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The Dynamics of Socio-Environmental
Conflict of Land Reform in Jordan:
A Political Ecology Perspective

Salma Nims



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Abstract

This paper highlights the realities of landless Palestinian refugee farmers in the Jordan Valley in the context of Jordanian policy change towards economic liberalisation. During the 1960s, and under the guidance of the US government, Jordan constructed its largest water project in the Jordan Valley, the East *Ghor* Canal, aiming at achieving economic development through agricultural intensification. The land reform accompanying the project offered small land units to landless farmers and peasants. The majority of farming Palestinian refugees refused to buy land in the project because it implied giving up their right of return to their homeland. After five decades of waiting, the Palestinian refugees constitute the majority of farming practices in the Northern Jordan Valley on land rented from Jordanian peasants who acquired it through the project. Today, as the Jordan Valley is being opened for large investments, the land on which the Palestinian refugees have been surviving is now being subjected to an 'enclosure' process. While their right of return is becoming more of a fantasy than a belief, their current living practices are under threat again and displacement remains their destiny. Using a post-structural political ecology perspective, this paper reveals the dynamics of socio-environmental conflict over land resources in the Jordan Valley, highlighting the role of manipulation of power and social relations in maximisation of gains, and marginalisation of the 'other', in processes of change. It also emphasises the role of values and beliefs in processes of 'self-exclusion' and its impact on the current realities of the Jordan Valley framers.

Keywords

Jordan Valley, property rights, conflict.

Introduction¹

Jordan has been going through dire economic challenges since the 1980s, resulting with pressures by international donors to take drastic measures, which affected various socio-economic sectors, including agriculture. One of those changes involved the reversal of land reform of the 1950s, which accompanied the construction of East *Ghor* Canal, Jordan's largest irrigation project, which has only been approved by the Parliament in 2001. The process did not take a full-fledged effect in the Valley, yet; but its possible consequences on the farmers have been central to the discourse and dynamics of socio-environmental conflict within the valley and at the national level since the late 1990s. In order to understand the underpinnings of those conflicts, it is important to critically assess the land reform process of the 1950s. This paper presents a political ecology perspective to understand the triggers of those reforms, how they were shaped and manipulated, and how they have characterised the farmers' relation with the state, land-based resources and each other since then. The paper argues that the dynamics of socio-environmental conflict, which *shaped* and have been *shaped by* those reforms, are now playing a major role in the shaping of their reversal: A situation which would reproduce the same inequities that the land reform of the 1950s have produced, as landless and small farmers are increasingly losing access to the symbolic and material means to deal with those changes.

The research which this paper is based upon borrows from the growing field of political ecology, which is contributing to a better understanding of conflict over environmental resources as a conflict over meanings, representations and forms of relations. The paper offers a critical historical assessment of the project, which the land reform in the Jordan Valley was an essential part of: understanding its premises and the socio-political context through which it was articulated and manipulated. This would reveal how the various socio-economic constructs and political realities of the time have shaped the outcome of the farmers conditions today, reflecting its perpetual articulation with the dynamics of socio-environmental conflict and casting critical questions on the future of small and landless farmers, particularly the Palestinian refugee farmers, in the Northern Jordan Valley (NJV).

Political Ecology: Understanding Society's Relation with Land-based Resources

Political ecology is a field of research that 'combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy [...which] encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources' (Blaikie and Brookfield cited in Peet and Watts, 1996b: 3). The late 1990s witnessed a growing literature on political ecology (e.g. Peet and Watts, 1996a; Bryant and Bailey, 1997) that embraces post-structuralist concerns with 'knowledge-power, institutions and regimes of truth, and cultural differences' (Peet and Watts, 1996b: 20). Through a post-structural political ecology (PPE) perspective the relation between society and land extends beyond its material and economic dimension and embraces a broader and more sophisticated appreciation of the dialectic relation between culture and environment with a focus on understanding the role of power relations in conditioning human/environment interactions (Bryant and Bailey, 1997).

Post-structural political ecology is grounded in post-Marxist thought, which shifted towards a new understanding of societal interaction based on perceiving the society as a 'field of action [where classes] are defined more directly in terms of social action' (Peet and Watts, 1996b: 32) instead of structurally-defined positions in the production process or cultural institutions. Such position, they argue, ignores the consciousness of individuals about their own reality and consequently their ability to resist it. Post-structural political ecology leans toward a dialectical approach to understanding social

1 This paper is based upon the findings of research carried out in the Northern Jordan Valley for acquiring a Doctoral degree in Planning Studies from University College London; entitled 'The dynamics of socio-environmental conflict in the changing context of common pool resources: Water Management in the Jordan Valley'.

action within constraining social fields. This aspect of PPE has benefited from Foucault's work on power in which he challenged classical dichotomist approaches to structure and agency. It allows for the understanding of societal interaction through multiple identities, exceeding class and including notions such as race, gender, ethnicity, kinship, faction, religion, etc. This allows the development of an ethnographic perspective of local societies as heterogeneous political constructs through which socio-environmental conflict is animated (e.g. Moore, 1996).

Post-structural political ecology also emphasises the critical understanding of historical transformations to understand the complexity of socio-environmental conflict. Moore (1996) argues that a historical perspective of environmental conflicts reveals the numerous struggles over 'cultural categories through which access to critical environmental resources are contested' (p.129). The critical approach to history can also be attributed to Foucault's historical analysis, in which he argued that the complexity of the present could not be understood without first exploring the dynamics of power relations and their role in processes of change in the past (Foucault, 1972). Rather than over-emphasising the constructed 'continuities', portraying history as a coherent totality where change comes as a natural development to the underlying patterns of history, Foucault argued for a critical understanding of the contradictions and 'discontinuities' within those 'continuities', from which new 'continuities'/'permanences' emerge (ibid). For PPE, processes of change need to be understood through the contexts within which they were articulated. Those might involve hegemonic forms of knowledge which bring about specific changes, 'discontinuities', as well as 'other' prevailing forms of knowledge that create 'contradictions' within certain 'permanences', without achieving universality or observable change. Thus, the research which this paper is based upon test one possible framework—the 'moments' of social process (Harvey, 1996)—to unveil such articulation between the 'continuities' and 'discontinuities' and unfold the dynamics of socio-environmental conflict without directing it towards generalised and pre-determined assumptions about the realities of conflict.

The Moments of Social Process: A New Approach to Defining Property Rights

Land reform at the implementation level is an essentially property rights question, which is defined in legal terms by who owns land and who has the right to manage it. In the Jordan Valley, land reform was an after thought of an irrigation project that implied changing land and water property rights. Property right changes have been regarded as a pure economic process, which stems from the traditional definitions of property rights and overlooks their cultural and socio-political nature as social constructs. Economists and environmental economists studied property rights as institutional arrangements (e.g. Ostrom 1990; Bromley 1991). While environmental economists applied economic principles comparing different forms of property rights—public, private and common—and their potential of success such as weighing private benefits to social costs (Bromley, 1991), institutionalists tended to stress the appropriateness of scale, rules, incentives and monitoring mechanisms (Ostrom, 1990) through the use of game theories.

Those approaches overlook a number of facts related to property rights systems (PRS). First, resource use is not always carried out by clearly set PRS, but is rather embedded within the social process. Second, even clearly defined PRS are products of visible and/or subtle negotiation processes, which are also embedded within the social process. And finally, the modification or transformation of set systems does not necessarily manifest in the change of the rights and duties or the rules and regulations characterising them. Sometimes individuals and groups gain access to and/or control over resources despite the declared rights and rules. Thus PRS should not be studied as resource management mechanisms only, because such perspective conceals the social, political and historical constructions of PRS.

Property rights systems are embedded within the social process: the ongoing dialectical relation between the members of society, and between them and the various the social constructs including the environment within which they exist, the 'baggage' of the past, which inhibits their present but not necessarily lead it, and the inherent contradictions, from which the transformations within those

relations tend to emerge. This definition of social process rejects the timeless, homogenous images of the community and embraces the concept of community as a 'political association formed through processes of political and cultural creation and imagination—the generation of meaning in contexts of unequal power' (Roseberry, cited in Li, 1996: 509). This calls for a framework, which allows the definition of the various social constructs, including PRS, in a manner that embraces their embeddedness within the social process.

The research, which this paper is based upon, adopted the framework which Harvey (1996) introduced in his book, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*—the moments of social process. He specifically uses this 'dialectical map' to examine how the understanding and valuation of the 'environment' and 'nature' has evolved in the context of social change. He defined six distinctive 'moments' that represent the flow of social processes: Language/discourse, power, beliefs/values/desires, institution building, material practices, and social relations. Harvey (1996) uses the term 'moments' to avoid any prior sense of crystallisation of those processual activities into 'permanences'. While he does not deny that flows could crystallize into 'things' or 'systems', he insists that in order to understand 'permanences' such as power structures we need to understand the 'fluid processes that constitute them' (82).

The 'moments' of social processes offers a flexible framework for scholars who acknowledge the importance of economic factors raised by Marx' political economy (Morrison, 1995); the role of social relations mediating within certain society found in Durkheim's work (ibid); the impact of institutions, such as religion, on socio-political and socio-economic organisation with a society suggested by Weber's study of Protestantism (Walsh, 1998), and the contribution of post-structuralist thought on the role of power and discourse in giving 'partial representation' of the world (Jones, 1999). Harvey argues that almost all those who wrote about social theory and change have touched upon all the 'moments' of his proposed map, but they tended to privilege one of the 'moments' as a 'particular structure of 'permanences' that transfix relations between various 'moments' to give a structured order to society' (1996: 92).

Such approaches perceive the relation between the 'privileged' moment and the others as a linear one-way relation. This limits the possibility to envisage the ability of the other 'moments' to articulate the relation between them and affect that 'permanency', and consequently impairs the full investigation of transformation processes. It also could conceal the *persistence* of certain attributes of certain 'permanences' despite the disappearance of the 'permanency' itself, as in the example of the persistence of the same power relations despite the change of land ownership patterns and labour relations after land reform. This is because those attributes continue to be articulated through other 'moments', such as the hierarchical social relations.

One of the major processes of change of the past century, which was central to the 'development' practice of the 1950s is the 'enclosure of the commons', characterised by the transformation of commonly managed resources into state-controlled systems. In the case of land reform in Jordan, the 'moments' of social process can be employed to examine three notions in relation to access to land in the Jordan Valley: first, the prevailing PRS for managing land and water resources at the time of the reform, as part of the broader social processes at the local and national level; second, the role played by those prevailing processes in the shaping and implementation of the change of land and water PRS in the 1950s; and third, the current dynamics of socio-environmental conflict that were articulated in the past five decades of changes, which are shaping the reversal of land reform today.

It is important first to clarify the meaning of each of the 'moments' of social process and its importance in unveiling the dynamics of conflict in the context of PRS. Discourse is a communicative 'moment', which contributes to the construction of belief, action and reality. It can be employed as a discursive 'moment' to affect decision-making processes regarding the choice of PRS. Discourse can also be employed to build up 'apparent' consensus of how a certain resource should be managed, who accesses it and who controls it. Finally, discourse can be used as a discursive practice to gain access to and/or control over resources regardless of the prevailing system. In absence of agreed rules and

principles, actors employ discursive strategies to legitimise claims over certain resources (e.g. contesting unregistered tribal claims over their traditional territories).

One of the most important contributions of post-structuralism to social theory is the specific attention given to ‘power relations and institutional contexts to social interaction’ (Gare, 1995: 66). Foucault’s work demonstrated how ‘discipline and power in modern society segregate, differentiate, hierarchalize, marginalize and exclude people in it’ (Walsh, 1998: 31). PRS internalise those power relations, reinforce them, recreating those hierarchies and forms of marginalisation and exclusion—not only in terms of access to and control of resources, but also of the society as a whole. Lukes’ (1974) suggested that power operates within three dimensions: overt, covert and latent conflicts. Overt power is practiced when compliance is secured by *coercion*, through threat and *force*. Covert power is associated with discursive practices, in which compliance is achieved through the practice of legally recognised *authority* or *influence* on individuals’ decisions. The practice of power in latent conflict is the most difficult to recognise, because it is practiced over a long period of time and involves the *manipulation* of the very wants of individuals. Discourse is usually employed in those cases as a ‘mode of formation of beliefs and desires’ (Harvey, 1996: 83), through media and through socialisation processes.

Foucault moved the understanding of power from the notion of ‘the repression of the powerless by the powerful to an examination of the way that power operates within everyday relations’ (Mills, 2003: 33). Rather than perceiving power as a one-way relation between the oppressor and the oppressed, Foucault argued that besides its repressive nature, power is also something which triggers resistance and action where people criticise their own life conditions and attempt to negotiate and change those conditions through what he calls local forms of power—‘local struggles’ (ibid). Thus, neither is conformity achieved by the exercise of repression alone, nor does change or discontinuity emerge through overt resistance of power only. That is why treating all the ‘moments’ of social process as possible entry points to understand ‘permanences’ and ‘discontinuities’ is important for the critical understanding of the dynamics of socio-environmental conflict over land resources in the changing contexts of property rights.

The organisation of political and social relations between individuals on a more or less durable basis reflect the ‘moment’ of building of formal institutions such as the state, the law or religion. Formal institutions have been the focus of the study of PRS. However, institutions are also reflected in collectively manifest reified cultural rituals, such as traditions, myths, codes of practice, kinship, etc, which in the past played a major role in the management of environmental resources. Whether formal or informal, institutions reflect authoritative or recognised power, as well as dominant values and beliefs, which make them more difficult to change. Although informal institutions internalise power relations and social hierarchies, they also provide fora for association, negotiation and change. Dominating institutions can be weakened and changed through change in other ‘moments’ of social process.

The ‘moment’ of social relations is the moment though which ‘various forms of social human beings engage in’ (Harvey, 1996: 79). They could be the medium through which a certain natural resource is managed, accessed or controlled. Some social relations are mobilised around certain common issues to induce change—collective action. Multi-layered identities can be recognised through various forms of social relations such as co-operative structures, division of labour, social hierarchies of class, race, age and gender, or ‘differentiated individual or group access to material and symbolic activities and social power’ (ibid). Social relations could re-enforce or weaken certain power structures. So while some mobilised actions succeed in achieving change, other might fail. Although social relations are not only *of production*, they still materialise through the ‘moment’ of material practices, which can be defined as the moment through which all modes of social relating whether of productive or symbolic form are materialised (Harvey, 1996).

Anthropologists stress the role of practice in constructing knowledge (Ingold, 1992), especially in non-capitalist societies. This is relevant in the case of environmental resources, such as soil and water, which are sustenance necessities, but have transformed in the recent decades into economic

necessities. However, human relation with nature is more complicated as ‘across cultures and time, the natural world has shaped and been shaped by the way people think, act and live. Beliefs and ideology have framed the relationship between people and nature, social and economic groupings have formed human behaviour, and ecological variability has influenced style and living’ (Hanna and Jentoft, 1996: 35). The Marxist political economy perspective of material practices reflects only one dimension of societal dynamics: i.e. through economic modes of production. It is important to break from the limitations of this definition in order to be able to understand the broader dimensions of social hierarchies in agrarian societies. Similar to other moments of social processes, material practices could be place where conflict is articulated, resistance is carried out and change is achieved. On the other hand, in their articulation with the ‘moments’ of social process, material practices could reflect or institutionalise other dimensions of hierarchical social and power relations and they could internalise and reproduce prevailing discourse and meanings as well as values and beliefs.

Shared values and beliefs could ‘mobilise action, shape social identities, and condition understandings of collective interests’ (Moore, 1996: 127). The sources of values/beliefs and desires could be materialistic or symbolic. In some societies, religious discourse dominates and prescribes all ‘moments’ of social process, including assignment of meaning to social facts and environmental resources. In others, adhering to symbolic shared value system such as religion conceal the realities of multiple inequalities present within the other ‘moments’ of social process such as unequal power relations or exploitative material practices through which access to and control of resources is practiced. Although values and beliefs are perceived as fixed structures, they are continuously negotiated and reproduced at individual and collective levels through the dynamic dialectic relation between the ‘moments’ of social process. Appealing to certain values and beliefs could be one of the means employed to reinforce or establish certain PRS. Dominant discourse plays a major role in the formation and production of knowledge and the de-legitimisation of certain values and beliefs through the exclusion of the ‘other’. An example of this process is the post-colonial modern development processes, which established scientific knowledge as the only epistemologically adequate knowledge, and defined the value-ridden local knowledge as non-knowledge: EGC project in Jordan being an example of many such cases around the developing world.

Land Reform during the Development of the 1950s

Jordan has a diversified landscape of which three-fourths are desert. Rainfall is characterised by intensity and short duration, and the climate is described as arid to semi arid (WAJ, 1997). The Jordan Valley (*Al-Ghor*) occupies the length of the Rift Valley along the western borders of Jordan, where the Jordan River cuts through the Valley from its northern part ending in the Dead Sea. Surface water is only available in the Jordan River Basin in the valley, sharing the catchment area with Syria, the West Bank and Israel. Desert areas and mountain heights depend on groundwater aquifers, some of which are non-renewable.

Jordan received significant financial and technological assistance from the United States and multilateral agencies in the 1950s. The US attention to ‘development’ in Jordan stemmed from its concern for the interests of its newly-established protégé in the region, Israel. The American government realised that in order to minimise the possibility of conflict with or within Israel’s neighbour, Jordan, there was a need to ensure Jordan’s political stability and its ability to absorb the displaced Palestinian refugees after Israel’s *de facto* establishment in 1948. This was believed to be possible through the development of the Jordan River Valley based on exporting the principles of the American dream to the Middle East: the reclamation and development of ‘worthless’ arid land through the development of water resources ‘regardless of prior rights’ (Davis, 1999: 29) for the settlement of ‘new people’.

Until the 1950s, the Jordanian population was mostly dependent upon subsistence arable farming or nomadic pastoralism. The newly established ‘Kingdom’, still lacking stability and loyalty, needed immediate measures to feed the growing population, settle Bedouins and gain loyalty (Jureidini *et al*, 1984). The development of the Jordan River Valley through the construction of EGC, which promised

major financial and technical aid and intensification of agricultural production, seemed the best answer to the Kingdom's socio-political dilemmas. Under the central authority of the government, the construction of the project started in 1958 and continued over intermittent periods till 1978. Since its construction, the project and the Jordan Valley have been managed by an autonomous government body, Jordan Valley Authority (JVA).

Land reform was not a national policy stemming from a prevailing political ideology. It was a technical necessity during the construction of the EGC (Baker and Harza, 1955) that at the time served the establishment's political goals. The EGC project involved the diversion of the Yarmouk River waters, a major tributary of Jordan River, into a main canal running along the river's east bank towards the south. New irrigation networks distributed water in the Jordan Valley, which called for the re-planning and redistribution of agricultural plots. The project and the new land demarcation were supposed to improve the productivity of agricultural practice and the efficiency of irrigation water use (ibid). Thus, the authorities confiscated land in the project areas in the Jordan Valley and redistributed it in units that were considered economically viable and better suited for irrigation.

The arguments of this paper are based on findings of research carried out in the NJV towns of *Sheikh Hussein, Al-Mashare', and Wadi Arrayyan*. Until the beginnings of the twentieth century, the area was dominantly owned by the chiefs of one feudal family: the *Ghzawi* tribe, which, despite its small number, was the most influential tribe in the area. The authority of the tribe at the time of the construction of the project was attributed to the role of their *Emir*—prince—as the local chief and patron of the area, in addition to their access to large agricultural property within the project area (Ottoman documents; Bakheit and Hmoud, 1991 and 1989). The residents of the area also included settled peasants who cultivated on small plots for subsistence or worked in larger plots for the advantage of the *chiefdoms* or the emerging urban élite. The peasant community consisted of a mix of those who migrated from Egypt during the Ottoman period, called *Ghawarneh*, or slaves brought from Africa to the area. The various peasant clans try to dissociate themselves from the slave origins. Although slavery does not exist in the valley anymore, this form of distinction between the origins of each tribe and clan characterises the social hierarchical relations within the area till today.

In 1948, the area received a substantial proportion of the 487,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 1954). The NJV was adjacent to the *Baisan* area, the Palestinian land, which was taken over when Israel was established. Up until 1948, many of the tribes residing in the NJV used to impartially cross between the two banks. Thus, many Palestinians who lived in *Baisan* or its surrounding region crossed the river, temporarily, in order to flee the aggression of some of the Jewish groups, which used to attack Arab towns and villages. Many of the refugees who were landholders in Palestine opted to stay in the valley close to their land on the west side of the river in order to return as soon as peace was restored (Interviews). *As-saqer* tribe, an affluent nomadic tribe with large territorial claim in *Baisan*, was one of those tribes, in addition to many other smaller pastoralist and peasant clans (Rustum, 1966). Another tribe, which crossed the river is the *Turkman*, who were landholders in the fertile plan of *Marj Bani 'Amer* in northern Palestine. This tribe opted to receive land and settle in the Jordan Valley in 1950: an arrangement between the UNRWA and the Jordanian government, which awarded the tribe a collective right over a plot of land in *Wadi Arrayyan* in return for the refugees' rations cards. Interviewed elders of the *Turkman* recalled that the decision was collectively taken by the tribe in order to lead a dignified life in the Valley (Interviews). As large landowners, they regarded life as refugees humiliating and degrading; having to live in tents and queuing for hours waiting for basic food rations.

The social hierarchy, which dominated the NJV at the time of land reform, was not drawn by clear-cut lines of large landowners vs. landless people. It was a rather more complicated stratification created by origin, gender, labour relations, and forms of dominant tribal values and practices, all mediated through the moments of social process within changing ecological and historical conditions. The researched area in NJV was inhabited by dispersed groups of semi-nomadic and nomadic Bedouins and peasant of the above origins residing in the valley all year long, collectively under the recognised chiefdom of the *Emir*. This authority was bestowed upon the *Ghzawis* back in the 16th

century by the Ottoman government (Bakheit and Hmoud, 1991). At the time, the *Ghzawi* ruler was given the right to control the land in return for the collection he does from the peasants who planted the land. The land at some point during the 19th century was transformed to the name of the *Sultan* Abdul Hamid, which was called *mudawara* land under the Ottoman code in order to avoid taxation by the state (UNRWA, 1956b). Ottoman registrar books of the late 19th century reveal that the region of the *Ghzawis* did not contribute income to the state treasury. The arrangement offered a lucrative income to the *Emir*: cultivating the land tax-free and collecting shares from the peasant farmers in return for a small rent paid to the *Sultan*. Those lands remained registered as *mudawara* land until it was registered to individual and collective claimers under the provision of Land Settlement law of 1933, after the *Emirate of Transjordan* was established under the British the mandate.

Although land settlement during the 1930s and 1940s (Lancaster and Lancaster, 1999) must have led to the reduction of the *Ghzawis* territories in the region, it also created the opportunity for property exchange in the region. Settlement committees relied on the information given to them by heads of each tribe in the settlement process leading to the registration of most of the lands in the names of tribal chiefs and their inheritors (AADO, 1984). At the time of the EGC project, the *Ghzawis* ownership in the area made up 29.83% of the total researched area. A handful of *Ghzawis* held the land of the best soil quality and which the water streams went through all year round, giving them the right to control the distribution of water among the area. Their ownership was concentrated in the Northern village of *Sheikh Hussein*, 74.52% of the village, trickling to 0.0% in *Wadi Arrayyan* in the south where the Palestinian *Turkman* resided. However, the symbolic authority of the *Ghzawis* was present in *Wadi Arrayyan* as much as it was in *Sheikh Hussein*. Absentee landowners residing in the mountainsides and the urban elite held the largest percentage, 36.5%, of the land in the researched area. Peasant *Ghawarneh* and of slave origins owned 6.45% and 5.24% of the land, respectively. However, while the *Ghawarneh* owned land collectively as clans by the side of the Jordan River, those of slave origins owned small plots, by clearing land, deemed unsuitable for agricultural practice, and gaining rights to the land through the customary right, the placement of hand—*wadi' al-yad* (Interviews). Of the Palestinian refugees, only the *Turkman* held land in the area. Thus, prior to the EGC project, land was accessed through a variety of processes including, the manipulation of the law through power and authority and material practices derived from customary ones which over-lapped with formal legal institutions such as the Ottoman land code.

Labour relations in agricultural practice were as much determined by social and power relations as they were mediated through landholding patterns. As land claims became more asserted in the valley in landholders needed to make use of it. The different weak and impoverished clans including those of slave ancestry were the labour force that started agricultural operation on a worthwhile scale in the Jordan Valley, through sharecropping. Sharecropping was not only a form of labour relation in the NJV. It was also an expression of power, patronage and alliance. It was practiced through two main forms, which represented different status and social hierarchy: *Muzara'a* and *Muraba'a* (Abu Jaber, 1989; Johansen, 1988). Although the word sharecropping implies a form of partnership, in NJV only *Muzara'a* was considered partnership, while *Muraba'a* was considered closer to commodified labour. Those who worked in *Muzara'a* were called *muzare'*—literally farmer—while those who worked in *muraba'a* were called *harrath*—literally ploughman. Until today, the word *harrath* is used to refer to someone of lower social status. In a *muraba'a* arrangement a ploughman would live with his family on the land he works in. He would plough and harvest the land all year long in return for a quarter of the product after the deduction of tax and cost of food and lodging, usually leaving the ploughman and his family less than one fifth of the product. Women were excluded from those arrangements, as they were considered unable to plough. They only could work as casual labour as bundle-makers or harvesters.

Despite the inherent inferiority of the arrangement, many peasants preferred it to worse possibilities of unsecured casual labour or even working on their own land, fearing falling into debt due to loss of crop in bad seasons. The relation between the *harrath* and the *Ghzawis* was a societal relation mediated through power and material hierarchy. Being a *harrath* for the *Emir* implied the enjoyment of his

protection. The *harrath's* clan would be attached to the *Ghzawi* tribe giving them a sense of belonging and false superiority. To the *Emir*, the *harratheen*—plural—were considered his men, who fought with him and demonstrated his authority. Due to the recognised exploitative nature of the arrangement, the *harratheen* families tended to emphasise origin hierarchy existing between them. Peasants of the *Ghor* origins tended to look down on peasants of slave ancestry and insisted on calling themselves *Ghawarneh* and referring to those of slave ancestry as '*abeed*—slaves. The influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948 provided the peasants of slave ancestry with another group to could look down upon as inferior, since almost all refugees were initially homeless, landless and with no means to support themselves.

The status of Palestinian refugees, however, did not remain as such for long. After a few years of working as wage labourers, the refugee farmers opted for the independent arrangement of *muzara'a*, in which they shared the costs and the losses of the practice with the landowners. Despite its risks, the Palestinian refugees preferred *muzara'a*, as it positioned farmers at a higher social level than *harratheen* and wage labourers. They did not perceive their relation with the *Ghzawis* beyond its material purposes. Peasants who sought independence from the *Ghzawi* authority opted for claiming less soil quality rainfed land. This gave them complete independence from the *Ghzawis* who controlled the distribution of water resources between the different clans and sharecroppers. The availability of water in the area and the water share of each land affected the area of land farmers could cultivate. The *Emir* mediated any arising conflicts between farmers over water rights and had the final word in resolving them.

Within this setting of multiple and overlapping unequal power-relations, two features contributed to symbolically decrease the effect of such dynamics: Islamic values as an equalising social system and the *madafa*,² *Ghzawi* guesthouse, as a forum of debate and closest congregation to collective action in the area. Although Islam was not formally institutionalised within the area, it prevailed in its embeddedness within local cultural practices and day-to-day rhetoric. Adherence to Islam provided a shared value system through which all the resident of the NJV felt equalised within a setting of unequal power relations symbolically expressed through the rhetoric of 'origin' and practiced in everyday social and material relations, such as the impossibility of inter-marriage between different origins and the labour relations. Women status remained inferior within the social process in both rhetoric and practice. They were deprived from their religiously lawful share in inheritance through other customary practices. Women were expected to either marry their paternal cousins to keep property within the family or to give up their inheritance to their brothers without return. In terms of shared social values, it was a shameful act for a woman to claim her lawful inheritance.

On the other hand, the guesthouse of the *Emir*, an essential part of every rural and Bedouin dwelling, provided a space for male social interaction, exchanging practical knowledge, local news and ideas for dealing with collective problems. For the *Emir*, the *madafa* provided another expression of his power and influence in the NJV: a local forum of debate and conflict resolution under his leadership. The *madafa*, which was open to all males of the NJV, provided those who attended it a feeling of inclusion and equality despite the inherent hierarchy of the relation. Attending the *madafa* was considered an expression of alliance and solidarity and non-attendance was considered a form of defiance of the *Emir's* authority. However, the *madafa* was also an expression of women's inferiority in the society and her exclusion from the only available mechanism for collective decision-making. This was based upon customary and religious practices, which prohibited women from mixing with non-relative males. Excluding women from decision-making regarding agricultural and irrigation issues was based on the limited perception of women's role in agricultural practice.

Those prevailing dynamics of social process in relation to agricultural practice and landholding played a major role in the shaping and outcome of the land reform, which accompanied the construction of the EGC in 1958. Despite its rhetoric of equality, the reform law did not bring a drastic equalising effect to

2 Rogan (2000) discusses the *madafa* as an expression of generosity, honour and power.

the valley neither in symbolic nor material senses. The law itself gave priority to previous landholders to regain maximum 300 dunums³ if their previous holding exceeded that area, giving them also the choice to choose the plot of land they wanted. Landless farmers were only given the choice to buy only a maximum of 35 dunums and only conditional to the approval of the farmers' selection committee.

The process of acquiring land in the project was subjected to manipulation processes of the *Ghzawi* chiefs leading to the exclusion of small landowners and the landless interested in buying land. Due to the stir caused by the land acquisition from large landowners, the government, interested in maintaining good relations with the powerful tribes, the backbone of the monarchy, tried to minimise tribal chiefs' fury by giving leeway's in the reform implementation process. Government officials advised large landowners to distribute their ownerships between their male children to minimise the size of confiscated land. Sons of the *Ghzawi* chiefs were also offered high-ranking positions within the government including the EGC Authority and other powerful bureaucratic agencies, including the secret police.

One of the brothers of the *Emir* was selected to be a member in the 'Farmers selection committee', whose role was mainly as an 'informant' to confirm that the applicant was actually a farmer within the area and able to pay back the cost of the land to the government. There were cases when he abused his position in the committee and denied some poor farmers the right to buy land in the project. Those who were persistent and appealed directly to the committee managed to buy land within the project. In most cases, the *Ghzawi* chiefs remained the farmers' only connection with government officials. Most of the interviewed landless farmers said that they did not get land in the project because the *Emir* told them that only those who previously owned land would have the right to apply to the project.

As the land reform was carried out in stages, the process was also open to manipulation by those who accessed 'knowledge'—the *Ghzawis*—and speculation by those excluded from it by their social status. Even those who held very small pieces of land prior to the project were led to believe that they would not have a right to apply for land in the new project. Some were also given the impression that they might not be paid for their land or that the compensation would be less than the actual value of their land. Within such highly speculative environment, large landowners who were interested in acquiring land within the project took advantage of the situation, persuading many small landholders to sell their land, at a cheap price to avoid further losses. The Jordanian élite and the royal family managed to gain access to agricultural land in the Jordan Valley for entrepreneurial practices, through discursive practices and the use of power and influence within bureaucracies.

While tribal chiefs and urban élite tried to increase their potential acquisition of land within the project, the majority of Palestinian refugees of 1948 and semi-nomadic tribes who depended on cattle for their sustenance practiced self-exclusion from the project. Self-exclusion from the project was based on the values of those groups and their material practices and was obscured by their ignorance of the realities of the project and its objectives. Most of the Palestinian refugees refused to acquire land in the project because of it implied giving up their UNRWA rations card, the proof of their status as refugees. Giving up their rations card in return for a 35dunum plot in the project implied giving up their right of return as well as their large properties back home. The attachment of the Palestinians to their land is an intrinsic part of their identity, values and beliefs. In their Diaspora, the memories of their lives 'out there' have become the fantasy which got them through every day hardship of being refugees. Giving up those hopes would have made their miserable lives in 'temporary' refugee camps more unbearable and was also considered an act of treason. Until today, Palestinian refugee farmers continue to practice farming on rented plots or through sharecropping.

The project was also not attractive to resident of the Valley who led semi-nomadic lifestyle depending on raising cattle for sustenance. Those included few small clans from the eastern side of the valley as well as the large and powerful tribe of *As-Saqer* who mainly had territory on the Palestinian side of the river. Those put more value in cattle than land and they were not interested in shifting to

3 1 dunum = 0.1 ha

settled agriculture. At the time of the project, not all the land was developed for cultivation and there were enough pastures for cattle, which they could also water from running streams. They did not realise that the project plans to intensify agriculture would imply a significant decrease in pasture lands or the loss of water sources which were later contained within underground piping systems.

Facets of Change and Re-creation of Old Systems in the Jordan Valley

Over the following decades, the project changed agricultural practice in the Jordan Valley, as well as symbols of power, the bases of social relations, and the prevailing values and beliefs which were articulated within prevailing symbolic and material practices. During the first two decades of the project, agricultural practices enjoyed a false sense of water abundance in a water-poor country. Even land plots, officially categorised as rainfed, were supplied with irrigation water, giving poor farmers a false sense of security in buying those lands. The creation of an authority (EGCA) to manage the project was in itself a turning point in social process. A new '*madafa*' was symbolically created in EGCA offices, which also became a new space for exercise of power and authority. EGCA became a forum of meeting and exchange of information with the original local chiefs. The engineers represented a new authority within the valley as they became responsible for access to land and water. EGCA also became a new space for the traditional powerful to exercise their own power over the officials or being themselves employees of EGCA. The project itself changed the entire set of values and beliefs of the valley's people. Land and water became commodities: a source of cash rather than a source of living. The project was becoming perceived as bringing 'civilisation' to the valley: herding lost its appeal, and cultivation of fruits and vegetables replaced wheat and barely.

Although traditional spaces of social interaction within the valley did not disappear, they were replaced by new institutional formations, which reinforced the 'knowledge of expertise' and dismissed the farmers' traditional practices as inefficient and obsolete. The government imposed new spaces for collective action, which were supposed to help farmers move into the new age—the farmers' Union in 1974. The union's role remained limited to the implementation of the government agricultural policies and lacked any form of political action, especially because the government funded it. By establishing the Union as the only avenue for formal collective action in the valley, the government constrained the farmers from taking any politically oriented action outside its confinements. This was possible through the ability of the one-third of the board members, who were appointed by the government, to stir the meetings away from decisive issues.

None of the changes brought any significant improvement to women's lives. The distribution of land was limited to 'heads' of households, which were assumed to be male. Women were expected to work in their 'family' property and those from landless families ended up working as casual labour at entrepreneurial agricultural practices. In the 1970s, some female heads of households, mostly Palestinian refugees, started to sharecrop or rent land to practice agriculture. Some succeeded in turning their practices into successful enterprises. Until today, they remain excluded from the collective forums of the Jordan Valley farmers. The Jordan Valley Farmers Union excluded female farmers by the nature of its all male set up, and the prevailing social values where women were separated from spaces of male interaction, despite the absence of any formal regulation against female farmers.

The farmers' union became another forum where alliances are practiced. Over the years, many members of the powerful tribes rotated on the chairmanship of the union. By the same token, the union became a space for the practice of inequity and exclusion. Like the *madafa*, the union gave those who attended it a feeling of inclusion and equality within the community despite the inherent hierarchy of the relation. However, the union was a new space where farmers sat in rows facing the board members, which reinforced the hierarchical relation between them. Under the Jordan Valley Authority law, wage labour was considered practicing farmers and consequently union members. But as in the case of female farmers, they were excluded from the union and their working and living conditions were never regulated. Foreign and female labour continued to work under grievous working conditions.

In effect the traditional powerful enjoyed those new spaces for practicing their power and benefiting from their services, while the major strategic decisions and policies were being negotiated and decided upon within political and technocratic networks outside the valley and only the few privileged could access. Some of the traditional powerful within the valley had access to those networks, which predominantly constituted of members of the Jordanian élite, leaving the *real* practicing farmers and the landless outside the circle of negotiation and decision-making.

Economic Reform Policies and the Jordan Valley

The confiscation of land and water rights in the Jordan Valley was an act of ‘intensification’ of use rather than an act of ‘conservation’, despite the well-known fact that Jordan has a semi-arid nature and the growing shortage of water resources since the early 1970s. Water wells licences were given generously for agricultural use in the desert and highlands as well as manufacturing, spurred by the oil boom in the Gulf countries in the late 1960s. Regarded as the main vehicle for economic development, minimum constraints were exerted on manufacturing practices. As urban water needs increased throughout the past three decades, agricultural practices in the Eastern plateau continued to be carried out using the precious underground water aquifers. The growing shortage in municipal water has been covered in the past five years by diverting the irrigation quality water from the EGC and treating it for domestic and industrial use.

The water abundance, which agricultural practices in the Jordan Valley enjoyed, is now being significantly cut down, with a varying influence on the agricultural practices in the valley. The irrigation water rationing involved cutting down 50% of irrigation water to lands cultivated with trees during the summer season only, while it banned irrigation water altogether from vegetable crops during the summer season, and 50% decrease for the rest of the year. Lands, which were previously granted irrigation water despite being rainfed, are now denied irrigation water altogether. Since only those who owned the land could plant trees, they were the least affected by the irrigation water rationing. It was sharecroppers who depended on vegetable crops that were the hardest hit by the new policies. Farmers who owned rainfed land had to revert to planting wheat once a year depending on the rain season at a time when Jordan was going through draught years.

Changes in access to irrigation water were part of broader water policy changes that were taking place at the national level. Since the late 1980s, Jordan economic performance has been undergoing the severe scrutiny of the World Bank and IMF, as Jordan’s long dependence on foreign aid, coupled with unstable changing political environment in the region, left Jordan with the heavy burden of debt, which it is still struggling to pay back (Brand, 1992). Under the pressure of the international financial institutions, the Jordanian government was forced to make ‘painful’ concessions, in order to continue receiving financial aid and refinance its debt payments to the IMF and the World Bank. The water sector in one of the sectors, which have been under scrutiny by the World Bank and USAID since the mid 1980s. What initially started as a call for tariff and institutional reform has shifted in the 1990s to a call for a partial privatisation of the water sector, including the management of the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA). Changes to the setup of the JVA have already started by the introduction of its amended law of 2001, which aims at transforming the authority into an economically viable for-profit institution. The law abolished the exclusivity of JVA over the development of the Valley and opened the land market to external private investment.

Jordanian agricultural entrepreneurs and the World Bank consultants seem to meet in their vision regarding the water and agricultural sector. They agree that the agricultural practices of small farmers and their ‘lagging’ irrigation technologies are obstacles to that development. Indeed, none of those seem to recall that until the construction of the East *Ghor* canal, those farmers were not interested in cash crops or the maximisation of their practices. The discourse of the World Bank regarding the water sector does not seem to have effectively changed since the 1950s: water is still perceived as a vehicle for economic development and expensive state-of-the-art technologies are considered the only means to achieve an efficient maximisation of available water resources. Water sector policy papers in

Jordan favour investment towards meeting municipal and industrial water demand (World Bank, 1997), despite its high cost, without a sensitive regard to its impact on the social organisation and socio-political dynamics within the Jordanian society.

As Jordan joins the WTO it is opening its market to the products of well-established markets, which are competing with Jordan's lagging agricultural sector. At the same time, Jordan's agricultural sector is forced to make expensive concessions, which would not give its prices an edge in the global markets. Experts argue that it is only by opening the agricultural and water sector to entrepreneurial and external investment 'sustainable development' would be achieved. Some even argue that small farmers are themselves part of the private sector, and they are welcome to participate in the coming changing processes. The realities of small farmers, however, are more complicated than that. The application of state-of-the-art technologies requires an amount of capital, which the heavily indebted small farmers are unable to attain. The World Bank had set a \$40 million fund offering loans for export-oriented agricultural investment for the development of irrigation and agricultural technologies. The fund also demands \$100,000 minimum investment in order to qualify for the loan, which small farmers can never afford or attain.

The Economic Consultation Council to the King is hoping that by encouraging cooperatives between small farmers, they would be able to compete with larger investments. Some aid agencies such as the German Technical Cooperation have already started pilot projects to encourage the cooperation between farmers in the Jordan Valley. Although it is too early to assess the experience, initial farmers' reactions are not promising. While farmers are willing to cooperate with each other under the umbrella of an aid agency, they are not prepared for a form of cooperation between each other as a private party. This can be attributed to the long history of socio-environmental conflict in the contexts of the change, which started in the 1950s. Prior to the construction of the canal agricultural and irrigation practices were as much part of the dynamics of the social process as any other social or material practice. They expressed, reinforced and embedded all the 'moments' of social process; including historically and religiously derived values and social and power hierarchies. As much as those dynamics were manipulated by the powerful for their own advantages, their mechanisms were also accessible to the dwellers of the valley, which made it possible for them to negotiate their conditions and sometimes change them. Both the men and women of the valley acquire enough knowledge of their surrounding nature and their own abilities, which, together with their belief in God as the ultimate power, allowed them to pursue alternative agricultural practices which granted them a level of independence within a context of highly interdependent and hierarchical social process.

Development processes of the 1950s resulted with a change in the relation of small farmers with their environment as well as with each other. Agricultural practices were no longer limited by natural constraints; their power and social relations became mediated through state authority and their practical knowledge was deemed irrelevant in the face of highly specialised agronomic knowledge. Farmers' cooperative relations were no longer dictated by their tribal relations, upon which land ownership was based. The farmers were no longer neighbouring their relatives or members of their own clan. The dynamics of socio-environmental conflict within the Valley was further complicated by the presence of various newcomers of diverse power and material resources. Those included Palestinian refugees, who practiced agriculture on rented land; members of the Jordanian élite and royal family who enjoy exclusive benefits in the area within the bureaucratic system and local large landowners who still enjoyed power within the area and manipulated previous cooperative set-ups for their own benefits. Under such circumstances, it is not quite possible for small farmers to be willing to put their trust in a system which failed them, nor are the entrepreneurs willing to believe in a possible role for small farmers in the coming age of investment and technology.

Due to the decreasing access to water resources and increasing challenges of agricultural practice, small farmers are left with the option of selling their land to large investors. A World Bank advisor was quoted to have said that those farmers would eventually work as farm workers on large-scale investment farms (*Jordan Times*, August 31, 2000). Even Jordanian experts are completely

disregarding the social and cultural dimensions of agricultural practice, by embracing such assumptions. So far the Jordanian labour law has not been revised to improve the conditions of either agricultural or manufacturing labour working for foreign investments. Judging by the current conditions of wage labour in the Jordan Valley, chances are independent, even poor, small farmers are heading towards worse and more insecure conditions in comparison to those they are living under today. In any case, the reality remains that to rural communities agriculture is a way of life. Even those, who are in formal employment, still practice agriculture on small plots of land. The large investors would only hire young male farmers for heavy-duty jobs and young females for harvesting, while in reality older men continue to practice in their land until their death.

The debate on the reversal of land reform overlooks the large majority of Palestinian refugees who practice agriculture on rented land to sustain a dignified life. While many Jordanian peasant females do work in wage labour in the Jordan Valley, Palestinian families do not allow their daughters to work outside their families' farms, which raises a question about the possibility of those women finding jobs after their families lose access to agricultural land. The issues is slowly unveiling a latent conflict between the Palestinian refugees who perceive themselves superior to Jordanian peasant farmers regardless of their origins and landowner peasants who do not practice agriculture in their own land. Palestinian refugees perceive themselves as producers within the valley, while peasants are enjoying the rent paid to them for the land they acquired through the EGC project. As the possibilities of those landowners selling their land to investors increase, the Palestinian refugees are foreseeing yet another displacement agony in search for new land-leasing opportunities. To them, the peasants of the valley gained access to land they do not deserve and would easily give it up in return for easy cash, which the Palestinians cannot afford.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that as much as the land reform of the 1950s was dictated by economic principles and over-reliance on technologies for achieving economic growth, the current reversal processes are following in the same footsteps of ignoring the broader socio-political and cultural dimension of changing processes. The current state of the economy cannot be only blamed on external geo-political factors and poor rural communities should not be sacrificed on the altar of global economic integration. As much as the rural communities of the Jordan Valley have been manipulated as the tool for achieving development in the 1950s, they are regarded obsolete in the process of economic liberalisation, today, with a total disregard to the importance of agricultural practice to their symbolic and material existence. Unfortunately, resistance to those changes have been limited to individual actions and adaptation practices. This lack of organised action should be understood through the historical critical analysis of the dynamics of socio-environmental conflict in the Jordan Valley and the role of the development intervention in shaping those conflicts and disintegrating any possible basis for organised resistance. As the land reform reversal in the Jordan Valley looms in the horizon, the future of small and landless farmers, especially the Palestinian refugees, seem bleak and unpromising, with little being done to deal with the impact of those changes on them by the government or the aid agencies behind those changes.

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