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Abstracts of Presentations

Mudar Kassir

The Counter-revolution Intercepts the Revolution: the Dispossession, Settlement, and Displacement of the Public Sphere

The public sphere is an abstract concept that does not refer to something concrete, but rather it refers to a group of interactions. We call the domain where they take place “the public sphere”. The interactions that define the boundaries of the public sphere are those that form the nature, conditions, rules, and acceptable patterns of non-intimate relationships between people. Amongst these conditions are those related to the political system, production relations, and anything that would determine the parameters of the historical epoch in a society. Hence, social conflicts related to changing and enhancing (or preserving) the status quo, or related to the direction of the perceived change are necessarily conflicts about the public sphere. Therefore, the processes of shrinking and disposing of the public sphere are tools for the conservative societal powers for whom the status quo is beneficial, and who act to suppress attempts of change.

Techniques of suppression vary according to their nature and timing. They include such techniques as sterilization, abortion, mutilation, suffocation, alienation, substitution, settlement, and expropriation. They are directed towards one of three aims: first, to prevent the emergence of change actions, such as suppressing the will through intellectual (ideological) framing, or forming false consciousness and transforming public issues into personal issues, dealing with which takes place in the private sphere. Second, to redirect the change action towards another goal, such as populism, or limiting the political protest to a discussion about policy. Third, to undertake a counter-action against change through repression, confiscation, expulsion, banishment, exile, imprisonment, and so on.

Since every change action reformulates the public sphere, the expansion of the public sphere is evidence of the impact of the change action. Although widening the public sphere does not necessarily mean changing it, but the incremental and steady expansion of the public sphere creates the conducive conditions for change. This is the reason that makes the struggle about the public sphere an issue regardless of the specific subject matter of the struggle. The representation of the public sphere as a cause in itself enables us to defend it despite the fact that it does not exist in a concrete tangible form, because the concrete domain of every act as a process is a constituent of the public sphere. Therefore, forms of change are cumulative if they proceed in a specific direction, even if they are related to different issues. Education, national struggle, union struggle, and feminist struggle, are all acts of change that liberate the public sphere and ward off those who seek to possess and monopolize it.

Roula Abi Habib – Khoury

Revolutionaries Without a Revolution

“I only represent myself” is a phrase that was widely used by “revolutionists” during the first phase of the popular uprising that started in October 2019 in Lebanon. The lack of coordination and leadership along with big slogans dispersed the protestors and vanished (overthrow the regime, overthrow the system, replace all political class, everyone means everyone, overthrow

patriarchy, overthrow bank control, and abolish (political) sectarianism). Some representatives of the revolution arrived at the parliament and the dilemma is still the same: with whom are they coordinating?, with whom are they meeting? are they not condemned to “deal” with some of the class they wanted to overthrow? Isn't the phrase "dealing with segmental and partial issues" used by the "reformist" MPs an expression of the limited space for actual change?

Where are the protestors today? After the Beirut port explosion, the rise of the US dollar (or the collapse of the local currency), the lack of medicine and bread? We do not hear voices in the streets! The discussion is almost confined to the issue of Hezbollah, “the Iranian Occupation”, displaced Syrians in Lebanon, the gas issue, and the demarcation of the maritime borders. In front of this scene, it is important to try to understand why the demand to make change has been delayed in Lebanon? What prompted individuals and groups to act on that specific moment?

The paper argues that the shrinking of spaces for change caused by repressive policies in general stems from the contradictions of the (absent) revolution and its inability to set priorities.

Ahmad Al-Jahham

Depoliticization: Shrinking the Action and its Sphere to Curb the potential of Societal Change

This paper seeks to deepen the discussion surrounding the techniques of neoliberal regimes' dominance over the process of social reproduction, such as the expropriation of the public sphere, the reduction of the space available for different societal actors, and the promotion of what is known as the “third way” and the accompanying “de-politicization” approach. Together, these techniques inhibit social change which has become urgent, while the penetration of neoliberal actors such as corporations deepens. This paper deals with the discussion of depoliticization as one of the most important tools of neoliberal systems directed at curbing effective political participation, and its impact on the opportunities for the formation of new political forces and actors, capable of first restoring the public sphere and then utilizing it to bring about social change outside the imposed neoliberal framework.

Our world today is witnessing a general consensus that we live in the era of "post-politics", where ideology has disappeared and with its disappearance, the difference between the right and the left has diminished in favour of the emergence of a third way. This third way is characterized by technical management of societies, and the reduction (monopolization) of political action to what is taking place within the components of the political establishment, or what has come to be called the “deep state” and its agencies, as the only body authorized to exercise it (political action); limiting the possibility of political participation to professional politicians, representative institutions of the state, such as parliament; de-politicization of the economy and society, and the state's and corporations' dominance on the public sphere in exchange for undermining it as an essential space for practising politics outside the state dominated sphere.

In this third post-political dimension, the political contradictions that result from economic and social issues are dealt with as procedures and policy dilemmas that technocrats treat within a neoliberal framework of action.

This remains unaccountable and uncontested, which sets a predetermined ceiling and horizon for economic and social thesis, interventions, and treatments, as they cannot question or challenge the hegemonic neoliberal framework or the free market.

The slogans "the end of ideologies", "the end of history" and "the third way" constitute headings for the production and implementation of a broad and systematic movement/policy of depoliticizing society and dismantling its political and organizational structures. This adopted approach is considered one of the most important tools used by neoliberal systems to curb the actors of social change and prevent them from bringing about, or even envisioning any social

change from outside the state's systems.

Jawida Mansour

A Woman Rises as a Societal Change Maker in Jenin: Challenges and Prospect

Cultural heritage as a socio-economic driver is widely used as a creator of jobs and revenues, a means of making poverty eradication strategies, and a tool for community development and resiliency in developing countries including Palestine. Under the current circumstances of uncertainty, insecurity, and occupation, the Palestinian society attempts to prove its 'sumud.' Sumud is not merely a socio-geopolitical concept; it also entails the collective action of survival under occupation, chronic adversity, limited resources, and improper infrastructure. In this study, which was conducted between 2019 and 2021, I investigated the prolific uses of Palestinian heritage by various national and international civil society organizations in their community's development programs, which mostly target marginalized women and youth. The study focuses on the work of two selected grassroots associations and women centers in Jenin governorate that were established by women for women. The study aims at exploring the challenges and constraints that these women faced/are facing while striving to empower women and girls in the least attractive area in the West Bank for development actors and donors. It examines the ways in which these women negotiated power relations to sustain their work, in particular with limited funding and governmental support. Furthermore, it explores their synergies and resilience tools which they developed to cope with traumatic experiences (for example the ongoing Israeli attack on Jenin refugee camp and other towns in Jenin governorate) and economic fragility .

Besides reading literature related to the topic, the study uses semi-structured interviews with the two associations; their staff and beneficiaries.

Ibrahim Rabaia

Colonial Domination and its Resistance: Clashing Chaos vs. Facilitations in Jenin

In 2008, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Jenin, in the context of the US administration's support for the political movement that was active during that period. She said that what the city witnessed in 2002 was horrific, and that it will become a model for peace. This visit was accompanied and followed by an in-depth program to rebuild the Palestinian economic and political contexts, on new, neoliberal bases, within the reform and institution-building program, that was adopted by the successive governments of former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad (2008-2013), which dedicated a campaign to Jenin "to enforce the rule of law and achieve prosperity", titled the "Smile and Hope" campaign.

At the same time, Israel prepared its map to redesign the Palestinian social space in Jenin, in order to advance its control. One of the most important components of this map was the generation of social formations, consisting of businessmen, workers and local merchants, linked in the interests of stability and calm, which formed an economically dominant class in the city that is benefiting from the expansion of the "facilitation" system.

With the expansion of this class and the deepening of its interest in calmness, and the crossing, the structure of the city began turning "modern", in terms of buildings and consumption patterns. Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the city, the refugee camp remained a difficult area to transform, which prompted the "Civil Administration" in the year 2020 to launch a campaign for "Lifting the security ban" and ensure the camp's involvement in the "facilities" system. However, this did not prevent the continuation of clashes between the camp and the occupation on the one hand, and between the camp and the authority on the other, as happened with the arrest of the prisoner's son Zakaria al-Zubaidi in January 2022, which prompted describing the state of the camp as chaotic.

Hence, this paper attempts to investigate the nature of the relationship between the aforementioned social formations and the camp in Jenin as an area of intertwined chaos. The paper also questions the reasons for the inability of the “facilitation” system and the associated social formations to attract the camp and dismantle its steadfastness, according to what the residents call the camp. For this purpose, the paper examines the transformations of the concept of resilience among the camp residents between 2002 and 2022.

Issam Younis

Change Actors and Spaces in Gaza

One may argue that the colonial apartheid state has succeeded to a large extent in fragmenting the unity of the Palestinian territories. It is working upon a security racist mentality that aims to transform the Palestinian people into groups that are forcibly segregated from one another, and each group - East Jerusalem, the north of the West Bank, the south of the West Bank, and Gaza Strip - has its own issues that are imposed by the occupation.

If we look more closely at the colonial apartheid state's control mechanisms, we realise that it has controlled the very details and minutiae of Palestinians' lives and forcibly imposed public action on a society that, maybe as a tool for survival and resilience, widely relied on reaction and adaptation. This begs the fundamental question of what remains of what is said and not said regarding the capacity for change and for enhancing resilience, i.e., the ability of the society to effectively take the lead and determine the daily agenda.

From a variety of factors, this makes Gaza a unique case with multiple duty bearers and responsibilities. Gaza is an occupied territory that is part of the Palestinian territories, and through the continuous siege it has imposed on Gaza for 15 years, the colonial apartheid state has played a major role in transforming Gaza into a humanitarian situation and dealing with it as such instead of a political case.

The most dangerous aspect of this is the high dynamics that produce new realities and reproduce a consciousness that seems conservative and self-reliant in search of individual solutions in the absence of any real protection system. This is not only collective punishment but also a process of de-development for the area. In addition to the international community, there are two divided authorities among the responsible parties: one is a *de facto* authority and the other has diminished legitimacy. After fifteen years, a lot has happened that the political divide between the West Bank and Gaza created realities that occasionally seem irreversible, and as it reproduces itself dangerously in separation from its prelude, the division, its tools, and its effects contribute to the enforcement of the fragmentation.

It is needless to say that the political division in 2007 and the one in 2022 are not the same, and this this merits thorough investigation. All of these factors have played a vital role in shrinking the public spheres and the available margins for citizens and actors due to the multiplicity of authorities and their political expediency to all societal concerns.

Emilio Dabed

Palestinian Legal Activism: Between Liberation and the ‘Desire’ for Statehood

Contemporary Palestinian politics is marked by paradoxical dynamics: while we observe an entrenchment of the colonial regime, division within the national movement, territorial and institutional fragmentation, and heightened authoritarianism, we also witness a growing reliance on international law, the language of rule of law, good governance, and human rights. The paradox lies in the fact that despite law playing a central role in furthering these dynamics, Palestinians and pro-Palestinian groups increasingly translate their political claims into legal language as their primary site for the pursuit of an elusive political emancipation.

This paper addresses the urgent need to seriously engage with the Palestinian movement's turn to law and its potential consequences for political emancipation. The aim of this analysis is not

to advocate for an abandonment of law and rights, but rather to engage a necessary debate on the paradoxes, ambiguities, and traps that law offers, so that Palestinian “strategies of emancipation” do not become “technologies of domination.”

Sandra Rativa, Luz Angela Rojas and Blandine Juchs

Social Movements: People Power in Colombia

In Latin America, a diversity of communities, organizations, collectives and other social groups, including municipalities, have created alternative ways to build and preserve local economies and political governance based on direct democracy. Agro-alimentary territories (Colombia), Comunas (Venezuela), Cooperatives (Uruguay), Indigenous municipalities (México), and others, are examples of ongoing struggles to create the material and symbolic conditions for the reproduction of life.

In this paper, we will present the Colombian experience of Agro-alimentary territories. This initiative is the result of a long history of struggles for land, water, food sovereignty, and recovery of native seeds and ultimately the defence of territories. The encounter of Black, Indigenous and Peasant struggle and even their exchange with urban areas and popular neighbourhoods created a collective consciousness of “territories”; the bond between people, life, nature, culture, music, art, dance, economies is a complex and holistic collective experience; Agro alimentary territories is the self-government of the people that inhabit a specific territory, committed to protect it, including unarmed “Guards”, a community protection corps, to defend this counter hegemony in practice .

Each Agro alimentation territory, is a social, communitarian and political process of self-organization against historical threats such as, colonization, paramilitary violence, state repression, and mega projects (oil, mining monoculture etc...). Agro alimentary territories are the articulation between a local economy model and political autonomy, to confront the state and the aggressive imposition of the capital in the territories.

Camila Vergara

“New Constitution or Nothing!”: Lessons from the Plebeian Revolution in Chile

After becoming the posterchild of neoliberalism for the last three decades, flaunting its rapid economic growth and incorporation into the OECD, the exclusive club of 38 high-income developed countries, Chile, one of the most unequal countries in the world, was “awakened” with a popular uprising that set it ablaze on 18th October 2019. After a small increase in the metro fare in the capital city Santiago, high school students called for a massive disobedience campaign, jumping the turnstiles and “evading the fare as another way to fight.” This direct action escalated into massive mobilizations throughout the country. The diverse demands for structural transformations that social movements had been pushing for more than a decade crystallised into Chileans’ oldest demand since the Pinochet dictatorship ended in 1990: a new constitution. I will present the constituent process that followed the uprising from a plebeian perspective, analysing the struggle of the common people to craft the basic rules “from below,” independent from the State and political parties. I will highlight the lessons from this ongoing constituent event in terms of the repertoires of contention and repression used in the past two and a half years, the limits of the participatory mechanisms people could utilize to influence the writing of constitutional norms, and the promises of the new constitution regarding the exercise of direct popular power.

George Giacaman

Not always Shrinking Spaces, but the Ineffectiveness of Working for Change: Causes in the Palestinian Case

Although it is true that the current Palestinian System always finds a way to reduce the available spaces for protest, reform, and change action, whether in the West Bank or Gaza, and regardless of the various cases and problems, this does not preclude the existence of spaces that have been used for these purposes on various occasions.

The teachers strike in 2016, 2020, and 2022, the social security movement in 2018 and 2019, the multiple protests that called for those guilty for Nizar Banat's murder to face justice, as well as other instances, all took place in these still-existing spaces and made use of them.

The outcomes varied from one social movement to another, but the results in terms of achievement are meagre given the variety and multiplicity of issues with numerous reform demands.

The paper will discuss a number of causes, but it will mostly focus on the needed mechanisms to achieve results in specific cases at least, the types of organization, the necessary starting points, as well as the reasons for failure in many of the cases.

Larabi Sadiki

Democratisation using Undemocratic Tools: Constitutional Occupation of the Public Sphere

Dana Farraj

Unions as a Public Sphere: The Public and Professional Domains of Unionism

The Palestinian unionism and labour movement, historically, constitutes a backbone for national liberation action, organizing and building workers' unions, and professional unions that contribute to the human rights, social, and economic struggle, and for social justice, in parallel to its align and integrate with the rest of bodies and frameworks of the national liberation movement, and the different components of civil society.

Departing from the perspective that mass unions organization is the basis for building collective organized action, with the realization that unionism is not turned to be the only form of community organization, though, one form of community organization without dominating over another. In the meantime, to understand the ceiling and limits of union work, the demanding struggle affects the national liberation struggle and is affected by it, consequently, we find that the national interest is broader than the interest of the union struggle in most cases, and it must prevail. However, does this mean that workers and trade unionists, who suffer from various forms of oppression, should put their struggles behind in the name of the national liberation struggle, and that there is no possibility of changing their current reality or alleviating their suffering except after liberation from colonialism, and the initiation of revolution for social justice? No. Rather, the daily, cumulative and tactical struggles come as part of the strategic struggle. Since fundamental human rights are not offered voluntarily, but through mass, intertwined and united action.

In the context of unionism today, and the solidarity, synchronization and intertwining of union struggles, are we getting back the organized and united collective action? Does the possible renaissance of unions herald hope for the renaissance of collective organization, in its various forms, capable of formulating national, political, social and economic programmes?

This article tries to understand part of the challenges of the union reality, the narrowing of spaces in unions as the public space for workers, the issue of building alliances and the intertwining of struggles, how to build demands and figure out a collective conscious identity, and its impact on the political and dominant context in society.

Koen De Feyter

Civil Society Space in Global Human Rights Treaty Making

In April 2019 Al Haq, a non-governmental human rights organisation based in Ramallah, submitted a document to the Advisory Committee of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in support of a new international treaty on the right to development. The submission highlighted why such a treaty would be especially important for occupied populations in terms of access to their natural wealth and resources, which were systematically and routinely denied in situations of prolonged belligerent occupation. The drafting process of a convention on the right to development is currently taking place at the HRC Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development in Geneva.

New global human rights treaties ideally reflect not only the views of States (as the primary duty bearers in human rights law), but also of actors advocating on behalf of the rights holders. NGOs are able to participate in UN human rights treaty drafting to some extent – particularly if they were granted consultative status by the ECOSOC Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. Consultative status is attributed as a result of a highly politicised process. Even NGOs with consultative status (such as Al Haq) may find UN arrangements for participation unduly restrictive. It thus remains to be seen to what extent societal actors are able to ensure that human rights law responds to new forms of injustice at domestic and international levels. The paper will investigate whether the space for civil society to impact on global human rights treaty making is shrinking, taking the treaty making process of the right to development convention as an example.

Sahar Francis

Palestinian Civil society Organizations in the midst of the Restrictions of the Occupation, the Donors, and the PA

Pursuing and targeting civil society institutions by various means is not a new strategy used by the occupation authorities, nor is it a result of the events of September 11th in the United States, and the policies, laws and international treaties that followed with the aim of combating terrorism. Since the early years of occupation, the occupation authorities have fought federations and associations, cultural and sports clubs, student movements and others, in reference to emergency regulations and military orders; and declared hundreds of institutions, associations and clubs as illegal organizations; closed their headquarters and confiscated their property. This has been one of the occupation's tools to control and restrain the growth of the Palestinian society, its development, and its struggle against occupation.

This policy did not stop with the signing of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. On the contrary, and especially in the city of Jerusalem, the attack intensified to close down dozens of civil and human rights institutions to impose a political reality that Jerusalem is the capital of the occupying state, and that the Palestinian Authority will not have any control or presence in the city. This attack has intensified in recent years, especially after the enactment of the Prevention of Terrorism Law in 2018 and the amendment of military orders in line with this law.

This attack affected all those who called for the imposition of sanctions and the withdrawal of investments from the occupying state, those who demanded accountability under international law, and those who contributed to supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and provided them with basic services, especially in the areas most targeted within the annexation plan. In order to fight Palestinian civil society, the occupation government established the Ministry of Strategic Planning and allocated millions in order to silence Palestinian institutions. Despite the abolition of this ministry with the formation of the government in 2021, the Minister of War declared six Palestinian institutions as terrorist organizations, and later closed the headquarters of these institutions.

Restricting the workspaces of Palestinian institutions is not limited to the policies of the occupying state. Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority has had a share in restricting the work of NGOs with some of the policies and decisions it issues. The same applies to the policies of funders and donors, especially through imposing political conditions attached to their funding, on the grounds of fighting terrorism, or offering work programmes that do not fit the priorities of the Palestinian society. These policies have affected the work of institutions and their relations and have caused more dispersal and fragmentation. Therefore, what is required to face these challenges? and is it really possible to overcome them and continue to work to make change?

Raef Zreik

The Challenge of Antisemitism

Since the adoption of the IHRA Israel has been launching a strategic and well planned attack against different pro- Palestinian groups of activists and scholars labelling many of their activities as being antisemitic. Together with Germany and the US Israel is promoting a UN resolution adopting the IHRA. This adoption poses a very serious threat to the morality and justness of the question of Palestine. The paper will try to evaluate this danger and raise some ideas as how to challenge it!

Anmar Rafeedie

Organizing and Framing as Mechanisms of Success for Middle-Class Social Movements

After the inactivity in the societal and political movement in the years following the popular uprising of 1987, the Palestinian street, influenced by the wave of Arab Spring movements, witnessed a series of attempts to transfer this experience to Palestine. There is much talk in recent literature about contemporary youth and social movements and about the fragility of these movements in terms of organization and vision, which led to movements such as “15th of March” to be described in terms that do not suggest their success at the demand or grassroots level. This is what researchers agree on by raising issues such as the formulation of negative discourse, its lack of a plan, and its action on the basis of reaction (Hilal, 2013; Khamis, 2013; Azm, 2019). But after nearly 15,000 employees invaded the streets of Ramallah, calling for social security for a period that exceeded several months, unlike previous movements, this called for thinking about how the social security movement was able to succeed at the demand level by forcing policy changes, and bring about grassroots change by mobilizing thousands for months.

The research paper reviews a set of mechanisms through which the movement demanding social security has succeeded in mobilizing to be the first movement in its ability to continue and mobilize. The analysis in this paper is based on two chapters of my thesis that I submitted at Oxford University to obtain a master’s degree on the mobilization of the middle class in the social security movement. These chapters discuss the internal organization of the movement and its framing and discourse, and what is called in social movements’ theories “political infrastructure.” Through this, the movement was able to exploit the political structure to its advantage and frame itself in a way that ensures that it reaches individuals more effectively, which were main issues when discussing the failure of previous social movements. The discussion in these chapters of my thesis is the result of a series of interviews with actors in the social movement and through the analysis of the movement’s discourse, as well as framing analysis, and the analysis of the movement’s archive. I suppose that the presentation will lead us to conclusions and lessons in the successful internal organization of social movements and the mechanisms for framing the movements and its discourse in the authoritarian context lived in a way that makes the movement more capable of mobilizing individuals.

Bilal Awad Salameh

The Palestinian Social Actor: from the Fragmented to the Integrated Act

The social structure is a key factor in understanding and realizing the horizons of social action, its discourse, and its impact on the daily lives and vice versa as Pierre Bourdieu puts it. This calls for studying and deconstructing the variables and their impact on the transformations that took place due to the dominant groups and political forces on social action in the Palestinian context in particular. This intersects in some way with the Arab context within the neoliberal transformations and its dominant discourse.

There were a systematic attack within the social engineering of the social Palestinian action on the cultural, social, economic, and political values represented by political parties, national institutions, and collective movements to attempt to undermine family values, which did not culminate in isolation from direct and symbolic violence by the political and security systems and the institutions associated with them. This was done through restricting the social act in the normalisation situation of the daily life , along with the state of political indifference and marginalization that was separated within the dominant neoliberal discourse in the Palestinian colonial context, and the disintegration of major collective structures

These predictions prompted social actors to search for solutions, individual salvation, and fragmented social work, which lacks an integrative vision in understanding the scene and comprehensive solutions to come out and restore the correct path of the meaning of social action in the colonial context. the unified work is considered the most important condition for its effectiveness within a social and psychological vision that is capable of forming the conditions of invulnerability of the community under the colonial condition. This paper, attempts to provoke a discussion about the importance of having a reflexive vision of individual action for collective action as a prerequisite for liberation for the Palestinian people and a regulator of work for youth, feminist, social, and development movements in a way that ensures individual and collective dignity at the same time.

Rana Barakat

Nurturing Conversations: BZU Museum and De-colonial Practices

Over the course of the last decade, decolonizing museums as spaces and practices has garnered major political and cultural attention. Often considering the colonial nature of a modern museum, or even collection practices, the decolonizing framework has been primarily about return, recovery and repatriation. While these are obviously concerns in Palestine, as we endure an ongoing settler colonial invasion and all that entails in terms of daily existential violence, as well as stealing and appropriating culture, BZU Museum has, over the course of the last several months, tried to ask questions about our own practices and praxis. This paper will cover that sense of radical praxis and ask: how do we (or can we) decolonize Palestinian museums through the work of BZU Museum? How do we move beyond the limitations of preservation and yet remain committed to a protection as well as a revolutionary praxis in terms of cultural and knowledge exchange? This presentation will open up these questions for consideration and show how BZU Museum can and should be a public space that can potentially be a useful resource against neo-liberal encroachment and deeply counter-revolutionary anti-intellectualism.