

The Coloniser and Gendered Economic Violence: the impact of prolonged Israeli occupation in Palestine on women's economic survival

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DRAFT for discussion

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Overview

When Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 in the wake of the Six Day War, the international community used the term “occupation” to describe the situation which followed. However, some 50 years later, this state of affairs no longer matches the general understanding of the term “occupation”, which is by definition short-lived. Many commentators are more accurately identifying what has happened to Palestine as a stage of settler colonialism. The towns and outposts built on Palestinian land, in contravention of international law, are called by many “settlements”, a rather benign word, but are more accurately defined by many influential thinkers as “colonies”. For the purpose of this article, I shall use the term “settlement” and “occupation” to reflect the dominant discourse. However, I recognise that an alternative narrative of settler-colonialism is gaining strength and recognition and I fully endorse this stronger analysis.

In 2018, the Palestinian Social and Economic Policies Monitor – Al Marsad, produced a short film that reflected experiences of the Palestinian female workers in ‘Israeli’ settlements or colonies, as they are more appropriately called. The film, titled “Bloody Basil” featured several female workers who mainly work in agricultural settlements in the Jordan valley. The women featured in the film spoke of their experiences and the violations of their rights as workers as a result of the occupation’s policies that confiscated Palestinian farmers’ lands and turned them into workers in the settlements. The women explain how they would leave their houses at 5 am, be picked up with other women in a small van and driven into the settlement. They described the work as exhausting and

frustrating. They had to handle abusive treatment from supervisors and work under very difficult conditions. Almost all the women were controlled and made compliant by being told that if they did not want to work as instructed, there were many others who would take their place.

What “Bloody Basil” reflects is a glimpse of the Israeli violence against Palestinian women which is a routine aspect of their life under occupation. Various UN bodies have expressed concern about the human rights, humanitarian and security issues that occupation brings, with an emphasis on the situation of women. The Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on her mission to Israel submitted to the Human Rights Council in 2017 highlighted the linkage between the prolonged Israeli occupation and violence against women⁵⁷. Both Palestinian men and women face numerous human rights violations inflicted on Palestinians, including property destruction, house demolitions, settler violence, forcible transfer as a form of collective punishment and targeting of human rights defenders⁵⁸. Economically, the colonisation and occupation of Palestine (since 1948) – but more specifically after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 - have had a significant impact on the Palestinian people which manifested itself in the intensified denial of Palestinians’ human rights including access to land, water and natural resources. The detrimental Israeli measures against Palestinians also include blockades, control over markets, and restriction of movement.

In this case study, I focus on a specific segment of the Palestinian population: women workers in Israeli settlements. Drawing on interviews conducted mainly among Palestinian female workers in Israeli settlements, I argue that Israeli settlements, which are constructed on Palestinian lands and are deemed illegal under International Law, have a devastating impact on the lives of Palestinians in general and Palestinian women in particular. Due to the difficult economic conditions, lack of alternatives, high unemployment rates, and the gap in wages and quality of life between the Israeli and Palestinian economies, many Palestinian women find no option for employment other than to work in the settlements, under Israeli control, to support themselves and their families. I will reflect on the conditions in which those women find themselves and how the settlements’ economy contributes to greater marginalisation of Palestinian women and socioeconomic disadvantages. The settlements, sites of militarised political control, is the primary theatre of extraction, both of land, resources and labour of thousands of working-class Palestinians, including women.

Political and economic context

For over half a century of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (Occupied Palestinian Territory), Israel has established and continues to reinforce an asymmetrical power relationship with the Palestinians, through a matrix of control which is all-embracing. For example, the Palestinian people are denied access to their own land, water and natural resources, while their property and assets are being confiscated or destroyed. Gaza continues to be blockaded by air, sea and land and

⁵⁷ Human Rights Council. 2017 Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on her mission to Israel. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-of-the-special-rapporteur-on-violence-against-women-its-causes-and-consequences-on-her-mission-to-israel/>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

is where living conditions are bordering humanitarian collapse⁵⁹. Fifty-two years of policies and measures, imposed by the occupying authority, have set the Palestinian economy on a debilitating path of de-development and dependence for the Palestinian people. The process of de-development began in 1948, when a balanced agricultural relationship with the land and many indigenous industries, as well as local Palestinian culture, were crushed after the Nakba (meaning catastrophe in Arabic and refers to the mass exodus of Palestinians between 1947 and 1948) to make room for the Israel state. Jewish workers were given preference over Palestinians as a deliberate policy to suppress those who remained within the borders of the new state and, of course, these Palestinian citizens of the new Israel were placed under military rule until 1966. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967 then brought Palestinian economy into direct contact with that of Israel and represented the second major dislocation of the economy since 1948.

Throughout the years of its occupation, Israel has continued its measures to undermine the Palestinian economy, which was largely agricultural and relatively small compared with the industrialised economy of Israel. By 1967, the total GNP of the West Bank and Gaza Strip combined equalled only 2.6 per cent of the Israeli GNP⁶⁰. Due to the Israeli control over Palestinian resources, in particular water and the most fertile land, the Palestinian economy remained weak and dependent whilst the Israeli is the large, dominant one. For example, the field of agriculture became vulnerable due to the incremental and continuous confiscation of Palestinian land and natural resources and the excessive Israeli restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and labour.

Israel assumed total control of the Occupied Palestinian Territory's economy until the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994. However, the Palestinian people have never enjoyed full, sovereign control over their economy, natural resources and society. As the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza remain under occupation, Palestinians have to face tight restrictions on movement, loss of land and of other natural resources, a fragmented domestic market and separation from neighbouring and international markets. In addition, the tight blockade of Gaza since 2007 and the construction of the Apartheid Wall have undermined development. Since 1967, Palestinians have lost access to more than 60% of West Bank land and 66% of its grazing land. The Apartheid Wall has effectively annexed to Israel the main aquifers and much prime agricultural land, whilst the fertile Jordan Valley is dominated by illegal Israeli agricultural settlements which use a disproportionate amount of precious water resources.

Following the 1995 Oslo II agreement, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip remained under occupation and restrictions on the movement of people and goods, control and loss of land, water and other natural resources continued. The city of Hebron, for example, is divided into two areas: H1, under control of the Palestinian Authority, and H2, representing 20% of Hebron, under Israeli control. In East Jerusalem, Israeli law has been applied and provides the status of "permanent residents" of Israel to Palestinian residents but effectively treats them as immigrants in their own lands. The blockade of the Gaza Strip has led to a critical socio-economic and humanitarian crisis for Palestinians residing there, involving limited access to water, housing, land, property,

⁵⁹ International Labour Office. *The Situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. Geneva: 2018.

⁶⁰ Roy, Sara. "The Gaza Strip: A Case of Economic De-Development." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1987, pp. 56–88. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2536651

health care and employment opportunities; women particularly suffer the disbenefits⁶¹. The domestic market is fragmented and separated from neighbouring and international markets. Since 2007, a tight blockade has been imposed on Gaza whilst the expansion of Israeli settlements and closure policy in the West Bank (including the construction of the Israeli Apartheid Wall) and the isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued.

The West Bank has been divided into Areas A, B and C, each of them having a different status of governance. In Area A, representing 18% of the territory of the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority (PA) exercises control over security and civil matters. Area B is administered by the Palestinian Authority, which has control over civil matters, while the Israeli authorities jointly with the PA have military control. In Area C, which constitutes 62% of the West Bank, the Israeli authorities have full control over security, planning and construction⁶². This division of land does not guarantee rights for Palestinians, especially those living in Area C. Within Area C, Palestinians have limited access to water, electricity, education, and other state services. Palestinians face daily human rights violations in these areas including house demolition, denial of construction permits, army raids, and violence by Israeli settlers. It has been reported that 70,000 Palestinians living in Area C have been subjected to settler violence, including harassment and violence causing severe physical harm and significant psychological impact especially on women, who constantly fear for their lives and those of their children⁶³.

An important instrument of the Israeli colonisation and control over Palestinian lands and resources is the development of settlements (more accurately described as colonies). The Israeli settlements are illegal Jewish-only communities built by Israel for Israeli settlers on West Bank lands which have been occupied since 1967. Settlements enjoy the approval and direct or indirect support of the Israeli government although illegal under international humanitarian law⁶⁴ which bars an occupying power's transfer of its civilians to occupied territory. However, the existence and expansion of these colonies continue and, in parallel, systematic discrimination against Palestinians and in favour of the settlers: this is manifest in the provision of services, protection, and freedom of movement in favour of the settlers at the expense of the Palestinian population, not to mention the application of military law to indigenous Palestinians, including children.

As in other colonial processes, the Israeli military relied on settlements as a strategy of establishing territorial claim and control over an indigenously populated area. While illegal under the 4th Geneva Convention and numerous UN resolutions, some 620,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) in about 131 settlements and 110 outposts (settlements not officially recognised by the Israeli government)⁶⁵. The settlements have a destructive impact on the human rights of Palestinians that extend beyond the hundreds of thousands of dunams [1 dunam = 1,000 sq. meters], including

⁶¹ Commission on the Status of Women. 2016. Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women-Report of the Secretary-General. <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2016/6>

⁶² www.ochaopt.org/location/area-c

⁶³ A/HRC/35/30/Add.1, Paragraphs 35 and 36, 8 June 2017

⁶⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2007. The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and Other Infrastructure in the West Bank, July.

⁶⁵ the Israeli information centre for human rights in the occupied territories (2019). Settlements. <https://www.btselem.org/settlements>

farmland and grazing areas, that Israel appropriated from Palestinians in order to build them.

Israeli citizens are incentivised by the Israeli government to move to settlements. The many benefits provided to settlers and settlements by the Israeli government include government subsidised housing, higher salaries for teachers than in Israeli areas, subsidised transportation for students and prioritised scholarships. Economically, Israel has established several industrial areas in or near settlements in the West Bank. The Israeli West Bank Industrial Zones are fortress-like hill-top factory complexes connected to nearby hill-top settlements. The government has heavily subsidised the building of these areas. Government subsidies also include leasing fees for land, access to research grants, and income tax breaks. While Palestinian communities and settlements are physically located side by side, they exist in what Human Rights Watch has called a “two tier system of laws, rules, and services... which provide preferential services, development, and benefits for Jewish settlers while imposing harsh conditions on Palestinians.”⁶⁶

Settlers and settlements remain a central pillar of Israeli colonial structure as they provide a means to create a claim over Palestinian land, as well as allowing the institutionalisation of a legal system of segregation, which is a common feature of most colonial projects.

The Israeli military, for example, has instituted two different legal systems in the West Bank: one for the settlers and the other for the Palestinians. The settlers are governed by Israeli civilian law while the Palestinians are ruled by military law. Settlements became administered like any town in Israeli areas, including rights to local planning, to levy taxes, right of zoning and urban planning, which were all forbidden to Palestinians. Furthermore, more land and resources have been expropriated to create hundreds of kilometres of roads for settler use only; roadblocks, checkpoints, and other measures that limit only Palestinian movement have been erected based on the location of settlements. At present, settlements cover 538,130 dunams – almost 10% of the West Bank. Together with their regional councils - including vast open areas that have not been attached to settlements- the area under the direct control of settlements has been raised to more than 40% of the West Bank, and 63% of Area C. Along with this governmental land grab, settlers have exploited the enforced separation between Palestinians and their land by means of building houses, outposts and roads, grazing livestock and taking over natural water sources – all outside the vast areas already allocated to the settlements. Further, Palestinian landowners have been effectively denied access to much of their farmland, which means the destruction of their main source of livelihood leading a large segment of the Palestinians labour force having to work in Israeli areas including the settlements.

Palestinian movement, including farming access, remains restricted around and within Israeli settlements where prior coordination or special permits are required. The approval rate for permit applications to access land in this area during the olive harvest fell from 58% in 2016 to 55% in 2017. Over 10,700 applications by farmers were either rejected or were still pending by the end of the 2017 olive harvest⁶⁷. In addition, many Palestinian

⁶⁶ “Separate and Unequal: Israel’s Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories”, Human Rights Watch, 2010.

⁶⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2016. The Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin: November 2017.

farmers complain that the window of time allocated for harvest activities with Israeli army protection is insufficient and leaves farmers vulnerable to settler attacks⁶⁸.

With the Palestinian economy and labour market experiencing further deterioration designed by the Israeli colonial project, tens of thousands of Palestinians find themselves forced to seek employment in Israel and the settlements as a means of economic survival. Palestinians have been obliged by economic necessity to undertake work within illegal colonies on what is, in reality, their own land. Labour thus became a blatant expression of economic subjugation and frequently used as a method of control.

The economy of the settlements

Under Israeli occupation, the Palestinian and Israeli economies remained dissimilar and unequal; Israel has the large, dominant economy and practices policies that keep the small Palestinian economy weak and dependent. Immediately following the 1967 occupation, Israel targeted Palestinians (especially youth) for much needed labour in Israeli areas. Further, Israeli economic policies and unemployment among Palestinians provided Israel with a large pool of workers, mainly for low-paid - unprotected jobs. Israeli policies denying various aspects of economic development in the Palestinian areas led to these huge unemployment numbers, creating a pool of workers ripe for exploitation. The unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip increased in 2018 to reach 52% compared with 44% in 2017, while in the West Bank it was 18% in 2018 compared to 19% the year before, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) said in the latest results of its Labour Force Survey 2018.

The weak Palestinian economy in addition to the high unemployment has led a large number of Palestinian workers seeking employment, some outside of Palestine such as in the Arab Gulf countries or in Israel and Israeli settlements. It is important to emphasise, as briefly mentioned before, that many Palestinian workers in illegal Israeli settlements work on confiscated lands originally owned by their families or one of their relatives, adding psychological injury to physical and economic detriment. However, due to the Israeli policies, they would not be able to access these lands, even for work, unless they obtain work permits from the Israeli authorities. The permit is often managed by people known as “brokers” who work as intermediaries between Israeli employers and Palestinian workers.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of Palestinians working in Israel and Israeli settlements was about 127,000 in 2018 with the largest share of those, 59%, having a work permit while 30% worked without any permit, putting their security and even lives in danger⁶⁹. Further, the number of employees in Israeli settlements was 22,000 in 2018 compared with 21,000 in 2017. Palestinian workers in Israel since 1967 have been predominantly male, with the construction sector being the highest work market. In 2018, for example, the construction sector recorded the highest employment rate in Israel and Israeli settlements, which was 64% of the total Palestinian employment in Israel and Israeli settlements. Other fields of employment are restricted to

⁶⁸ Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO). Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, Brussels, 20 Mar 2018.

⁶⁹ PSBS, 2018.

mainly agriculture, industry and services. Palestinians are permitted to work in these labour-intensive sectors as employers have difficulty finding Israelis who are willing to perform this work for the low wages they offer. In business and labour practices in Israeli settlements, abuses of Palestinian workers' rights including the denial of benefits and underpayment are common practices. Palestinians are denied industrial rights such as organisation into trades unions. The Israeli Histadrut labour organisation offers no protection to Palestinian workers and is widely viewed as an instrument of Israeli governmental policy with regard to the Palestinian workforce.

In the agricultural sector, over 90% of the workforce are now from Thailand, displacing Palestinians from this work opportunity, which was hazardous, but at least gave minimal income. This point underscores the fact that Palestinian labour is seen as worthy of exploitation when needed but can be dispensed with at the earliest opportunity when a more compliant migrant workforce becomes available. Unlike in the state of Israel, at this moment Palestinians remain a necessary labour pool in the West bank.

Industrial zones and other economic projects are central in the Israeli settlements. Due to the benefits provided by the Israeli government to businesses in the settlements, these industrial areas continue to grow. Further, Israel has moved many of its polluting industries from places inside Israel to areas near the 1967 border or inside the settlements. For example, a pesticide factory in Kfar Saba settlement which produces dangerous pollutants was moved to an area near Tulkarm, inside the West Bank. The wastewater from this factory has damaged the local citrus trees and polluted the soil in the area, in addition to the likely problem of tainted groundwater. Israel's strategy to expand the territory controlled by Israeli settlers also includes the agricultural takeover of large swathes of Palestinian lands and turning them into agricultural businesses in which Palestinian workers are targeted and exploited.

The majority of the Israeli settlement farms in the occupied West Bank are located in the Jordan Valley and Palestinian women form a significant labour force in these areas. In the next section, I shall focus on the Palestinian workers in the settlements and more specifically on Palestinian women labourers.

Palestinians working in Israeli settlements

The Israeli occupation and continued settlement expansion profoundly affect the daily lives of Palestinian men and women seeking to earn a living. It restricts their rights to freedom of movement and residency, and access to resources, to work and education, all of which are closely interlinked. The United Nations has repeatedly called on the Israeli government to cease settlement activity in the territory occupied since 1967. The United Nations has expressed condemnation of the settlements on various occasions including the 2016 Security Council resolution on the issue (No. 2334) where the Council condemned the "construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions⁷⁰."

The wages of the Palestinian labour force are far below the Israeli minimum wage in most cases. Sadly, however, those wages – in many cases -- can be more than the amount

⁷⁰ <https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>

Palestinians earn working in a Palestinian-owned business elsewhere in the West Bank, where unemployment is high and salaries are low. For most Palestinians who have a job in Israel, their work remains associated with high costs, vulnerabilities and hardship. Palestinian workers encounter many difficulties, including checkpoint crossings where they face inhumane and humiliating treatment and where they have to queue for long hours in crowded surrounding before being able to enter Israeli areas. Many workers are forced to leave their homes in the West Bank long before dawn and waste energy and many hours waiting due to lack of efficiency in the checkpoint system and abuse and harassment by soldiers and security personnel. Furthermore, working conditions are often precarious. Occupational injuries and fatalities of Palestinian construction workers at Israeli construction sites are frequent, mostly falls from a great height as construction increases. After these accidents, Palestinian workers are left to pay for hospital bills and are given no benefits or compensation.

Andrew Ross, a former builder, turned academic, has written a book titled 'Stone Men: the Palestinians who built Israel'. He quotes a Palestinian stonemason saying: "They demolish our houses while we build theirs." Andrew Ross discusses how Palestinian "stone men," utilising some of the best quality dolomitic limestone deposits in the world and drawing on generations of artisanal knowledge, have built almost every state in the Middle East except their own.

The number of permits given to Palestinian workers is restricted by the Israeli government, so many Palestinians have no choice but to work without a permit. This results in workers being more vulnerable to exploitation by their employers, who may threaten to report the worker for working without a permit. Many Palestinians work in the agricultural settlements, especially in the Jordan Valley during the date and fruit picking seasons, among them children under the age of 14.

Palestinian women who work in Israeli settlements work predominantly in agriculture and as domestic workers in private households. Seeking work in the settlements is perceived as an economic necessity but also constitutes a moral dilemma for many workers. In the Jordan valley I interviewed ten Palestinian women who shared numerous daily challenges and struggles they faced as workers in the settlements.

The ages of the group ranged from girls aged as young as 15 years to women in their sixties. The need to support their families was the main motivation to work in Israel. For many, such work was the last resort when they were unable to find other jobs. Most domestic workers found their jobs through referral, usually from a friend or family member of the employer. Almost all female workers interviewed indicated that they did not have a written contract, reinforcing the informal type of employment relationship. Issues related to annual and sick leave, public holidays, working hours and working conditions were not part of the negotiated terms and conditions discussed when they start work. The women expressed concern over issues related to termination, dismissal and job security. Such an absence of any regulations of terms of employment would be deemed unacceptable in other developed economies. The presence of unions, legislation and access to industrial tribunals protects workers in modern states from the worst excesses of capitalism. No such structures exist for the Palestinian workers in Israeli settlements.

The development of the economy in the settlements and the related Israeli policies has led to a deliberate weakening, or de-development, of the Palestinian economy; this is not

accidental, but an integral part of the Zionist project. Such policies have led to social fragmentation and, within a system already pre-disposed to patriarchal organisation, have produced various forms of gender bias. Women are at the bottom of the employment hierarchy, to put it bluntly, and whilst all Palestinian workers suffer at the hands of the occupying force, women arguably suffer double discrimination: as women and as Palestinians.

In a nutshell, the settlements are a site of extraction, as colonies usually are for the coloniser, as I will discuss next.

The case of women workers in settlements: minimal rights and social stigma

According to local workers in the Jordan Valley, the number of Palestinian women workers in Israeli settlements is more than 5000, around half of whom are service providers in homes, schools and hotels while the rest work in agriculture. The numbers of workers vary depending on the seasonal nature of the jobs. Agricultural workers receive a third of the Israeli minimum wage, 50-60 NIS (\$15) for an eight-hour working day. This also applies to children employed during the picking season. By contrast, in the industrial zones workers (male) receive about two thirds of the minimum wage, around 80-120 NIS per day. Israeli minimum wage, by contrast, exceeds 29 NIS per hour (230 NIS/ (\$70).

Furthermore, Palestinian women workers employed in West Bank settlements suffer from hardships stemming not only from problematic employer-employee relationships but also from political and social realities which make their situation even more difficult. I will start with the former and then discuss the social implications of women's work in the settlements.

Work conditions and brokers

Palestinian workers in Israeli settlements depend on their employers not only economically but even for the very permission to work. These permits can be annulled at any time, especially when workers demand their rights or try to unionise, or if they (or one of their family members) engage in any kind of political activity. In theory, Palestinian workers in Israeli areas are covered by Israeli labour law and collective agreements. In practice, however, significant protection gaps exist as many workers do not have written or oral employment contracts which offer access to rights and benefits. All interviewees emphasised the weak protection against occupational injuries; many women reported wage cuts or being threatened with dismissal if they merely complained about the harsh working conditions. In addition to the lack of job security, there are multiple types of occupational hazards and risks that women face in the settlements. For example, women working in agriculture have health risks due to the intensive use of chemical pesticides and machines, in addition to the risk of insect stings and sunstroke, exposure to high and low temperatures⁷¹.

Brokers benefit from the employment process and the resulting vulnerability of the workers. An example of worker exploitation is that brokers or employers may resell

⁷¹ Corporate Watch: "Apartheid in the fields" is a good reference point for this.
<https://corporatewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Apartheid-in-the-fields1.pdf>

permits when an employer is allotted a higher quota than the number of workers needed. This practice results in workers being employed by an employer or company other than the one indicated on the work permit, which in turn can cause serious gaps in protection and undermine workers' ability to claim their rights in respect of wages, compensation for work injuries, or other social benefits. The reselling of permits is most common in the construction sector, but it appears that workers also frequently use permits issued for this sector for employment in other sectors. Brokers can make disproportionate profits from matching Palestinian jobseekers with Israeli employers. Due to the difficulty of obtaining a work permit, many Palestinian workers including women have to deal with brokers. These people are often Palestinian male contractors (though a few are women) who facilitate permits for Palestinians, a common practice for the past 20 years. The contractor's job is to bring workers to work when needed, to pay them and to make sure they do not demand a raise. Unregulated and unscrupulous brokers exploit women in need of employment by making them work long hours and confiscating for themselves large sums of their daily salaries. As a control mechanism, contractors can, in most cases, change the workers' workplace, fire them and prevent them from demanding their rights.

All interviewed women stated that they would not be able to find a job unless recruited by a broker. The women could not tell how a person can become a broker but stated that it's a person who has already established links with Israeli employers. Although disliked by the workers, the brokers are needed for employment, which gives them power over the workers.

The broker collects the women workers in the morning (often in a van) as early as 4:30 am or 5:00 am to reach the settlement by 6 am. The interviewees said the broker cuts transportation costs by carrying more women in the van than its normal capacity. For example, a van of seven seats would take around twenty women at one time. The women also believe that the broker deducts transportation fees from their wage. Often, a broker gets a fixed percentage from each woman worker and takes this from her wage before she receives it. Almost all women workers don't know the total sum of their actual wage. The employers pay the brokers for his services in bringing the female workers and the broker pays the wages to the women workers. The workers often do not even know the name of their Israeli employer. Testimonies of women workers in Israeli settlements assert the broker receives large sums of money from the Israeli employer for their service, inducing them to ignore any violations of Palestinian worker rights.

B. Violence against female workers

The interviewed women reported many violations of their rights both by the broker and the employer. Since their direct contact is often with the broker who oversees their work, the women spoke about treatment by male brokers that is frequently abusive, including insulting names and verbal insults. The women's phones are confiscated at the start of the working day and given back to them at the end. They are told it is to ensure their focus on work and not being distracted by social media or family calls. Women workers are also often blackmailed by threats of replacing them at any time by other Palestinian workers or migrant Thai workers. One woman reported that even a minor dispute with the broker, including asking for a rest during the day, might lead to their being replaced. Further, due to the control of employers in the permit system, an employee reported by the Israeli employer or the Palestinian broker could lead to refusal of a permit. Israeli

employers and brokers can use this as a bargaining chip to pressure workers. The fear of these measures prevents many workers from demanding their legal rights.

Female workers in the settlements are exposed to sexual harassment. All the women I spoke to in the Jordan Valley spoke of ‘other’ women being violated, mainly by the male brokers or the supervisors. One of the women reported that hints of a potential physical relationship with the broker might guarantee the woman ongoing possibility for labour. Due to the conservative local culture and fear of judgment and shame, women refrain from speaking openly and explicitly about the harassment and violations in the settlements. In cases of harassment, the broker does not intervene or defend workers due to his financial interest. Many brokers prefer to seek the services of women from outside their personal circles, networks and area of residence in order to avoid problems and complaints about their conduct becoming known. This aspect of mistreatment and control of women represents a pool of unexplored evidence against the exploitative practices within the Israeli settlements.

C. Social stigma and further responsibilities

Women’s desire to work and the lack of job opportunities combined lead them to accept any type of agricultural or service work, even though, among Palestinians, working for settlers is seen as a violation of their dignity. Many women I interviewed in the Jordan Valley reported avoiding marrying their sons to women who worked in the settlements. According to the women, brokers target young women because they are easier to control and can be more efficient workers. Often, however, younger women work in agricultural settlements without permits as most of the women workers who successfully obtain a permit are married. One of Israel’s preoccupations is security; seeing the occupied people as a constant threat (arguably assuming the suffering they inflict as something they would wish to resist) and assesses some people to be a greater ‘security’ threat than others. Young men are at the top of the list, while women generically occupy a lower place. Married women are an even lower rated threat due to the family responsibilities which Palestinian women, including workers, take with much seriousness.

Often women workers have to carry out family responsibilities and childcare in addition to their daily labour at the settlements. Domestic duties they bear are mostly carried out during the night or before going to work or after coming back. For example, several of the interviewed women explained having to wake their children in the pre-dawn before leaving to work so they can go to school. Some children end up not attending school due to lack of supervision. The daughters of working women also bear part of these responsibilities.

In addition to all this, Palestinian women often occupy a traditionally defined role within their families. In their households, women continue to be subjected to gender-based violence and other gendered human rights violations by Palestinian men. UN Women reported that the relationship between occupation violence and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is complex and multi-layered⁷². The same report states that communities, men and women suffering from occupation are more likely to fall into a cycle of domestic violence⁷³. This is understandable, if not excusable. Many men feel

⁷² UN Women, “In-depth Gender Needs Assessment in Area C and Hebron H2” (2018) P.53

⁷³ Ibid.

intensely the humiliation of being placed in a subordinate, subservient position by the Israeli military, facing as they do routine humiliation, degradation of their masculine status, a sense of powerlessness and an inability to protect their families as tradition expects of them. Dr Samr Jabr, a Palestinian psychiatrist and researcher, has written strongly about the effect of humiliation as a weapon of colonisation, not simply as an accidental consequence of occupation. As she puts it: “These omnipresent acts of personal humiliation are not simply collateral by-products of occupation, but its core policy. An essential feature of the occupation is to target and undermine every facet of Palestinian identity, especially those aspects of identity that are a source of pride for the emerging intellectual and moral development of a Palestinian nation. Humiliation acts to crush the sources of autonomy and independence. It aims to reduce Palestinians to a state of passive silence⁷⁴.”

This psychological damage can impact negatively on personal relations at home, with the woman/mother absorbing the man’s frustrations in addition to her own, possibly suffering in other ways too as a result of the occupier’s violent – and deliberate - disruption of traditional male security and confidence.

Findings

Based on the interviews conducted among women workers at the Israeli settlements, I can summarise the key points as follows:

For women, as for all other Palestinian workers, working within illegal settlements is not a choice but an economic necessity consequent on the deliberate destruction of indigenous industries, including agriculture, by the occupying force. Israel sees itself as a major player in the modern industrial world and has exploited the natural resources of Palestine, in particular land and water, to provide the economic infrastructure for its people and its more technological industries. The need for cheap, malleable and compliant workers has resulted in the exploitation of Palestinian people as if they too are a natural resource to be used freely by the occupying power. This process violates international law, but the world community tolerates and even endorses it through preferential trade deals.

Employment opportunities offered to Palestinians embed violence in various forms at every level and stage of employment. This can be physical, emotional or psychological and involves, where women are concerned, coercive control rooted in an exploitation of strict norms of modesty and propriety which can silence women and prevent them speaking openly about the abuse of their persons or abusive language which disrespects them as women. Another aspect of abusive employment practice that is often facilitated by a broker involves the denial of basic rights, including respect for basic terms and conditions of employment.

Exposed in this way at work to multiple abusive practices, women can find the home environment is no safe refuge. Socially defined gender-based responsibilities are still fulfilled by Palestinian women, intensifying the workload they subsume. Additionally, their hard work in settlements brings no social kudos, but shame.

⁷⁴ Samah Jabr. Humiliation: The hammer crushing Palestinian society. June 30, 2016.
<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160630-humiliation-the-hammer-crushing-palestinian-society/>

Work normally brings financial benefits and enables social mobility and other material benefits. This is denied to Palestinian women workers because of the poor pay, lack of protection and rights. They work hard for minimal reward and must endure the indignity of labouring on what is their own land.

The humiliation and control of the Palestinians is not simply motivated by Israel's need for cheap labour. As Samr Jabr identified, such treatment is corrosive of the individual's spirit and reduces the worker to a servile position which makes her / him much less likely to resist injustice: a wholly dependent worker is a weak worker. There are many ways to undermine social fabric and national spirit and aspirations: exploitative and demeaning work is one such method. Whilst it is true that many capitalist employers adopt exploitative practices, the Palestinian experience is unique in that it takes place within a colonising project intended to deradicalise, weaken and ultimately displace the indigenous people. Exploitative and demeaning labour is a tool of a wider policy of colonisation.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This paper argues that the economics of Israeli occupation is a structural relation of domination by the colonisers towards a colonised population. Palestinian workers in Israeli settlements are an example of how Palestinians face a complex structural violence including lack of employment rights, exploitation by employers and brokers, harassment and threats in addition to social stigma and humiliation. Although some aspects of the violence that have been discussed above could be true for any other third world country, the existence of the Israeli occupation and its colonial strategies against Palestinian workers which affects the ways these workers are connected to global supply chains.

Companies doing business in Israeli settlements contribute to and profit from land confiscations and the violation of Palestinian workers' rights - and support the settlements which are illegal under international law. The ultimate and inescapable truth is that no settlement business should be operating and profiting from land and resources illegally taken from the Palestinian people.

Making recommendations to improve this situation on the assumption that this is a fixed arrangement would normalise a grave injustice. Essentially, it is illegal for Israel to colonise Palestinian land. It is also illegal for Israel then to transfer its population to that colonised land and expropriate resources for its own benefit. The treatment of the Palestinian workforce is a further injustice built on this illegality.

The core recommendation for restorative justice must be the enforcement of international humanitarian law and the implementation of UN resolutions. One practical step in the process would be for the EU to remove its preferential Trade Agreement with Israel by enforcing its own Article 2. This alone would have massive consequences for the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

With regard to other issues, such as domestic violence, the solution begins with the removal of the major causal factor: the humiliation and demeaning of Palestinian men at the hands of the Israeli military occupation. After that, Palestinian society, and Palestinian women, in particular, will take the issue into their own hands and provide a home-grown solution, independent of the colonising force or external agencies.

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