



Planning under a colonial regime in Palestine: Counter planning/ decolonizing the West Bank

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ABSTRACT

After the Oslo Peace Accords (1994), the West Bank, Palestine was divided into three zones as an interim agreement for establishing a Palestinian State, where Israeli control would end on the occupied region within 5 years. These zones: Zone A, under full Palestinian control, Zone B under joint control of Israeli and Palestinian authority and zone C which covers more than 60% of the West Bank area and which Israel has full control over security, planning, land administration, and construction. Most of the zone is designated for Israeli military uses, settlements and bypass roads. Palestinian communities in this zone suffer from significant shortages on different levels, among which is urban/rural planning and development.

Planning in this zone is completely controlled by Israeli authority and has resulted in segregation and enclaving of the Palestinian communities. In Zone C, Palestinian communities look like scattered islands, which is a hindrance to any attempts to manage, develop or serve.

This study aims at investigating planning policies in zone C, case studies for selected communities were chosen and examined to find out whether there were attempts by the Palestinians to counter Israeli planning in the assigned zone.

From the cases, it is clear that there are some Palestinian attempts to counter Israeli plans, but they failed. It is concluded that planning in zone C is fully under control of the colonial power, no Palestinian plan proposal has been approved.

1. Introduction

Palestine went through different ruling regimes during the past century: Ottoman Empire, British Mandate, Jordanian and Egyptian, Israeli occupation and finally the Palestinian National Authority. While under the British Mandate, efforts were focused on creating a 'National Homeland' for Jews in Palestine. 'Israel' was declared on 78% of the land in 1948, and then in 1967 the remaining parts of Palestine: West Bank (W.B.) and Gaza Strip were under the Israeli occupation.

As a result of the Oslo Peace Agreement in 1994, the Israeli forces withdrew from parts of the W.B. and recognized a Palestinian right of self-governance in some parts. The W.B. was then divided into 3 zones,¹ A–C; Zone A: full Palestinian civil and security control, zone B: full Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control, zone C: full Israeli control over security, urban/rural planning, land administration, and construction; most of the W.B. area was classified as zone C (about 60% of the West Bank) (B'Tselem, 2014; B'Tselem, 2013).

The W.B., especially zone C, has remained without real urban/rural planning since 1967. In the past few years the focus has been to do master plans for communities in zone C. The recent initiatives were motivated by donor countries and agencies, and were being performed by several local planning firms. However, the upper hand in the field of planning in zone C is reserved for the Israeli colonial power. It is vital to ask: are these attempts/initiatives (planning in area c) really aiming at challenging the Israeli control and sovereignty? Is it counter planning? Is it a new era of decolonization in urban planning in the W.B.?

2. Planning and colonial power

The relationship between planning and power is fundamental. Physical planning can be used as a means to serve political ambitions, and power can easily change the landscape accordingly. Classical planning theories tend to identify the act of planning as a technical tool used by planners to guide decision makers. Forester (1989) argued for the significance of looking at planning from a political perspective in

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¹ Oslo agreement states that: Israeli forces will withdraw from the West Bank within five years gradually, that is why areas such as A–C were assigned in order to make the withdraw smooth.

the opening statement of his book “Planning in the Face of Power” Forester states:

“In a world of intensely conflicting interests and great inequalities of status and resources, planning in the face of power is at once a daily necessity and constant ethical challenge” (Forester, 1989, p. 3).

Such arguments are considered valid in our communities today considering that capitalist societies continue to create a difference between those who have power (status, money) and those who lack it (the poor, the minorities, the marginalized (Forester, 1989). Therefore, in order for planning to achieve its main objectives of social equity, prosperity, and social welfare, planners are challenged to understand the planning systems including the relations of power they are working within. According to Sandercock (2004), in order to make planning more ethical and inclusive, sovereignty is a crucial issue, and it is not about participation, it is about rights. She adds that planning is an ethical commitment to the future, in which planning has to strengthen indigenous communities’ autonomy to manage their lands. The major ethical considerations in planning in the face of power can be summarized as: empowering indigenous communities and planners, providing them with the required skills to do the job themselves. In addition sharing information and knowledge transfer to indigenous communities is a must.

In the colonial era, ethics in planning were absent when dealing with natives’ rights, quality of life and basic needs. When colonies were established, planners used the power they gained from decision makers to oppress and isolate indigenous people in different ways: enslave, segregate communities and confine them in remote areas in the outskirts of the colonizers’ cities and towns. In addition planners during this era used zoning as a tool to achieve all mentioned above goals, and manipulated with regulation to allocate low-density areas for the white, and high density areas for the natives.

Planning and politics interact in many ways, planning in all its forms is- and has always been- one of the most influential tools used by politicians or colonizers to control and gain power, it also serves as the basis for a ‘legal’ tool such as laws of private property, surveying, and relevant regulations. Colonizers used planners to draw maps to impose laws and regulations accordingly as a source of power (Sandercock, 2004; Carson, 2002; Coon, 1992). Power was evident in planning colonial locations in which topography played a major role. Colonizers/planners aimed at establishing their structures on top of hills to show power and control.

Planning researchers tend to use a new term to distinguish the actual planning being applied on the ground from the utopian planning being promoted in books and researches. This term is called “the dark side of planning”. It is defined as what planners apply on the ground which often *contradicts the common standards of democracy, efficiency, and equity and planning ethics*” (Flyvbjerg, 1996). Similarly Yiftachel (1995), set the term “dark side of modernism” which addressed how planning is used to dominate and oppress minorities (or even majorities as in the case of South Africa). Most recent literature discusses power and planning in the context of democracy, ethnicity, minorities, and racial segregation. The researchers focused on how the planner has to work as an advocate to defend these groups’ needs and objectives in the face of dominant power. Power in this study can be defined as the power of occupation, cleansing, and changing the whole landscape to achieve dominance, control and rule.

Çelik (1997), took a detailed look at Algiers colonial policies, these policies were based on an understanding that architecture and urban forms were key players in forming the life of the indigenous. Haussmann’s ideas were applied here; a new spatial organization was imposed on the locals to control their lives, movement, culture, and way of thinking in order to guarantee the continuation of the French colonizing rule.

More recent example of the ramifications of power on spatial organization is the apartheid era in South Africa in the last century;

racism was a key factor in shaping the space, the idea of separate developments dominated in South Africa after 1948, policies and laws were enacted to serve this ideology, which restricted residence of colored natives to the outskirts of white urban areas and away from the economic opportunities, and even planned for separated educational services and other amenities. These racially based residential areas were separated spatially with borders such as railroad lines, roads, or open space corridors. The ruling power in South Africa justified its racial segregation measures with the pretext of “eliminating the conflict between different races”. Eventually this yielded in creating separate ‘states’, for each of the major ethnic groups, in order to isolate the blacks from ‘white’ South Africans (McCusker and Ramudzuli, 2007).

Fainstein and Fainstein (1994), define planning as a future-oriented, public decision making directed toward attaining specific goals, as well as (Levy, 2009) the understanding that real planning should take into account the needs of the local population, and organize their space according to their priorities. In the same context, Kay (2007), argues that urban planning is a key player in the formation of spatial policies that will promote integration, equality, and opportunity within a society and its built environment, but in some cases planning measures don’t achieve these goals due to an outer power.

Throughout history, colonialism aimed at the restructuring the nature of the society. European colonialism for example was interested in the development of the European societies in the colonized state, more than it was with the development of native ethnic groups, in fact the natives were perceived by the European colonialism as ignorant people, who were not able to control or rule their own lives, and were in need of help and guidance (Kay, 2007).

Many scholars in colonial planning (Yiftachel, 2009; Sandercock, 2004; Khamaisi, 2006) refer to decolonization and empowering the indigenous people within countries of stable political context like in the new world. They introduce how to incorporate these native groups within the system by participation and giving them the right to share in the planning process. However, few scholars (Thawaba, 2011; Qurt, 2013; Coon, 1992) shed light on the extreme cases of oppression and control inflicted on natives by using physical planning. In this study, decolonizing/counter planning comes in the context of the struggle against this controlling power.

The Israeli occupation authority invited famous architects and planners (Louis Khan, Lewis Mumford, and others) from all over the world in 1968 – after one year of conquering Jerusalem-as was the first step in changing the landscape, dividing and segregating Jerusalem (Weizman, 2007) these planners worked according to the ruling power agenda/vision, ignoring the indigenous peoples’ rights.

This study deals with a unique context, where the colonial power “Israel” is still confiscating land for the new immigrants (Jews) to settle in the W.B. regardless of any complications it may cause to the native people. Meanwhile the conflict on the land is still on-going. Moreover, Palestinians are not allowed to build in area C without a permit, and if they were to do so, the controlling power would immediately demolish it, disregarding any ethical dimension. It is helpful to keep in mind that obtaining a permit is a complicated process. In short, when using decolonization/counter planning in this context it means how to “counter the colonial power actions and provide locals with legal ‘master plans’ to maintain their rights on land.”

Accordingly, theories define counter plans as schemes that are prepared by the local community to confront the plans of mainstream planning authority that do not serve the local inhabitants’ needs or objectives. Here, it is worth mentioning the work of Sandercock (2004) who addresses mechanisms leading to sovereignty and rights: using non-indigenous planners to produce plans would empower indigenous people and support their desire for recognition and rights, granting indigenous institutions a legal status to facilitate their involvement in the decision making process, using non-indigenous legal structures to achieve recognition of rights, where ‘Western’ planners know the rule of the game. In addition, community participation would enrich the

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