. The introduction of the study area and the villages will not include any consideration of their Political, national, or ideological settings.

## 3. Area of study

All the villages are in AKD which is at the southern end of the of the west Bank Fig. 1. AKD is the largest in land and population among the 16 districts of the Palestinian authority. The area of the district is approximately 1000 km<sup>2</sup> and its population reached around 1 million in 2019 (ARIJ, 2019). The city of Al Khalil is the capital of the district has 4 cities in addition to Al Khalil city and it has 13 towns with municipal councils. The district has 32 villages with local councils and several other small hamlets (PCBS. 2017). 16 villages were referred to in the research and the caves of 14 villages were studied. Most of the dwellings considered were developed during the British Mandate occupation or the Jordanian role afterwards.

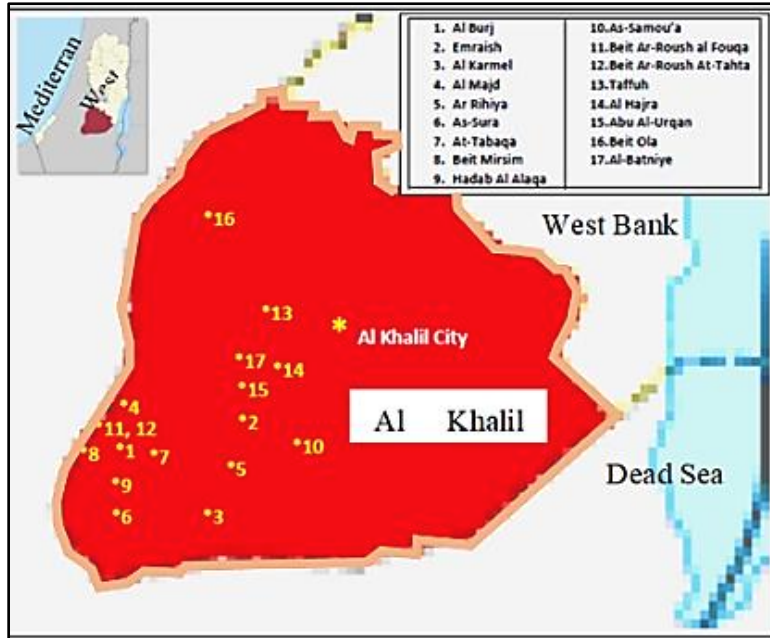


Fig. 1. Map of Al Khalil District showing the 16 villages of the research. (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

### 3.1 Types of Village dwellings in Al Khalil

After the inspection of the traditional dwellings of almost all the villages in AKD, it was possible to identify the following types:

#### 3.1.1 Magara (cave)

It is believed that cave dwelling started in Palestine since 500 thousand years (Manasra, 2017). What is extraordinary about the cave dwelling in AKD is that they are quite new developed in the 20th century during the British Mandate occupation and the Jordanian role. some of them are still in use until recently. Second, these cave dwellings have been treated in a very distinguished way in their external form especially the entrance which sometimes has an arch, and entrance stone façade. There is no intention here to discuss the interior space of the cave dwelling. It needs to be discussed in separate research. Fig. 1. shows Cave dwelling in the villages of At-Tabaqa and Beit Mersem.

At-Tabaqa



Beit Mersem



Fig. 2. Cave dwelling in the villages of At-Tabaqa and Beit Mersem [Riwaq]

### 3.1.2 Toor (Beehive or Tholos)

The Toor represents 1 step higher than the Magara in its architectural physical quality. It is a unique type of dwelling in Palestine. A small, lowered space at the side of the road or in the middle of a flat area is developed into a dwelling by making use of its 2 or 3 sides and adding one façade or 2 in addition to a flat roof. The roof usually is made of tree trunks, thatch, stones, and mud. The Toor complements a passageway or a flat working place above. Added facades of the Toor are built with stone with a door with a flat stone lintel and sometimes arched. Some examples surprisingly resemble the concept of the Mycenaean Tholos (Como, 2009) but to be a Tholos for the live not the dead, a Tholos for life not for death. Giving this Palestinian Tholos a distinguished difference. A special ontological philosophy and life perception that enabled people to transform the Tholos into a dwelling. Fig. 3. Shows the Toor dwelling in the villages of Hadab Al Alaqa and Al Batniyeh.



Fig. 3. Toor dwelling in the villages of Hadab Al Alaqa and Al Batniyeh [Riwaq]

### 3.1.3 Sakifeh (stone walls with flat roof)

The Skeefe is a single space ground floor dwelling with rubble stone or rough stone walls and a flat roof usually made of tree trunks, thatch, stones, and mud. It has a linteled or arched door with smooth stone jambs (Hmdan, 1996). Usually, these dwellings are separate and have open spaces around them. The door opens to the outside space directly to an area called Kassah along the width of the dwelling. The Kassah has a smooth lime mortar floor that is usually used as the outdoor family space. (Hmdan, 1996). If the Skeefe exist in a multiunit

Composition then is called Dar. And if the single or multiunit has a walled fence around it or at one of its sides then it is called Hosh. These 2 types will be explained later. Fig. 4. Shows the Skeefe dwellings in the villages of Al-Surrah and Al-Mowarak.

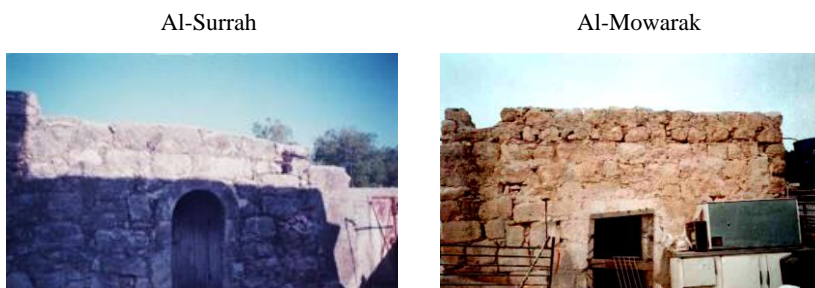


Fig. 4. Skeefe dwelling in the villages of Al-Surrah and Al-Mowarak [Riwaq]

### 3.1.4 Aqed (Stone cross-vaulted single space)

The Aqed dwelling is a gain a single space dwelling with stone walls and cross vaulted roof that is more expensive and technically complex than the Skeefe roof. It is usually built by families with better economic capabilities. Its stones usually are finer than Skeefe stones and its door is usually arched. Sometimes there are small openings in one or more of the walls. Like Skeefe, tha Aqed usually has a Kassah yard in front of its door. And it might form a Dar if more than one unit unite, and it might have a Hosh. Fig. 5. Shows Aqed dwellings in the villages of At-Tabaqa and Beit Mirsim

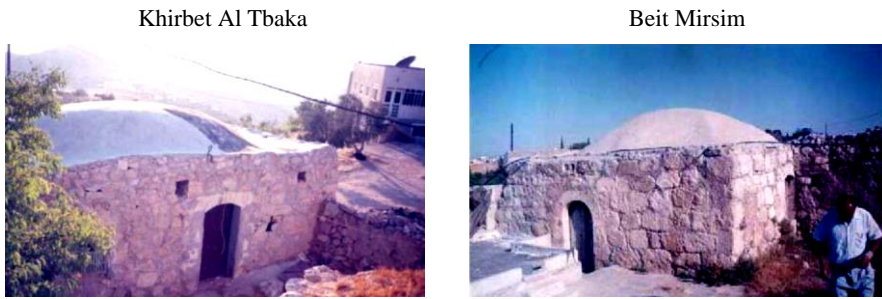


Fig. 5. Aqed dwelling in the villages of At-Tabaqa and Beit Mersem [Riwaq]

### 3.1.5 Dar (stone cross vault- multiple space)

Usually, the Dar is for large families with better economic abilities. The walls and the roofs have better handcrafting and the main façade have 1 or more large windows open at the Kassah. Fig. 6. Shows Dar dwellings in the villages of Beit Ola and Majd.



Fig. 6. Dar dwelling in the villages of Beit Ola and Majd [Riwaq]

### 3.1.6 Hosh (single or multiple Skeefe or Aqed with stone walled yard)

What distinguished the spatial form and arrangement of these dwellings in all the villages studied that they are exist separately and individually independent with quite wide areas between them contradicting the traditional urban structure of traditional Palestinian cities and the compact structure of larger villages and towns. Their doors and windows open freely and directly to the outside. Women, men, and their children used the Kassa for their different activities freely without any barriers or embarrassment. In certain cases, larger families sought to enclose the semi-private space of the Kassa with medium high stone walls to transform it into a totally private space. It is not only economic, social, or political factors that might work separately or collectively to generate this type of dwelling. Other important factors related transformations in the perception of the dynamics of the life world of the village. Fig. 10 shows Hosh dwelling in the village of Al-Majd.

Al-Majd



Fig. 7. Hosh dwelling in the village of Al-Majd [Riwaq]

### 3.1.7 El-Elliye (Multiple or single Aqed with first floor rooms and terrace)

Richer families could build an Aqed on the ground floor and top it with a first floor aqed room with open or walled terrace. The ground floor could be used for the family or sometimes it used for the animals. A stone stair leading to the first floor and usually it is at the corner of the ground floor Aqed which is the strongest structural part of the building. Elliye dwellings existed in their simple form and structure independently in the space of the village.

The name Elliye is known in the vernacular village culture but could be found in all the famous resources of Palestinian architecture but one internet source, Palestine Blog by Mohammed Hamdan (Hamdan, 216).

Beit Ola



Fig. 8. El Elliye dwelling in the villages of Beit Ola and Ar-Rihye [Riwaq]

## 4. Analysis of Magara inside-outside dialectics and attachment to place

The cave is an inside space. It is connected to the outside world through one of its sides only, its entrance plane. Closing this plane completely cuts the cave from the outside world. The cave is surrounded from all sides except the entrance with bold, cold, and solid rocks. Nothing can penetrate through them. The space of the cave as a result is dark, cold, and damp. The cave space means secrets and mysteries. It means hiding far and deep from the outside world. It means fear and horror from outside aggressive forces. The forces of human other creatures' enemies. Or the fear of destructive natural forces. The cave thence means isolation and decreasing relationships with outside to the minimum possible. It means regulating this relationship to be at certain times and in certain manners. If the source of fear is the enemy, then its coming or going controls the relationship. If the source of fear is natural, then its time and season control the relationship between the cave and the outside world. The cave means temporary stay for short time, not to settle nor to dwell. It lacks the sense of place and place attachment. It is about endless waiting for a change in the atmosphere around to abandon and to leave.

On the other side, the cave is quietness and privacy. It means reflection and meditation. It means purifying of the mind and the soul. The special relationship between the limited dark and cold space of the cave and the open air and light outside gives the mind clues and excitement to discover the realities of all. The cave is a place to think of existence, universe and beyond. Many philosophers went through this experience and brought great ideas to humanity. The cave is religious and sacred. Several prophets and their followers lived for a certain time in their lives in caves. The cave is generative and resourceful.

Magaras of the Palestinian villages in AKD, Fig. 9, present special and distinguished situation. The Magaras in all the villages have similar spatial settings and similar façade structure as if they were built by the same group of people although the villages spread over a wide area of AKD. This reflects a common cave culture that is acceptable and respected. It is also a reflection of the common skills of caring for these types of dwellings. Such cultural and architectural common agreement not only represent a strong social bond but also a distinguished place attachment. The Magaras of these villages are not isolated from the built-up mass of the village Fig. 10.

















Al-Tabaqa		Beit Mirsim		Beit Ar-Roash Al-Foka		Al-Hajrah	
Beit Ar-Roash Al-Tabaqa		Al-Karmel		Al-Karmel		Imreish	
Al-Mowaraq		Hadab Al-Alaqa		Hadab Al-Alaqa		As-Samoa	
Al-Bamriyeh		Al-Majid		Taffuh		Abu Al-Urqaq	
Abu Al-Urqaq		Abu Al-Urqaq					

Fig. 9. Magara in the villages of Al Khalil District [Riwaq]



Fig. 10. Magara in the village Beit Ar-Roash Al-Foka [Riwaq]

There are several Magaras in the same village that are part of its structure, and they integrate strongly and organically with it and with its natural settings Fig. 11.



Fig. 11. Magara in the village Beit Mirsim [Riwaq]

The facades of the Magaras are built carefully to adore. Natural stones of the site are used reflecting a kind attachment to the natural environment Fig. 12.

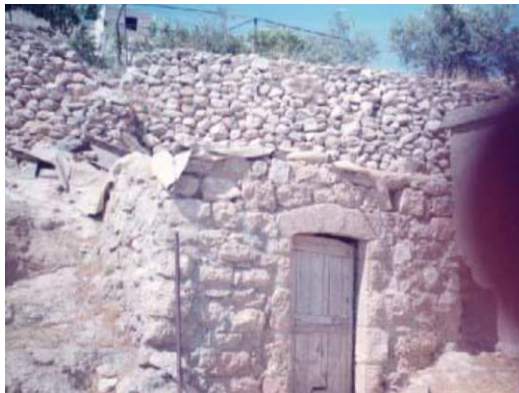


Fig. 12. Magara in the village Hadab Al-Alaqa [Riwaq]

The facades are similar in many aspects Fig. 9. The rough stones are carefully laid in the same way with a door that connects intelligently between the indoor and outdoor space making the outdoor space a livable extension for family activities and enhancing the sense of place in front of the Magara Fig. 13.



Fig. 13. Magara in the village Abu Al-Urqa [Riwaq]

There is always the tendency to strongly link the Magara to the its front yard as a transitional space between the inside and the open space outside in an attempt to mix both of them with each other Fig. 14.



Fig. 14. Magara in the village Abu Al-Urqa [Riwaq]

The way the stones are laid in the facade of the Magara shows love, care, and passion for the stones themselves and for the earth from where they were obtained, the rocky hills, and mounds which make the distinguished space of the village. It also shows the happiness of these people caring for these stones. It shows the knowledge and skills of how to assemble them in a poetic manner with passion and sincerity. The aesthetics of these façade gives them a distinguished visual accent of a fine art language. The treatment of the doors with flat stone lintels or arches reflects the care that was directed to them, the love of doing them and the love of the wall itself and the space at both of its sides. Many people were born in these Magaras which became their life world. They walked out their first steps and played on the ground of the Magara front yard where they learnt their first world-of-life. They were raised up in this place going in and out of the Magara and connecting the two spaces together. Many are still living in these Magaras or at least using them in a sign of a strong connection with the Magara and its place.

## 5. Conclusion

The Magara dwelling in Al Khalil District provided a unique example of the phenomenological connection between people and their land with all its fine details. The Palestinians could intelligently transform the Magara into a distinguished place with a strong sense of attachment that the villages cannot be imagined living without. The Palestinians transformed the ugly, dark, and damp Magara into a beautiful visual art piece full of life. They used these poetic architectural designs for the facades of the Magaras to convey their love of life, of land, and of the small pieces of stone of their villages. This research is the first of its type to examine the phenomenological dialectics of dwelling place relationship with the inside outside concept in the Magara dwelling in the Palestinian village. The research is the first reference to add new village dwelling types to the literature of the Palestinian architecture. Additionally, the research proved in a very simple, plain, and straightforward phenomenological reflection the indispensable and inseparable natural, historical, and organic attachment of the Palestinians to their land and its fine details. Finally, the research opens the door for more opportunities to use the phenomenological approach and the concepts of dialectic dwelling place and space relationships in the Palestinian architecture.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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