



**Solidarity Economy and the Struggle of Trade Unions:
One Combined Approach for Resilience and Resistance
in Palestine**

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Solidarity Economy and the Struggle of Trade Unions: One Combined Approach for Resilience and Resistance in Palestine

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen growing debates about the optimal structure of the Palestinian economy. Out of more than 28 years of enforced economic dependency on the relation with the colonial Israeli power, the need emerged to change the structure of the Palestinian economy to be inclusive and resistant against colonialism. This paper seeks the potential founding structure which can empower solidarity and resistant economic actions. Trade unions, marginalised during the post-Oslo era by the political factions and the Palestinian Authority, are at the centre of our investigation. The paper finds that trade unions, as decentralised wide networks struggling for the rights of workers, have a potentially adequate structure for a solidarity economy supporting the resilience and resistance of the Palestinian people against the Israeli colonial power.

KEYWORDS

Solidarity economy, cooperatives, collective production, trade-unions, resistance.

Introduction

The concept of social economy emerged in the middle of the 19th century in the United Kingdom and in France. The concept simply refers to cooperatives, where each member is an owner of an equal share and has one vote. More recently, in the mid-1990s, a different approach emerged in the Latin American countries, as the solidarity economy. It is not only the concept of cooperatives; it is an approach of collective actions and production which seeks to change the whole social and economic system and put forward a different paradigm in the economy.

The Palestinian struggle against the settler colonial system has been facing neoliberal policy led by international interventions and under the supervision of the colonial power. After more than 28 years of the Oslo process, the Palestinian economy has been deprived of all resources and has been made to be totally dependent on the Israeli economy. Scholars have been seeking for

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alternative models of the Palestinian economy, which can sustain resilience and empower the resistance against the settler colonialism.

This paper seeks first to describe the historical and contemporary contexts of the solidarity economy in Palestine. Then, the second objective is to find the structure which can empower the solidarity economy in Palestine. I believe that trade unions, despite the lack of democracy in many unions, can create an adequate founding structure to empower and expand the solidarity economy concept and to empower the resilience of the Palestinian communities in their resistance against the colonisation and confiscation of resources. Trade unions are decentralised networks of workers who have common interests and are struggling towards justice and equity in their work environment. The concept of the solidarity economy, as previously stated, seeks to change the whole social and economic system. As the settler colonial regime dominates the Palestinian economy, the solidarity economy cannot be put in the context of changing the social and economic system without the issue of resistance against the colonial power. This paper contributes to the conceptualisation of the resistance economy concept as introduced by Dana (2014 & 2020).

Based on an extensive literature review and on interviews with three agricultural cooperatives, residential cooperatives and independent trade unions, the paper investigates the research questions and discusses the solidarity economy as an alternative paradigm, supporting the most vulnerable but also involving resistance against the colonial power.

Alternatives or reforms to global capitalism

With the elimination of most of the financial regulations in the United States, which were designed to control excessive risk-taking by the financial institutions, and with the effect of the unrestrained competition in the financial sector, banks and other financial institutions began engaging in increasingly risky activities in order to acquire profits, while workers' wages were stagnant. Flexible labour markets involved the widespread use of temporary and contingent workers, leading to decreased job security, lessened bargaining power and declining wages (Rosenberg, 2010).

The monetary policy of central banks in the dominant capitalist economies had only intervened through increasing the funding discount rates in order to lower inflation during expansion, or through decreasing the discount rates in recession periods. The Federal Reserve, for instance, aimed to maintain consumption at high levels through increasing lending at low interest rates, while maintaining speculative assets in the financial markets (Orhangazi and Seda-Irizarry, 2009). The pandemic crisis of COVID-19 and the long global lockdown revealed the pitfalls in the global economy's structure and the failure of the neoliberal economy. The pandemic resulted in the deepest recession in the history of neoliberal capitalism (Roubini, 2020). Privatisation strategies, which included the health sector among other sectors, had rendered the working class precarious, but had also transformed the right of access to health into a paid service. The lack of state central planning exacerbated the insufficiencies in health services (Saad-Filho, 2020).

Economic crises are alarming for the economy's structure. However, they represent opportunities for transformation (Kawano, 2009). According to Saad-Filho (2020), the crisis is an opportunity for the left to consolidate the collectivity concept of the economy and pave the way to an alternative to neoliberalism.

Before addressing the solidarity economy as an alternative approach to neoliberalism, it is important to stress the differences between alternatives to, and reforms of, the neoliberal economy. Programmes funded by the World Bank support participatory decision-making, local capacity building, and community control of resources (Dinerstein 2010). These policies transform the social solidarity economy into a tool for neoliberal governance promoted by international development, which encourages decentralisation, micro-ventures and community sustainability. Rather than enabling the free development of the solidarity economy, these kinds of policies dispossessed the solidarity economy from its emancipatory potential. Decentralisation policies aim to reframe social policies along the lines of local market-oriented liberalism, away from the state's central policy. Vázquez (2011) suggests that these policies, which transform the social solidarity economy into small decentralised initiatives, entail the suppression of the emancipatory dimension of the solidarity economy rather than enabling its aspects to flourish and expand.

Analyses and evaluations of the alternatives to capitalism have expanded in the post-crisis periods. Under the "Alternative Development" (AD) paradigm, the social solidarity economy offers a critique of the liberal vision of development, as it embraces the principles of collective property, distribution of wealth to meet the needs of people rather than capital, and freedom of association and autonomous decision-making (Dacheaux and Goujon 2012:206 and 208). The social solidarity economy alternative encourages associative forms of production, sustainable development, the economic support for the marginalised through the provision of land and housing, women's empowerment, and the revival of "the local" (De Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito 2006; Escobar 1992).

Kawano (2009) argues that the solidarity economy, in the case of the U.S. economy, offers pathways to recovery in the post-crisis period, away from the business cycle fluctuations. Through taking speculation out of housing, the rise of community development credit unions which offer finance in case of need, and protecting the environment and the natural resources, the solidarity economy is able to offer stable and decent jobs to a large number of employees. Although differences can be observed in the solidarity economy approach across countries, the common characteristics of the social solidarity economy are articulated around the values of (i) cooperation and mutuality above unbounded competition; (ii) economic democracy where people define individual and collective well-being; (iii) economic and social equity struggles being priorities; (iv) the responsibility to work toward ecological health, developing respectful and sustainable relationships with the ecosystem; and (v) democracy at all levels of society, organisations, and unions. Finally, (vi) the emphasis on diversity and pluralism, the belief in working together toward freedom while accepting all differences, encourages different forms of solidarity to be driven in different contexts (Miller, 2009). The link between production activities and social needs, rather than profitability and individual interest, is a fundamental element of the social solidarity

economy. This link ensures stability of production, collective well-being, and an alternative pathway toward sustainable development (Dacheux and Goujon, 2012).

Utting, van Dijk and Mathei (2014) examine the various benefits and limits of the social solidarity economy. On the one hand, collective action and economic activities grounded in ethical values and active citizenship are encouraged. On the other hand, a variety of pressures, coordination problems and dilemmas confront the social solidarity economy when scaled up and when it interacts with the markets. Later in this paper, we examine an alternative way to scale up the solidarity economy to support the resilience of the Palestinian people in their resistance against colonialism.

The structure of the Palestinian economy: Colonialism and neoliberalism

The Palestinian Authority, under guidance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, adopted a policy to expand workers' access to loans from banks and other credit institutions. The neoliberal approach, led during 2008 – 2012 by the Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad, has been termed "Fayyadism" by Tartir (2015a). Tartir argued that US-funded "Fayyadism" founded for a Palestinian authoritarianism through the expansion and enforcement of the Palestinian security system, associated with an economic policy to increase private debt. This neoliberal paradigm has been detrimental to the Palestinian resistance against occupation. On the one hand, an expanded security system coordinating with the Israeli occupation forces repressed resistance against this occupation. On the other hand, the widespread incidence of private debt increased the dependence of Palestinian workers and households on the neoliberal system, whereby their ability to consume and survive became dependent on the political positions of the Palestinian Authority. The fragility of this system was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, as indicator of the private sector and households to pay private debt, the number of bounced cheques from the total number of cheques deposited for clearance in banks in the West Bank and Gaza increased in April 2020 from 11.0% to 40.7% (PMA, 2020).

The neoliberal paradigm of the Palestinian economy ignores the historical colonialism in all areas of Palestine, including the areas occupied in 1948, arguing that the main problem of the Palestinian economy is the Israeli restrictions on economic activity in area C (Niksik, Nasser Eldin and Cali, 2014). This is only one element of the settler colonial setup in Palestine, and needs to be put in the larger frame of colonisation, land confiscation and exploitation of Palestinian labourers in the construction of settlements after having deprived them of their resources.

Although international donors' aid to the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is among the highest among low income and developing countries, with an average of 527 USD per capita in 2016, unemployment and poverty rates have been staggering over 25% since 2000. Moreover, Palestinian workers in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in the occupied territories of 1948 account for 18% of Palestinian workers in the West Bank, mostly working in agriculture and construction (PCBS, 2019). The neoliberal paradigm has failed to address social and economic problems in the West Bank and Gaza, since it has been segregating the economic

problems from their colonial context and from the existing resilience and grassroots resistance of Palestinians.

The continuing colonisation in Palestine is keeping the Palestinian people in widening poverty traps. According to an estimation by Sadeq and Lubrano (2018), the wall constructed in the West Bank resulted in an increase in the probability of entry into poverty of 18%, but the most important finding is that the wall resulted in an increase in the probability of chronic poverty of 53%. Therefore, the wall, checkpoints and the whole Israeli segregation and confiscation system is leading to a permanent dependence of the Palestinian economy on international donors' aid, workers' permits in Israeli settlements, and Israeli decisions to pay Palestinian custom taxes to the Palestinian Authority.

Solidarity economy: Alternative development in the reconstruction process

Post-conflict countries need reconstruction of their infrastructure and their economy. Moreover, reconstruction needs to address inequality in opportunity and access to resources. In the reconstruction process, the cooperative economy and social justice strengthen the social fabric through the consolidation of solidarity values with economic inclusion and integration. The proper implementation of reconstruction with solidarity values contributes to social integration (Doria Orozco, 2018). Thus, the introduction of the "social levy", comprised of contributions from the higher income deciles in the post-apartheid era in South Africa, was necessary to sustain social justice and create income redistribution over the long term (Seekings and Nattrass, 2002).

Donor-assisted reconstruction packages in post-conflict countries adopt a technocratic approach to addressing political and economic problems in a capitalist framework. Ignoring the need to rebuild social capital and to put it in its context widens the gaps between the social classes. Different levels of building social capital chain in post-conflict economies were introduced by Vervish (2011). First, is that of building social ties between people who have social similarities; second, bridging the gaps between the different social groups; third, linking the groups to the resources, including physical and financial resources. Without approaching the solidarity chain, the donor-assisted technocratic approach complicates the task of building solidarity within and between the different groups (Kandiyoti, 2007). For instance, women's rights in Afghanistan and Iraq have become implicated in the geopolitical manoeuvrings of powerful global actors, making a principled politics of solidarity with women's movements increasingly problematic (Kandiyoti, 2007).

In the post-apartheid South Africa, the neoliberal policy towards agriculture and the food industry has had devastating consequences. The loss of food sovereignty has transformed South Africa from an exporter to an importer, engendering food inequality across social groups in the country (Satgar, 2011).

Reconstruction in Palestine has an additional dimension to that of its physical and economic dimensions. It is considered by Palestinians as an act of resistance against land colonisation. For

Palestinians in Jerusalem, the reconstruction of the demolished houses is an act of spatial protest to enforce their rights of residence in their city against the colonial policy to push them out of the city (Braverman, 2007). Similarly, the recultivation of the destroyed agricultural lands is an act of resistance which attempts to maintain the presence of the Palestinian people on their land.

In the context of resistance, solidarity values do not only contribute to social integration, but also contribute to collective and more resilient resistance against colonialism. Thus, the emphasis of the three levels in the solidarity chain contextualises the resistance in its national solidarity aspect. The national resistance strategy needs to emphasise connecting those who are facing the destruction and land confiscation policies, bridging with other groups of Palestinians, including political groups, to build a national resistance strategy, and linking the Palestinians to all resources needed for reconstruction and sustaining resilience through the allocation of a national fund for such.

Trade unions, struggles and the solidarity economy

The first challenge in building a solidarity economy is building a bottom-up solidarity. Bridging the gaps between the different social groups requires organised grassroots and struggles for social justice. These grassroots cannot be visible and effective unless such solidarity is widely adopted by movements which believe in grassroots and the struggle for social justice.

There is a strong connection between struggles for alternative production, labour solidarity and struggles against all forms of oppression. For instance, feminist movements have contributed to the debates on alternative economies in Latin American countries (De Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005).

One of the emancipatory aspects of the collective production alternatives is economic democracy. The term 'economic democracy' is an alternative feature to replace the neoliberal autocracy, where self-interest is the only production criterion. Economic democracy does not only entail collective production decisions, but also democratic management and election of the management committees. In countries with authoritarian regimes, civil society organisations, including NGOs, cooperatives, associations and trade-unions represent a way out to exert democracy and freedom of expression.

During the 1990s, the Argentinian Unemployed Workers' Organization, born out of a series of protests, created cooperatives through the use of state resources for collective purposes. What distinguishes these cooperatives is the identity of workers as its co-proprietors. It means that they are, as workers, members of the confederation of trade unions. The confederation has a supervisory role in this group of cooperatives, which is called ANTA. (Dobrusin, 2014). The cooperatives organised within ANTA share three fundamental key elements which strengthened them: democratic management, common property and their identity as workers (Dinerstein, 2014).

According to Marx (1990), two tendencies of capital stand in contradiction: the tendency “to reduce as much as possible the number of workers employed” and the tendency “to produce the greatest possible mass of surplus-value” (Marx, 1990: 420). The contradiction results in the permanent destruction and recreation of capitalist means of production.

The worker has the misfortune to be a living capital, and hence a capital with needs....As capital, the value of the worker rises or falls in accordance with supply and demand, and even in a physical sense his existence, his life, was and is treated as a supply of a commodity... as soon as it occurs to capital – whether from necessity or choice – not to exist any longer for the worker, he no longer exists for himself... the existence of capital is his existence, his life... political economy therefore does not recognise the unoccupied worker, the working man in so far as he is outside this work relationship. The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are figures which exist not for it, but only... for the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers.... (Marx, 1992: 335)

The permanent destruction of labour’s value of the unemployed workers and the social needs of these workers resulted in movements towards an alternative production and an alternative value-sharing principle. As mentioned earlier, there is a strong connection between collective production, labour solidarity and struggles against all forms of oppression. In the Argentinian (ANTA) case, the struggle of unemployed workers for social equity was linked to labour solidarity, represented by trade unions. This link resulted in a struggle for collective alternative production, based on value sharing rather than value destruction. As a result, the main hypothesis of this research is that trade unions seem to represent a fertile environment to fortify workers’ cooperatives. However, this should not ignore democracy issues among trade unions, which are capable of building trust within cooperatives.

Palestinian unions: History, trust, democracy and solidarity toward resilience

It can never be erased from the Palestinian memory that the outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifada in December 1987 came about after that four Palestinian workers in Israel were killed in a crash with a truck of Israeli soldiers on their way back to Gaza.

On the one hand, for the majority of Palestinian workers before the Oslo agreements, the main challenge was to confront the Israeli occupation, not the Palestinian bourgeoisie. All classes of the Palestinian population were under equal oppression from the Israeli occupation forces (Usher, 1995). On the other hand, the Palestinian unions were divided between the political factions, instead of being divided by industry. For instance, it was easier for a teacher affiliated to a left wing faction to join the union of agriculture workers than the teachers’ union. The PLO constructed a federation of 150 factional unions under the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU). However, the management committee has been divided between the political factions struggling for power within unions, leaving the struggle for workers’ rights beyond factions’ interests in the PGFTU management (Sovich, 2000).

Under the PLO-Israeli economic protocol signed in Paris in April 1994, 75% of all Palestinian workers’ taxes and welfare deductions paid in Israel are to be disbursed to the Palestinian

Authority. Of these, 1% is for the PGFTU. Although the PGFTU officially declared its commitment to the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel (BDS), normalisation meetings were held with delegations from the Histadrut. The PGFTU's struggle for workers' rights does not go further than the Palestinian Authority's and employers' neoliberal agenda. For example, the Palestinian social security law signed by the Palestinian president in 2016, which was elaborated in coordination with the PGFTU, did not even satisfy the minimum expectations of workers in term of social security. Independent workers' movements succeeded in suspending the enforcement of the law.

As an alternative to PGFTU, independent unions have started to organise themselves. In 2011, the General Federation of Independent Trade Unions – Palestine (GFITUP) was established, regrouping independent unions. The objective of the GFITUP is to coordinate unions' struggle in order to improve workers' inclusion in unions and to defend workers' rights.

In 2016 and in 2022 the teachers' movement in the West Bank and Gaza, attempting to reclaim the unpaid cost of living allowances following a previous agreement with the Palestinian Authority, was violently confronted by the same authority by means of activists' detention, checkpoints to impede teachers from attending the massive demonstrations and punishment to strikers through salary deductions. The movement was stopped by a decree from the Palestinian president in 2016, but with a decision to organise elections of the General Union of Teachers. Such independent movements do not only foster the struggle for the defence of workers' rights, but may also contribute to democratisation and reactivation processes of the PLO unions.

GFITUP believes that the struggle for Palestinian workers' rights cannot be distinct from the struggle against occupation and against the neoliberal paradigm. The role of trade unions, as defenders of workers' rights, to struggle for an alternative economic paradigm, in addition to the national struggle against colonialism.

The Palestinian solidarity economy context: Cooperatives, civil society, unions and funding

Over their history, Palestinians have had different forms of solidarity economy. Palestinians have been using a land rental system in agriculture based on sharing one-third of the agricultural production with the land's owner. This system provided an important tool for poor peasants who were not land owners to keep working. At the same time, it gave an opportunity to land owners to make their uncultivated lands productive for agriculture. Moreover, the rental system was not based on monetary payments, but on a share of the product, as a way of risk sharing between the owners and the peasants.

In the mid-1970s until the early 1980s, the Palestinian political factions formed trade unions, students' committees, and women's committees. These committees provided a structure for collective struggles.

Despite the factional power competition between the trade unions, as previously explained, this form of committees created organised and decentralised networks for resistance, transforming people's power into a daily practice of resistance (Tabar, 2013). Committees had been founded for a popular resistance and effective mass organisation in the first Intifada, but the committees' paradigm had also been intensified by the outbreak of the Intifada (Jean-Klein, 2003).

At the beginning of the first Intifada, popular committees spread in a decentralised structure. The popular committees provided popular and mass educational support to students while the schools were closed. Solidarity grassroots, and most importantly the committees, contributed to an alternative vision of development (Tabar, 2013). The traditional land rental system, based on product sharing, contributed to making land available for agriculture development by the popular committees. Self-sufficiency, the return to the land, agricultural development and food security contributed to building an autonomous independent economic structure and to building economic resilience for the Palestinian people.

Trade unions served as a base for a mature activism, factional work and the organisation of resistance (Jean-Klein, 2003). The focus of trade-unions' work was on resistance against the Israeli occupation, this being the main concern for the Palestinian people, including the workers.

The popular committees' paradigm faced a large setback at the end of the first Intifada in the early 1990s and after the signing of the Oslo agreements. On the one hand, the decentralised system failed to coordinate through the popular resistance committees once the national popular resistance declined. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority, once installed in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, adopted the neoliberal paradigm and started to attract large investments from Palestinians in exile.

Twenty-eight years later, the neoliberal paradigm has penetrated the Palestinian economy in all its sectors in favour of Israeli colonialism. The Paris economic protocol of the Oslo agreements gave the Israeli economy the power to control all the sectors of the Palestinian economy, including the Palestinian Authority's payments to the public workers and to social transfer programmes. Instead of being a temporary framework to organise the economic relations between Israelis and Palestinians, as stated by the defenders of the Oslo agreements, this framework gave the Israeli economy the power to dominate the Palestinian economy at all levels and to enforce the colonial policies. The installation of a new context which did not build on the existing solidarity relations prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, transforming all economic relations and activities into individual interests aiming to extensive profit maximisation, has expelled the Palestinian economic relations outside the circle of resistance against the Israeli colonial policy. Furthermore, the Israeli officials and the supportive US government have been talking in recent years about the so called 'economic peace' plans, transforming the Palestinian liberation struggle into a struggle for breadwinning.

Amid the establishment of a dominant economic protocol over the Palestinian economy, a massive donors' action invested a large amount of funds in the sector of Palestinian non-

governmental organisations (NGOs). According to Sbeih (2014), the Palestinian associations and NGOs engaged in a professionalisation process in order to be able to compete for funds presented by the international donors. This professionalisation transformed voluntarily engaged association members into paid workers looking for internationally funded projects to safeguard their salaries. “The universalisation of this order in the name of development overthrows the locally established social order (in Palestine) and normalises the one based on the Oslo Accords and donor intervention” (Sbeih, 2018).

In the middle of the ‘funding auctions’ to the Palestinian civil society, which did not exclude the existing cooperatives system, and the enhanced market system, new cooperatives were established to benefit from the donors’ aid. Many of these new cooperatives did not really exist – or, at least – they were not envisioned to be permanent. In this context, the ‘real’ and active cooperatives found themselves in a need to justify their presence and to show an extent of professionalisation disconnected from any political context.

The cooperatives interviewed indicated three main challenges facing cooperatives in the West Bank. The first is trust among cooperatives’ members, who require transparency in cooperatives’ management in light of the emergence of fictitious cooperatives and in light of a number of corruption cases in some cooperatives. The second challenge is poor members’ participation in meetings. In most meetings, where important decisions had to be taken, participation did not exceed 10% of members. This would postpone decision-making by the management. The agricultural cooperatives indicated that the marketing of their products is a challenge. Wholesalers proposed the purchase of products at unfair prices. A cooperative member stated, “We had to organize ourselves and struggle against wholesalers profiteering”. Another member of a women’s cooperative added, “At the beginning of our work, we went directly to deal with retail stores when wholesalers gave us low prices. It was exhausting, but only when we started to succeed wholesalers gave us better prices”. Some initiatives by the civil society, such as the initiative of the Popular Art Center to help the watermelon farmers during the summer of 2020, helped cooperatives to become known to the public, but these initiatives are not permanent. A fair and useful channel to market cooperatives’ products is fair trade companies; ADEL² (which means justice, in Arabic) is a fair-trade company constantly working with 12 cooperatives and women’s associations, including agricultural cooperatives and food processing centres.

The legal framework of cooperative work was intended to facilitate the work and establishment of cooperatives. However, the amended Law of Cooperative Work decreed by the Palestinian Authority in 2017 has unclear issues which may constitute obstacles to cooperatives. The law gave the regulatory and supervisory authority to the Cooperative Work Agency (CWA). The chair of the agency’s board is directly nominated by the Minister of Labor. Only three of the other nine members are representatives of cooperatives’ unions, as well as one representative of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), one representative of union of chambers of commerce and industry, and four representatives of the relevant ministries. This composition

²See <https://www.adelfairtrade.com/>

is controversial, since half of the board is nominated by the government. Thus, the decisions taken by the CWA's board can be affected by the political intentions of the government, impeding cooperatives' work to frame an alternative economic paradigm. The law makes any funding of cooperative work subject to the approval of the CWA's board. This regulation can reduce the number of fictitious cooperatives which merely seek funding, but it can also control the resources of many cooperatives and restrict their independence. (Applied Research Institute - ARIJ, 2020). Following the political division between Fateh and Hamas parties, few associations and cooperatives were shut down by the PA's government because they were related to opposition parties, using the funding restrictions in the law. The absence of clear criteria in the law enforcement process is the main issue of concern. For instance, the CWA's board has the authority to dissolve existing cooperatives, but without any clear criteria for doing so, while the dissolution of any existing association has to be taken based on a juridical decision, one not based on the board's judgement. The board can transfer the cases of illegal cooperatives and associations to the juridical system, but cannot directly take the judgement.

The law does not allow the existence of more than one cooperative working in the same field in the same town. On the one hand, this restriction encourages the cooperative approach within the same town, but on the other hand, family cooperatives can be founded and so block the entry of other members. Although the law does not allow for the registration of cooperatives whose members are from the same family, the follow-up on the accessibility to cooperative membership is inexistent. According to the union of agricultural cooperatives, in many villages, the cooperatives can be restricted to some extended families, where the members can have different family names within the same extended family.

Residential cooperatives constitute around one-third of registered and active cooperatives. Most residential cooperatives were established by trade unions in order to provide decent and cheap residence to the middle class workers. The main concept of residential cooperatives is that all members have similar and equal residential units, which do not show major inequalities between members. Residential cooperatives have three main challenges: the first is trust between members, but this can be achieved through transparency and accountability. The second challenge is finding a common structure of houses to serve the needs of the members. The third challenge is the access to infrastructure, including water networks, electricity and roads. New residential cooperatives have increasing difficulties in finding large land parcels at reasonable prices, given the Israeli occupation restrictions on building in area C of the West Bank, which is under the total control of the Israeli colonial power. The advantage of residential cooperatives is that the share of the fixed infrastructure costs are borne by a large number of members, which lowers the total cost of housing. Moreover, small towns where new residential cooperatives are established benefit from the development of the local infrastructure.

In light of the challenges in the surrounding environment to the solidarity economy and in light of the success stories of cooperatives, there are three key success factors for cooperatives. The first is trust, which can be achieved through democracy, independence and transparency. The second is social capital, which exists when a group of people have the same concerns and

objectives. The third factor is the ability, capacity and willingness to struggle against any impediments and abuses. The structure which mostly exhibits the three factors is trade unions, since they represent a group of members who have common concerns and who are in continuing struggle against unjust work and living conditions, in addition to the national struggle against the Israeli colonialism. As previously discussed, labour solidarity is connected to seeking collective production alternatives. However, the issue of democracy is still controversial, especially among the PLO's unions.

According to the interviewed Palestinian unions, the success of unions' struggle would not be achieved without democracy within unions. Moreover, the success of unions' cooperatives had been enhanced by the democratic and transparent management of cooperatives by independent committees of the unions' management. Many unions' cooperatives are residential cooperatives. As residences are a long-term investment by employees in order to have a decent, homogenous and equal residence, the employees tend to incorporate themselves in the management of the cooperatives. Regular elections, clear financial statements, and unions' supervision are the key factors of unions' residential cooperatives' success. They represent the success of the concept of solidarity economy in Palestine. One of the interviewed unions' cooperatives is a credit union for union members at Birzeit University, established by the union to enhance the social solidarity among employees. The credit union started 30 years ago with the idea of small contributions from employees (equivalent to 5 USD per month). Nowadays, the credit union has total deposits of around 2.5 million USD from 600 members and is providing credit of around 1.5 million USD to members who need funding. Unlike banks' credit, the credit union members can obtain an interest-free credit paid back over 50 months. Restrictions on the maximum loan amount and the minimum duration between loans per member are imposed in order to sustain the fund and to prevent any usage of loans for speculation.

Solidarity economy as a form of resistance: Bonding and bridging

The failure of the neoliberal economic system, associated with the political failure of the so-called 'peace process' in the West Bank and Gaza, entailed a debate between scholars about the required economic system, under a situation of colonisation. A new approach was introduced as "Resistance Economy" (Dana, 2014; Tartir, 2015b; and Arafah, 2018). Aside from the memory of the resistance committees' economy during the first Intifada, the conceptualisation of this approach moved between a social solidarity economy and a participatory economy, without conceptualisation of the political economy of resistance. A concrete conceptualisation of the resistance economy was introduced by Dana (2020), namely, a localised economy to respond to local needs under the Israeli colonialism, inclusive, has the purposes of reshaping the social order and causing economic harm and financial burden to the colonial power. Hence, the resistance economy is not only a process for galvanising collective actions, it is also the outcome of collective actions. The resistance economy involves localised collective production, in combination with acts of resistance against the colonial power and the imposed economic dependence.

The resistance economy concept, as introduced by Dana (2020), is equivalent to bonding the localities around collective actions and resistance actions. However, bridging between the different actors, the different localities and the different social categories is not involved in this context. In the weakness of the Palestinian political factions and of the donor-funded civil society, the aggregation of the localised collective production and resistance into a powerful political movement remains unclear. A similar resistance economy during the first Intifada had failed due to the absence of coordination between the political factions and between the localised popular resistance committees. A national framework is needed to create coordination and bridging between the disaggregated activities. Again, democratic unions represent a potential framework for such collective action and resistance. Unions are already a space of collective action and struggle, localised in specific areas or enterprises, but also have a coordination body. Trade unions can be a founding structure for the solidarity and resistance economy, where other structures can join, follow and develop the process.

Conclusions

Solidarity economy has become a key concept in the growing interest in exploring alternative approaches to capitalism. The debate about the concept's process and framework does not exclude the fact that the social solidarity economy is inclusive and helps the most vulnerable social categories to remain active.

The failure of the capitalist economic paradigm under colonialism in Palestine highlighted the necessity of discussing the alternative economic paradigms. For an economy under settler colonialism, seeking to colonise the land and to impose economic dependence, solidarity and resistance concepts need to be taken in combination whenever tackling the alternative economic paradigms. The Palestinian solidarity economy context, discussed above, highlighted challenges related to trust and participation, but also related to the relation with the government within the law of cooperative work.

This paper suggests that unions can be a founding structure for a solidarity and resistance economy. Unions are spaces for collective actions and for resistance against both colonialism and capitalism. Thus, an emancipatory approach needs to tackle social inclusion in all spheres of the population, including some unions which have been exclusive to a substantial category of workers in the post-Oslo era. Democracy within unions needs to be addressed and work on this issue needs to commence.

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