

# 11 Farming for Freedom: the Shackled Palestinian Agricultural Sector

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## Introduction

In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, agriculture is commonly perceived by the Palestinian people to be the backbone of the Palestinian society and economy, with farmers widely viewed as the last stronghold of resistance (Sansour and Tartir, 2014). Agriculture is not merely viewed as an ordinary economic sector, but is instead widely perceived to be an act of resistance and an illustration of steadfastness (Dana, 2014a). Farmers preserve and reclaim land, build self-reliance and an economy of resistance, and challenge forced dependency and economic asymmetric containment. In each of these respects farming is also a political act.

Additionally, agriculture and farming are embedded in and well connected to the individual and collective identity of the Palestinians: their history, culture, lifestyle, literature, and overall struggle for freedom and self-determination. In addition to fulfilling the conventional economic and societal role of the agricultural sector, Palestinian farming and agriculture can be seen as domains that challenge oppression and achieve freedom and emancipation.

However, the reality of Palestinian agriculture and farming has proven to be somewhat at odds with the popular narrative and conscience –

closer reflection shows that this backbone has been severely distorted and damaged, if not paralysed (Abu Sa'da and Tartir, 2014). The resilience and resistance of the farmers have been hampered, mainly by the continuation of the Israeli occupation and its policies, but also by the unsupportive and rather damaging policies of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In engaging at both points, this chapter argues that Palestinian agriculture and farmers have been shackled by Israeli colonialism, but also by Palestinian neoliberalism.

As the colonial power, Israel continues in its land confiscation and territorial annexation policy: expanding settlements and colonies; nourishing settler violence; stealing land and natural resources; imposing policies of closure, siege and blockade; controlling trade, exports and imports – each being an element within a 'matrix of control' directed towards the colonization of the Palestinians (Farsakh, 2004; Halper, 2010). Each one of these policies is ultimately directed towards the Palestinian agricultural sector, being undertaken with a view to 'destroy[ing] farming as a way of life for Palestinians and thereby weaken[ing] their passionate attachment to their ancestral lands' (Cook, 2016, p. 4).

As the colonization process advanced, Palestinian land was lost and conquered by the

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Israelis, with the remaining lands being fragmented by multiple measures; trees were uprooted and yields destroyed; water was stolen or became unfit for consumption; and the whole agriculture sector was besieged (UNCTAD, 2015). Since 1967, Israeli authorities have uprooted 2.5 million fruit trees (ARIJ, 2015a); 800,000 Palestinian olives trees, equivalent to 33 Central Parks of New York (ARIJ and PMoNE, 2011; Visualizing Palestine, 2013), have also been removed, providing a particularly vivid depiction of the colonial enterprise and its impact on agriculture.

The policies and donor-driven development model of the PA also continue to contribute to the deterioration of the agriculture sector (Abdelnour *et al.*, 2012). Less than 1% of the PA budget is currently allocated to the agricultural sector, which is also completely absent from the organization's state building and development plans. The adoption of the neoliberal approach of joint Palestinian–Israeli agro-industrial zones and qualified economic zones also continues to negatively impact both the needs of Palestinian farmer and the agricultural sector more generally (Tartir, 2012a, 2013; Dana, 2014b). These are just few examples of the PA's pernicious policies and terrible neglect of the agricultural sector.

However, ultimately it is the PA's reluctance to invest in farming that has proven to be the gravest dereliction of duty. The PA's reticence appears to be primarily attributable to the fact that such investment would necessitate direct confrontation with both Israel and the international donor community, a confrontation that the PA is both unable and unwilling to undertake (Tartir, 2016). In addition, the donor community has shown little or no interest in agriculture, evidencing a clear lack of interest in confronting the Israeli occupying authorities and an orientation towards quick-impact projects (Le More, 2008; Taghdisi-Rad, 2010). A total of nearly US\$30 billion of international aid has been committed to Palestine during the period 1993–2015. Of this, only a tiny amount has been directly committed to the agricultural sector: between 1994 and 2000 only 1.41% of aid was allocated to agriculture; between 2000 and 2005 the average allocation was 0.74%; and between 2005 and 2009 only 0.9% on average was committed (DeVoor and Tartir, 2009; Tartir *et al.*, 2012; Kurzom, 2017).

In the half-century since 1967, the Palestinian agriculture sector has experienced a pervasive process of de-development that has gradually deprived it of its transformative potential while expanding Israel's territorial dominance and control. The process of de-development is a 'deliberate, systematic and progressive dismemberment of an indigenous economy by a dominant one, where economic – and by extension, societal – potential is not only distorted but denied' (Roy, 2007, p. 33). De-development is therefore a process that forestalls development by 'depriving or ridding the economy of its capacity and potential for rational structural transformation [i.e. natural patterns of growth and development] and preventing the emergence of any self-correcting measures' (Roy, 1995, p. 128). De-development occurs when normal economic relations are impaired or abandoned, preventing any logical or rational arrangement of the economy or its constituent parts, diminishing productive capacity and precluding sustainable growth. Over time, de-development represents nothing less than the denial of economic potential (Roy, 2014). While the implications of this politically constructed process extend beyond agriculture, it is this sector that most clearly conveys its different attributes.

This chapter will initially provide an overview of the Palestinian agricultural sector, which sets out its resources, productivity and contributions. This is then followed by a discussion of the impact of the Israeli occupation, which focuses on the distortion and deterioration of Palestinian agriculture. The chapter also reflects on the PA's neglect of the agricultural sector, along with the pernicious policies that it has enacted, before offering a set of conclusions.

### **The Palestinian Agricultural Sector: an Overview**

In 1967, Palestinian agricultural production was almost identical to Israel's, accounting for, according to some estimates, over half of the Palestinian gross domestic product (GDP). The West Bank exported 80% of the entire vegetable crop it produced, along with 45% of its total fruit production (Hazboun, 1986; PASSIA, 2015).<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of the 1967 *Naksa*, the agricultural

sector's contribution to GDP declined dramatically (UNCTAD, 1990): from nearly 50% of GDP in the 1960s, this share fell to 9.8% in 2000; 5.5% in 2010; and 3.4% in 2015 (UNCTAD, 2015; PCBS, 2017a). Due to the Israeli state's violence and economic policies towards the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the agricultural labour force fell as a percentage of the total labour force from 46% in 1969 to 27.4% in 1985 (Kahan, 1987); between 1965 and 1989, Palestinian cultivated areas in the West Bank declined by 30% (from 243,500 ha to 170,600 ha). As a result of the 1967 Israeli occupation of what remains of the Palestinian lands and to the construction and expansion of its illegal settlements, the area of field crops and forages evidenced an equally drastic decline, decreasing from 85,000 ha in 1966 to approximately 46,000 ha in 1994 (Al-'Aloul, 1987; Butterfield *et al.*, 2000).

By 1993, food self-reliance (production/consumption) for some products exceeded the 100% level (citrus 213%, olives 190%, vegetables 149%), but declined at a dramatic rate in the years since (Anabtawi, 2016). The average yield per hectare is half that of Jordan and only 43% of Israel, despite the fact that these countries share an almost identical natural environment (UNCTAD, 2015). The agricultural and fishing sector employed 32% of the Palestinian labour force in the early 1980s; however, this percentage declined to 11.8% in 2010 and 8.7% in 2015 (PCBS, 2017a). Between 2000 and

2008, the total cultivated area in the West Bank and Gaza Strip averaged 150,000 ha; however, since 2008 it has dropped by a staggering 40% to 90,000 ha due to the three major Israeli assaults on the Gaza Strip and the illegal settlements expansion, lands confiscation and continuation of the military occupation measures in the West Bank, as well as the PA's neglect of the agriculture sector (Kurzom, 2016; PCBS, 2017a). In addition, the ratio of labour productivity in agriculture to labour productivity of the economy as a whole fell by more than 50% between 1995 and 2011 (World Bank, 2014).

Figures provided by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) indicate that nearly 81% of West Bank cultivated land is committed to the cultivation of low-value and low-yield crops – olives account for 57% of cultivated land while vegetables and fruits account for 19%. The 2011 PCBS agriculture survey reported that there are 7.8 million fruit-bearing olive trees and 1.1 million non-bearing olive trees in the West Bank and Gaza (PCBS, 2011). The olive subsector contributes 15% of total agricultural income and also 'mitigates the impact of unemployment and poverty by providing 3 to 4 million days of seasonal employment per year and by supporting 100,000 Palestinian families' (UNCTAD, 2015, p. 5). However, olive oil production is in decline. It has dropped from an average of 23,000 tonnes per year (2000–2004) to 14,000 tonnes per year

**Table 11.1.** Palestinian agricultural holdings, average daily wages, and cultivated areas. (Prepared by the author based on PCBS (2011), PA (2014), UNCTAD (2015) and PCBS (2017a).)

Dimension	Statistics
Number of agricultural holdings (2011)	105,238 (85,885 in the West Bank and 19,353 in Gaza)
Type of agricultural holdings (2011)	68% plant holdings; 10% livestock holdings; 22% mixed holdings
Ownership of agricultural holdings (2011)	93% to men; 7% to women
Agricultural sector average daily wage (2015)	US\$13 (US\$18 in the West Bank and US\$6 in Gaza), below the average wage for all economic activities (US\$22) Of women employed, 82% were unpaid family members
Total cultivated area (2011)	103,490 ha (64% fruit trees; 13% vegetables; 24% field crops)
Type of land (2014)	200,000 ha as rangeland; 62,100 ha for grazing; 9400 ha as forests
Location of land (2015)	62.9% of the arable land is located in Area C; 18.8% in Area B; 18.3% in Area A
Number of livestock (2013)	33,980 cattle; 2058 camels; 730,894 sheep; 215,335 goats; 4,342,910 broilers; 1,154,586 layers; 46,226 beehives
Caught fish and fishermen (2015)	Caught fish totalled 3.2 tonnes; 3617 fishermen; 1261 boats

(2007–2010). As a result of this decline, around half of domestic demand had to be met through imported olive oil in 2009 (Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, 2010). This is a particularly significant development because the olive harvest 'represents the ultimate kind of resistance by Palestinians: an individual refusal to be moved, and a collective refusal to be ethnically cleansed' (Cook, 2016, p. 3).

Crucially, Palestinian use of water for agriculture was estimated to be one-tenth of Israel's (UNCTAD, 2015); on a per capita basis, Israel's residential water consumption is more than five times that of West Bank Palestinians (Ma'an Development Centre, 2010). Israeli settlers, meanwhile, consume ten times more water than the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank (AIX, 2017; Hass, 2017). The same pattern of water allocation extends to the agriculture sector. Palestinians are allowed to use only 18% of the water resources available in the West Bank, with the remainder used by Israel (ARIJ, 2007, p. 4). Over 70% of communities located entirely or predominantly in Area C<sup>2</sup> are not connected to the water network, meaning that they are forced to rely on tanker water, a resource provided at very high cost, which also extends to the agricultural domain (Abdel Razek-Faoder and Dajani, 2013). The lack and the increasing cost of water have forced many Palestinian farmers to leave the agriculture sector, and instead work as cheap labour within the Israeli economy (Farsakh, 2002; Stop the Wall, 2007; Mansour, 2012).

The deterioration of the Palestinian agricultural sector has clear implications for poverty, inequality and food insecurity. Nearly 30% of Palestinians are caught in a poverty trap, while others experience persistently high levels of unemployment (the unemployment rate in Gaza is around 45%, while youth unemployment surpasses 60% (Wildeman and Tartir, 2016)). Only one in four households in West Bank and Gaza is food secure (UNCTAD, 2014). In Gaza, 57% of households are classified as food insecure, 80% are dependent on humanitarian aid and around 33% have been forced to reduce their daily food intake as a result of the Israeli blockade (ILO, 2014). In 2014, approximately 40% of all Palestinian households reported that they received some form of assistance (84% in Gaza Strip and 17% in West Bank) (FSS and PCBS, 2016). Clean water is a requirement for food security, but

approximately 95% of the Gaza regional aquifer's water is unsafe for drinking without treatment. In 2000, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided 80,000 refugees in Gaza with food assistance – in 2016, this figure had increased to more than 930,000 refugees (UNRWA, 2016). These bleak indicators derive from a decades-long process of domination and colonization, appearing as the logical conclusion of political decisions and predispositions.

### Impact of Israeli Occupation on Palestinian Agriculture

The perpetuation of the Israeli occupation and its colonial project are the central factors that continue to militate against Palestinian development. The occupation actively seeks to curtail Palestinian economic, cultural and political rights (Abunimah, 2014). Palestinian political and economic rights are the key objects to which the occupation is addressed, being clearly directed towards their frustration and even negation. This is why the land, and by extension agriculture and farming, are such core preoccupations for the Israeli occupation (Farsakh, 2004). Land remains at the very core of the conflict, a point which is clearly retained by the policies that successive Israeli governments have pursued since Israel was founded in 1948 (Pappe, 2016).

The Israeli policies of domination, enacted over the course of decades, have created fundamental structural deficiencies and distortions in the Palestinian economy, a feature evidenced in the dramatic erosion of the agricultural base (Calis, 2017). From the Israeli perspective, this damage is not negative but rather translates to direct profits, culminating in clear benefits for the Israeli economy, the occupation and Israeli settlers (Who Profits, 2017a, 2017b). Any attempt to quantify these policies, along with the damage that they inflict, will only reflect part of the reality of de-development. However, despite this limitation, it is still worthwhile to reflect upon quantitative indicators that have been provided by international institutions and scholars that are directly engaged with agricultural questions in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, the Palestinian Ministry of National Economy (PMoNE) and the Applied



Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ) reported that the measurable costs imposed by the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian economy (for 2010) amounted to US\$6.897 billion, which represented 84.9% of the total estimated Palestinian GDP. This estimate suggests that, in the absence of the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian economy would be nearly twice its current size. Closer consideration reveals that more than half (56%) of the costs are attributable to the fact that the Palestinians are not able to access their own resources, including land (ARIJ and PMoNE, 2011).<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, ARIJ updated the report, estimating that the overall cost of the Israeli occupation amounted to around US\$9.458 billion, a figure representing 75% of Palestinian GDP (ARIJ, 2015b). Direct damages inflicted during the course of the three Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip during the period 2008–2014, were at least three times the amount of Gaza's GDP. From 2000–2005, the total cost of Israeli incursions during the *Al-Aqsa* (or second) *Intifada* amounted to US\$8.4 billion, an amount twice the size of the Palestinian economy (UNCTAD, 2016). Clearly, these costs cannot be reversed or retrieved while the military occupation is ongoing; international aid provides, at best, a partial or qualified amelioration.

The World Bank has also estimated that the potential direct additional output of a number of sectors (in particular agriculture and the exploitation of Dead Sea minerals) would amount to a total annual income of at least US\$2.2 billion – equivalent to 23% of Palestinian GDP (2011 figures). This counterfactual estimate suggested that the agricultural sector would benefit by a total of US\$704 million, equivalent to 7% of the 2011 GDP (World Bank, 2014). The Office of the Quartet Representative estimated that an increase of nominal GDP (up to US\$1 billion) and employment (up to 30,000–55,000 jobs) could be achieved over a 3-year period, despite the continuation of the occupation. Both outcomes, it was suggested, could be achieved through the commitment of an additional 150 million cubic metres (MCM) of water and cumulative capital expenditures of US\$190–245 million (Office of the Quartet, 2014, p. 3).

Upon descending from the abstract level of these counterfactual analyses, we see that the reality of Palestinian agriculture is characterized

by deterioration and falling productivity, developments that have important implications for the wider economy and society: UNCTAD estimates that the Palestinian agricultural sector is currently operating at perhaps one-quarter of its potential (UNCTAD, 2015). In large part, this unrealized potential is attributable to the access and mobility restrictions that continue to impede the work of Palestinian farmers. The digging of wells is not allowed; security buffer zones are established and Palestinian land is confiscated for Israeli military use; meanwhile, the Separation Wall, checkpoints and other physical barriers impede the ability of the agricultural sector to grow or even function. In Gaza, a large area of agricultural land is inaccessible or out of production as a direct result of its procurement for security purposes; meanwhile, the fishing industry has completely collapsed.

The regime of control and restrictions imposes considerable transaction costs, complicating economic exchange and frustrating economic development. UNCTAD estimates that the 'costs of exporting and importing borne by Palestinian producers are twice as much as those borne by their Israeli counterparts, while procedures for importation require four times the amount of time Israeli importers spend on similar activities' (UNCTAD, 2015, p. i). As a direct consequence of Israeli restrictions on the importation of fertilizers, Palestinian agricultural productivity has declined by between 20 and 33% since enforcement of the restrictions on the importation of fertilizers (UNCTAD, 2015). In 2016, Israel demolished 1023 Palestinian residential and commercial properties in the West Bank (PCBS, 2017b); between 1967 and 2013, 27,000 Palestinian structures were demolished (UNCTAD, 2015, p. 20). In the West Bank, there are around 413 illegal Israeli constructions (including 150 settlements and 119 outposts), of which 48% are built on private Palestinian land (PCBS, 2017b). In 2014, approximately 9333 productive trees were destroyed or vandalized; in January 2015 alone, another 5600 trees were vandalized. At least 10% of the most fertile land of the West Bank has been enclosed behind the separation barrier; meanwhile, only 35% of potentially irrigable land is actually irrigated, coming at an annual cost of 110,000 jobs and 10% of GDP (UNCTAD, 2016, pp. 11–15).

Area C of the West Bank effectively remains out of reach for Palestinians – of the 16,000 arable hectares in the Jordan Valley, Palestinians only farm about 4200. Settlers, meanwhile, farm between 3000 and 5000 ha with the rest being blocked off to Palestinians (AIX, 2017; Hass, 2017). As the consequence of a systematic policy of displacement, the Jordan Valley's Palestinian population has decreased over the period 1967–2009 from 320,000 to 52,000 residents (Abdel Razek-Faoder and Dajani, 2013). While most of the West Bank's aquifer and spring water is located in Area C, Palestinians have not been able to extract their agreed allocation of 138.5 MCM per annum (World Bank, 2014, p. 19). If utilized to its full potential, this resource would irrigate the 32,640 ha of arable land that is notionally available for Palestinian cultivation in Area C, thus increasing Palestinian Area C production by US\$1.068 billion (World Bank, 2014, p. 20).

During the course of the 2014 war on Gaza, the Israeli army destroyed major parts of the agricultural infrastructure, a large portion of which has not yet recovered. During that assault, the Israeli army destroyed 1287 ha of tree orchards, 335 licensed water wells, 1754 ha of vegetables, 922 poultry farms, 1532 sheep and cattle farms and 3219 greenhouses (FSS, 2016). In 2011, it was estimated that three-quarters of the Gaza Strip's population were food insecure, a development attributable to Israel's commitment to use food as a means of population control (Zurayk and Gough, 2013). The Israeli 'security buffer zone' usurps about 24% of the total area of Gaza Strip, further constricting the most densely populated area in the world (which has around 5000 capita/km<sup>2</sup>) (PCBS, 2017b). In response to rapidly deteriorating living conditions, in which socio-economic conditions have fallen to their lowest point since 1967 (UN, 2015), the UN has suggested that the Strip could become uninhabitable by 2020.

Israeli policies also impede the farming livelihoods of Palestinian Bedouin communities resident in the West Bank and Al-Naqab (Negev). An Al-Shabaka policy brief (Abdelnour *et al.*, 2012, p. 3) suggests that there are 13,000 Palestinian Bedouins resident in the West Bank, with 20 communities just east of Jerusalem accounting for 2300 of this total (IWGIA, 2011); of the 7000 Bedouins resident in Area C, more than

80% are refugees, with 55% being food insecure (OCHA, 2011; 2014). 85% of Bedouins in the West Bank lack connection to electricity and water networks, while two-thirds reported facing settler violence over the course of the preceding 3 years (OCHA, 2014). The struggle for existence of the Palestinian Bedouins against Israel, especially those resident in Area E1 (an area located just east of the Jerusalem 'municipal boundary', on the hills between Ma'aleh Adumim Jewish settlement and Jerusalem), is particularly instructive, resulting in the loss of almost all access to land (Crowe, 2012; Hass, 2016). Many of these residents have demolition orders pending against their homes and face severe security risks, including exposure to land mines on a daily basis, which poses a direct threat to their herding activities and their livelihoods (Heneiti, 2016).

In the Al-Naqab (Negev), similar practices are also being implemented (HRW, 2008; Amara, 2013). The Bedouin village of *Al-Araqib* has reportedly been demolished more than 110 times (MaanNews, 2017), with a view to realizing the Jewish National Fund's plan to plant a 'peace forest' in its place. The violent demolition of the Palestinian Bedouin village of *Umm al-Hiran*, undertaken with a view to enabling the construction of a Jewish village, is another instructive example in this respect (Avis, 2017). The 2013 Prawer Plan envisages the 'relocation' of 40,000 Palestinian Bedouins, with a view to settling 1 million Israeli Jews in the Al-Naqab/Negev.<sup>5</sup>

While the human costs of these actions are considerable at the Palestinian side, they have resulted in substantial profits for Israeli companies and settlers. For the Israeli government, agriculture is an offensive weapon that can be directed towards the denial of Palestinian rights, a denial that in turn implies the inverse (e.g. profits and privileges) for Israel's Jewish citizens. This is clearly reiterated by the fact that a considerable amount of the agricultural export, much of which is grown by Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian and Syrian territories (Who Profits, 2014), is exported to Europe. In the process, the illegal Israeli settlements make extensive use of water and other natural resources, clearly reiterating Israel's systematic intention to dry Palestine of its water (Dajani, 2014). In the Jordan Valley, Israel granted almost exclusive use of water to settlements; every year, settlers

export around US\$285 million worth of agricultural goods to Europe, which is around 28% of the total agricultural goods exported from Israel to Europe (Who Profits, 2014, p. 8); in contrast, Palestinian exports account for a total of around US\$19 million.<sup>6</sup> These figures clearly illustrate how the potential profits of Palestinian agriculture are seized and transferred, being transformed into a weapon that helps to perpetuate the colonial condition.

### The PA and Agriculture

The Israeli policies and their consequences for Palestinian farming and agriculture have not been challenged, much less reversed, by the Palestinian governing body. For the PA, this imperative is at the bottom of its list of priorities, something that is clearly reiterated in actions and policies (or the lack thereof) and the resources that the PA commits to this issue (Dana, 2014a). The official Palestinian neglect of the besieged agricultural sector has been qualified to some extent by the engagement of an aid-dependent Palestinian civil society. Yet, this remains profoundly problematic; appearing to suggest, by virtue of the fact that it does not openly challenge or contest, a tacit approval of a colonial strategy that seeks to strip the colonized from their productive base and attachment to their land (Sansour and Tartir, 2014).

Since the establishment of the PA in 1994, less than 1% of the PA annual budget has been allocated to the agricultural sector (Abdelnour *et al.*, 2012), with 85% of this total being spent on the salaries of staff within the Ministry of Agriculture (UNCTAD, 2012); in comparison, over the past decade, the security sector has accounted for around 30% of the PA's annual spending (Tartir, 2017). It is particularly instructive to reflect that the budget of some Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) exceeds the budget set aside for the PA Ministry of Agriculture. The little funding that has reached the agricultural sector has helped in sustaining the status quo and reinforcing the condition of dependency (Mansour, 2012; Saleh, 2012). The consequences that have arisen from specific donor practices (conditionality) and interventions within specific areas (particularly water-related issues) have not been challenged, much less corrected, by the PA (Hanieh, 2016).

These developments serve as further confirmation of the PA's deeply embedded dependence upon external donors (Tartir, 2015). The PA's failure to prioritize agriculture is clearly underlined by the fact that the agricultural sector does not feature prominently within its strategic development plans and state-building programmes. In those instances, where the sector does appear within these plans, there is the suspicion that this is attributable to the need to tick the inclusiveness box rather than the indication of a clear commitment to elevate the sector. In the absence of a clear strategic direction, the PA is neither supporting farmers through subsidies, infrastructure investments or the opening of new markets, nor protecting farmers from the violence of Israeli settlers.

PA policy makers have also frequently yielded to the conceptual and theoretical limitations of the modernization paradigm, thereby coming to view farming and agriculture as being an 'anti-modernity' domain that is fundamentally opposed to the project of modernization that needs to be undertaken. In contrast, the services and real estate sectors have instead been afforded priority, being more clearly aligned with the central prerogatives of the donor-imposed programme of neoliberal economic reform. In all too many respects and instances, the PA leadership has come to view the agriculture sector as a burden, failing to acknowledge, much less engage, the essential contribution that agriculture can make both to the national economy and the wider political struggle (Bisan, 2011; Tartir and Shikaki, 2013).

Instead of empowering farmers, the PA, acting in harmony with its political and economic agenda and complex network of corruption, has instead provided agency to Palestinian crony capitalists and a private sector elite (Tartir, 2012b). In essentially adopting the mantra 'rich individuals, poor nation', the PA unconsciously echoed the practices of the Israeli occupation. In a faithful rendition of the policies pursued by the colonial power, the PA has even forcefully confiscated land from Palestinian farmers, citing 'public use' justifications in the process, with a view to empowering crony capitalists to expand their real estate investments (Dana, 2014b).

As a direct consequence of neoliberal policies, credit facilities have rapidly proliferated. However, and as in many other places around the globe, this



development has been of little benefit to the agricultural sector, in large part due to the perception that it is a 'high risk' investment (Mansour, 2012; Abunimah, 2014). Neoliberal policies have also directly cultivated a class system among agricultural producers, spawning an elite of large-scale land-owning agribusiness owners and a rootless and dislocated peasantry willing to undertake wage labour in the service of these agribusinesses (Mansour, 2012). Neoliberal trade policies initiated under the Economic Paris Protocol (the economic annex of the Oslo Accords) have contributed to an influx of cheap food imports, leaving traditional Palestinian producers struggling to compete as a direct consequence (Mansour, 2012).

The PA's close adherence to neoliberal policies has also resulted in the establishment of joint Palestinian–Israeli agro-industrial zones, with the apparent expectation that these export-oriented zones will support Palestinian farmers. There is ample evidence that suggests the exact opposite, with farmers being transformed into cheap labour, ultimately benefiting Israeli companies and Palestinian crony capitalists. Export, as opposed to the fulfilling of urgent local demand, is the underpinning priority informing each of these developments (Tartir, 2012a; Bisan, 2013).

More problematically, these donor-driven and sponsored agro-industrial zones were built on fertile lands (as in the case of Jenin), a development that represents a 'criminal waste of Palestinian agricultural resources' (Cook, 2016). Closer examination reveals that these agro-industrial zones 'are helping to deprive the Palestinian economy of its transformative potential; expand Israel's territorial dominance in the OPT; increase Palestinians' dependency on Israel in both goods and labour markets; and displace small-scale family farming, which has been the sustaining power of the Palestinian people and culture for generations' (Sansour and Tartir, 2014, p. 2).

To summarize, the PA's reluctance to confront the conditions that sustain and embed dependence ultimately contribute to a perpetuation

of the colonial condition. In remaining beholden to wider developmental prejudices and its own conceptual limitations, the PA lacks a clear strategy that can be applied to existing challenges and obstacles. Far from addressing the conditions and attributes of de-development, the PA, through its policies, actions and cooperation with the colonizer, ultimately ensures its reinforcement and perpetuation.

## Conclusion

The crisis of the Palestinian agricultural sector is not in itself attributable to the absence of a modernized farming sector. Rather, this feature is instead a symptom, which can be traced back to originating political pathologies. The distortions and the fundamental deficiencies that characterize the agricultural sector are driven by the decades-long Israeli colonization of the Palestinian land. This process of colonization rested upon the conquest of Palestinian land that sought to restrict and confine the possibilities of independent Palestinian development (both political and economic). De-development is not an unfortunate or coincidental outcome, but can instead be traced back to a deliberate and focused colonial strategy.

Israel's systemic policies, which targeted Palestinian farming and agriculture, have been sustained and embodied by coercive power and brutal occupation, inflicting substantial economic and social damage. Far from challenging or contesting colonial power, the PA has instead more frequently functioned as a conduit through which it is reproduced. The Palestinian agricultural sector is therefore entrapped between Israeli colonialism and Palestinian neoliberalism, a uniquely pernicious double-bind that frustrates both its contemporary and future development. To continue under these circumstances is to undertake an act of resistance: to farm Palestine is to farm for freedom.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, the scope of analysis is limited to the Palestinian agricultural sector in the occupied West Bank (5840 km<sup>2</sup>) and Gaza Strip (360 km<sup>2</sup>), with particular focus upon the past two decades. For added context and historical background, see Tamari (1981), Doumani (1995), Sayigh (1979), Nadan (2006), Kurzom (2001) and Samara (2005).



<sup>2</sup> Under the terms established by the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three areas: Area A, which came under the civilian and security control of the PA (18%); Area B, which came under PA civilian and Israeli military control (21%); and Area C, which came under full Israeli control (61%). According to the World Bank, 'less than 1% of Area C, which is already built up, is designated by the Israeli authorities for Palestinian use; the remainder is heavily restricted or off-limits to Palestinians, with 68% reserved for Israeli settlements, circa 21% for closed military zones and circa 9% for nature reserves' (2014, p. 13).

<sup>3</sup> Hever (2010; 2012; 2016), Bar-Tal and Schnel (2012) and Swirski (2005; 2008) are particularly relevant to this discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Costs imposed by the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian economy were also attributed to restrictions on the value added of irrigation (15.0%), the restrictions on the Jordan Valley agriculture (8.2%), restrictions on the Dead Sea salts and minerals (13.6%) and the uprooting of trees (1.7%).

<sup>5</sup> The amount of land cultivated by the Bedouins in the Negev prior to 1948 was more than three times the amount cultivated by the entire Jewish community (the Yishuv) in all of historical Palestine. Refer to the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Special Focus on Palestinian Bedouins, published in July 2016 ([www.palestine-studies.org/resources/special-focus/palestinian-bedouins](http://www.palestine-studies.org/resources/special-focus/palestinian-bedouins)).

<sup>6</sup> Most of the pomegranates exported from Israel to Europe are grown in the occupied West Bank, as well as 22% of the almonds, 12.9% of the olives, 5.4% of the nectarines and 3% of the peaches (Who Profits, 2014, p. 11). Additionally, more than 60% of the dates sold in Israel are grown in the occupied part of the Jordan Valley. More than 80% of the dates grown specifically in the Jordan Valley are destined for export (Who Profits, 2014, p. 15).

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