



Alaa Tartir,
Tariq Dana,
and Timothy
Seidel, eds.,
Political
Economy of
Palestine:
Critical,
Interdisciplinary
and Decolonial
Perspectives
(New Texts Out
Now)

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Dana, and Timothy Seidel*

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Alaa Tartir, Tariq Dana, and Timothy Seidel (eds.), [Political Economy of Palestine: Critical, Interdisciplinary, and Decolonial Perspectives](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, Middle East Today Series, 2021).

Jadaliyya (J): What made you edit this book?

Alaa Tartir, Tariq Dana, and Timothy Seidel (AT, TD & TS): We believe making sense of the last quarter century in Palestine—from the Oslo Accords, to US President Trump’s “deal of the century,”

to the recent bilateral agreements normalizing relations between Israel and Arab states such as the United Arab Emirates—requires a critical understanding of political economy that turns on the colonial question. We edited this volume with the goal of a deeper analysis of these regional and international developments provided by critical, interdisciplinary, and decolonial perspectives. Attention to these factors also provided a focus on resistance as a critical political economy approach aids in the exploration of embodied forms of political subjectivity, especially in neoliberal, settler colonial contexts.

J: What particular topics, issues, and literatures does the book address?

AT, TD & TS: This volume argues that an approach to economics that does not consider the political—a de-politicized economics—is inadequate to understanding the situation in occupied Palestine. Including a conclusion by renowned political economist Sara Roy, the contributions in this volume make the case that critical, interdisciplinary, and decolonial perspectives provide a more robust framework and signal a commitment to a politics of solidarity with popular struggles in Palestine and around the world. With particularly salient implications for peacebuilding and development, *Political Economy of Palestine* details how ongoing events in the region demonstrate once again the failures of “economic peace.” It outlines a *critical interdisciplinary* approach to political economy that challenges prevailing neoliberal logics and structures that reproduce racial capitalism, and explores how the political economy of occupied Palestine is shaped by processes of accumulation by exploitation and dispossession from both Israel and global business, as well as from Palestinian elites. It also explores a *decolonial* approach to Palestinian political economy that foregrounds struggles against neoliberal and settler colonial policies and institutions, and aids in the de-fragmentation of Palestinian life, land, and political economy that the Oslo Accords perpetuated, but whose histories of de-development over all of Palestine can be traced back for over a century.

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J: How does this book connect to and/or depart from your previous work?

AT: This book builds on my extensive research and publications on the links between state-building, governance, security sector reform, and international aid. In particular, it builds on my work that examines the implications of aid dependency on the Palestinian society, and the failure of the development process over the past three decades. My work problematizes the role of donors and their harmful intervention in the OPT. The book also builds on my latest publications, *Palestine and Rule of Power: Local Dissent vs. International Governance* (with Timothy Seidel) published by Palgrave Macmillan (2019) and *Outsourcing Repression: Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination*, published by Afro-Middle East Centre (2019).

TD: Political economy has been a key epistemological and methodological component of my previous research. My work has examined issues of settler colonialism, civil society, international intervention, and state-building with a particular focus on Palestine. This book builds on these research interests and opens up new questions and issues for further future research.

TS: This volume builds off my research on development, peacebuilding, and resistance generally, and in Palestine in particular. It follows my last co-edited volume with Alaa Tartir, *Palestine and Rule of Power: Local Dissent vs. International Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), where we explored the rule of power in terms of settler colonialism and neoliberalism as well as forms of everyday resistance to those logics and regimes. It also relates to a book project that examines and interrogates dominant categories of nonviolence and civil resistance mapped onto Palestine by outside observers and explores the late modern-colonial constitution (and discursive function) of the violence/non-violence binary.

J: Who do you hope will read this book, and what sort of impact would you like it to have?

AT, TD & TS: We had in mind academics and students working in the fields of Middle East studies and critical political economy broadly, and on Palestine in particular. That being said, we also had in mind policy analysts, advocates, and activists because it is important for our scholarship to signal our commitment to a politics of solidarity with the popular struggles in occupied Palestine and around the world.

The Oslo process diverted many intellectual efforts toward the illusion of liberal state-building and economic development, involving technical exercises influenced by the World Bank and other donor agencies, distracting scholarship from the impacts of Israel's settler colonial project. Given the hollow and de-contextualized conclusions of Oslo-inspired research, the past two decades have witnessed a resurgence of vigorous studies that have deconstructed the very meaning of "peace" in the Oslo context and unpacked the Israeli matrix of control over all of Palestine. We hope that our volume contributes to this work and scholarly effort, not only for the sake of producing knowledge but also for transforming this knowledge into a force for social, economic, and political change. Sara Roy's conclusion underscores the book's themes on critique as an act that historicizes, offering powerful stories that foreground the erasures and the logic of elimination central to settler colonialism, and the book's decolonial approach that understands this work as both a material and an epistemic project. As Professor Roy describes, if the role of authority is to obfuscate, then the role of the intellectual is to reveal. We hope readers will find this volume to be sufficiently engaged with this process of revelation.

J: What other projects are you working on now?

AT: I am working on a book manuscript entitled *Policing Palestine* to be published by Pluto Press, a book chapter (jointly with Professor Benoît Challand) for the sixteenth edition of *The Middle East* edited by Professor Ellen Lust. After acquiring a research grant from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, I am also working on a book project that aims to document the history of the contemporary Palestinian theatre movement (1967 to present) by exploring the cases of Adel Tartir, Balalin Group, and Sandouq El-Ajab Theatre.

TD: I am working on a book manuscript that explores the transformation of Palestinian civil society and the ways in which it relates to the changing political, economic, and social dynamics under Israel's settler colonialism. I am contributing a chapter on the political economy of Palestine to be published in the Routledge Handbook on Palestine, and a research article that reexamines the concept of political autonomy as represented by the Palestinian Authority under Israeli rule.

TS: I am working on a journal special issue project, guest co-editing with Alina Sajed, "Anticolonial Connectivity and the Politics of Solidarity: Between Home and the World." This special issue will examine the connections among (post)colonial spaces with a focus on "anticolonial/postcolonial connectivity" that indicates the existence of alternative forms of spatiality that go beyond the linear relationship between metropole and colonial spaces, exploring the ways in which colonized and postcolonial subjects cultivated knowledge "sideways" without needing to call upon the imperial center for interpretation.

J: What are scholars saying about your new book?

AT, TD & TS: In her conclusion, Sara Roy says that the "political economy approach as articulated in this book is so crucial. It challenges common misconceptions about economics and economic relations that often remove and disbelieve the political (and historical) dimension and, by extension, reject the inseparability of politics and economics especially in the Palestinian context."

Professor Laleh Khalili (Queen Mary University of London) says the *Political Economy of Palestine* "offers exciting new vistas into Palestinian political economy," and Professor Ray Bush (University of Leeds) calls it "the 'go to' collection of timely essays committed to liberation and decolonisation. A fabulous yet daunting read."

Professor Adam Hanieh (SOAS) writes, "This brilliant book brings together some of the most innovative and critical work on the political economy of Palestine today. A fascinating collection that makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Palestinian struggle - past, present, and future."

And Professor Mandy Turner (University of Manchester) points out, "Edward Said wrote: 'We cannot fight for our rights and our history as well as future until we are armed with weapons of criticism and dedicated consciousness.' This book provides both."

Excerpt from the book (from “Palestinian Political Economy: Enduring Struggle against Settler Colonialism, Racial Capitalism, and Neoliberalism,” pp. 11-18)

Book Overview

The book is divided into three parts. Part I “Contextualizing Palestinian Political Economy” offers an in-depth analysis and an overall framing to some critical dimensions in the realm of political economy in Palestine...

Chapter 2, written by Tariq Dana, uncovers political economy dimensions of Israeli strategies and policies in the OPT since 1967, and how they impacted Palestinian politics, economy, and society. Dana also sheds light on the Palestinian interaction with and response to these strategies. He argues that over decades of colonization, Israeli policymakers deployed the dual principles of economic domination (through physical violence) and economic pacification (through symbolic violence) as an integral feature of a grand colonial strategy. Although Palestinian anticolonial resistance exposed the structural shortcomings of these colonial Israeli strategies in the pre-Oslo Accords era, these colonial strategies have grown in sophistication and complexity after the initiation of the “Oslo peace process.” Dana concludes that economic domination was in fact institutionalized by the Oslo Accords and its economic annex (Protocol on Economic Relations or “Paris Protocol”), which enabled Israel to exploit the land and natural resources, and to use coercive means to control the Palestinians economically, politically, and territorially. Furthermore, Dana concludes that Israel’s economic domination has been facilitated by the extensive pacification of large segments of the Palestinian national movement, the private sector as well as substantial forces of civil society.

In Chapter 3, Ibrahim Shikaki examines the political economy of the OPT through the lenses of dependency and class formation. Shikaki divides the analysis into a pre- and post-Oslo process/era, and establishes that dependency on the Israeli labor and goods markets was fully established in pre-Oslo years and that the proletarianization process was at full acceleration during those years. Yet, they took other complementary forms and shapes in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords. Shikaki argues that in the Palestinian-Israeli context, mainstream neoclassical economics is insufficient as a tool of analysis. In contrast, he underlines the historical material conditions using a political economy approach—one that considers issues of class, power, and politics. Therefore, he discusses, among others, the evolution of the Palestinian labor and goods markets, the contribution of economic sectors to employment and output, trade relations, and the economic implications of policies implemented by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). He also discusses the parallel process of class formation within Palestinian society and examines the proletarianization process that proliferated after 1967. Shikaki concludes that the multileveled failure in addressing the sustainable development of the

Palestinian economy in the OPT is largely due to the insistence of delinking economics and development from politics and class.

Chapter 4, written by Timothy Seidel, explores the structures and process of settler colonialism in occupied Palestine, how it constrains the livelihoods of Palestinians, and how Palestinians respond to those social, political, and economic realities. In particular, Seidel examines land-based configurations of power and land-based struggles and political economies of resistance. To aid in this, he explores the contours of a decolonial approach to political economy that foregrounds land and the experience of indigeneity in the context of settler colonialism—an approach that also uncovers the global, transnational, anti-colonial inflections of that struggle. He argues that a decolonial approach not only gives attention to histories of erasure and enduring indigeneity, but also to the role of land in social and political economy in the struggle for autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination. Seidel concludes that in Palestine, resistance as *sumud* or steadfastness reminds us that it may not be about a pre-determined political economic telos per se but about existence, being, land, and a refusal of erasure and elimination.

Part II, “Political Economy of Integration, Fragmentation, and Inequality”, presents original analyses that aim to rethink Palestinian political economy...

In Chapter 5, Walid Habbas is interested in the Palestinian-Israeli economic encounters in daily life. Habbas highlights how Palestinian actors, operating in different economic sectors, can innovate strategies of “adaptation” and convert the complexity of the structure into ingredients to improve their life chances. He argues that Israel’s colonial domination of the West Bank has indeed resulted in a deprived, exploited, and pauperized economy, but it has also given rise to profit-seekers and cross-border networks. He contends that Palestinian-Israeli economic relations have been extensively analyzed on the aggregated level, yet essential components of economic integration that are more observable on the disaggregated level have gone under-researched. Therefore, Habbas focuses on smugglers and permit brokers, and conceptualizes their roles through drawing insight into the political economy of borderlands and the sociology of brokerage frameworks. Habbas concludes that any engagement in the political economy of Palestinian-Israeli economic integration should not exclude the myriad interlinks, and relations of power, that are being classified as “illegal” or “informal.” In fact, these relationships constantly deepen economic integration.

Chapter 6 by Ahmed Tannira illustrates how the rule and control of Hamas over the Gaza Strip since 2007 have influenced the economic and social realities under the Israeli siege and blockade on the Strip. Tannira also looks at how the short-lived tunnel economy imposed a long-term, continuing impact on reconstructing Gaza’s economic elite, with emphasis on Gaza’s private sector. He argues that the shape and form of Gaza’s political economy under Hamas’ rule witnessed significant changes in terms of key players and actors, performance, and the nature of economic activities. This includes the emergence of a new economic elite that soon dominated the work of Gaza’s private

sector and redrew its map, the empowerment of a group of non-traditional traders and businessmen through the tunnel economy, and the detrimental consequences of the duality in the political system. Tannira concludes that the process of reforming social and human capital in the Gaza Strip entails rebuilding trust between both society and its economic institutions, especially when both operate within a political framework characterized by constant polarization.

Hebatalla Taha focuses on the contemporary political economy of Palestinians of 1948 (also known as Palestinian citizens of Israel) in Chapter 7. Taha demonstrates the ways in which neoliberalism has restructured Palestinian capital and labor as well as the ways in which Palestinians have, as active agents, often embraced neoliberal processes to challenge their precarity. She traces class contestation and formation by highlighting the emergence of an indigenous capitalist class that has coalesced around ideas of economic development and whose members have become key intermediaries in processes and mechanisms of neoliberalism. In doing so, Taha simultaneously engages with the role of this class as a supposed “patriotic bourgeoisie” and demonstrates that members of a neo-liberalizing class are an integral node in sustaining the relationship between capitalism and Zionism. Thus, Taha argues that the history of dispossession and proletarianization and the emergence of neoliberal development have been employed simultaneously and play a crucial role in processes of settler colonialism.

Chapter 8, written by Shir Hever, suggests that it is time for a paradigmatic shift in the study of the political economy of the Israeli occupation in the OPT, through shifting the focus from the concept of occupation to the concept of apartheid. The economic study of the occupation and of Israeli colonial policies in the entire Palestine-Israel region must catch up with the political and sociological research, Hever suggests, and hence, it urges for putting inequality at the center and focuses on the economic aspects of apartheid. In particular, he suggests shifting the focus from one in which the state is the unit of analysis (measured by national income or national product indicators, trade, and institutional capacities) to an analysis of inequality and discrimination. Hever argues that conceiving of Palestine-Israel as a single economic unit, the question becomes how to measure the unequal distribution of resources among certain groups (defined by nationality, geographic location, and different sets of rights), and what trends can be determined toward equality or toward greater inequality. Hever proposes a methodological framework to begin this much-needed original analysis and identifies the types of data which will be required in order to continue the research.

Part III, “Political Economy in the Absence of Sovereignty,” explores multiple sectors (such as foreign aid, security, fiscal, and waste and its infrastructures) and their interaction with the sphere of political economy in the absence of sovereignty...

Chapter 9 by Catherine Chiniara Charrett explores how the nonfuture of the Gaza Strip as a site of indigenous elimination and resistance against it is performative of local, regional, and transnational symbolic and material economies. Within analyses of the political economy of settler colonialism, the

elimination of indigenous populations is a central figuration. Through queer and anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-imperial feminist writings, Chiniara Charrett explores the attraction of participating in the neoliberal project when under threat of elimination, which acts as a tool of pacification and division within colonized communities. She explores Gaza as a site of gratuitous anti-indigenous violence and shows how indigenous non-futures are pitted against the future of tamed or pacified neoliberal subjects. She therefore shows that the perpetual and increasing violence against the refugees and residents of the Gaza Strip is not only productive of weapons economies, but also the racialization and disposability of resistance movements, which is performative of histories of indigenous elimination. Chiniara Charrett concludes that the feminization of the Gaza Strip, as a site of indigenous struggle, is performed as needing to be saved or tamed, and the neoliberal projects directed at “saving” Palestinians are performative of a whitewashing of native dispossession.

Jeremy Wildeman and Alaa Tartir tackle the political economy of the nexus of development aid and the Palestinian de-development process taking place under colonial Israeli rule in Chapter 10. They do this by categorizing and assessing the way policymakers and analysts have approached Palestinian development, based on the analysis of key features, underpinning assumptions and arguments. Wildeman and Tartir categorize them into four approaches that developed over the era of Oslo Aid: Instrumentalism; Critical Instrumentalism; Critics; and Neo-Colonialism—some of which are comfortable with the status quo, and some that want to challenge it. Wildeman and Tartir conclude by arguing that any political economy-driven analysis or framing of the impact of foreign aid in the Palestinian context necessitates recognizing the inherent and embedded structures of power and relations of colonial dominance and control in the development paradigm and de-development processes.

In Chapter 11, Anas Iqtait explores the political economy of the Palestinian Authority (PA) through a fiscal sociology approach. He examines the nexus between contemporary and historical fiscal affairs and economic structures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip before and after the establishment of the PA. Iqtait studies the evolution of public revenues since 1967, investigates recent neoliberal attempts at tax reforms, and identifies the economic consequences of the PA's fiscal structure. By shifting the focus from the spending side of PA budgets to the revenue side, Iqtait illuminates the fiscal structure connecting Israeli colonial policies with neoliberal economic development in the OPT. The chapter contends that in the absence of sovereignty and legitimation, the PA had to design domestic revenue collection strategies for building fiscal capacity and ensuring its financial survivability. However, the PA's fiscal operations ultimately further entangled the Palestinian economy with the availability of external income. He further argues that readily available funds, in the form of foreign aid and clearance revenue, have relieved the PA of constructing an authentic contract with its populace and widened the gap between its senior employees and rest of society. Iqtait concludes that public revenues in the OPT have historically served as agents in an overarching political economy architecture of control, and that the PA's budget reinstated and, at times, innovated new measures of economic and fiscal colonial control in OPT.

Chapter 12 by Tahani Mustafa describes the political economy of securitized ordering in the OPT and its implications for the emergence of a Weberian end-state. Mustafa therefore focuses on the ways in which Security Sector Reform (SSR) becomes a pivotal programmatic process in the (re)construction of space, creating actors, structures, and processes. The chapter argues that the political economy of control in the OPT is shaped by a multifarious network of engagement between the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) and the Israelis, the broader Palestinian society, the international donor community, and self-interested regional Arab states. These networks of engagement shape outcome expectations and continuously create and recreate multiple levels of agency, interests, and hegemony in the OPT. Thus, Mustafa scrutinizes the creation of these various levels of authority that have largely influenced the current socioeconomic, political, and security landscape within the OPT. She further evidences how the Oslo Accords sought to redefine the means and ends of security, highlighting how this process contributed to creating new security configurations to supplement existing ones and how differing Critical Security Interlocutors (CSI) position themselves vis-a-vis national, regional, and international security partners.

In Chapter 13, Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins asks what can a political economy of waste demonstrate about contemporary Palestine? And what can the ways in which Palestinians participate in trading, regulating, and valuing discarded materials tell us about the nature of settler colonial occupation in twenty-first-century Palestine? Stamatopoulou-Robbins answers these questions by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork on waste and its management in the West Bank between 2007 and 2017. She explores the ways that waste creation and management is not simply a political and economic “externality” but is fundamentally linked to capitalist state-building processes. Stamatopoulou-Robbins focuses on the techniques the PA deployed to extract payment for increasingly costly waste services from residents, shining light on how, through automation of waste fee payment, the relationship between Palestinian governance and its subjects was rearranged in a settler colonial context.

Finally, looking beyond the more obvious political explanations, Professor Sara Roy, in her concluding chapter, examines another lesser understood but equally compelling reason for why the production of so much knowledge—evidence and data—has failed fundamentally to improve conditions for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the possibility of a meaningful resolution to the conflict. Professor Roy reminds us that knowledge is exponential, and that knowledge production is itself a form of resistance. Professor Roy’s conclusion underscores our book’s themes on critique, as an act that historicizes, offering powerful stories that foreground the erasures and the logic of elimination central to settler colonialism. Her chapter also speaks to the decolonial approach we are aiming for in this book, namely an approach that understands this work as both a material and an epistemic project, which underscores the role of the intellectual, even as a part of resistance.

