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EDITORIAL

Understanding Israeli Practices of Forced Displacement and Settler-Colonialism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt)

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This Issue of the Journal of Internal Displacement (JID) examines the plight of Palestinian refugees and displaced communities as a marginalized-protracted refugee community through the lens of international and regional laws and policies. In order to investigate whether these legal frameworks are in symphony with the existing development agencies the volume aims to analyze the efficacy of local and international law on the overall status of displaced persons. The on-going research around forced displacement across the Palestinian territories employs both data collected in the field and existing interpretive theoretical methods, borrowing from several disciplines - health, law, human rights, development and social entrepreneurship disciplines. Researching the broader framework of displacement and dispossession of Palestinians through a legal angle; requires a law-in-context approach, which assesses the relationship between the international legal instruments in relation to regional/local laws and policies. It also requires a close dissection of the various laws, treaties, peace agreements and policies of host countries, as well as a critical read of international and regional institutions along with the respective development/humanitarian agents and their responsibilities towards the protection of refugee rights and the rights of internally displaced persons.

The issue is unique in several ways whereby it raises important questions in three separate domains towards the broader subject area in the attempt to help fill a major gap pertinent to understanding the struggles of Palestinian refugees as a protracted refugee community. Most literature to date lacks the holistic nature that is distinct to this issue; also existing research is often one-dimensional while this issue aims to bring a multi-dimensional – comparative angle in addressing Palestinian refugee narratives.

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The larger underpinnings of this issue include the efficacy of the conflict between the international legal instruments versus the host state/regional legal and policy dynamics, which mirror each other in marginalizing Palestinian refugee rights, and the rights of communities to land and resources. The legal read of International Refugee Law in relation to the policies towards Palestinian refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories (with a focus on the Area C and West Bank communities) reveal a systematic erosion of refugee rights. Against this backdrop this issue aims to present the narratives that probe a discourse against the ‘warehousing’ of the Palestinian refugee issue whereby seeking approaches towards the very basic socio-civil rights in the absence of a viable peace/resettlement/compensation with Israel.

Simultaneously the issue posits the importance of developing a long-term strategy to promote good governance, participation, and state commitment to legal/human right instruments in order to reduce violence and systematic discrimination of Palestinian refugees in the region. This issue endured several challenges. At the core of this research rests the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the politics of Zionism and settler-colonialism. On several occasions there was a struggle in keeping perspective on the struggle of the refugees and their voices. The aim here is not to discuss political advocacy nor to discuss the genealogy of Zionism in its entirety, nor to define the competing narratives upon which Zionism has shaped the diverse demographic that currently makes up the state of Israel. This issue if anything, aims to connect Zionism as a movement to the struggle of the Palestinian refugees whether in the occupied Palestinian territories or outside in exile. To offer readers context however, I will utilize the project of Zionism to which I am referring to, through the work of Edward Said; “ The Question of Palestine’ . In it, he writes;

There is no doubt in my mind, for example, that most Jews do regard Zionism and Israel as urgently important facts for Jewish life, particularly because of what happened to the Jews in this century (...). Together, these successes of Zionism have produced a prevailing view of the question of Palestine that almost totally favors the victor, and takes hardly any account of the victim. *Yet what did the victim feel as he watched the Zionists arriving in Palestine? What does he think as he watches Zionism described today? Where does he look in Zionism’s history to locate its roots, and the origins of its practices toward him?* These are questions that are never asked – and they are precisely the ones that I am trying to raise as well as answer...²

This issue therefore wants to remain true to its relevancy towards the refugees and their needs and rights as it stands in the current context. However it is also important to establish the origins and the root causes of the conflict that continues to prevent a feasible settlement for the Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, I am reluctant to allocate time in discussing whether the oppression and displacement of Palestinians under the Zionist/colonial governance is philosophically grounded in religious legitimacy or in the politics of security. This debate would add little or no constructive site to discuss development for Palestinian refugees. Also, as the late Edward Said has described; ‘ Zionism from the standpoint of its victims.’³ Therefore, I intend to contribute towards the examining of, ‘Zionism from the standpoint of its victims’ by contextualizing the contemporary status of Palestinian refugees in scattered and crowded refugee camps. The narrative of Palestinian refugees is a powerful story, one that includes both physical and emotional scars stemming from the loss of their land and survival through war, massacre and

² Said, Edward. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

³ Ibid.

on-going occupation. These stories illustrate qualities of a people against whom a great injustice continues—courage, humanity, faith, and the overall will to survive against all odds.

Finally, it should be noted that essentially this project aims to create a capacity to understand the various aspects of refugee livelihoods and more importantly how these can be shaped in the pursuit to *resist* and by virtue *exist* in face of settler-colonialism. Resistance through development is a form of struggle against oppression and conflict through which refugee communities can build and sustain their livelihood. Palestinian refugees, given their current context face serious complex forms of discrimination whereby their livelihoods are threatened in several ways. This issue aims to create a capacity to seek alternatives to the current design and framework that governs the lives of a vulnerable population through a wider debate in theory and practice. To offer context;

the uprooted and the resettled have been joined by allies at national and international level from communities of activists from human rights, environment, gender and indigenous peoples organizations around the world. Indeed, corresponding to the wide array of activities undertaken in the name of development around the world, many of these issues interweave with resistance to development—induced displacement and resettlement, involving an extremely wide range of peoples, organizations, levels, contexts, and relationships that call for greater democratization and more participation of local populations in the decisions and projects affecting them.” (Oliver-Smith, 2001, p. 5)⁴

The connection between development that is grass-roots and is community-led is a progressive forward looking model through which refugee communities can build their livelihoods and call for the full implementation of their basic human rights—including the right to self-determination. This issue is just a humble contribution to that idea—the idea to resist, exist and affirm life.

⁴ Oliver-Smith, Anthony. (2001). *Displacement, Resistance and the Critique of Development from the Grassroots to the Global*. University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre.