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Centre



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THE REGULATION OF PALESTINIAN EVERYDAY LIFE

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The Regulation of Palestinian Everyday Life

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Introduction

Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, Palestinian society has been subjected to multiple regulatory frameworks and normative rules enacted by a range of national and external actors and institutions. By regulatory frameworks, we mean forms and mechanisms of control within everyday life. These frameworks include Israeli occupation military regulations, Palestinian national laws and agendas of national and international non-governmental organisations, such as donor organisations.

In November 2017, the LSE Middle East Centre and LSE Human Rights organised a workshop examining theoretical and methodological questions on ethnographic research in Palestine and the challenges of doing ethnography within a society affected by a continuous state of violence.

This workshop is part of a collaborative research project with Birzeit University, which seeks to explore how Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are affected by complex regulatory and normative systems, and the ways in which they perceive and negotiate such frameworks in their everyday life.

The workshop took an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together researchers to discuss their findings while addressing the project's key research questions: (a) How do regulatory frameworks enable and constrain Palestinians in their daily lives? (b) How are these multi-layered regulatory frameworks perceived by Palestinians, and what are the discourses developed by them to engage with these frameworks? (c) How do neoliberal modes of governance influence the way these regulatory frameworks operate?

Palestinians in their Everyday Life

The workshop's primary objective was to situate the Palestinian as an active subject, rather than a passive receiver of regulations that shape his or her everyday life. In the dominant literature concerned with the effects of law upon Palestinian society, law is often the starting point for investigation. However, in order to unpack complex regulatory frameworks, workshop participants embarked on an analysis of the experiences of several segments of Palestinian society across the West Bank and elsewhere, including school teachers, farmers in the Jordan Valley and Palestinian labourers in Israel.

Teachers in the West Bank

Mai Abu Moghli discussed how Palestinian teachers have been recognised across different historical phases as a group who have the potential to mobilise for national identity and the anti-colonial struggle. This particular understanding implies a set of regulatory frameworks from both the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority to which teachers are subject, including coercive and punitive measures, such as mandatory transfer between teaching posts, sackings and imprisonment if they are active in strikes, encourage nationalist sentiment, or are affiliated with particular political groups. Abu Moghli

identified the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE) as a key regulatory authority that has set the framework for education to enact nation-building since its inception in 1994, following the Oslo Accords. As part of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the MoE aims to create law-abiding citizens, where teachers are expected to educate students to build a functioning state.

Although Palestinian teachers are subjected to constant monitoring and scrutiny under political control and strict regulations, they have developed different forms of engagement with the regulatory frameworks imposed on them. Under different occupying powers, Palestinian teachers have employed different methods of resistance with strikes as one of their main tools, which they continue to use under the PA. However these strikes are usually sporadic, reactive and manipulated for political gain by teachers close to the PA. Recent examples include a general strike that was held against the PA in 2016, when around 35,000 teachers took to the streets and demanded an increase in basic salaries and the restructuring of the teachers' union. Though these events have led to a revival of hope among the Palestinian public for possible political, social and economic change, this is often short-lived.

Farmers in the Jordan Valley

Muna Dajani examined the transformation experienced by Palestinian farmers (*fellahin*), particularly in relation to their access to basic amenities such as water, land and electricity in the Jordan Valley. The Israeli occupation's restrictions on Palestinian existence in the Jordan Valley, which lies in Area C under the Oslo Accords, have devastating effects on their daily lives and existence as farmers. In addition, the neoliberal regulations and frameworks imposed by the PA have further negatively impacted their livelihoods. Following the Oslo Accords, the image of the farmer as an actor within the national struggle faded, transforming him/her into a mere labourer. This de-development and de-politicisation of the role of the farmer meant the emphasising of economic growth rather than strengthening of political and socio-cultural values.

This portrayal of the farmer as passive and victimised strips away his/her agency as a political subject, replacing this with economic rationalisation. Furthermore, this neoliberal evolution supposes a new form of 'liberation' through economic growth, but constrains the farmer to the logic of the capitalist business model. As a result of this framework, farming and indigenous agricultural practices are overlooked, and the farmer is viewed as a weak being who needs to be pulled out of poverty through wage labour. However, farming communities in the Jordan Valley have manipulated this imposed identity through daily acts of resistance against industrialisation, including holding multiple demonstrations against economic struggles, as well as demanding water access. They have used their agricultural practices to oppose the Israeli occupation's water and land dispossession, while simultaneously protesting against the PA's neoliberal projects which limit and weaken their livelihood and eventually their ability to remain on their land.

Palestinian Labourers in Israel

Andreas Hackl explored how Palestinian labourers working in Israel are being incorporated into the settler economy, but excluded from access to fundamental rights and privileges through tight regulation of their mobility. In this sense, these labourers are essentially ‘on tap’: the Israeli authorities can switch the flow of workers ‘on’ and ‘off’ depending on their economic demands and need, and depending on the political context. Complex bureaucratic regulations govern the conditional issuing of work permits. This permit regime allows the Israeli state to regulate labourers’ inclusion and exclusion within a dynamic of extreme dependency, whereby around 25 percent of West Bank Palestinians’ income is earned in Israel.

Palestinian labourers have found several ways to negotiate these regulatory frameworks, and to develop a form of constrained agency. These include tactics that enhance their mobility despite the absence of permits, but also the exploitative role of brokers who trade and resell working permits for inflated prices. The ‘smuggling’ of Palestinian workers across the West Bank’s borders allows tens of thousands to earn more than double the wage they could earn at home. Forced to lead underground lives in Israeli towns and cities – sleeping in construction sites, crammed apartments, or on the beach – labourers create small spaces of opportunity within severe restriction. Yet, deep economic dependency limits any space for political action under such conditions, as workers no longer have the time or means to organise effectively or seek alternatives.

Manifestation of International Regulatory Frameworks in Palestinian Everyday Life

The examples of the various Palestinian social groups emphasise the complex multi-layered normative worlds and regulatory frameworks that shape Palestinian life. They highlight the way Israeli military and civic regulations, as well as the PA legal system, determine daily life in Palestine. However, understanding the role played by international bodies is crucial when examining the domination of neoliberal legality and its direct influence on the lives of Palestinians.

UNRWA and the Distribution of Legal Documents

Anne Irfan discussed the influential role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a regulatory framework and a de facto governing authority over registered Palestinian refugees. This role directly regulates Palestinian refugees’ everyday life, including in the West Bank, given UNRWA’s responsibility for issuing them with legal documents that enable them to verify their identity and establish their entitlement to services, work and travel, as well as issuing birth certificates. Yet, not all Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA, as registration is limited to individuals who meet its eligibility criteria. This has immensely affected the excluded group of refugees and increased their dependency on international and foreign aid.

Although the Oslo Accords could have changed this regulatory role of UNRWA, their impact was minimal and didn't introduce any fundamental change to the existing structure. In response to UNRWA's normative framework and exclusionary registration practices, Palestinian refugees have resisted by negotiating and rejecting any discrimination between 'registered' and 'unregistered'. They perceive UNRWA's services as a right to which they are entitled to by virtue of being Palestinian, and this has been expressed in the ways different Palestinian communities organise regular protests against UNRWA's attempts to add further restrictions to its registration eligibility criteria, or to charge unregistered Palestinians for using its services.

Foreign Aid Agendas in Palestine

In her presentation, Alice Panepinto discussed additional international regulatory frameworks, such as the operation and involvement of donors in the lives of the Bedouin communities residing in what is considered Area C. These communities have become fully dependent on international aid to sustain their daily needs, since the PA is not allowed to operate in these areas. Panepinto suggested that the foreign aid system in these areas has introduced a normative regulatory system that distinguishes them and their residents from other Palestinian groups, as they are treated as a population in need of humanitarian assistance, their long-term development being therefore sidelined.

The application by foreign aid bodies of a humanitarian agenda, as opposed to a developmental one, contributes to dissolving Palestinian sovereignty in Area C. Moreover, these agendas have a great influence on Bedouin communities' lifestyles. They are forced into urban settings, causing them to lose grazing land and become cheap manual labour in Israeli settlements. Additionally, forcible transfer may accelerate the loss of the distinctive cultural heritage of families already expelled from their ancestral homes in the Naqab desert in southern Palestine in 1948.

Rethinking Research Themes and Concepts

The workshop also addressed the question of how to critically research the regulation of Palestinian everyday life and how to challenge dominant concepts, themes and methods in researching complex legal and social categories in Palestine, including class, status and gender. In this sense, presenters discussed how the Palestinian body is constructed and represented in research, how class can problematise dominant political structures in Palestine, and how challenging conventional temporal framing and contextualisation can allow for marginalised narratives of everyday life to arise.

Researching the Palestinian Body

Rami Salameh discussed his positionality as a Palestinian ethnographer researching everyday experiences lived by Palestinians at the Qalandia checkpoint, and the implication of this positionality on his research. He examined different experiences lived across various

spaces produced by Israeli colonial practices, including love, life, death and parenthood. The specific experience of crossing the checkpoint contextualises the Palestinian as both a product of, and subject to, colonial power. This research explored the implications this daily experience has on the agency of the Palestinian and the perception that he or she has of themselves; including the researcher's perception of himself and his body.

With regards to his positionality as a researcher in the field, Salameh also discussed the advantages of being Palestinian when doing ethnography in Palestine, such as having access to certain knowledge of the field and not facing cultural obstacles that non-Palestinians would face. Yet, being a Palestinian ethnographer in the field introduces several challenges, including facing scepticism from people used to be researched by foreigners, and thus questioning his professional credentials. Furthermore, Palestinians may fear to reveal their identities when talking to compatriots, assuming this might cause them some social harm depending on the subject under discussion.

Class and Historical Methodology

Mezna Qato addressed the question of historiography and historical method in researching everyday life in Palestine. She criticised how Palestinian historiography either focuses on certain static points in time, like 1948 (the Nakba), 1967 (the Naksa), 1993 (the Oslo Accords), or that history is studied through looking at groups of Palestinians who are normally politically visible. She proposed an alternative to this top-down historiography by looking at classes that have not traditionally been politically visible, such as the case of teachers in the multiple education systems that Palestinians are engaged with. Dominant Palestinian historiography perceives its role as preserving Palestinians' history and preventing its erasure. This produces a series of assertions and reproductions of unquestioned concepts and categories.

Through her historical research on educational systems and teachers in the Palestinian context, Qato suggests challenging mainstream static temporal frames by examining others, such as 1930, when the first agricultural school in Palestine was opened; 1949, when UNESCO developed a system with UNRWA to educate Palestinian refugees; 1955, which witnessed the rise of student organisations' activities in the diaspora; and finally 1969, which marked the unionisation of Palestinian teachers. These examples illustrate how different groups, time periods and fields of activity would give a better understanding of Palestinian society and the different developments that took place across social, political and cultural levels.

Rethinking the Question of Context when Researching Palestine

Haneen Naamneh argued that the reproduction of Jerusalem as a colonised city, both on the ground and in the Palestinian collective imagination, is a result of constant legal, political and physical processes applied by Israel since 1948 and later on in 1967. Thus, she examined the possibility for re-contextualising the city in Palestinian social and legal studies, by asking questions around how we write about Jerusalem without representing its

residents as ahistorical beings, and how scholars could construct the context of researching post-1967 Jerusalem beyond its legal status.

Naamneh argued that law itself should be analysed through its authority to produce narratives of the past. In the case of Jerusalem, Israeli and international legal discourses about the city diverted the narrative from that of a hostile war to a legal battle. The Israeli legal system reset the legal timeframe of the Palestinian community in Jerusalem, putting its link to the city into question and dismissing its pre-1967 personal and collective histories. These legal practices concealed marginalised stories of everyday life within this community and the ways it perceived and negotiated Israeli regulatory frameworks since 1967.

Concluding Remarks

In her concluding remarks, Lori Allen raised a set of questions for researchers to consider in relation to the examination of everyday life in Palestine and in other contexts of ongoing violence. Allen raised the question of whether social scientists working on Palestine have a particularly unique obligation to consider how their research can help or hurt, and to consider how it might do so. Should researchers in the social sciences put the over-coding of daily life through politics aside and consider new practices underway in Palestine? In contrast to some social scientists who have advocated moving away from political issues, Allen suggested that the prioritisation of violence, suffering and resistance as dominant subjects of research in Palestine is justified by the fact that these are realities on the ground.

Allen also invited presenters to rethink their understanding of the concept of agency within the Palestinian context. Given that researchers are citizens with moral feelings, ethical stances and political demands, how do they understand the motivations of the agents they study? On behalf of whom do researchers expose structures of domination in new ways through the concept of agency? Finally, Allen addressed the issue of framing and locating Palestine within a wider political, geographical and historical perspective, as a way to de-exceptionalise Palestine studies. Adopting a comparative approach that understands Palestinian society within broader frameworks could allow for new – or renewed – thoughts about possible forms of solidarity.

Speakers

Mai Abu Moghli is a Palestinian–British human rights activist based in London. Mai holds a PhD from the Institute of Education, University College of London.

Lori Allen is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology (Near and Middle East) at SOAS University of London. Her work focuses on Palestinian politics, and she has published on topics in the anthropology of nationalism, violence, gender and human rights.

Muna Dajani is a PhD candidate in Environmental Policy & Development in the Department of Geography and Environment, LSE. Muna’s research aims to examine the distinctive livelihood practices by which farming acquires political subjectivity in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

Andreas Hackl is Teaching Fellow in Anthropology of Development at the University of Edinburgh. His research is interested in the impact of labour migration on the socio-economic development in Palestinians’ home areas in the West Bank.

Anne Irfan is a PhD candidate in the Department of International History, LSE. She is a historian of the modern Middle East, specialising in migration and socio-political history in Palestine and the Levant.

Haneen Naamneh is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology, LSE. She is also Research Assistant at the LSE Middle East Centre working on the academic collaboration project with Birzeit University led by Professor Chetan Bhatt.

Alice Panepinto is Lecturer at the School of Law, Queen’s University Belfast. She researches international law, human rights and transitional justice, with a regional interest in the Middle East.

Mezna Qato is Junior Research Fellow at King’s College, Cambridge University. She completed her DPhil in History from St. Antony’s College, Oxford, on the history of educational regimes for Palestinians.

Rami Salameh is Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy And Cultural Studies, Birzeit University.

