

IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POSSIBLE UNDER OCCUPATION?

The case of Palestine

Basem Ezbidi

Palestinians have received significant economic and technical assistance from donor countries since they signed the Oslo Accords in 1994, yet development initiatives have not succeeded in moving the overall condition of the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) to the point of self-sufficiency. The promise of Oslo has not materialized regarding economics or political peace. The main argument of this chapter is that development cannot be achieved in Palestine, due to the settler colonial condition. In Palestine, development is impossible as long as Israel maintains its settler colonial rule, which necessitates marginalizing, and even eliminating, all aspects of the Palestinian presence. In making such an argument, this chapter analyzes material and symbolic (political and economic) factors and their connotations in the Palestinian context and highlights how they prevent development, directly and indirectly. The discussion illuminates how Israel's colonial approach thwarts the attaining of development, as the occupying country isolates and fragments Palestinian territory, impedes Palestinian access to their own resources, obstructs movement, constrains the import and export of goods, prevents Palestinians from using and regulating their own national currency, withholds tax reimbursement monies as a means of pressure, inhibits Palestinians from freely managing urban planning, and more. Also, the analysis sheds light on the role of the international community in this conflict and delineates how international aid contributes to the maintaining of the colonial condition and the perpetuation of the conflict—at the expense of development.

The development–conflict dichotomy

Discussing development in Palestine, whether simple or sustainable, necessitates a clarification of this concept. The term can be variously understood, depending on a country's resources and the institutional setup necessary to transform resources into social structures and services. The process of development is multi-dimensional and may involve the establishing, re-formation, and/or reorientation of social and political structures and processes, beyond economic assets. Development aims to improve living standards of individual citizens and society as a whole; it seeks to establish social, political, and economic systems and institutions that promote human dignity and respect (book review, Nussbaum 2011), and rewards and encourages self-reliance, initiative, and entrepreneurship. This implies liberation from external domination and entails equality among citizens, as well as the absence of internal oppression.

Sustainable development entails the capability to maintain a balance between the current social, economic, and environmental needs of society and the limitations it encounters. Thus, it responds to the necessities of the present without endangering the resources that are to serve future generations (World Commission 1987; Blewitt 2015). Thus, in Palestine, sustainable development ought to enable Palestinians (individuals, local communities, and society at large) to care for their social, economic, and environmental needs on their own and over the long term. This includes the right to be free from occupation, to self-determine one's future, to ensure sustainability for future generations, and to enable the people to remain on their land and live with respect and in dignity.

The origins and varying forms of any conflict must be considered in efforts to bring about a solution. In Palestine, conflict plays out at two entangled levels. The first concerns the struggle against the occupying power, which involves the Israeli military and security apparatus, the over 600,000 Jewish settlers who live in the WB and East Jerusalem (Human Rights Watch 2018), the Palestinians who are resisting occupation, and the regional and international parties who act as mediators—with varying degrees of impartiality.

The second level relates to internal political divisions among Palestinians. In particular, it includes the contest over the right to govern, played out between Fatah and Hamas and their supporting political and economic elites in the WBGS (West Bank and Gaza Strip). Hamas and Fatah differ in their interpretations of both the internal and external conflicts. They hold contrasting ideologies and pursue incompatible interests. Moreover, geographic fragmentation, specific histories of individuals and communities, economic class, and—last but not least—external influences sustain their differences. The severity of this internal conflict is greatly exacerbated, if not caused, by the occupation.

The Palestinian condition is so complex that it is not possible to conceive development independently of these two levels of conflict. Whereas most interpretations agree that their root causes lie in the occupation, differences exist in the conflict's assessment. Some interpretations consider the conflict a settler-colonial and apartheid, or "bantustanisation," situation (Farsakh 2002, p. 14) that developed as a result of the repressive Israeli occupation of entire historic Palestine.¹ Another interpretation is based on international law and United Nations (UN) resolutions, and accepts the existence of Israel based on the 1947 partition plan (Lynk 2018). Others consider the conflict mainly a case of civil war among Palestinians in the WBGS (over how to oppose the occupation). A fourth interpretation considers Palestine a fragile state and basically ignores the roots of the conflict. The terminology used in association with aid, policies, and most international actions avoids mentioning the occupation, especially since the Oslo Accords, seeking to portray the situation as one of peace-building.

Material impediments to development

Fragmented territory

The 1995 Oslo Accords divided the Palestinian territories. Area A (18% of the WB) comprises Palestinian city centers (except Hebron), where the Palestinian Authority (PA) is in control of civil and security affairs, but not of underground resources (water) or airspace. Palestinian security control ceases at the city boundaries and as soon as Israel announces its intention to enter. Area B (22% of the WB) encompasses Palestinian villages and is under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian jurisdiction and security control. To an even greater extent than in Area A, Israeli overrides Palestinian control. Area C (60% of the WB) holds the water reserves and most of the agricultural lands, but here, Palestinians have neither political nor security control (Zahriyeh 2014).

Israeli settlements

The Israeli settlements in the WB are the most immediate and tangible impediment to a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They constitute a breach of international law and are considered illegal by many in the international community. Nevertheless, successive Israeli governments have supported the building and expansion of Jewish settlements in the territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem.

They have applied Israeli domestic laws to settlement residents who enjoy the same rights as citizens living within Israel, in addition to special privileges such as housing subsidies and tax exemptions (Human Rights Watch 2016). Thus, since 1995, the number of settlers has grown four times faster than Israel's population, and almost one-tenth of Israel's Jewish population now resides on Palestinian land (East Jerusalem and the WB), outside of Israel's recognized borders (B'Tselem 2017a). Israel calculates that—in case it agreed to dismantle some of these settlements—it can demand to be compensated through Palestinian concessions rather than be punished for violations of the Oslo Accords or international law.

Settlements affect all aspects of Palestinian lives on a daily basis (OHCHR 2016). Their impact extends far beyond the appropriation of land and severe violations of Palestinian human and political rights. Through settlements, new demographic realities are being created that clear the way for a structured apartheid regime where rights are determined by national identity. Thus, settlements constitute roadblocks to peace because they make the establishment of a contiguous, viable, and sovereign Palestinian state increasingly impossible (B'Tselem 2017a).

Land appropriation

To make room for settlements, Palestinian land has to be appropriated. In the GS, Israel had confiscated 49% of the land before it withdrew its army and settlers in mid-2005 and imposed a blockade on the movement of goods and persons. This blockade was tightened in 2007, after Hamas had taken control of Gaza, turning the Strip for all practical purposes into a large detention camp. In the WB, overlapping with the categorization into areas A, B, and C, Israel has confiscated 38% of land (B'Tselem 2017a), mostly in East Jerusalem and Area C (officially declaring these appropriations annexations).²

The main strategy Israel employs to take over land for settlement building has been seizing it 'for military purposes.' Another approach is to seize Palestinian property through legal maneuverings that are in breach of both local and international law, violating basic tenets of justice and due process (B'Tselem 2012). Israeli law allows, for example, the confiscation of land that has not been utilized for agriculture—but frequently, Palestinians are prevented from accessing their land because it is close to a settlement or behind the Separation Wall.

Unofficial appropriation of land is carried out by settlers who build outposts and roads outside the vast areas that are already allocated to settlements as natural resources and security zones. Frequently attacking Palestinian farmers on their land and in their homes, settlers are guarded by the Israeli army and protected by a grossly biased legal system (Nassar 2018; Hagbard 2018). For example, when Palestinians are accused of attacking settlers, 95% of the cases are prosecuted based on Israeli military law, but when settlers attack Palestinians, that figure drops to 8.5% and Israeli civil law is applied instead (Hagbard 2018; Human Rights Watch 2018).

The Separation Wall

According to B'Tselem:

The route of the Separation Barrier, 85% of which runs inside the WB, has laid the groundwork for the de-facto annexation of most settlements and much land for their future expansion. The barrier broke up contiguous Palestinian urban and rural blocs, severed inter-community ties forged over generations, and abruptly imposed an arbitrary reconfiguration of space based on settlement

boundaries and suiting Israeli security forces in line with Israel's longstanding policy of using the WB to serve its own needs, while disregarding the needs and rights of Palestinians.

(B'Tselem 2017b)

By preventing access to arable lands and for livestock farming, the Wall heavily affects Palestinian livelihoods.

Israeli checkpoints

Checkpoints are spread all over the occupied territories and restrict movement not only into and out of the territories, but also within them (B'Tselem 2018). Palestinians cannot physically reach the outside world without having to go through Israeli-controlled border crossings. Neither can Palestinians' imported or exported goods and materials. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA):

By the end of 2016, there were 572 fixed movement obstacles, including 44 permanently staffed checkpoints, 52 partially staffed checkpoints, and 376 roadblocks, earth mounds, and road gates. More than 100 additional obstacles, including 18 permanent checkpoints, segregate part of the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron city (H2) from the rest of the city.

(OCHA 2017)

OCHA lists the presence of 705 Israeli checkpoints in September 2018 (OCHA 2018). Many of these require a special permit to cross; others simply increase transportation time for goods and persons. Movement and access can also be entirely prevented, a policy frequently applied arbitrarily to both regular and so-called 'flying' checkpoints that can be opened anywhere, anytime. The effect on Palestinians is debilitating.

A fragile economy in the WBGS

Since 1994, the Paris Protocol has regulated the monetary, fiscal, and trade relations between Palestinians and Israel. Even though the agreement's shortcomings were recognized, it was signed by Yasser Arafat, then chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This was based on the argument that it would be valid only until 1999, during the interim period of limited self-rule. After that time, an independent Palestinian state would regulate its imports and exports independently. The Protocol allows Israel to maintain full control over Palestinian trade and tax revenues, and stipulates that the collected taxes and duties be handed over to the PA after the deduction of service fees. With this source of income, a substantial portion of PA expenditures could be financed. However, Israel uses these monies to pressure the PA whenever there are disagreements.

Currently, the WBGS economy is weak and encountering serious challenges, mostly related to the unsuccessful peace process which negatively affects investment. Israeli efforts to dominate the feeble WBGS economy have largely succeeded. The once productive agricultural, industrial, and tourist sectors

are in decline; the WBGS economy imports three times as much as it exports—with 85% of exports going to Israel and two-thirds of imports coming from Israel. Even though a significant percentage of the Palestinian workforce is still employed in Israel and in settlements (around 130,000 workers with an annual income of USD 2 billion), in the second quarter of 2018, unemployment soared to nearly 34% among labor force participants, and youth unemployment (20–24 years of age) was at 49.9% (PCBS 2018). This subordination is worsened by Israel's control of scarce resources such as land, water, raw materials, and energy. It is deepened by an inefficient infrastructure and disorganized delivery of services. The absence of direct and free access to external markets—despite trade treaties that promise preferential treatments—further impairs the WBGS economy (Naqib 2002).

In summing up the overall conditions under Israeli occupation, Sara Roy concludes that the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is characterized not by underdevelopment but de-development. Here, Israel is not only undermining the WBGS economy but also weakening its productive capability to implement meaningful reforms or a rationally structured transformation (Roy 2016; UNCTAD 2017).

Deficient planning

Planning in the Palestinian areas reveals the impairing impact of long years of occupation (Abdelhamid 2006). According to the Oslo Accords, Palestinians are responsible for planning and development in Area A. Some restrictions also apply in Area B, but not in Area C, preventing urban expansion. Security considerations are frequently cited to curb Palestinian development, but their excessive use reveals them as methodical. Thus, projects such as Gaza's seaport, the passageway between the WB and GS stipulated by UN Resolution 181 and the partition plan, and industrial zones have not been realized because of their geopolitical implications, and because Israel considers or presents them as threatening.

But there are internal handicaps for proper development, as well. The planning framework developed under the PA does not meet the needs of a population under occupation. The laws and institutions responsible for the planning and implementation of policies largely lack the needed capacities and expertise to manage, control, and monitor the development of populated areas in shrinking physical space. Finally, in the areas that are under their relative control, Palestinians must pursue their goals while accommodating the wishes of the donor community. The latter's priorities are not always in harmony with Palestinian needs and aspirations.

The burden of vulnerability on development

Obstacles to development in Palestine spring largely from asymmetrical power relations at two levels of conflict. The first is between the Palestinians and Israel, and the second is among rival Palestinian groups. The prolonged conflict has damaged political will and weakened social cohesion and harmony among Palestinians. External aid provision has played a role in such discord. The government in Ramallah, for example, relies on Western and Arab donors, whereas Gaza depends on support from Qatar, Turkey, and charity organizations in Arab and Islamic countries. Both are obliged to accommodate the interests of these various parties. Thus, foreign assistance widens the rift among Palestinians and perpetuates the political and geographic division between Hamas and Fatah or/and between the WB and GS (Ezbidi 2015).

There are four predominant narratives of the root and type of the conflict—and resulting vulnerability. These affect how the various players search for solutions or aim to mitigate its repercussions. One

interpretation sees the conflict mainly as an outcome of the repressive Israeli occupation (Lynk 2018). While Palestinian national resistance expresses itself in measures that range from efforts to preserve Palestinian cultural identity to rebellious violence, actions of non-armed resistance are largely deemed acceptable. In contrast, few international players perceive armed resistance to be acceptable. Israel has succeeded in presenting any form of Palestinian resistance as terrorism, a cause of conflict rather than a means to achieve peace. Palestinians, however, view resistance as an act that leads to positive developmental consequences (Ahmed 2005). They link resistance, in addition to national rights, to socioeconomic factors such as poverty and psychological estrangement—similar to conditions that found expression in recent Arab revolts. The inability of Arab rulers to achieve economic development and tackle deprivation and disorientation serves to explain violent outcomes in the wake of the 2011 uprisings. Because Palestinian resistance is directed against a condition of repression and injustice, this camp considers it an act of empowerment with developmental implications.

The international community has largely accepted the position that deems Palestinian resistance as terrorism rather than a means toward liberation. Donors have focused on how to use development to minimize Palestinian ‘violence’ against Israel—rather than how development could guide Palestinians to liberty and independence. This camp argues that Palestinian resistance may increase some forms of Israeli structural violence and direct military action, but, more importantly, may reduce other aspects. Because the structural violence of occupation causes de-development, Palestinian violence—if it succeeds in removing the infrastructure of occupation—may not be un-developmental. In general, however, such resistance is considered less controversial only when applied to anti-colonial struggles or anti-apartheid violence in other settings (e.g., in South Africa). Even though it is increasingly accepted that Palestine is facing apartheid and colonialism (Nakhleh 2012; Collins 2011; Human Sciences Research Council 2009; Massad 2006), most international development parties still view violence against these systems negatively in the Palestinian context. Thus, they focus on training the PA security apparatus to better exercise force against other Palestinians. Such an approach is grounded on the premise that the PA should remain the dominant maintainer of violence.

A second narrative bases its understanding of the conflict on international law. Diverging from liberal economic theory that views development in gross national product (GNP) terms, this approach links human rights and development theory, and considers them to be mutually reinforcing. In the WBGS, this interpretation tends to be applied when development initiatives are conceived and their implementation methods determined (Donnelly 2013, pp. 217–234).

The development-human rights nexus allows for the contextualization of conflict, incorporating its causes and the manner by which it can be addressed. In Palestine, the international law approach allows for the acknowledgment of a regime of colonial rule with apartheid consequences. Apartheid is expressed in: (a) division of population on ethnic lines; (b) deprivation of WBGS Palestinians from participation in political, social, economic, and cultural activities, and denial of the basic rights and freedoms that are necessary for their development; (c) restrictions that affect Palestinian freedom of movement and Palestinian rights to choose place of residence, freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly, including the blockade of the GS; (d) a system of persecution and oppression of opponents to the Israeli hegemony, including frequent military attacks on the GS; (e) the violation of Palestinians’ right to exploit their natural resources; and (f) preferential treatment of settlers with regard to water resources, in clear violation of international water law (Amnesty International 2009).

The colonial aspect of the regime is expressed through Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, the construction of Jewish-only settlements linked by roads (between settlements and to Israel) to which Palestinians are denied access, the building of the Separation Wall on Palestinian land, and the subordination of the WBGS economy to the Israeli occupation.

This latter view acknowledges that the occupation regime constitutes a gross violation of fundamental human rights and functions as an obstruction to development. It is quite striking to see, however, how foreign aid essentially facilitates the sustainability of colonialism and apartheid in the WBGS. The economic and technical assistance to the PA exempts Israel from the responsibility associated with over 50 years of occupation. It instead allows it to continue its colonial domination. Under such conditions, it should be counter-intuitive for the international community to continue its aid while remaining apolitical, avoiding dealing with the core of the conflict—namely, the Israeli occupation.

A third narrative focuses on internal divisions, considers them a case of civil war (Stewart 2007, p. 414), and considers the implementation of development policies within the civil war framework. Advocates of this approach acknowledge that war and poverty are mutually causative factors. They consider the failure of economic development the key root cause of conflict (Collier et al. 2003, p. 53), viewing both factors as contributing to a vicious circle that becomes difficult to break. Once economic and ideological disparities persist, they are likely to generate conflict because shared identities permit the group formation and mobilization that may serve as a primary motivating factor for people to participate in the conflict. Identities may be self- or other-constructed. The group may be externally defined and discriminated against, or it may be self-constructed, and motivating members to rebel or demand rights. Within such multi-layered disparities and complexities, sustainable development is difficult to achieve (Stewart 2007, p. 414).

Among the fragmented Palestinians, many disparities exist. They are identifiable between two authorities and their (politically) affiliated groups, between refugees and non-refugees, between rural and urban dwellers, between Christians and Muslims, between family-based groups or clans, and between the so-called 1948 Palestinians who reside in Israel and the residents of Jerusalem, the WB, and the GS. These groups live with different restrictions constraining their economic, social, and political welfare and, exacerbated by geographic isolation from each other, have led and are still leading to the emergence of separate identity groups.

This view that focuses on internal disparities plays down, however, the relationship between the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the prevailing poor conditions in the WBGS. It pays little attention to the obvious disparities between Israel and Palestine. In Palestine, development has failed and is even considered a case of de-development (Tahhan 2017). Overall economic, social, and political conditions have deteriorated, despite aid efforts by the international community. Because the Palestinian entity enjoys little sovereignty and no control over its borders, airspace, population registry, or security, it is vulnerable to Israeli measures. These are determined by Israel's own interests, rather than the interests of the occupied Palestinians, as stipulated by international law, and dependent on the generosity, demands, and concerns of the international community (Saleh 2008). Israelis, however, enjoy freedom of movement and broad social rights, in a modern, growing economy with a per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 34,134.81 in 2016. Yet, Israel is engaged in the suppression of economic development in Palestine, where per-capita GDP in 2016 amounted to USD 1,700 (Trading Economics n.d).

The fourth narrative considers Palestine a case of a fragile state (Saleh 2008, p. 48; Anten et al. 2012). It holds that external pressures have undermined the authority and legitimacy of the PA—that was created as merely a prelude to a sovereign state. This view denies, or ignores, that the PA never attained the features particular of a nation-state. It neither controls its resources, security agenda, military capabilities, and borders, nor has the right to ratify international treaties. The PA is sidestepped in the crucial issues of settlements, East Jerusalem, and refugees, whose resolution has been postponed to an undefined later time. Such trivialization of the PA is not surprising. It was founded only to serve as an ineffective negotiating partner with Israel, but never granted the mandate, legitimacy, or resources to influence the process of state building or achieve independence. The PA was enabled to monopolize power among Palestinians and suppress political opponents (mainly Islamists). Yet, it lacks the might and credentials to develop a viable framework for adequate or sustainable development. But even if the PA were able to meet the challenge of ‘good governance,’ neoliberal governance under occupation—however ‘good’—can neither substitute for the broader struggle for national rights, nor ensure the Palestinian right to development (Khalidi and Samour 2010, p. 6).

Even though these various narratives differ in their assessment of the conflict in the WBGS, they all acknowledge that sustainable development is an exceptionally thorny pursuit. They give varying weight to factors such as the lack of Palestinian control over land and resources, the absence of political stability, a continuation of Israeli colonial policies, frequent physical attacks against Gaza, PA vulnerability to international players, and heavy reliance on donors. Some focus more on internal constraints that cause further difficulties. Political factionalism, or neoliberal approaches to development, can crowd out emancipatory claims. These narratives partly acknowledge to varying degrees that these difficulties have emerged due to, and are exacerbated by, the external conflict.

The burden of colonial politics on development

Politics is the space where official societal transactions take place. Therefore, sustainable development cannot be isolated from the political environment created by the settler colonial condition in Palestine. Generally, the relevance of politics stems from three aspects (Barber 2014). First, development-initiative priorities are determined by the governmental systems, structures, policies, operations, laws, and provision of services. Second, political considerations provide individuals and groups with the momentum necessary to engage in and support development initiatives, prompted by cognitive motives—such as the expression of citizenship or of national or minority identity—and operating through behavior such as electoral participation. Third, political values are strongly associated with the most central human ideals, such as rights, liberties, self-determination, self-expression, and human dignity.

In Palestine, politics is coupled with a fierce denial of Palestinian suffering and of their right to self-determination and independence, adding special connotations to the term ‘political’ that are absent in sovereign and independent countries. Palestinian politics encompasses a broad hybrid of internal and external influences that have become intertwined with the challenges of national liberation and statehood. In this context, grand convictions, power relations, and political agendas have clashed and are still clashing, not only between the colonizer and the colonized, but also among the Palestinians. Palestine has become a space where the weakness of Palestinians and the might of the other, be it the West or Israel, have interacted to produce one the most troubling conflicts of modern times. Under this condition,

Palestinians have been sidelined, again and again, forced to compromise and make concessions. Meanwhile, Israeli colonial rule is ignored and met with silence, faintly criticized, or even supported and rewarded.

The burden of the Oslo Accords on development

Currently, developments in Palestine are entirely captive to the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA in 1994. The gravity of the national struggle has moved inside Palestine; direct negotiations with Israel have replaced armed resistance; and in the pursuit of national aspirations, state- and institution-building have replaced national liberation as the PA has substituted the PLO. To legitimize the PA and shun its revolutionary past, the PLO was weakened, becoming merely an item in the PA's annual budget. This transformation, however, has been accompanied by vital questions about the new order's legitimacy and the extent to which it is capable of achieving independence. This issue has been subject to profound disagreement among the proponents of conflicting agendas, both local and external. It has led to the current fragmentation among Palestinians—especially since it has been widely acknowledged that the so-called peace process has achieved little. Thus, serious tensions can be found in Palestine between Islamists (Hamas and al-Jihad) who consider resistance as the sole credible approach, and others who subscribe to negotiations; those who subscribe to the notion of national struggle, and others obsessed with obtaining a state; those who see the PA as an advantage, and others who perceive it as a burden to liberation and independence; those engaged in security cooperation with the occupier, and others who oppose such cooperation; and those who support unity and cohesion, and others who support splintering and fragmentation.

Despite its limited success, the custodians of the existing order in Palestine are keen to safeguard the 'peace process,' strengthen the PA, and consolidate the influence of the emerging political, economic, and security elites created to preserve the status quo. These groups employ mechanisms of reward and control, demote and exclude opponents, and even target Palestinian society at large. Their aim is to pacify its orientation to allow for the transformation of the conflict into an order of 'peace and prosperity,' benefiting and guarding the interests of a select few.

The alliance between the political and security elements allowed the economic elites to partake in redesigning Palestinian political and economic realities, particularly in developing laws and legislation that serve their interests. For example, real estate developers succeeded in obtaining tax incentives for their projects not available to small enterprises (Palestine Investment Promotion Agency 1999). Subsequently, enormous investments were directed toward various sectors such as real estate, banking, and insurance industries, telecommunications, agriculture, and more. This eventually enabled large enterprises to generate further privileges and advantages and increase their influence on the overall conditions under the PA.³ The composition of Palestinian society has also been impacted by these new realities. Large investments in various sectors have weakened the middle class and widened the socio-economic gap as unemployment and poverty rates increased (UNCTAD 2017).

The politics of the Oslo Accords continue to influence the criteria and ways in which aid is administered in Palestine. Aid is meant to preserve the political process that is premised on negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians—even if they show very limited success. Initiatives are geared toward developing Palestinian institutions that work in accord with the political process, regardless of the PA's legitimacy.

Hence, aid constitutes short-term interventions and budget support, directly covering the salaries of PA employees. This is because in the absence of a peace agreement, the PA cannot generate the necessary resources to operate. Yet, unmitigated deterioration and revolution must be prevented. Political objectives here supersede developmental considerations, making foreign aid a fostering mechanism and not a tool for development per se (Nakhleh 2012; Haddad 2018). This explains why political objectives have never included exerting sufficient or genuine pressure on Israel. This is the case even as faint criticism is voiced against destructive measures such as the construction of the Separation Wall, massive land confiscations, the building and expanding of settlements, and the siege of Gaza.

The burden of indecisiveness on development

Some international players have perceived various measures to isolate unwanted opposition parties, including development aid. Others have perceived such measures as neither developmental nor a proper method for tackling conflict. For example, the international community refused to recognize that Hamas won the fair and open 2006 elections, causing a deep split among Palestinians that remains to this day. Hamas was boycotted by international and internal actors, yet it managed to take control of the already besieged GS in 2007, and had to face an even stricter general blockade. Israel's wars against Gaza (in 2008–2009, 2012, and 2014) were in fact acts of retaliation against Gaza for not agreeing to participate in the 'peace process' (UNDP 2014). Recent rumors that Hamas was engaged with Israel in secret negotiations toward the alleviation of the untenable humanitarian situation have been denied by Israel. These talks do not have the approval of the PA, which believes that the Gaza government does not have the authority to conduct such negotiations. The GS today exhibits an alarming level of weakness and fragility.

The fact that foreign aid was never detrimental to Israel's settler colonial rule should suggest that Palestinian humanitarian needs cannot be tackled independently of engagement that addresses the national rights of the Palestinian people (Anderson 2005). If aid is not linked with credible political intervention, it resembles the work of firefighters who only move to extinguish a fire after it has already burned out. This is what happened when the donor community responded to the second uprising between 2000 and 2005 by doubling its aid, reaching USD 1 billion (Shearer and Meyer 2005, p. 167). The same pattern characterizes international responses to Israel's 2008–2009 war against Gaza, when donors pledged USD 5.2 billion for reconstruction (Hass 2009). The myth that aid can be de-politicized is the reason why aid has perpetuated the conflict. Thus, Palestinians must identify measures that strengthen and reinforce their resilience, so they may effectively resist and eventually end the Israeli occupation.

Development in Palestine: pedagogical insights

Research on Palestinian development tends to encounter various challenges. These are dictated mainly by the specificity of the colonial situation and the ensuing distortions that have affected the available literature regarding research of the premises, assumptions, and methods. The literature on Palestinian development has moved through three stages. The first was produced in the 1970s and 1980s by institutions associated with the PLO and UN agencies, and by Israeli academics and institutions.⁴ The second stage started with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Here, political, socioeconomic, cultural,

governance, spatial and infrastructural, and other aspects of development were covered in reports by donors and international bodies, with a strong focus on maintaining the so-called peace process. Commentaries were published also by Palestinian, Israeli, and international writers.⁵ In the debate regarding development policies and priorities, however, a striking absence of the PA can be observed—beyond a few descriptive reports demanded by donors to continue their aid. Thus, two and a half decades after Oslo, Palestinians' own vision of development (policies and priorities), and of the implications and outcomes of its defunct condition, are largely absent. The third stage covers scholarship that appeared in the last decade or so, differing from the previous work. The usual discourses of peacebuilding and neoliberal policies which have characterized literature since the founding of the PA are overtly questioned.⁶ Recent analysis of development is strongly critical of colonialism and neoliberal policies, focusing on resistance. It seeks to defend and revive a different form of liberation scholarship that focuses not only on national struggle (previously put on the back burner), but also on the intrinsic links to anti-imperialist and social struggle.⁷

The emerging literature dissents,⁸ both theoretically and empirically, from the premises and hypothesis adopted by what I call the 'post-Oslo-Accords consensus,' which consists of the Palestinian 'ruling' elite, the donors, international organizations, and Israel. It is diverse and brings different perspectives to the understanding of development by raising questions about the cost of donor interventions and the consequences of so-called peace-building, state-building, economic development, good governance, etc.

Reflecting on the works of the new writings, Raja Khalidi deems them as invaluable and necessary (ethically and methodologically) both to express what suits the Palestinians and to determine the best means to achieve this after two decades of PA subjection to external parties, adding:

Not only are donor programs rarely 'owned' in either design or implementation phases, but increasingly the Palestinian government and NGO 'beneficiaries' of international aid have largely abandoned any pretext of trying to influence the aid flows, acquiescing in whatever the changing priorities of this or that donor might bring in the next funding cycle. So through informed scholarship, greater agency might indeed permeate the Palestinian body politic in the years to come.

(Raja Khalidi 2015, p. 10)

Apparently, the new critical discourse on development in Palestine is not unjustified. This explains why it is steadily becoming part of the overall debate of development under colonial settings. These new writings have opened up broader spaces for analysis of the peculiarity of development in Palestine.

Despite the vigor of the issues raised by the new writings, there is certainly space for studies interrogating where the latest analysis might lead. Among the questions that can be raised pertain to particular visions and approaches for understanding and tackling development under colonial rule. Other relevant questions explore how foreign aid harms the Palestinian struggle for liberty and dignity. What alternative development methods could be introduced to support this pursuit, and what new modes of interactions with international actors can be foreseen?

Other related concerns (highlighted by Raja Khalidi) can be addressed. How can the settler-colonial framework proposed by new scholars provide a better guide for policy action aimed at social and

economic progress for the Palestinian people? Is “reform” of the PA possible without re-initiating the liberation struggle? How can settler–colonial inquiry help build a consensus about which liberation agenda may suit Palestine? Should it focus on resisting the colonial regime in the WBGS? Or rather, is this a call for a liberation struggle of Palestinians wherever they live under Israeli rule, regardless of statehood? Also, how and when can a critical analysis of neoliberalism be an effective political and social tool without further polarizing the otherwise wide Palestinian consensus on the need to resist settler–colonialism through a nationalist political agenda? We must further bear in mind that there is no serious discussion on whether to resist neoliberalism. These are crucial questions for new scholars to explore. Such trajectories should not ignore the demise of the two-state option or the continued growing of the internal split among Palestinians.

Conclusion

Since the founding of the PA in 1994, development has faced two key challenges. First, Israel’s physical control over land and resources and its linking of the Palestinian and Israeli economies have prevented Palestinians from obtaining sufficient resources or basic conditions for development. Second, as foreign aid is frequently determined by political considerations, this aid in Palestine serves to control (and domesticate) Palestinians. This comes at the expense of their inalienable national and human rights. Foreign aid is, in fact, deepening Palestinian reliance on others, and leaves them unable to reject destructive measures. Development interventions and the struggle for national liberation do not seem to be entirely compatible in the case of Palestine. Development necessitates sound laws and regulations, stable institutions, and secure resources. These conditions also allow for the creation of a state that preserves liberty and dignity. They are, however, not easy to obtain when a people under colonial rule aim to dismantle repression and shake off injustice. The two endeavors involve different talents and skills. If the international community intends to truly support the Palestinians and to spend its foreign aid wisely, it must address the root causes of the conflict expressed in Zionist colonialism and assist in dismantling the last colonial rule in modern days.

Notes

1 A colonial power denotes a foreign entity that is seeking to appropriate the land of the indigenous population and establish a new colonial society. For a discussion of settler colonialism, see Wolfe (2006).

2 This is not done without purpose. Some settlements were built on fresh aquifers to enable Israel to transport water from settlements to Israel proper.

3 Small and medium-sized businesses are unable to compete with big companies such as foreign agencies, contractors, and the monopolies. See Mohammed Nasr (2004).

4 Examples of academic works are: Kuttab (1989); Abed (1988); Roy (1987); Khouri (1980).

5 Examples of works are: Raja Khalidi and Sobhi Samour (2010); Saleh (2008); Keating et al. (2005); Khan et al. (2004); Roy (1999).

6 Examples of these works are: Haddad (2018); Roy (2016); Hanieh (2013); Nakhleh (2011).

7 See *Critical Readings on Development Under Colonialism: Towards a Political Economy for Liberation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (Center for Development Studies 2015), a book based on the conference “Geographies of Aid Intervention in Palestine,” held by Birzeit University in 2010, which discussed the meaning of development after the Oslo Accords. It aimed to propose alternatives to donor-guided aid paradigms and neoliberal approaches to development and questions mainstream theories and prescriptions on Palestinian development, especially the neoliberal reform and state-building agenda, yearning to provide alternative strategies.

8 Generally, research (Roy 1999, 2000; Keating et al. 2005; Le More 2005) has focused on the structural aspect the Israeli occupation plays in undermining the potential of Palestinian development and aims to reveal how this has shaped development policies. In these studies, the symbolic and material neoliberal foundations of development policy and its impacts have been unnoticed. Despite recent studies (Khalidi and Samour 2011, for example), the relationship between neoliberalism and Palestinian development has not been fully examined.

References

- Abdelhamid, A. 2006. Urban development and planning in the occupied Palestinian territories: Impacts on urban form. Presented in *The Conference on Nordic and International Urban Morphology: Distinctive and Common Themes*, Stockholm, Sweden, September 3–5, pp. 5–6.
- Abed, G. T. ed. 1988. *The Palestinian Economy: Studies in Development Under Prolonged Occupation*. London: Routledge.
- Agha, H. and Khalidi, A. 2006. *A Framework for a Palestinian National Security Doctrine*. London: Chatham House. P. 139ff. a.
- Ahmed, H. H. 2005. Palestinian resistance and ‘Suicide Bombing’: Causes and consequences. In T. Bjørgo, ed. *The Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality, and Ways Forward*. New York: Routledge, 87–102.
- Amnesty International. 2009. *Troubled Waters: Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water*.
- Anderson, M. B. 2005. ‘Do No Harm’: The impact of international assistance to the occupied Palestinian territory. In M. Keating, A. Le More, and R. Lowe, eds. *Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: The Case of Palestine*. London: Chatham House.
- Anten, L., Briscoe, I. and Mezzera, M. 2012. *The Political Economy of State-building in Situations of Fragility and Conflict: From Analysis to Strategy*. Conflict Research Unit Netherlands Institute of International Relations.
- Barber, B. K. 2014. The Politics of Development. *Human Development*, 57, 319–321.
- Blewitt, J. 2015. *Understanding Sustainable Development*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- B’Tselem. 2012. *Under the Guise of Legality: Declarations on State Land in the West Bank*, March 2012.
- B’Tselem. 2017a. *Settlements*, November, updated June 2018.
- B’Tselem. 2017b. *The Separation Barrier*.

- B'Tselem. 2018. *List of Military Checkpoints in the WB and GS*, updated June 2018.
- Center for Development Studies. 2015. *Critical Readings on Development Under Colonialism: Towards a Political Economy for Liberation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*. Birzeit University.
- Collier, P. et al. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. World Bank: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, J. 2011. *Global Palestine*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Donnelly, J. 2013. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ezbidi, B. 2015. The Palestinian split: Roots of fracture and requirements of repair. (in Arabic). *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi (December)*, 77–90.
- Farsakh, L. 2002. Palestinian labor flows to the Israeli economy: A finished story? *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 32(3), 13–27.
- Haddad, T. 2018. *Palestine Ltd: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Territory*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Hagbard, C. 2018. *Israeli court rules to dismiss confession of Israeli charged with burning Palestinian Family to death*. International Middle East Media Center, June 21.
- Hanieh, A. 2013. The Oslo illusion. *Jacobin*, (10), 21 April.
- Hass, A. 2009. International donors pledge \$5.2 billion for Gaza reconstruction. *Haaretz*, March 2.
- Human Rights Watch. 2016. *Occupation, Inc.: How Settlement Businesses Contribute to Israel's Violations of Palestinian Rights*, January 19.
- Human Rights Watch. 2018. *World Report 2018: Israel and Palestine—Events of 2017*.
- Human Sciences Research Council. 2009. South African study: Israel practicing apartheid and colonialism. *Electronic Intifada (June)*.
- Keating M., Le More, A. and Lowe, R. (eds.). 2005. Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: *The Case of Palestine*. London: Chatham House.
- Khalidi, R. and Samour, S. 2010. Neoliberalism as liberation: The statehood program and the remaking of the Palestinian national movement. *Institute for Palestine Studies*, 40(11), 6–25.
- Khalidi, R. 2015. Twenty-first century Palestinian development studies. *The Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45(16), 7–15.
- Khan, M., Giacaman, G. and Amundsen, I. 2004. State Formation in Palestine: Viability and Governance during a Social Transformation. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Khoury, R. 1980. Israel's imperial economics. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 9(2), 71–78.
- Kuttab, E. 1989. Community development under occupation: An alternative strategy. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2(1), 1–38.

- Lynk, M. S. 2018. Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. Report by the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, submitted to the General Assembly on October 22, 2018. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights.
- Massad, J. A. 2006. *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*. Taylor & Francis.
- Nakhleh, K. 2012. *Globalized Palestine: The National Sell-Out of a Homeland*. New Jersey: The Red Sea Press.
- Naqib, F. M. 2002. Economic aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economics Research (October).
- Nasr, M. 2004. Monopolies and the PNA. In M. Khan, G. Giacaman and I. Amundsen, eds. *State Formation in Palestine, Viability and Governance during a Social Transformation*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Nassar, T. 2018. Settlers step up hostilities against Palestine's mosques. *The Electronic Intifada*, 13 July.
- Nussbaum, M. 2011. *Creating Capabilities—Human Dignity Central to Economic Development*. London: Harvard University Press.
- OCHA. 2017. *WB: Movement and Access*, December 2017.
- OCHA. 2018. *Humanitarian Bulletin: Occupied Palestinian Territories*, September.
- OHCHR. 2016. *Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan*, October.
- Palestine Investment Promotion Agency. 1999. *Law on the Encouragement of Investment in Palestine, The Amended Palestinian Investment Law: Law No. (1) Of 1999 and its amendments (Merged law)*, State of Palestine.
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics [PCBS]. 2018. *Press Release on the Results of the Labour Force Survey, Second Quarter (April–June 2018) Round*.
- Roy, S. 1987. The Gaza strip: A case of economic de-development. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17(1), 56–88.
- Roy, S. 1999. De-development revisited: Economy and society since Oslo. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 28(3), 64–82.
- Roy, S. 2000. Palestinian de-development. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29(3), 98–100.
- Roy, S. 2016. *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development*, Expanded Third Edition. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Saleh, B. 2008. The fragility of the Palestinian authority: Economic causes. *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, 3(2), 48–56.

- Shearer, D. and Meyer, A. 2005. The dilemma of aid under occupation. In M. Keating, A. Le More, and R. Lowe, eds. *Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: The Case of Palestine*. Royal Institute of International Affairs. London: Chatham House.
- Stewart, F. 2007. Horizontal inequalities and conflict: An introduction and some hypotheses. Presented at Conference on Conflict Prevention and Peaceful Development: Policies to Reduce Inequality and Exclusion, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity CRISE (July).
- Tahhan, Z. 2017. UN slams Israel for 'de-development' of Palestine: New report reviews effects of Israel's 50-year occupation of the Palestinian territories and settlement growth. Aljazeera, September 12.
- Trading Economics. n.d. Country comparison Israel vs State of Palestine and Palestine GDP per capita. Available at: Countryeconomy.com.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD]. 2017. Fifty Years of Occupation Have Driven the Palestinian Economy into De-development and Poverty, September.
- United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]. 2014. Results of the detailed infrastructure. Damage Assessment–Gaza 2014.
- Wolfe, P. 2006. Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387–409.
- World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. Bruntlant Report.
- Zahriyeh, E. 2014. Maps: The Occupation of the WB. Aljazeera America, July 4.