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## **Between Aid and Action: Aid, empowerment and resistance amongst fishermen in the Gaza Strip.**

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PhD in Anthropology

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November, 2021



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS  
E HUMANAS

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Department of Anthropology

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## Resumo

Palavras chave: resistência cotidiana, empoderamento, humanitarismo, Faixa de Gaza

Esta pesquisa etnográfica estuda a vida cotidiana dos pescadores palestinos na Faixa de Gaza, uma área que foi moldada por vários fatores, entre os quais a cultura, a governação e a ocupação. Através dos olhos e das palavras dos pescadores, pretendo mergulhar no desenvolvimento e na transformação de uma população relativamente rica mas politicamente inativa, um grupo de atores empobrecido, mas politizado e mobilizado, que está a usar as suas habilidades recém-adquiridas e sua nova voz para a ação coletiva que, em última análise, contribuem para a justiça social e a liberdade para si e para os outros.

Conceitos de empoderamento libertador, resistência cotidiana e o humanitarismo, são explorados/desenvolvidos através das experiências dos pescadores. A pesquisa, adotando uma abordagem antropológica, tenta então abordar questões como:

- Quais são os efeitos e implicações da provisão de ajuda prolongada sobre a resistência e os métodos de resiliência diários dos autóctones?
- Como a ajuda humanitária pode ser alinhada com a resiliência auto-organizada e o empoderamento, a fim de aumentar a resistência e dignidade quotidianas durante condições prolongadas de adversidade?
- Que novas estruturas de micro-poder são estabelecidas como resultado da ajuda e do empoderamento?

Explorar os pontos de vista e as vozes dos pescadores de Gaza ofereceu-me uma oportunidade de obter uma melhor compreensão dos efeitos da ajuda nas estruturas locais invisíveis, especialmente em termos de auto-organização, particularmente em resiliência e resistência, investigando as estruturas micro-sociais e de rede que as define. Elevando as suas vozes e construindo conhecimento, a pesquisa tenta estudar o humanitarismo com base nas próprias experiências dos destinatários e nas lutas contínuas contra a hegemonia.



## Abstract

Key words: everyday resistance, empowerment, humanitarianism, Gaza Strip

This ethnographic research studies the everyday life of Palestinian fishermen in the Gaza Strip, an area that has been shaped by various factors including culture, governance, and occupation. Through the eyes and words of the fishermen, I aim to delve into the development and transformation of a relatively wealthy and politically inactive populace into an impoverished but politicised and mobilised group of actors who are using their newly acquired skills and newfound voice for collective action, and who ultimately contribute to social justice and freedom for themselves and others.

Concepts of liberating empowerment, everyday resistance, and aid as a space are explored through fisherfolk experiences. The research, adopting an anthropological approach, then tries to engage with the following questions:

- What are the effects and implications of prolonged aid provision on indigenous everyday resistance and resilience methods?
- How might humanitarian aid be aligned with self-organised resilience and empowerment in order to further everyday resistance and dignity during prolonged conditions of hardship?
- What new micro-power structures are established as a result of aid and empowerment?

Exploring the views and voices of Gaza fisherfolk has offered an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the effects of aid on invisible local structures, especially in terms of self-organisation, particularly in resilience and resistance by investigating the micro-social and network structures that define them. By raising their voices and building knowledge the research tries to study humanitarianism based on recipients' own experiences and ongoing struggles against hegemony.



## Summary in Arabic

### ملخص

يناقش هذا البحث الإثنوغرافي الحياة اليومية للصيادين الفلسطينيين في قطاع غزة والتي شكّلتها عوامل مختلفة، بما في ذلك ثقافة و تقاليد المجتمع وانظمة الحكم المتعاقبة بالإضافة الى وجود الاحتلال الإسرائيلي. هذا البحث، و من خلال عيون الصيادين و الأستماع لصوتهم، يهدف إلى الخوض في دراسة تفاصيل تحوّل مجموعة من الصيادين كانت تعيش في وضع اقتصادي جيد نسبياً و ليس لها اي انتماءات سياسية بل و غير منخرطة في العمل السياسي اصلاً إلى مجموعة فقيرة مُعدّمة ولكن لها دور سياسي نشط و فعّال تم اكتسابه من خلال تجربة طويلة تميّزت بالصمود في وجه التغيرات السياسية و الاقتصادية التي عصفت بالمجتمع الفلسطيني عامة و العزّي خاصة على مدار عقود. لقد استطاع مجتمع الصيادين و من خلال استخدام مهاراتهم المكتسبة حديثاً و رفع صوتهم عاليًا و العمل الجماعي من المساهمة في تحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية و الحرية لأنفسهم و للآخرين.

مفاهيم التمكين التحرّري و المقاومة اليومية و المساعدات الدولية كمساحة يتم استكشافها من خلال تجارب الصيادين. ثم يحاول البحث التعامل مع أسئلة مثل:

ما هي آثار و انعكاسات تقديم المعونة لفترات طويلة على أساليب المقاومة و الصمود اليومية الأصلية؟

كيف نربط بين المساعدات الانسانية من جهة و بين التمكين و الإجراءات المنظمّة ذاتياً من جهة اخرى، و التي بدورها تعزز المقاومة اليومية المستمرة و الكرامة الإنسانية في ظل الظروف المعقدة طويلة الأمد؟

ما هي هياكل القوة الصغرى الجديدة الناشئة نتيجة المساعدات الدولية و التأهيل؟

لقد أتاح استكشاف آراء و أصوات صيادي الأسماك في قطاع غزة فرصة لفهم أفضل لتأثيرات المساعدات الخارجية على الهياكل المحلية غير المرئية، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بالتنظيم الذاتي و الصمود و المقاومة، ذلك من خلال التحقيق في الهياكل و الشبكات الاجتماعية الصغيرة التي ينتمون اليها.

يحاول هذا البحث من خلال الإستماع لصوت الصيادين و النظر الى اساليب بنائهم للمعرفة دراسة تأثير المعونات الإنسانية من وجهة نظر المستفيدين و تجاربهم الخاصة و نضالاتهم ضد الهيمنة.



## A Note on Transcription and Translation

In this research there are at times words presented in phonetic Arabic. A transcription of Arabic which is consistent and accessible is often a too laborious a job. In Arabic, at times, the same word can be transcribed in various ways. I have aimed to keep a simple and consistent format based on the common transcription of words as they are usually known or used in the West (e.g., Hamas, Intifada, Gaza, Abu), and for words that are not commonly used in the West I have adhered to the format I learned while studying Arabic in university according to the phonetics and transcription as presented in the book *Kullu Tamam* (Heinen-Nasr and Woidich 1996). Where I stray from these formats, it is in favour of terminology and transcription which might be more fluid or intuitive.

As for the translation of documents and audio recordings, these have been done by myself without any further formalities and on a needs-only basis.

# Map of the Gaza Strip

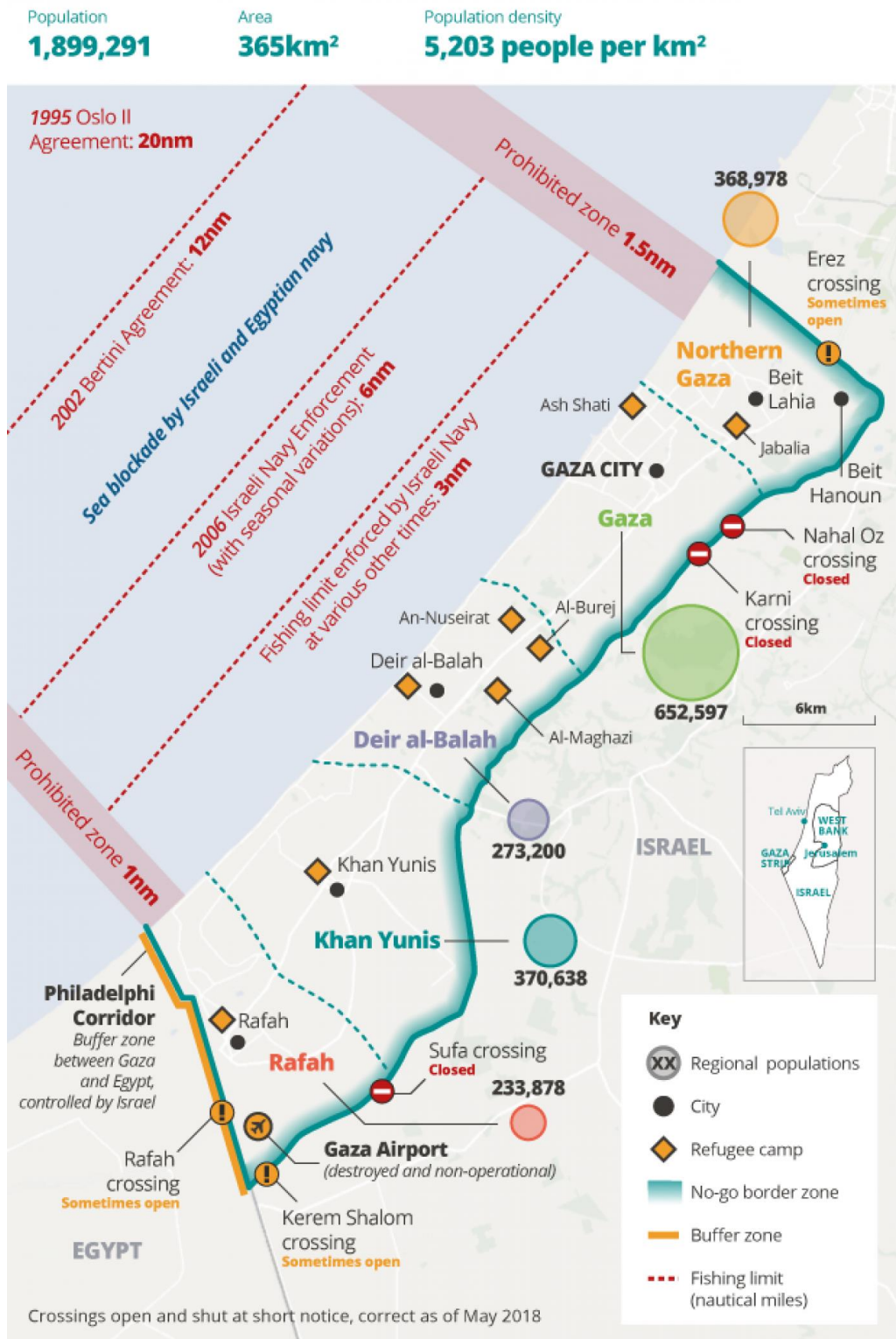


Figure 1. Middle East Eye, Map of Gaza under Israeli blockade (Source: www.middleeasteye.net).



## Chronology of key events in the Gaza Strip

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 1948    | <i>Nakba</i> (“Catastrophe”) coinciding with establishment of State of Israel   |
| 1967    | Six-Day War   |
| 1973    | Yom Kippur War  |
| 1987    | Outbreak First Intifada which lasted until 1993   |
| 1993    | The PLO and Israel sign the declaration of principles on interim self-government arrangements (Oslo I)  |
| 1995    | The PLO and Israel sign an interim agreement granting the Palestinians some autonomy in certain parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Oslo II)   |
| 2000    | Camp David talks fail and soon after the Second Intifada breaks out which lasted until 2005   |
| 2005    | Israeli Disengagement from Gaza   |
| 2005    | Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), signed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), stipulates that Rafah and all other crossing points to Gaza operate continuously and that Israel allow the movement of goods and persons between the West Bank and Gaza. |
| 2006    | Hamas won democratic elections  |
| 2006    | Operation Summer Rain*  |
| 2006/07 | Hamas/Fatah intra-conflict (post-election)  |
| 2007    | New Palestinian National Unity government sworn in, headed by Hamas member Ismail Haniyeh, and with a cabinet comprising Fatah, Hamas and independent and left-wing MPs.  |
| 2007    | Hamas <i>de facto</i> control of the Gaza Strip after it seizes control of Gaza after Fatah is ordered to abandon its posts. Abbas disbands the unity government and declares a state of emergency.   |
| 2007    | Beginning of the blockade of the Gaza Strip - The Rafah crossing with Egypt is closed to the public. Israel closes the Karni crossing on the Gaza-Israel border (commercial crossing).  |
| 2008    | Operation Cast Lead*  |
| 2010    | Nine pro-Palestinian activists killed by Israeli naval forces in international waters while trying to sail to Gaza aboard a flotilla of six ships carrying 10,000 tons of goods in an effort to break the blockade.   |
| 2012    | Operation Pillar of Defense*  |
| 2014    | Operation Protective Edge*  |
| 2015    | UN report claims Gaza uninhabitable by 2020   |
| 2021    | Operation Guardian of Walls*  |

\*Names of aggressions against Gaza used and presented in Israeli and Western media. These names are not used in the Palestinian narrative or Arabic language media outlets.



## List of Abbreviations

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| AHLC   | Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee   |
| EU     | European Union   |
| GDP    | Gross Domestic Product   |
| GoI    | Government of Israel   |
| GRM    | Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism                                      |
| IOF    | Israeli Occupation Forces  |
| JSC    | Joint Security Coordination and Cooperation Committee              |
| MC     | Maritime Coordination and Cooperation Center                       |
| MP     | Member of Parliament   |
| NGO    | Non-Governmental Organisation                                      |
| NM     | Nautical Mile  |
| ODA    | Official Development Aid   |
| OECD   | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development             |
| OPT    | Occupied Palestine Territory                                       |
| PA     | Palestinian Authority  |
| PCHR   | Palestinian Centre for Human Rights                                |
| PLO    | Palestinian Liberation Organisation                                |
| SAP    | Structural Adjustment Programme(s)                                 |
| UAWC   | Union of Agricultural Work Committees                              |
| UN     | United Nations   |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development                 |
| UNRWA  | United Nations Relief and Work Agency for the Palestinian Refugees |
| US     | United States  |
| WFP    | World Food Programme   |

## Glossary

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Al-Nakhwa | Fishermen custom ensuring fishermen at sea have protection provided by fellow fishermen when in need out at sea                               |
| Bizr      | Kernel or seeds often eaten as a snack  |
| Dhallal   | Auctioneer  |
| Fellahin  | Peasants  |
| Floka     | Non-motorised boat  |
| Gar       | Trawler (large fishing vessel)  |
| Hasaka    | Smallest fishing boat, in its motorised form the most common fishing boat in Gaza. A Hasaka can also be made operational with the use of oars |
| Al-dein   | To buy on loan / accrued payment to be paid at a later stage  |
| Ikramih   | A form of tipping to the fishermen workers when sea mission is completed  |
| Kufte     | Palestinian local dish made with either meat or fish  |
| Lanche    | Medium sized motorised fishing vessel: Launch Trawler or Launch Shanshula   |
| Maggia    | Vessel owners   |
| Samid     | Someone practicing <i>Sumud</i>   |
| Shanshula | Purse seiner  |
| Sumud     | Steadfastness   |
| Shwahl    | A long, wide, often colourful dress women wear inside the house   |
| Tawjihi   | Final year of High School   |

# Chapter I Introduction

This dissertation is an ethnographic examination of fisherfolk in Shati Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, focusing on their views, experiences and responses to their everyday challenges under blockade, prolonged occupation, and chronic humanitarian crisis.

Drawing on research in resistance studies, empowerment theory, and anthropological critiques of humanitarianism and development, I describe the historical, social and political factors that have influenced the everyday life of the fisherfolk and how it has been experienced by the fishing community. This inter-disciplinary approach is timely and important as very little ethnographic research has been conducted on the effects of the combination of occupation, local governance and prolonged humanitarianism on marginalised communities in general and even less so inside the Gaza Strip.

Additionally, it is of importance to other disciplines like political science and development studies. Debates continue in these fields around increasing localisation and ownership within aid, but progress has been slow whilst local knowledge and experience does not often get the recognition it deserves.

For this reason, it is critical to examine what various factors are at play and how these affect the lives of the fisherfolk and their responses in struggling to maintain their lifestyle alive against all odds. The fisherfolk in Gaza provide us with a unique window through which we can explore and experience the complexities of aid and politics, how these play out at a micro-level, and how this has shaped the responses and actions of the fisherfolk themselves.

## Significance of the research

Literature indicates that populations faced with adversity resort to resilience and / or resistance. There is less agreement, however, on how these concepts are related or affected by external action.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Palestine, Bourbeau and Ryan recently demonstrated that infrapolitics, resilience and resistance are closely related (Bourbeau, Ryan 2018).<sup>2</sup> Infrapolitics was coined by Scott (1990) to describe the resistance strategies employed by subordinate groups that go unnoticed by superordinate groups. These three concepts can be identified in a term particular to the Palestinian context, known as *Sumud*. The concept was introduced as a formal resilience strategy in 1978, when

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<sup>1</sup> Relational Approach agreeing that resilience and resistance are related and not mutually exclusive vs Neo-liberal substantialist approach which excludes one from another and claims they can not occur simultaneously by same household

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this research proposal I have thus used the concepts interchangeably.

the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) recommended Sumud as a way of encouraging the Palestinian population to remain steadfast. Thus, Sumud became a national concept and strategy for Palestinians in order to prevent the uprooting policy, to preserve identity and to restore dignity in the struggle for national liberty (Teeffelen 2011). Marie, Hannigan and Jones (2017) further this idea by stating that Sumud is interwoven with ideas of personal and collective resilience and steadfastness. The concept of resilience deserves further defining as it has been gaining traction in development and humanitarian fields. For the purpose of this project the aim is to focus on the aid sector, and within this context we may define resilience as ‘the ability of individuals, households, communities, and institutions to anticipate, withstand, recover, and transform from shocks and crises’ (USIP 2016).

Ever since its introduction in Palestinian culture, the concept of Sumud has been applied as a socio-political strategy following the *Nakba* and the Occupation and refers to ways of surviving in the context of occupation, chronic adversity, lack of resources and limited infrastructure (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, Marie, Hannigan and Jones 2017). However, Sumud goes further than resilience in that the connection to land and physical presence on the land is at the root to the concept. Marie, Hannigan and Jones (2017) explain this in further detail when connecting Sumud to the social ecological idea, “Within Arabic and specifically Palestinian culture, resilience can be conceptualised as a prerequisite to understanding and achieving Sumud, meaning that the individual has to be resilient in order to remain steadfast in the face of daily challenges and not to leave their place or position.” (Marie, Hannigan, Jones 2017 p.35). As Kent (2012) elaborates, ‘resilience does not occur in isolation. It is an interactive process that requires something or someone to interact with. It is dependent upon context or environment, including our relationships’ (p. 111). As this implies, Sumud entails interaction with external actors. This is further supported by Marie, Hannigan and Jones (2017), who state that resilience is interdependent and occurs on both individual and community levels.

These interactions can, *inter alia*, be linked to the provision of humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip. The displacement of Palestinian civilians that occurred in 1948 resulted in emergency needs for the displaced population. The United Nations Relief and Work Agency for the Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) was established in 1949 for precisely that purpose, the provision of basic services to the Palestinian refugees. Over the past decades literature claims that shifts have occurred allowing for humanitarian aid to become politicised in contradiction to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and ‘do no harm’ (Barnett, 2005 and Mills 2005). Palestinian refugees have been one of the leading recipients of international aid. As a result of foreign government engagements in the provision of humanitarian aid, and Israeli-government approval of the aid provided, it has been subjected to conditions and politicised aid initiatives. For instance, the continuation of the occupation combined with Israeli-approved humanitarian intervention has

resulted in politicised aid initiatives aimed at creating a Western-approved Palestinian society and has transformed approaches to indigenous resilience (Sumud) amongst Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip (Tartir 2017 and Qamut and Beland 2012). Even more so, the ongoing political situation in which the de facto Hamas government is being boycotted by the international donor community has resulted in a unique situation in which parallel aid systems have been created with final oversight by Israel, further consolidating its hegemony. This research project attempts to build on the literature produced to date, to demonstrate how humanitarian aid has influenced modes and structures of resistance as they play out at local level.

This study attempts to shed new light on the effects and implications of prolonged aid provision on indigenous invisible resistance and resilience methods within the context of a specific population: the fisherfolk of Shati Refugee Camp in Gaza. Their situation is unique as they consist of both refugee and non-refugee communities, both of which are engaged in the fisheries sector. Their situation has changed dramatically since the imposition of the Gaza blockade in 2007: whilst they have become increasingly impoverished and vulnerable over the past decade and a half, it has also been a period during which they have received the most international assistance.

## Contributions to Anthropology

Anthropology of Humanitarianism is a relatively new field of study which came into being in the late 1990s and only gained traction at the turn of the millennium. Anthropology's aim has been to study humanitarianism critically, and these critiques are commonly premised upon the political concepts of 'biopower' (Foucault, 2008), 'state of exception' and 'bare life' (Agamben, 2005).

According to Minn (2007), as humanitarianism is an applied field, inside knowledge by aid workers themselves was initially transferred into valuable sources of knowledge on clarifications, advice and critiques on the functioning of humanitarian aid. Prominent examples include Prendergast in his 1996 book *Frontline Diplomacy*, as well as Thomas Weiss who contributed to the literature at various occasions but most notably with an elaborate volume with Minear (1993).

Whereas in the early stages research focused on the functioning, politics, and ethics of humanitarianism, more recent literature has expanded with an increasing focus on power dynamics, as highlighted by Fassin and Pandolfi who explore power dynamics of the 'humanitarian government' in their inter-disciplinary book *Contemporary States of Emergency* (2010). With regards to the specific case of Palestine, Ilana Feldman (2009, 2012) has published extensively on the anthropology of humanitarianism with an ethnographic approach in which she elaborates on such power dynamics by linking it to the 'politics of living' through which she studies the effects of a prolonged humanitarian

condition on Palestinian aid recipients. However, due to the constraints on access, Gaza itself has not been included in the research.

Although there has been more focus on the effects of aid on social and power dynamics, the link between prolonged aid provision and effects on (invisible) local structures, especially in terms of self-organisation around resilience and resistance by investigating the micro-social and network structures that define them, remains understudied. This makes the case of Palestine, and especially Gaza, particularly interesting. The notion of Sumud, a well-researched concept, has often been linked to forms of everyday resistance (Vinthagen 2013, 2015, van Teeffelen 2014) based on Scott's concepts of everyday resistance of subalterns and infrapolitics in which subordinate groups use invisible strategies of resistance. Bourbeau and Ryan (2017), for example, use the concept of Sumud to demonstrate the enmeshment of resilience, resistance and infrapolitics, as opposed to being mutually exclusive.

Groundwork has thus been laid in defining the key concepts and elaborating on them in terms of the Palestinian case. The link between self-organisation, collective action and Sumud is then in essence, relatively easily made. Within development and humanitarian fields, however, discourse has only recently moved beyond a traditional understanding of resilience to include the social, cultural and political spheres of resilience as well (Rampp, Endreß and Naumann eds. 2019).

This research then fills a void in the literature around aid, action and microstructures on which there has, as of yet, been little ethnographic exploration within the anthropology of humanitarianism. This project aims to do so through following and documenting the lived experiences of fisherfolk who have benefited from aid initiatives in the Gaza Strip and the study will look at how this has transformed their self-organisation structures and collective action.

Besides the theme that is discussed in this study, it is the application of a method in a unique situation which adds further novelty. I conducted ethnography in an area, the Gaza Strip, which has been isolated for nearly a decade and a half resulting in very limited original academic fieldwork being conducted across any discipline other than work completed by Gazans themselves. In the absence of a Department of Anthropology across any of the universities in Gaza, very limited ethnographic work has been completed. I have been able to work closely with the local community, both with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the fisherfolk themselves, through conducting interviews, observation and spending time in their families, which allowed me to gain unique insights into their everyday life. This has been the foundation upon which this research is based, as further elaborated upon in chapter 2 of this study.

## Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three parts: the first elaborates on the methodology used and theory underlying the research, the second explores the factors affecting the lives of the fisherfolk, and the final part elaborates on the responses and actions of the fisherfolk within their context.

Chapter 2 considers the methodology used to obtain the data that has informed this research. I set out the research design and research questions that I have used as a guidance in my research, after which I shed light on the various methods used including dialogue, observation, participation, immersion and small talk, and discuss important methodological decisions that were made in the process. Small talk although not a structured method in the traditional sense but rather an integral part of any ethnography, has proven to be as informative and useful as the other more traditional methods.

In Chapter 3, I present the theoretical literature I draw upon to examine the everyday challenges and actions of the fisherfolk in Gaza. I introduce resistance studies, empowerment theory and anthropological critiques of humanitarianism, and discuss my explorations of on-the-ground realities of fisherfolk in Gaza, allowing me to move beyond rigid paradigms and instead adopt an interdisciplinary approach throughout my research rooted in in-depth ethnography that considers the unique context in which actions occur.

Chapter 4 relies largely on literature review to elaborate in detail on the specificity of aid in Gaza and how prolonged humanitarianism has become enmeshed with politics. I provide two case studies as evidence of the complexities and enmeshment of occupation, politics and aid. This is followed, in Chapter 5, by a description of the historical and cultural development of fishing in Gaza to describe how past events affect everyday life. I also focus on common fishing practices and how fisheries in Gaza have been shaped and organised over time.

Chapter 6 traces the development of fisheries management in the Gaza Strip, highlighting four time periods with different entities that have ruled Gaza resulting in a complex system of policies and laws that remain applicable today. The chapter provides historical context for the current state of fisheries in Gaza, including their organisation and management. I analyse data collected through semi-structured and informal interviews, meeting and participant observations to show the shortcomings and complexities in the fisheries sector in which aid has been introduced as an additional factor. As a result, the actual day-to-day reality of management is different from how it was meant to be.

Chapter 7 focuses on policies arising from Israeli occupation and the human rights violations that affect Gaza's fisherfolk on a daily basis. In particular, I consider movement restrictions at sea and how they have affected the daily lives of fishermen and how their physical protection is increasingly



compromised and violated. I conclude the chapter by assessing the impact of occupation policies on the fishing families.

Chapter 8 sets the final scene and introduces aid and its effects on the fishing community. The chapter uses the form of a critical discussion to explore how a self-sufficient and prospering community turned into a community labelled 'most vulnerable'. The chapter does so by engaging concepts of de-politicising aid and negotiating power and aid, based on in-depth interviews with various stakeholders. This chapter thus aims to provide deep insights into the dimensions of aid within the fisheries sector in Gaza.

Chapter 9 is focused on the response and actions of the fishing community to the different factors that have been explored in previous chapters. This is where the majority of the fieldwork findings come to the fore, as well as the integration and fluidity between concepts of resistance and empowerment. I will do this by presenting how different fishermen and women have responded, taken collective action, or have otherwise mobilised and engaged to ensure their lifestyles have been able to continue.

In chapter 10, I conclude my research with a series of policy recommendations and future research directions identified by the research findings.

## Overview of Context

The Gaza Strip is a small, almost rectangular coastal sliver of land situated near the south-western tip of where the African continent meets the Asian continent, squeezed between Egypt and Israel. It is 45 kilometres long, 7 kilometres wide at the northern end and 12.5 kilometres wide at its southern end, creating a landmass that totals 365km<sup>2</sup>. On the northern and eastern sides it borders Israel, whereas its southern border is with Egypt. Its western border is with the Mediterranean Sea, hence the long coastline all along the western shore running from north to south. Its borders have remained largely unchanged since the 1950 Armistice Agreement.

Gaza appears to be built on sand, so close to the sea and surrounded by desert, however there are stretches of agricultural land on the northern and eastern border with Israel which provide the main fields for vegetable production. A buffer zone is currently in place along the border with Israel extending up to 300 metres onto Gaza's agricultural lands.

The Gaza Strip is horizontally split in half by *Wadi Gaza* (coastal wetland) which originates from the Negev hills and the southern hills of Hebron in the West Bank. The *Wadi* enters eastern Gaza and flows to the coast where it enters the sea. It is located centrally along the Gaza Strip coast, and is bordered by the sea, Bureij Camp, Nuseirat Camp, and Al-Zahra' City.

The rich biodiversity of the *Wadi* has been under constant threat due to pollution and poor wastewater treatment. Water in general has become a scarcity in the Gaza Strip and its main water supply is sourced from the Gaza coastal aquifer, which has been polluted by over-pumping and wastewater contamination. As a result, over 90% of families depend on water that is being trucked in and sold by private vendors at high prices.

Due to its location and proximity to the sea, the summers are hot and humid, and the winters are known to be damp and mild.

### Present Day Gaza

When you enter Gaza, it is like nowhere you have ever been. I remember that the first time I entered in 1997 and it still holds true today. There is an intensity and a paradox in what I see, smell, and feel. I see destruction of buildings, crowded refugee camps, dirty sanitation, darkness at night. I also see business and people getting on, I see men sitting at the side of the road chatting and eating 'bizr' (seeds) and smoking waterpipes or cheap cigarettes. I see women going about their shopping, carrying plastic bags full of the most colourful fruits and vegetables. I see young women entering public transport to go to university and their workplaces. I see families packing up for a day at the beach. Near the Gaza boulevard I see tens of stalls selling coffee and tea, fresh juice and popcorn and nuts. I see the recycling of material everywhere, unfinished buildings. What strikes me is the few green spaces around – almost everything has the same dull grey/beige colour, no trees or bushes in sight, maybe just some bougainvillea on the pre-1948 buildings, the old mansions lining the side streets of Gaza City or the well-maintained roundabouts in the centre of the city. The smell – it smells like life, the smell of fresh bread, the smell of exhaust from old cars, the smell of food coming out of the kitchens, the smell of fish in the seaport. The seaport area radiates a blue/white colour like elsewhere in Mediterranean communities, a newly built and towering white mosque standing tall next to it. All these paradoxes between beauty and ugliness are captured in a single moment in Gaza. It is what makes Gaza so loveable. People say once you go there you can't forget it.

Gaza today has a population of nearly two million, the majority of them under the age of 18. It is severely crowded and it is visible in the overburdening of just about everything: the streets, the housing, the public services. Ever since the Battle of Gaza in 2007, in which Fatah and Hamas, the main political parties, were fighting each other over the outcome of the 2006 parliamentary elections, Hamas, an Islamic political organisation, has been in power in the Gaza Strip. The battle cost the lives of many young Gazan men but also resulted in the end of the unity government and the *de facto*

division of the Palestinian Territories into two entities: Gaza Strip ruled by Hamas and the West Bank ruled by the Palestinian Authority.<sup>3</sup>

An immediate consequence of Hamas being in control of Gaza has been that Israel and Egypt, both for political reasons, closed the border, whereas the international community boycotted Hamas as it had been designated as a terrorist organisation. The closing of the borders resulted in a blockade, which is the ongoing land, air and sea closure of the Gaza Strip imposed by Israel and Egypt since 2007 and includes the reinstatement of the buffer zone, a unilaterally enforced military no-go area, ranging from 150- 300 meters inside the Gaza Strip.<sup>4</sup> The blockade and buffer zone have had a severe impact on the movement of goods and people in and out of the Gaza Strip, as evidenced by European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) reports indicating that the Gaza economy reached a state of collapse with continuous contraction of the economy, increasing rates of unemployment and deteriorating humanitarian conditions (UNCTAD 2019). The blockade has thus had a severe impact on the humanitarian condition in the Gaza Strip with nearly 80% of people being dependent on some form of aid. As one of the leading human rights activists in Gaza told me:

“We have become a nation of beggars, dependent on every element of our lives whereas we are a place with tremendous human potential, productivity, culture and natural wealth.”

Whereas the blockade has major implications, these have been further exacerbated by the attacks carried out against the Gaza population since 2007. A total of eight Israeli operations varying in scope and intensity have been carried out since Hamas won the elections in January 2006.<sup>5</sup> Hamas and other Palestinian groups based in the Gaza Strip have launched rocket attacks against Israel and engaged in battles inside the Gaza Strip. The prohibition on entry of dual-use-goods into the Gaza Strip has hampered reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and halted the economy further.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside Israel-Gaza violence, ever since the Battle of Gaza in 2007 Hamas has also been involved in attempts to resolve its hostilities with Fatah, resulting in a series of reconciliation attempts which

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<sup>3</sup> As a result of the outcome of the parliamentary elections in 2006, a Unity Government was formed on 17 March 2007 following negotiations in Mecca. As it did not meet the Quartet conditions it did not receive international support and thus it was short-lived. Israel immediately rejected the Unity Government and indicated only to deal with Abbas, the PA. It would not deal with the new government unless it would recognize the Jewish state.

<sup>4</sup> The buffer zone range varies across the Northern and Eastern border. The precise designated buffer zone area is unknown but runs up to 1500m inside the Gaza Strip according to AlMezan; *'Factsheet: Displacement in the 'bufferzone', three years after Operation Cast Lead'* accessible on <http://www.mezan.org/en/uploads/files/13210.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The first one was Operation Summer Rains in June 2006, followed by Operation Autumn Cloud in November 2006, Operation Hot Winter in February 2008, Operation Cast Lead in 2008-09 also known as the first Gaza/Israel war, followed by Operation Returning Echo and Operation Pillar of Defense both in 2012 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014, May 2020 witnessed another round of aggression.

<sup>6</sup> Dual-use good are goods that can be used both for civilian and military purposes

have, as of yet, been unsuccessful. Thus, Hamas and therewith Gaza have been isolated by the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli government, and the Western governments.

As a result of growing economic pressure, ongoing violence and continuing isolation, many young Palestinians have been trying to leave the Gaza Strip in search of employment and to rebuild their lives. The Palestinian human rights activist expresses his concerns on the situation:

“I think we are witnessing the second Nakba, another flux of people – young capable people who are the future of Gaza that are leaving our tiny sliver of land. The lack of opportunities, the ongoing closure and the highly skilled young people is an unsustainable combination. They are being pushed out. They will not come back.”

As Ophir (2010) argues, Gaza remains in a state of *suspended catastrophe* as it continues to receive international aid that goes through donor agencies and international and national NGOs which directly fund programmes in the Gaza Strip. These programmes are intended to alleviate the negative economic impact of occupation and are aimed at improving the humanitarian situation. However, whether as an intended or unintended outcome, aid has also been used to undermine the authority of the Hamas government while simultaneously failing to challenge the Israeli blockade (Qarmout and Beland 2012).

This has had a direct impact on aid delivery within Gaza, with most aid being delivered via the UN, INGOs and NGOs that circumvent any engagement with local authorities. This form of aid delivery is one of numerous examples of how politics directly influences and affects aid and shapes local realities.

Local realities have shifted with the politics of aid. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Palestine became a donor darling overnight with large inflows of funding aimed at state-building and peace-building projects. The power of donors who have been pushing for what they see as non-political projects aimed at democracy and good governance, gender, and human rights but in turn have de-politicised the local communities.

It is the response to these policies by a small, traditional, and marginalised community that I am exploring in this thesis. Through their eyes I will aim to shed light on how ineffective ‘non-political’ aid policies have resulted in unintended consequences through which the community has claimed their voice and space and re-politicised its existence and its struggle for survival and social justice on the national and international level.

In order to do so I will make use of the intersectionality of the concepts of empowerment and resistance in the setting of continued occupation and prolonged humanitarianism.

## Shati Camp

Shati camp, known in English as Beach Camp, was established in 1948 as a refugee camp to host 23,000 refugees. It is located north-west of Gaza city, right next to the beach, hence its name Shati which means beach in Arabic. According to UNRWA website data there are over 85,000 residents, all refugees since 1948 who are from areas in current day Israel, making it one of the most densely populated camps in the State of Palestine. The majority of the population is young, well under the age of twenty. As opposed to many other refugee camps in the Gaza Strip that are characterised by narrow streets, the Shati camp suffered the demolition of 2000 homes in 1971 by Israeli authorities to widen the roads for security purposes.<sup>7</sup>

The camp is built on a small plot of land making it massively overcrowded and indeed one of the most densely populated places on earth. It is like any of the other refugee camps in the Gaza Strip: hot, humid, intense, and busy. The houses are all concrete buildings between three and six stories high. Sometimes on the ground floor level there are some old extensions with conjugated roofs and single brick walls. From the rooftops one can easily see the Mediterranean in front of you and feel the sea breeze. On the ground floor and in the narrow alleys the air is muggy and humid. The houses are occupied by extended families who have remained on the land where they first arrived in Gaza. There are many large families in Shati camp that consist of between 150-450 people, extended families operating in the same sector and living in the same area within the camp – at times in a row of houses, in a one-storey building or on the same block.

Most of the side streets remain unpaved and are sandy dirt roads, giving a feel of the proximity of the beach. The widening of the roads resulted in the development of the camp into clear blocks, but there are still many narrow side roads in the camp, turning it into a maze in which one could easily get lost.

The main centre of the camp is the busy market street. In addition to the shops lining the streets there are stands selling fruits and vegetables, spices, cleaning materials, clothes and food on specific days of the week. This street is the main thoroughfare out of the camp and leading to Gaza City.

Shati camp provides a number of basic services provided under the auspices of the UNRWA, which it describes on its website as consisting of fourteen school buildings accommodating 25 school shifts in total. Boys' and girls' education is divided into different shifts. The first shifts start at 7h30 and finish by noon, while the second shifts start at 12h30 and last until 16h30. There is one UNRWA food distribution centre that is responsible for the monthly distribution of food parcels/baskets, which include basics such as rice, flour, oil, lentils, milk powder, sugar, canned tuna and other basic commodities. The camp also houses one UNRWA health centre where basic medical services are

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip/beach-camp> accessed June 2020

available. In addition to these services, there is also one relief and social services centre and one maintenance and sanitation office, as well as two water wells, all operated by UNRWA.

Besides the services delivered under UNRWA there are two political mechanisms for camp governance in Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza, and thus also in Shati camp: 1) popular refugee committees and 2) municipal councils. The first was in place in the pre-Oslo era, initiated by the PLO in the 1960s whereas the latter has come into being with the introduction of the local governance structure of the Palestinian Authority.

Tuastad (2012) distinguishes Gaza camp governance from that found in other Palestinian refugee camps, as in Gaza the camps participated in the local elections, electing their own municipal authorities to whom they pay tax and who govern and represent them. The popular refugee committees, on the other hand, have not been dissolved by Hamas but their role has become insignificant as it is the municipal authorities that run the camps. Tuastad points out that in practice this means that Gaza is the exception with regards to the political representation of refugees in the Middle East, as camp refugees have similar rights to non-refugees and have autonomy to organise their own camp committees (Tuastad 2012).

With Hamas in power in 2007 and the increasing role of Ismail Haniyeh, one of its senior political leaders, in Hamas and in Gaza, Shati camp received greater public attention. Haniyeh himself is from Shati camp and as a result a number of upgrades have taken place, albeit primarily in the area surrounding his house.

Besides population density, Shati's camp faces a number of other obstacles, most of them directly linked to the Occupation and the blockade as with other camps and areas throughout the Gaza Strip. The camp suffers prolonged electricity outages due to a lack of fuel to keep the power stations running. Generators are used widely as are alternative electricity grids and battery systems; when it is dark, Shati becomes immersed in the humming of generators all around. A second direct challenge is the lack of reconstruction materials to rebuild the houses and buildings that have been damaged since 2007, leaving many people without shelter or in severely damaged houses.

Although in many ways Shati is like any other Palestinian refugee camp, what sets it apart is that a substantial part of the refugee population derives its living from fishing and the fisheries sector. Approximately 600 are still actively involved today. The fishing community is tight-knit and located right next to the beach. Shati refugee camp borders Al-Rimal district, known to be a more affluent upper-class district in Gaza that also borders the beach, but with the northern part of it populated by fishermen. This northern part is occupied by fishermen who are not refugees but who have been part of Gaza's original (pre-1948) population and thus have a long tradition of fishing in Gaza. This northern

part also consists of sandy dirt roads and it is difficult to distinguish where Al-Rimal ends and Shati begins: the roads and houses look familiar, and familial relations cross the divide.

According to locals, there are several extended families ranging in size from 150 to 450 people who all derive their income from fishing<sup>8</sup>. Many of them have been doing so for generations and when they became refugee, they re-established their work in the Shati camp. Others they have taken it up when they found themselves dispossessed and unable to find other sources of income. The proximity of the refugee fishing community to the non-refugee fishing community of Al-Rimal might not be a coincidence. Many of the families who have been fishing for generations were connected and maintained relations well before 1948. Nowadays, they all know each other and collaborate in the fishing trade.

The presence of fishing culture in the camp is visible in daily life through graffiti and texts on the doors of the fisherfolk's houses – boats are pictured, often the boat of the owner. This is commonly done out of respect or to mark a celebration. The men often refer to the olden days when all they knew was their streets and the beach, when they used to live, drink and eat the sea, as they say. Many of them, unable to continue fishing, do meet at the beach daily for their cup of coffee, to maintain their relations, to socialise with their long-time friends who they worked the boats with at sea. Others sit at the floor and repair the nets by hand with fast hand and finger movements. Yet again, others work on the boats with what little equipment is available to conduct repairs. They all know each other, and they have all been working in the port since they were 12 or 13 years old. Working at a young age in the port continued until the early 2000s. As a result, young boys would drop out of school to help their fathers at sea. As I will explain later this has affected their ability to find alternative employment due to limited literacy and vocational skills and thus played a crucial role in remaining in the sector even when it no longer provided an income.

Women on the other hand have not had a traditional role in the fishing communities. They have been largely confined to the domestic chores of the household mainly as a result of the traditional roles allocated based on gender in a conservative setting. As many women stated, it was simply 'not done' for women to participate in fishing activities and instead they would ensure that when the men were away at sea the household was in order, thus putting heavy responsibilities on the women as well. With the fishermen now having reduced fishing opportunities and more time spent at home, women remain the anchor of the household and the domestic terrain. They have seen to the development of the children, household budgets and other daily activities. Especially when the men have been away at sea the women had a double burden and many have found themselves working

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<sup>8</sup> Many of the households I visited and people I spoke to elaborate on the fact that there are a few large extended families in the Shati camp who are especially involved in fishing like the Bakr, Abu-Riyala, Al-Hissi, and other families.

hard.<sup>9</sup> With the blockade and reduced income for many fishing families that has resulted, women have been forced to reinvent, improvise, and adapt to ever bigger challenges and have been pushed back from the initial strides they had made. Where previously they saw to the higher education of their children and nutritious food intake, this has now been reduced and many have been forced to re-allocate their household budget lines to ever tighter margins. There have been a few exceptions to women in this traditional role, in particular two women who participated in the research have been known for their role in the fisheries in Shati camp. One is the only female fisher in Gaza, a job and lifestyle she carried forward after her father fell ill and she found herself being the head of the household and, secondly, an elderly woman known for her organisation and trade skills which have supported her extended family extensively.

Finally, the fishing limit enforced by Israel has resulted in the collapse of the fishing sector. As a result of the blockade and its implications, unemployment levels in the camp are very high, especially amongst younger generations. As for the fishing community in Shati camp, a large number of the fishermen have become inactive in the sector and are desperately clinging to their scarce livelihoods as they and their families are pushed deeper into poverty.

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<sup>9</sup> This is not very different from other fishing communities around the world as evidenced in the anthropological work of Sally Cooper Cole 'Women of the Praia' in which she focuses on the role of women as workers.



## Chapter II Methodology

### Chapter Overview

Field research for this dissertation was conducted over an initial period of ten weeks in the summer of 2019 and it was then validated and added on over a period of six weeks in the summer of 2021. In this chapter I describe the methods utilised to collect the data and the rationale behind the choice of these methodologies. I explain why as a partial insider it has been so crucial for my research to spend time, socialise, participate, and have open dialogue with the majority of the interlocutors. I also present my research design including the research questions, data collection methods and related issues. I will elaborate on my approach which included a small but mixed sample of individuals involved in the fishing communities in Gaza's Shati Camp and who have been able to provide different insights and added value to the research.

### Selection of Research Site and Prior Research

The site selected for the study is the Gaza Strip, part of the State of Palestine. In particular, I focused on Shati Refugee Camp on the north-west side of Gaza City. I chose this particular site for several reasons: 1) A large part of the refugees living in this camp is dependent on fishing as a livelihood; 2) it is located directly next to Rimal neighbourhood where a large non-refugee fishing community resides; 3) I had been familiar with the main NGO supporting the fishing community in this area<sup>10</sup>; 4) my main interlocutor originates from this area and thus has an extensive network to rely on; and 5) I visited the Gaza Strip many times over a twenty-year time span, making me familiar with the background, overall context and situation relevant to my area of research.

Further on in this research it will become clear that fishing has been an important part of the Gaza culture and it continues to be so, even under challenging circumstances. It is important for various reasons: 1) it provides livelihoods and income to many Gaza residents; 2) it provides a source of food; and 3) it is a foundation for cultural identification. Moreover, the sea in front of the shore in Gaza is an extension of the land and thus fishermen are seen as crucial actors in maintaining access to the sea and its resources. The fishing communities were independent and relatively wealthy for Palestinian

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<sup>10</sup> Ever since 1997 I have been coming and going to the Gaza Strip. I worked closely with several local organisations, including the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and Al-Mezan – both well-known Palestinian human rights organisations based in the Gaza Strip. As part of this research The Palestinian Center was my entry point and led me quickly to the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC). UAWC has a programme focused on working with fishing and farming communities most affected by the blockade to support their livelihoods and protect their rights.

standards up to the late 1990's, when they first experienced closure. Since the blockade imposed on Gaza in 2007, the fishermen have faced ever more difficulty in continuing their daily routines. Violations carried out against them while international aid has been provided to the Palestinian authorities and the respective development community has influenced the organisation, empowerment, and claim-making processes of the fishing community. For these reasons, the fishing community in Gaza and especially in Shati camp are an appropriate site in which to examine how aid has supported or hampered the fishing community in their empowerment and claim-making efforts and how they have experienced this process.

### Description of Prior Studies

Although I have not conducted any academic studies regarding aid and empowerment amongst Palestinian fishermen in Gaza, I have been directly engaged in the Gaza development community since the late 1990's. My lived experiences thus provided a background for the development of my research and helped me to understand the experiences of the fishing communities. In particular I recall my experiences working with different civil society organisations (CSO), or organisations operating in the vast space between government and population, providing services, advancing legislation, and holding authorities accountable for their actions. This space is also known as the Third Sector, and it too has been engaged with fishing communities in the area. I have been regularly engaged since 2010 with these CSOs in Gaza, providing direct support to the development of strategies and programming as well as the monitoring and evaluation of their projects. This engagement allowed me to become familiar with the main seaport in Gaza, with ongoing violations that are carried out against the fishermen as well as the deteriorating situation of Gaza, in particular for the fishermen.

My direct engagement with the Palestinian community in Gaza has also allowed me to understand the challenges families face on a household level. Living for prolonged periods of time in my in-laws' household has provided me with insights that would have otherwise been hard to come by. This experience has allowed me to appreciate Palestinian culture in general, but more importantly, to understand refugee camp dynamics and daily struggles as well as how families cope, how they remain resilient, and how they continue to live normal lives in abnormal situations.

During my time in Gaza I spoke with many different actors, both individuals in the refugee camps like teachers, nurses, women and youth, but also with civil society workers and with international aid workers attached to International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) or the United Nations (UN). This took place in various settings – formal and informal meetings, during lunch, at the market or the local shop.

Through these conversations I learned about people's different perspectives with regards to aid, development and politics in the Gaza setting. I also learned how it was managed and how, against all odds, people continued to manage. It is this last element – the prolonged coping of communities in adverse conditions – that has been the inspiration for this research plan, which examines aid and its political and social processes and how it has affected the fishing community in Gaza. Overall, I have been able to avail of long-established relationships with individuals and organisations involved in the development community, many of whom provided key insights during my dissertation research.

### Issues of Confidentiality

Aid and claim-making can be a sensitive topic in Gaza. Taking into consideration the ongoing Occupation on the one hand and at times, repressive Palestinian authorities on the other, it was critical that I consider participants' concerns regarding the information they shared with me.

### Informed Consent

It is impossible to discuss the livelihoods of the fishermen and the effects of aid on them without mentioning the challenges associated with these, which are directly linked to power and come from two different corners: 1) Israeli Occupation and 2) Palestinian authorities in the Gaza Strip. I have been aware of this for many years, especially in relation to the challenges put in place by the Israeli Occupation, as many Palestinians and Israelis I knew have been interrogated or arrested, although often under different circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the current shrinking of civic space is putting additional pressure on activists and civilians alike who speak out against injustice, whether against the Israeli Occupation or the Palestinian Authorities and their respective human rights violations. In spite of these circumstances, the people I was introduced to all generously and without hesitation agreed to open their homes to me and welcome me for the day. This was in part due to the support I received from the Gaza local committee coordinator, who supported me in the identification of families and set-up of the dates for visits. Being introduced by him and thus having some form of approval, assured the families and overall fishing community I was welcome and that I should be treated as a welcome friend based on a truthful and respectful exchange. None of those approached refused to participate.

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<sup>11</sup> Although Palestinians are often arrested and imprisoned when perceived to be a security risk, with or without evidence, as for Israelis who are arrested, fined or experience other punitive measures this is a result of them standing up against their government and speaking out on the Occupation and its policies. As a result, there has been a crackdown on several Israeli NGOs including B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence and others. To counter anti-occupation activities, the Israeli government issued a new law in 2016 forcing Israeli NGOs to declare all sources of foreign funding, thus putting them under further pressure.

This allowed me to build easy rapport with a variety of people in the fishing community and outside of it, the directors and leaders of the fishing cooperative, the leaders of the respective local committees, the fishing traders, small scale fishermen, and women too.

Having this facilitated entry into the community provided me with the opportunity to have discussions and dialogues that were characterised by openness and honesty. There were various instances in which participants perceived me as a friend – as I was a friend of a friend, and thus their friend as well. This also facilitated informal conversations regarding their concerns and daily struggles, which have been useful for context and understanding. In addition, my being able to enter the house and spend time with the families in an informal manner also allowed me to engage with other family members who otherwise would not have participated in the dialogue and discussions, such as women, young men and children. As such, in general all participants were happy to participate and none of them showed any distrust towards me or concern about this study's results being used. Although there is contention and potential sensitivity resulting in risk for the participants, they thought the benefits of their participation would outweigh the risks. It also indicated that, according to them, it was safe to participate as they trusted me and my research intent. The participants indicated that I could use anything they had stated, as well as their names and other personal information, so long as it was for the sole purpose of the research, which I have accepted.

I had given extensive thought to risks during the research proposal stage, and again when I mapped the field work process, being familiar with the political context and potential risks involved for the participants. My experience in the Gaza Strip was a great advantage here as I understood the cultural sensitivities and spoke the language.<sup>12</sup> My professional experience as an evaluator further helped in having various tools and manners to break the ice when necessary, to introduce myself in a pleasant manner and to understand the ins and outs of conducting structured and semi-structured interviews. However, the biggest advantage was that I could help the participants feel comfortable to speak openly and build a special trust. This was evidenced by many of the participants who would ask after me long after I had left Gaza, some befriended me on Facebook and others asked me to come and spend more time with them, inviting me for lunch or dinner.

Although I established a quick rapport, I also felt it was very important to keep the informed consent process as simple and straightforward as possible. I thus relied on obtaining verbal informed consent while also audio-recording the conversations with those I was less familiar with. This also

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<sup>12</sup> I started learning Arabic in 1997 at the University of Amsterdam as part of my Drs. Degree in European Studies. During that period, I obtained scholarships to study Arabic and Politics at Birzeit University in the West Bank in 1997. From 1999 until 2004, with visa breaks, I lived in the West Bank and further expanded my knowledge of Arabic. I am a near fluent speaker and have used my skills in different social and work settings which has enabled me to conduct the dialogues and other data collection part of this research in Arabic.

facilitated the process for those fishermen and women who would have felt less confident in writing and reading. However, for those I spoke with several times I only obtained verbal informed consent once. I did not continue to highlight the fact I was a researcher but rather relied on my engagement and direct familiarity with the respective participants based on the previously conducted trustful and respectful exchange I had established. This was only the case with those who participated extensively in the research: the local committee coordinator, the facilitator, and the programme coordinator.

#### Conducting interviews with audio-recording

The situation in Gaza is very volatile and I was mindful of that during my field work preparation. One of the main concerns was that, due to unforeseen circumstances, I might be forced to return home unprepared and at short notice, threatening my ability to obtain further information, or even worse, risking a loss of data. A second risk I identified concerned difficulties in translation of the data collected. Although I conducted all interviews, meetings and other data collection events in Arabic, and although I am well versed in speaking Arabic, I had not practiced notetaking while conducting these interviews, and nor would I have known beforehand in which language I would conduct the notetaking.

In order to mitigate both risks I opted, when granted approval by the participant, to also audio-record the dialogues and conversation I had with the participants. I thus chose for a combination of methods, notetaking by hand and audio-recording of all prepared meetings. As explored by other anthropologists a mixed method can be helpful in increasing efficiency and reliability of data (Tessier 2012). This helped me to increase efficiency and accuracy in the data collection process as well as to create a simple audio-archive which provided a further added value by allowing to go back to the actual environment in which the data collection event took place, thus helping me to recall the scenes, the environment, and other specificities with regards to the locations and houses I visited.

As mentioned above, all participants agreed to the audio-recording process. However, I was sensitive to the presence of an audio-recording device in the room, which at times could frighten people, make the interview or dialogue more formal than it would otherwise have been, and therefore create some form of distance effecting the trust between myself and the participant. I therefore opted to use the mobile phone voice-recording option for all audio-recordings. The presence of a phone is entirely normal for everyone and helped to avoid any sense of threat or formality, enabling smooth and open dialogues. I would let the phone record for the duration of the dialogue, which could be for up to seven hours at a time, and save it on the phone and my online secure folder.

While the audio-recording was running I would also be taking notes in a mixed-language approach, which is to say, I would write in English, phonetic Arabic and even in Dutch, creating notes that it is highly unlikely anyone other than myself could interpret. This form of notetaking, as with the audio-recording, provided an added value as through practice I would always choose the language of the word that was most suitable to describe the situation as well as most familiar to me. This facilitated the overall translation process while also maintaining authenticity in the notes. However, due to this 'lost in language' approach, I had to ensure that I would transcribe the notes into standard English immediately after coming home from a day of fieldwork, to guarantee that the essence of the notetaking was as clear as possible and also to avoid any backlogs arising.

### Dealing with Vulnerability

Another critical ethical element I was confronted by was working with vulnerable people, or rather, taking people's time and space while they were in a vulnerable position, especially in terms of their financial and mental situation. While in Gaza I met informally at a friend's plot of land with two Japanese journalists who suffered from the same challenge. It should be noted that in the summer of 2019 Gaza was just months away from being a place declared 'unliveable and uninhabitable' by the United Nations, as foreseen in its 2012 report (United Nations Country Team 2012). Being both a partial insider and a development specialist gave me an advantage as I was well acquainted with the situation in the Gaza Strip, even when dire, and I had been exposed to and worked with vulnerable families in many different settings throughout my career. However, what I was unprepared for was that this time I had nothing to offer to the participants. Rather, I would arrive at their homes and community spaces, be welcomed and offered coffee, tea and lunch – but unable to return the favour. This I found difficult to deal with, especially when dialogues and conversations could last the whole day. According to ethical guidelines one would adopt a do-no-harm approach, which I was thankfully very familiar with. In addition, I would also really 'be there' – always fully engaged, interested, and listening – which remain the basic aspects of qualitative research in anthropological tradition. Participants often know if you have genuine intent or not and I felt this was confirmed by one of the participants when she received a phone call asking her to participate in an interview for an international journalist. She refused outright and said in the phone that it would waste her time. After she finished the call, I said I was also wasting her time and I apologised for that. Instead, she said I wasn't as I was just on her sofa listening to her and 'hanging out', rather than being interviewed.

Notwithstanding her genuine remark, I felt my listening and 'being there' was insufficient and I found it hard to digest that being a witness to their lives was my main aim and role in this research. Two Japanese journalists felt similarly, albeit with them being in different positions. We discussed the

options, providing cash or bringing gifts would have been one option, and one of the journalists opted for that. Instead, upon returning home, I have remained in touch with the local coordinator and offered my free time and skills to the organisation, which has been working with fishermen to defend and protect their rights. This way I feel I have been able to give back to the wider fishing community and continue, in some way and with at least some of the participants, a trustful and respectful exchange.

## Research Design

This section describes the overall research design of the dissertation. I begin by presenting the research questions that have been derived from the theoretical literature and research objectives presented in this study. I then describe the dominant research methods – namely, immersion and my experience in that – and then deliberate on each of the data collection methods employed in the study, including (1) literature review, (2) participant observation and dialogue, (3) participant observation and participation in meetings, and (4) observation at site visits and (5) small talk. This will be followed by a description of each of the stakeholder groups included in this study. I will highlight and account for the limited number of stakeholders from which I could draw. Then I will describe the data analysis technique I used in the process and how the small sample size has influenced this process. Finally, I will shed some light on my position as a woman and a partial insider conducting research with primarily men and the implications for the study.

## Research Questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, I developed a set of research questions, each one of them having a specific purpose to obtain a certain strand of information, which would feed into my overall research question and dissertation objective.

Question: What is the social and cultural role of fishing in Gaza?

Question: How has the situation of the fishing communities changed since 2006/07?

Question: What is the current structure of fisheries management in Gaza?

Question: How and in what forms has aid been provided to and received by the fishing community in Gaza?

Question: What impact has this aid had on the organisation and management of the fishing community?

Question: How has the organisation of the fishermen and their communities affected their position and situation vis-à-vis 1. Official management structures and 2. Incoming aid.?

To answer these questions I conducted detailed research making use of different data collection methods which are described next.

## Data Collection

### Literature Review

I began researching and reading on coping mechanisms back in 2004 as part of my initial intent to gain a better understanding of the cultural and social processes of economic coping in Gaza. These readings have been instrumental in preparing my first steps for my extensive literature review. As in qualitative research, the literature review focused on the main theoretical concepts that I would use to frame my research including anthropology of humanitarianism, aid critiques, the indigenous concept of Sumud, everyday resistance, and empowerment and claim-making. The research of these topics included searching ISCTE's library, but I benefitted more from researching international platforms with extensive collections on Palestine, aid, anthropology, empowerment. These collections included books, academic journals, and electronic databases. I also conducted open-source research that included various reports, data and fact sheets produced by think-tanks, the UN and INGOs and which I was familiar with from my previous experiences.

The case of Palestine has been well researched, and many resources are available to obtain a description of the place and to contextualise it historically and culturally. More is available about the West Bank, especially more recent research as the blockade on Gaza has severely reduced research opportunities for international scholars. In addition, local scholars in Gaza have mainly focused on political and social aspects, especially as there is no anthropology department in any of the Gaza universities, and limited anthropological research has been completed over the last decade or so. I would therefore classify the majority of the literature as either historical or political-economic accounts and descriptions of the situation in Gaza, or wider Palestine. When researching for historical context or data on the fishing communities in Gaza there is even less available. Not even a handful of academic resources describe the history, the communities, and the experiences of these communities. On the other hand, ever since the blockade has come into being there have been very regular updates on human rights violations suffered by the fishermen and the impact it has had on their lives in terms of financial hardship and loss of livelihoods. However, these are not academic articles, but rather online reports published by the international development community. To really gain insights into the lives of the fishing communities in Gaza it was thus necessary to rely largely on sources found and data collected in the field. There was one treasure handed to me – an unpublished report developed by a Gazan researcher who described and named many of the cultural aspects relating to fishing communities in Gaza, such as the names of boats and materials, as well as a number of songs, poems



and rhymes that fishermen have traditionally sung while at sea. My main interlocutor provided me with full access to this special report in its original Arabic language.

Once I arrived in Gaza, I also searched collections that were available to me including early accounts on the closures of the fishing zone. I obtained access to NGO libraries as well as to fishing families' personal collections of photographs and maps. Although very important to my research to establish some account of the situation in the past, it was also sad to learn that so little has been documented about the lives, experiences, and practices of a community.

Whereas I have been able to use the literature review to elaborate on historical facts and context, it has also provided me with much information relevant to my research questions. Documents and reports as well as development programme documents allowed me to gain an understanding of the processes and organisation of the local fishing community committees. These also demonstrated the link between fishing communities and aid and the results obtained as a result of this relationship.

### Getting there

Getting there was such an important part of this research, not merely because it informed the findings of this dissertation but because being in Gaza has been impossible for so many scholars for so long. Hence the severe shortage of field work conducted by non-Gazan academic scholars. Before elaborating on the details of the different data collection methods adopted, I would like to shed some light on the visit to Gaza itself. By the summer of 2019, the summer I planned my field work for, Gaza was under a tight blockade in its thirteenth year. This had tremendous implications for getting into the research site, mainly because it was almost impossible to enter the Gaza Strip and could only be achieved through two main entry points: i) Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza and ii) Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt. Either of these entry points required previous approval or coordination with Israeli or Egyptian authorities, respectively. Although more dangerous, we (myself, my husband and our two children aged 8 and 6 at the time) had a better chance through the Egyptian border and had previously taken that route.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> My husband originates from Bureij Camp in Gaza. We previously used the Rafah border crossing on three occasions: 2012, 2013 and 2015. In 2012 the entry and exit were relatively easy as Egypt was governed by the Muslim Brotherhood. With Sisi coming to power in Egypt, this affected the entry and exit to Gaza. In 2013 we got stuck for 6 months and in 2015 we got stuck for 4 months. The Sinai desert is a militarised zone, only open to Egyptians living there and Palestinians from Gaza, and their family members if registered on their Palestinian Identity Cards. A Palestinian Identity Card is an official Israeli registration document, indicating unique number in the Israeli register of Palestinian population. Although Palestinian passports, issued by the Palestinian Authority, are required for international travel, it is the ID card that is crucial to enter Palestine as it outlines who the family members are of the card holder (husband/wife, children). Only when registered on the ID card one is eligible to enter Gaza via Rafah.

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2019

Location: Rafah – Egypt/Gaza border

We made it! It took us 21 hours from Cairo to our temporary home, the house of my in-laws in Bureij Camp, Gaza a mere 350km, but with a lot of hassle. We arrived in Cairo on Saturday morning and had already been trying to identify the best way to get down to Rafah. We asked my husband's cousin who lives in Cairo and he confirmed it is true that there is an 'alternative' way to get there. We opted to take that riskier but shorter way. Thus, we left at 10h30 Sunday evening and drove to Ismailiyya where we changed cars. We entered a second car which took us to the Martyr Ahmad Hamdy tunnel after which we turned onto off-road. We drove for four hours over dirt roads and agricultural fields always parallel to the Suez Canal north-eastwards avoiding the Egyptian checkpoints. It was pitch dark and the off-road areas were difficult, at times dangerous. After four hours we stopped in the middle of a dirt road where we changed cars again, back to the first car. We drove to a coffee shop where we waited til AlArish town would lift its curfew at 6am. Right at 6am we continued only to be surprised by an unexpected checkpoint. The sergeant controlling the checkpoint was known to be extremely tough and unpredictable and he did not let any Palestinian through. We had no choice but to wait. There weren't many cars as the Maadiya, the boat ferry to cross Suez north east of Cairo, had been closed for three days and thus there were only those there who either took our road or who had already been stuck waiting for several days. Families with small children had been travelling in a car for four days, without proper sanitation along the way, no place to sleep or get proper food. The children were carrying the scars of the hundreds of mosquito bites they suffered. After three hours waiting and being constantly humiliated, we were lined up. However, our driver got really edgy and did not want to continue. He did not have the required paperwork and would risk his license. He told us to get into another car. Hence, we moved into a 'public taxi', we squeezed ourselves into the 3<sup>rd</sup> row backseats, thinking it would be a short drive left of 90 minutes. We finally made it through the checkpoint, only to see more of them ahead which were however easily navigated, until we reached Arrisha checkpoint where another detailed search of people and luggage took place. Cars were lined up again in the street. Child street vendors roaming around with coffee and tea and grapes, a small mini market selling few things and the local health center next door for use of bathroom. We got out of the car to stretch our legs, have a cold drink, and wait at the side of the road. The temperature was rising, we were after all in the middle of the desert. We were told that normally the waiting here is very long. It seems we were lucky as we only had 5 cars in front of us, an hour waiting max. And so I took the kids to the bathroom in the Health Centre, walking there, to be turned back because we needed to present our passports. We went back to get the passports and entered the health center again. The brother of the driver waited outside for us as our car had moved on to the search place where the Egyptian soldiers and intelligence were present. The brother of the driver walked with us and he knew the leader of the checkpoint and immediately we were waved through and it saved us a lot of stress, hassle and valuable time. Everyone in the car now was happy and felt better. Onwards to the border we all thought! Because that was the last checkpoint, and we were nearly there. But then we saw military action in the street and we heard that the border was temporarily closed. The closer we came, the more obstacles we faced. Again, we got out of the cars. We had been in a car for 15 hours straight without breaks or meals and it was hot, and we were tired. Still, it was nothing compared to the other cars that had been driving in convoy with us and whose passengers had been going on for days, as expected energy levels were low and frustration was rising. Finally, we saw the tanks moving away, the path was cleared. Now we could see the border buildings appearing at the horizon. We made it to the border. Once there we found nothing but chaos and humiliation. Just getting into the building to get screened took 90 minutes in a chaotic line. Then onwards to get the stamps and submit exit forms. There we had to wait for another three hours until we got out paperwork after which we paid the exit fees and went on to the bus that would take us to the

other side. Even being on the bus took forever, we got screened and checked again and it was extremely hot as the bus was still at a standstill. Finally, we moved towards the Palestinian side – a homecoming awaited us with luggage taken politely from us and being dropped onto the carousel, while we entered the air-conditioned main building and submitted our passports. We waited a little while and all was approved only to be told to wait for senior officers to come to take our statements. My husband was asked some questions about us and where we came from and the officers wrote down our family history: marriage, children etc, even though we had done this process several times before. We were the last ones to leave the building, but the smell of Gaza had reached us. We got in a taxi and drove home. No one expected us on Monday, such early arrival. It was a moment of great joy when Umm AlAbed, my mother in-law, opened the door. Soon the house filled with family and friends and would not be empty for another five days. Bringing greetings is an important part of Arabic culture and thus the person who returned for a visit is welcomed as a hero. All friends and family came to visit but in an established order of hierarchy. First degree relatives first, then uncles and aunts and so on with last the acquaintances, neighbours and others. After all visitors had visited a first time, it started from the beginning all over again. As usual that is when I start to look for places to escape to because sometimes, I needed some privacy. The storeroom became my private room, not only did it provide a sense of privacy it was also relatively cool in an environment that can be oppressive in terms of both heat and intensity. It was there that I put my mattress on the floor every evening and tidied it every morning. No sheets were needed in summer, instead I slept in the wide long dress, locally known as a '*shwahl*' that I only ever wear in Gaza. I was home.

The getting there is not only important because of the restricted access for foreigners to the Gaza Strip but it also demonstrates the immersion process one undergoes when embarking on this long, tiring, and daunting trip. Just by undergoing and completing it, one completes an experience that only Palestinians experience.

### Participant Observation and Dialogue

How was I going to do justice to the voices of the Gaza fishermen? This question has occupied me since I registered for my PhD degree. How could I make sure I would be able to include their voices and their contributions and to let them speak through my field work, how could I let the complexities of their lives transpire in a dissertation? I believe I am a good listener, and I believe you can only be as good as writer as you are a listener. I was an evaluator before starting this PhD and it provided me with great understanding and insight into the importance of listening. If I was unable to provide any form of relief or had little to offer in return for the time they had given me, I could listen. I listened to their complex life stories, I listened to the daily violations they experienced, I listened to the many historical anecdotes they told me about, both the good times and the bad times, the past and the present. However, in the end, the participants wanted to know what all this listening would result in, how I would portray them and more importantly, how others would perceive them and their situation, who would listen to them other than me? Hadn't they tried before?

While I was sitting down in the living room of one of the fisherwomen, she and I together on the sofa in a dark room as electricity was cut off and a sole cup of black coffee was left standing on the coffee table, she told me:

“I told my story so many times, I am in the newspapers all over Europe, but who is making a change to our lives? This is a political issue and we do not have the power to make the changes. When will the international community listen and act?”

Well, I replied with empathy aware of the differences in our lives, that is very difficult, but it seems that there are some minor changes, the road is long though. There is a lot of solidarity around the world but we need to find new mechanisms to change political will.”

I had captured such dialogues in my field notebook. Dialogue has been the approach that I have taken in my ethnographic research. Mainly because I *wanted* to have a dialogue, I wanted to listen, and I wanted to relay and include their voices to the greatest extent possible. I thus found that dialogue was the best way to produce the ethnographic knowledge I was after.

In many of the dialogues the participants expressed deep and honest critiques of politics and related theories of power and dominance. They connected their situation to the global fight for justice and to global political concerns. As Tedlock (1987) contends, dialogue depends largely on translation and interpretation. This is of major importance to me as I was at times an insider, speaking the same language and being able to immerse in their culture. As Tedlock argues, even though one speaks the same language and there is a direct dialogue, there is always an interpretation inside one’s head. More importantly, he stresses the fact that if perfect symmetry existed in dialogue there would be no opportunity for ethnography because, after all, “*what is ethnography if it is not the phenomenology of asymmetry, of otherness or foreignness*” (1987 p.329). It is this asymmetry that I have been trying to capture in this research, whilst aiming to include the voices in my research through direct quotes and narrative descriptions of the dialogues I had. However, the interpretation of these dialogues is my own and although I shared some, not all, of the dialogues with some of the interlocutors there is a discrepancy amongst my interpretation and their interpretation – that is the result of the dialogical approach as described by Bakhtin (1981:329):

There are no “neutral” words or forms – words and forms that belong to “no one”; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents.....Each word tastes of the context and the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones... are inevitable in the word. (1981 p.293)

Bakhtin and Tedlock thus claim that there is no such thing as a neutral dialogue and that in essence that is exactly its richness as it is about the discovery of the Other. As such, I do not claim to be neutral in my interpretation of my dialogues, although I try to describe the richness that I was able to extract from it in aiming to preserve the voice of the participants and the context in which it occurred.

Participant observation often happened in tandem with dialogue, as is to be expected in ethnographic research. Participant observation occurred at several levels throughout my field work and physical presence in Gaza. Spradley (1980) explains the different types of participatory observation one can be involved in when engaging in this method of data collection. As for my case, I consider my presence in Gaza to be one of active participation: embracing culture, customs, language and related cultural aspects, and becoming nearly fully immersed. In many ways that is because of my previous lived experiences in Gaza and Palestine, through which I became 'one of them'. However, for the research itself I was a moderate participant when engaging directly with the fishing communities. I did not have previous knowledge or relationships within these communities. Nevertheless, I was well equipped to understand and immerse to the extent necessary to obtain the best results, to be accepted, to gain trust and respectful rapport. My active participation in other aspects of life in Gaza definitely contributed to being able to easily establish that moderate participant approach in my field work as explained by Merriam et al (2001).

The more one is like the participants in terms of culture, gender, race, socio-economic class and so on, the more it is assumed that access will be granted, meanings shared, and validity of findings assured. (Merriam et al., 2001 p.406)

As I identified my grade of participation there was still a need to position myself within the fishing community. This type of positioning needs to be negotiated in a manner in which one is in some way 'at home' or 'one of us' without becoming fully immersed (Hall 2000). I moved between being an 'insider' when I was with my family in-law to an in/outsider when setting up rapport and engaging with the different interlocutors. As explained by Merriam et al (2001), there are many different characteristics that influence these positions. The gender dimension was highly unusual, as I was often the only woman around the table with primarily male fishermen in the room. However, I did not feel this affected my relationships as I could compensate by adapting to the local culture, especially by my use of the colloquial Arabic language spoken in Gaza. On the other hand, being a woman also allowed me to enter households and spend time with the women in the house, drink coffee and tea and have lunch, which otherwise would not have been possible. Personal characteristics can thus be an advantage and a disadvantage depending on the group you are engaging with. This leads to the crucial element of reflexivity in my approach as separating the personal view from the scientific documentation remains controversial, and as discussed above, neutrality is an almost impossible mission in ethnography, not to say it is to be avoided as it would lose the richness of the research.

Indeed, the participant also listens to me and asks me various questions, criticising me and my work or approach. This often resulted in very balanced and interesting dialogues that could go deep into the respective subject matter, whilst also creating a closer bond between myself and the

participant. Moreover, reflexivity allows for deeper introspection, which I have tried to include in various aspects of this study through my diary notes to demonstrate my emotions and thoughts throughout the field work process. I have tried to engage with my own thoughts, perceptions, and assumptions in order to portray my own experiences as well as those of the fishing community, rather than my sole analysis. My aim from the outset has been to relay the voices of the fishermen through their own words and narratives and to make readers engage with their daily situation. In *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1978), Rabinow adopted this type of reflexivity for readers to have a better understanding of the matter and a stronger connection to the study, allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions from it. I am in no way skilled enough to do the same but as with Rabinow (1978), or Crapanzano (2010), this reflexivity will allow my subjective field memoirs to blend with objective ethnography to the extent possible to give a realistic account of the lives of the fishermen.

This account has been based on evidence extracted from conversations and visits undertaken over a combined 16-week period in Gaza in 2019 and 2021. Although I enjoyed easy rapport with my interlocutors, I engaged in a relatively small number of household visits – a total of six, each lasting at least one day from 10am until 5pm. I began by building rapport before discussing the situation at hand, directing dialogue in a manner that encouraged open and fair conversation about the effects of aid, the situation they were in, what could be changed, and many other aspects of fishermen life. I also conducted observations of field sites like the Gaza seaport, which I visited at least once a week to observe the fishermen, to walk around by myself, or to visit as a ‘tourist’. In all instances the visits served the purpose of increasing my understanding of the Gaza fishing culture, to observe interactions between fishermen, to assess damage to the ships and nets, and to observe repair activities. I also visited the Tawfeeq Cooperative office and facilities, where I saw first-hand the storage procedures, ice-making machine and other equipment, and the fish auctions – however limited they were. These visits gave me a more technical understanding of the fish value chain in the Gaza Strip and the key obstacles in these. Finally, I visited the households and neighbourhoods where the fishermen reside, the camp surroundings, the walk to the beach and the port in front of their houses. I observed the houses from the outside, which at times were sprayed with graffiti depicting family boats that either perished at sea, were confiscated or were still at sea – all demonstrating a pride and resilience I often witnessed before.

While visiting the households, often on a floor in a multiple storey building, I would also meet other family members, the elders, the youth, the uncles and others, providing me a sense of the extent of the families and how many people would be engaged not only in the fishing trade but by now would all work on one boat – relying on it as a sole source of income. I should note that I had a limited official schedule while in Gaza. Most of my work took place ‘on-the-go’. The household or family meetings

were arranged in advance, but all other efforts took place with an hour's notice. This was mainly a result of me being engaged with the local NGO, which would not have a set agenda or meeting hours with the fishing community but would engage them upon the latter's request, based on need or simply when they had free time. As a result, I followed the same procedures and routines. This often resulted in me visiting the NGO office in the morning, supporting any work activities and discovering whether there would be anything happening later on in the day that I could attend. As a result, I spent a lot of time with the local coordinator of the Local Committees, allowing for an exchange of information that otherwise would have been obscured or lost. These observations have been crucial in understanding and contextualising the fishing community in Gaza.

Upon my return I continued to engage with the Local Coordinator, having correspondence via Facebook Messenger to obtain missing information. I would develop a set of questions he could answer and he would look for photographs that might help me position the fishermen in recent Gaza history.

### Sampling

The main sampling strategy I employed for the dialogues was the snowballing technique or referral sampling technique (Bernard 2006). I had specific information I wanted to gather from each participant and in collaboration with the local coordinator we could set out with a small group of households that would have these lived experiences and knowledge that would be willing to share with me. In addition, this method was well-suited to the context as the overall fishing community in Shati Camp in Gaza is relatively small and close-knit and these participants might otherwise not have been identified through other forms of sampling. Although I had no previous knowledge or contacts within this specific fishing community, the local coordinator and myself conducted two meetings to identify key contacts including participants from the Tawfeeq cooperative. The snowballing sampling method also demonstrated that the fishing community is small and close knit, as in all instances the participants mentioned the same names to be included in the research.

### Small Talk

Would you like some coffee? Have a seat. Where did you say you are coming from? Do you have any children? What do you think of Gaza? Oh, you speak the language beautifully, exactly like a Gazan. Yes, yes, the political situation is difficult, here is our voucher to go to the shop to buy food. Oh, you say you have been here before, when and to whom? In Bureij camp, is that where you in-laws live? What is the family name? Are they from Sawafeer (ed. 1948 village name)? We are from close to there too. Would you like another coffee, tea, juice? You stay for lunch, right?

We won't have fish though, our boat is in state of repair now, you know with the violations we haven't been able to repair it.

The final sentence was the moment that small talk became informative and worthwhile, yet another moment of serendipity while at work, maybe not by chance anyway, but rather important and informative for my fieldwork. As Driessen and Jansen (2013) describe in their article, making small talk can be of more importance to the production of field notes than doing interviews. When I am in Gaza, I feel I spend a lot of time just chatting, socialising, having coffees, hanging around. I never feel I have a moment 'off' or that my field workday is over, so to speak. Instead, the conversation goes on whether at the beginning when meeting a new family, when hanging out in the office, when commuting in a taxi or passing by shops on the way home. At every moment, each experience is laden with small talk and brief, but often intense, interactions. As Driessen and Jansen argue small talk requires a level of constant responsiveness which might bring new or sudden encounters, or serendipity while at work.

Malinowski (1923) coined a term for speech that is intended to create and maintain social relations as 'phatic communication'. Malinowski held the opinion that phatic communication, although empty of meaning, is not only a crucial first step in establishing rapport but also in maintaining relationships, opening doors for new encounters and the sharing of new information. Thus, this empty chat has been found to be detrimental for ethnography, as without social relationships there would be no useful exchange of information.

During my fieldwork it has been this small talk that brought me new encounters and insights that I otherwise could have easily missed if I had stuck to more rigid forms of communication. Ethnography in general requires flexibility and openness to receive and learn. I used small talk throughout my field work with the interlocutors, to keep relations going and to observe activities later on. For example, when some of the fishermen would come to the office of the local NGO to get their contributions while I was present, I engaged them in small talk and as a result got introduced to other fishermen who also invited me to their house to share information and become an interlocutor. Another instance I recorded was on location in the Gaza seaport when I observed the engagement between some of the fishermen who benefitted from one of the NGO schemes in boat repair and the respective programme officers. While observing I roamed around and made small talk with the fishermen, engaging in some jokes and photography, which facilitated my blending into the community.

#### Fieldnotes Diary

I captured the dialogues and my observations in a diary. I would spend every day at the end of the day another 30 minutes or so to write my daily reflections on what had happened, what I witnessed, what



I had done with whom and where so I would be able to keep a good record of the details that one easily misses after a little while, especially when writing up a thesis two years later. One of the main peculiarities I found when writing these notes was that I wouldn't keep to one language rather it was all over the place in Arabic and English, Dutch and even Portuguese. It reminded me of the text used by Belton (2009) describing Malinowski's note taking as a 'chaotic account'.

#### Description of Stakeholder Groups and Study Participants

I conducted a total of seven in-depth and sometimes recurrent house visits between July and August 2019 and August 2021, and a further 20 interviews with other stakeholders. Although I had a plan ahead of arriving in Gaza, my sampling and interview strategies changed once I arrived in Gaza and began working with local coordinators and facilitators as I realised what a small number of individuals made up the different stakeholder groups, and the even smaller number who were involved in the nexus of aid, resistance and empowerment in some form.

I also made the decision that although I could have extended the number of interviews to expand the wider region of Gaza fisherfolk or the economy linked to the fisheries sector, I decided to focus my research on the specific process of aid and empowerment amongst the fisherfolk in the Shati Camp.

Table 2.1: Overview of research participants

| NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH GROUP |              |                              |
|--|--------------|------------------------------|
| Stakeholder Group                      | Number       | Total interviews / dialogues |
| NGOs                                   | 2 NGOs       | 4                            |
| Fisherfolk                             | 7 Households | 18                           |
| Cooperatives                           | 1            | 1                            |
| Total                                  |              | 23                           |

Two NGOs were selected, both of which provide direct assistance to the fisherfolk in the form of legal assistance, capacity building initiatives, and other support activities. The staff responsible for the implementation of activities has been interviewed. The engagement with NGOs and their staff also allowed insights into project reports and data and I was able to join for field trips to observe activities.

The fisherfolk were visited on household-level. I would often encounter the father and mother and children all waiting for me. Following introductions and a group dialogue, I would assess who in the family would be most useful to engage with further. This would often be the father and the mother as well as the sons if they were already involved in fishing activities. Finally, I made visits to the Tawfeeq Cooperative where I conducted focus group discussions and side-conversations with the Director and members of the Board who were lifelong fishermen.

While in terms of numbers the engagement might seem limited, the quality I managed to obtain by spending time on a daily basis with the programme staff and fishermen was invaluable.

### Data Analysis

During dialogue, conversation and interviews I would record participants' responses in a notebook, while discreetly audio-recording to ensure I would not miss out or misinterpret any of the Arabic as all interviews with households and fisherfolk were conducted in Arabic. Upon completion I would draft vignettes or small thematic briefs based on analysis of the qualitative data, which served as a source for further and deeper analysis ahead of drafting.

Triangulation has also been crucial in this research as it allows for crosschecking data with other sources of information. In this case I would cross-check against observations, other interview sources or project data.

This was especially important due to the highly contentious nature of the topic and the different views of the actors. However, I must admit that I have been unable to triangulate any data with the Department of Fisheries administrated by Hamas due my inability to access them.

### Chapter Summary

The research design and methodology above have been employed to conduct an ethnographic study of the fisherfolk in Gaza and their engagement with aid. Although the research topic has been contentious for various reasons and the group for data collection been limited, the use of ethnographic methods combined with local language and understanding, allowed me to access what I perceive to be the realities of everyday life of the fisherfolk in Gaza.

## Chapter III Concepts and Theory

This chapter aims to provide insights into the concepts and the theories that are used within this study, as well as to provide an overview of Palestinian anthropology over the past several decades. The chapter is divided into two parts, with the first covering theories and concepts that have been employed in an effort to provide a theoretical lens through which to read this research, whereas the second elaborates on the specific case of Palestine as an area of anthropological research. A central purpose of this research is to provide an ethnographic account of contemporary Palestinian subjectivity under chronic humanitarian conditions, thereby contributing to scholarship on modern Middle Eastern studies, the anthropology of humanitarianism, and critical development studies.

This research brings theories of power to life through ethnographic research in an area known for its complexity, therewith shedding light on practices originating within empowerment and resistance to transform unjust power relations and contribute to social change. As these practices have been developed and organised in a situation of chronic crisis, aid forms the third component of the research. This research aims to understand what practices have been adopted, how actions and responses have been organised, and how this relates to historical, social and political factors as well as the relationships between the fishermen/folk and other stakeholders.

In order to understand how fisherfolk everyday life has been affected by aid, I draw on three fields of study: (1) Resistance anthropology, (2) Empowerment Theory and (3) Humanitarianism / Development Critique.

Drawing from resistance anthropology literature and relating it to empowerment theory will provide a framework that allows for deeper examination of the effects of aid on Gaza fishermen under a period of prolonged occupation and humanitarian crisis. Building upon the literature I focus on the broader historical, social, and political factors to demonstrate how these influence and impact fishermen's resistance and empowerment practices. While doing so I link to the politics of aid, which helps to understand the relations between people and actions in a humanitarian setting.

State of the Art: Everyday resistance, Empowerment and Aid Critique

Resistance

News coverage of Palestine in recent decades has often broadcasted images of protest and dissent, indicating that resistance is a regular aspect in everyday contemporary life. Power itself has been sufficiently controversial not to have a single definition of it within the literature. This is evidenced by

Foucault's and Hoffman's opposing views, with the former contending that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault 2008 ) and Hoffman countering that 'where there is resistance, there is power' (Hoffman 1999 p. 674). Thus, resistance remains a topic for further exploration, indeed it is an area of study that began receiving attention with the introduction of Marxist and post-colonial theories when 'subaltern voices' (Guha 1983) added to the debate and shed light on the perception of power and resistance amongst those who had until then been silenced. The opening of this anthropological area resulted in a deeper drive to engage with the concept of resistance, which really came to fruition through the influential ethnographic works of James Scott and his interpretation of everyday resistance (1985 and 1992), which departed from the hegemony / domination dichotomy which had been common until then. Scott's idea is that resistance and oppression are not static but rather in constant flux, and that by focusing on the visible we miss out on the 'invisible'. In other words, he distinguishes between overt and covert resistance, with the latter being non-observable acts of cultural resistance or non-cooperation carried out over time. His findings were particularly characteristic of less politically organised social groups, such as small landholders. During his fieldwork Scott collected evidence of these groups being involved in everyday forms of resistance, such as "theft, pilfering, feigned ignorance, shirking or careless labor, foot-dragging, secret trade and production for sale, sabotage of crops, livestock, and machinery, arson, flight" (Scott 1990, p.188). Scott continued his research on invisible forms of resistance in a second influential work on the subject, in which he explores the notion of "hidden transcripts", referring to a critique of power that takes place out of the public eye. He provides as one of many examples the case of slaves' theft of agricultural crops they had produced themselves, as an act to reclaim ownership (Scott 1992).

What made Scott's work innovative at the time was that it was largely based on ethnography digging into the lives of those who had previously been invisible in political life. This was a clear move away from the more rigid political theories that explored the concept of hegemony and resistance as a dichotomy. However, it also allowed for more controversy about its findings.

Gutmann (1993), for example, critiqued Scott by arguing for a need to study both overt and covert forms of resistance as well as the relations between them, rather than prescribing what forms of resistance should be researched. But in my view that is what the studies of Scott have achieved, increasing our understanding and deepening the debate on different forms of resistance within various contexts by providing insight on the acts of marginalised groups. Another critique put forward by Mitchell (1990) is that those oppressed 'choose' their form of covert resistance over direct confrontation, assuming that they are able to make such rational choices as opposed to being subjected to other factors implicit in the power context. It might indeed be ill-advised to assume that subordinated groups would have sufficient agency to decide on whether to engage in overt or covert

resistance, however Scott's view is that subordinate groups are not merely passive but do have a 'power within', rather than being mere subjects to power. He has thus been able to introduce new dynamics to the field of domination and resistance that have enriched the debate and opened a new field of research beyond the 'either / or' approach of power and into the daily lives of those subjected to these powers, coining therewith the concept of 'everyday resistance'. This exploration on the concept of everyday resistance has also allowed research to be completed in previously unexplored social spaces, such as the workplace (Huzell 2005), the family (Holmberg and Enander 2004), and gay/queer spaces (Myslik 1996; Camp 2004).

Besides exploring everyday resistance in social spaces, the concept has also been applied to different categories of people, as in Scott's work on peasants, but also for example migrants (Charles T. Lee 2016). The concept of everyday resistance has also been studied with regards to women and their different struggles (Riessman 2000, Esposito, Matos and Bosworth 2020, Jenkins 2017) and has even been 'engenderised' (Hart 1991) as a critique against or moving beyond Scott's class-based approach. Last but not least, there have been significant works on everyday resistance amongst the Palestinians, which I elaborate on in the second part of this chapter.

While multiple studies have been completed in the field of everyday resistance around different themes and categories, there have been limited attempts at bringing this into a more solid analytical framework. Scott made an initial effort in his *Domination of the Arts*, where he identified two forms of resistance: public and disguised resistance, which he set out against three forms of domination, thus resulting in a total of six types of resistance (Scott 1985, Table 6.1). He thereby attempted to establish categories of resistance. According to Vinthagen and Johansson (2013), one of the main critiques on 'everyday resistance' as a concept is that it risks labelling too many other expressions as "resistance". Hollander and Einwohner (2004) attempted to conceptualise the term and create some standardisation. In doing so they identified two criteria for general agreement, active behaviour and opposition, and two criteria that were deemed very contentious, namely, recognition and intent (2004, p.538 and p. 541). In their work they highlighted Ruben (1996 as cited in Hollander and Einwohner 2004) and the likes (Carr 1998 and Tye and Powers 1998, both cited in Hollander and Einwohner 2004) who argue that resistance is overt and thus focus on collective actions like protests and demonstrations asserting that recognition by the target is key to defining resistance. This is contrary to Scott who identifies the invisibility and hidden forms of resistance which clearly go unnoticed. I attempt to follow Scott's approach as Rubin's views forego agency of the subordinate groups therewith adopting a one-dimensional interpretation of resistance.

Scott's work served as a jumping board for others to study everyday resistance like Bayat (1997) who deepened the concept. Indeed, he also critiqued Scott's work, in particular with regards to the

limitations presented by the “Brechtian mode of class struggle and resistance” as he deemed these insufficient in relation to the dynamic interactions and relations of the urban poor. Although Scott had indicated that everyday resistance is “not a peasant monopoly” (Scott 1989, p. 52), but one that exists among all kinds of subalterns (Scott 1990). Nevertheless, Bayat viewed the struggles of the urban poor to improve their lives as a pro-active struggle in which they aim to curb the gains of the dominant groups (2000, 2009). Bayat therewith gives further importance to agency and moves beyond the class categories expanding to include different subaltern groups, just as Scott had indicated but without further evidence provided. Bayat critiques the comparison made by Scott between subalterns and hidden, individualised and everyday forms of resistance (1997, 2000), but claims that those subalterns do indeed also take collaborative action. He views that exactly as an ingredient of his concept of “quiet encroachment”;

The silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives ... marked by quiet, largely atomized and prolonged mobilization with episodic collective action. (Bayat 2000: 545–546)

Moreover, recent research in India (Chandra 2015) has attempted to go even further and re-think the concept of resistance all together, drawing on the subaltern studies collective but recognising such views came into being in the 1980s/1990s and need to be updated, especially in light of the changing context. Nielsen and Bedi in the specific issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (2015) highlight new ways in which subalterns resist including the use of the law although the outcome is often not favourable as business interests are served. The same can be said for the Palestinian fishermen who have used legal pathways to resist the illegal policies of the occupation, but they are blocked by the Israeli courts which operate in favour of the state of Israel.

Although such legal resistance is not always successful, it demonstrates that different forms of resistance can operate next to each other, as collective action or as individual action actioned by subaltern groups and thus, they continuously challenge the powerholders. It also shows that such initiatives can be supported by non-subordinate groups, for example such legal assistance is costly and can be supported by NGOs, forging bonds and expanding forms and levels of agency by increasing awareness and building capacities in previously unknown areas for the subordinate groups.

The lack of success of resistance tactics and strategies does not mean such acts can not or should not be categorized as resistance. Rather, according to Scott, intent is of more importance than the outcome of the act, especially as resistance often fails. However, measuring and identifying intent is a very difficult task especially with regards to the invisible forms of resistance. Moving beyond the critique on measuring intent, Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) adopt Weitz’s path (2001) towards assessing the nature of the act itself and rather than purely defining it by intent, to understand that there might be various types of intent at play. “Actors’ intent might be to survive, solve a practical

problem, fulfill immediate needs, follow a desire, or gain status among peers, take a pause, or something else.” (Vinthagen and Johannson 2013, p. 20-21). Based on such an understanding Vinthagen and Johannson then propose “that we should try to understand and analyze its way of acting; the creativity of resistance, the actual art of resistance.” (Vinthagen and Johannson 2013, p. 22). I support this view, especially as intent is difficult to identify and success is hardly ever a short-term goal.

In addition, there is a limited need to be precise about everyday resistance when the contexts in which they occur are complex and intersectional. To move beyond intent, Vinthagen and Johannson (2013) highlight four assumptions ahead of exploring a four-dimensional analytical framework. These are as follows:

1. Everyday resistance is a *practice* (not a certain consciousness, intent or outcome);
2. It is historically *entangled* with (everyday) power (not separated, dichotomous or independent);
3. Everyday resistance needs to be understood as *intersectional* with the powers that it engages with (not one single power relation); and
4. It is *heterogeneous and contingent* due to changing contexts and situations (not a universal strategy or coherent form of action).

These four assumptions indicate the complexity in which resistance occurs. The first assumption indicates that neither intent nor success can be measurements of resistance, rather it is the act itself, the practice that can be seen as resistance. Vinthagen and Johannson (2016) do this by linking acts or practices to specific questions including who is carrying out the practice, in relation to whom, where and when, and how? Thus, herewith they define an analytical framework based on the four dimensions of repertoire, actors, time and space.

Indeed, in my view it is the plethora of acts together, acts of resistance, that oppose the occupation and discriminatory policies which might not be successful now but are part of ongoing acts of resistance, contributing to an ongoing struggle. When looking at the nature of such acts through ethnography as I do in this research, there are indications of different acts, innovative, repetitive, recurring acts amongst others, that might not have resulted in success yet but are steppingstones on a pathway to change. Pathways to change are hardly ever linear, in my view then, resistance is not linear.

Vinthagen and Johannson continue their elaborate work in their 2020 publication *Conceptualising Everyday Resistance; a Transdisciplinary Approach* where they link these four dimensions to the concept of Sumud in Palestine to provide an example of everyday resistance according to the four dimensions of repertoire, space, time and actors.

They refer to Hammami's (2016) work who elaborates on Masafer Yatta, a small Palestinian indigenous locality in the South Hebron Hills which has been under continuous threat of demolitions, annexation and settler violence and which lies within an Israeli firing zone making daily life nearly impossible. Vinthagen and Johannson argue that within such a context of extreme vulnerability the forms of everyday resistance should be understood as; "To live on, to continue to exist and keep on trying to create "a livable life" despite facing "the logics of elimination" in the everyday is what sumūd is about." (p.158).

It is here that I differ from view and critique their use of Sumud in resistance studies. As many other authors have done, they have used the concept of Sumud from a one-dimensional perspective. They have insufficiently explored the concept of Sumud in its wider Palestinian context and meaning beyond the dimension of resistance. Elsewhere they state for example:

Moreover, sumūd is an example of what we call a "culture of resistance", where a particular kind of culture is created, which to a high degree is formed by its resistance and struggle to survive, and where it is an explicit and tacit knowledge among members to seek and develop opportunities for resistance in multiple forms as much as possible. (p.152)

To me it appears to be insufficient to limit Sumud as a basis to develop opportunities for resistance. I think this does not do justice to the notion of Sumud as lived by the Palestinians. From my experience Sumud is rather an explicit and tacit knowledge among members to seek and develop opportunities to continue their way of life and living which consists of different acts, one of them possibly being resistance. Although resistance is then part of the Sumud repertoire, Sumud is not part of the resistance repertoire as it includes acts, practices and mental state that are not necessarily a form of resistance. I would like to draw here on the spoken-word artist and academic in the Palestinian diaspora Rafeef Ziadeh who eloquently stated: "We teach life sir!"

Thus, in summary, the field of resistance studies is wide and varied and others might have called it troubled or controversial. Indeed, theoretical frameworks on everyday resistance are far and few and all in all the key works provide insights into specific cases from which learning can be drawn but which insufficiently use theoretical frameworks to base further analysis on.

It is therefore that I do believe that Vinthagen and Johannson's work is of value to this specific research as it provides clarity and structure for the research. Besides the analytical framework outlined by Vinthagen and Johannson I would also like to draw on another concept which has been explored by Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) and which is yet again based on the ongoing discussion in the field of resistance of what constitutes resistance and what not. In response Lilja and Vinthagen propose the concept '*dispersed resistance*'. They explain;

The binary perception of everyday resistance and organised resistance/social movements obscures a whole world of small-scale resistance that we need to recognize and explore more



thoroughly. The dispersed, small-scale resistance that we have pointed out – and which is not organised – is broader and more complex than everyday resistance. Everyday resistance – the hidden or disguised forms of resistance to material domination – is only one of many types of small-scale or individual resistance. (p. 229)

They thus call on further exploring and recognising the myriad forms of resistance that exist across context and categories, maybe contributing to further defining the concepts, on the other hand it might result in further complicating the concept itself. However, what is clear is that the field of resistance studies remains controversial, as power in general is. Robert Fletcher (2001) could not have been more right when he argued that:

The field does indeed appear supersaturated, to the point that, in preparing this article, I was reticent to include the word 'resistance' in my title for fear that it would dissuade potential readers. This is unfortunate, for the critique threatens the future of a very important field. Fundamentally, studies of resistance are concerned with the struggle for equality, the fight to end exploitation and achieve a more just and humane society. (p. 44)

In Charles T. Lee thought-provoking book *Ingenious Citizenship: Recrafting Democracy for Social Change* (2016), he studies how 'abject' populations find new ways to appropriate practices of liberal citizenship by combining everyday resistance and organised rights-based activism. He refers to Bayat's 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' and argues:

This romance of democratic agency, in envisioning "acting democratically" as the central mode of political action, crystallizes an invisible form of ideological judgment and normative exclusion that systematically remainder other forms of political agency. Even more important, its linear delineation of political agency forecloses a serious and open-ended investigation of how marginalized subjects lacking access and resources may contest and resist in surprising and even unthinkable ways to improvise and expand spaces of inclusion and belonging, thus obtaining "citizenship" via nonlinear routes. (2016 p.5)

He continues:

In sum, the subtle and roundabout improvisation of resistance, with its nonlinear and circuitous production of social change disavowed by democratic agency, suggests a needed shift of angle in viewing the horizon and potential of social justice activism. (p.8)

It is this exploration between non-linear everyday resistance and social justice that takes me to the second part of the theoretical debate of this research to examine the forms and debates around empowerment in search for social change.

## Empowerment

The term empowerment has been used, both in academia and practice, in various fields including social work, psychology, adult literacy and community development ever since the 1970s (Simon

1994). However, for this research which is set in the development and humanitarian context of the Gaza Strip, I will set out the debates and views of the term empowerment in the sphere of international development discourse.

Before heading into further discussion, it is of importance to mention that empowerment in all its use has been largely based on Paulo Freire's *conscientization* approach as presented in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* originally published in 1968. His work highlighted the power dynamics at play in consciousness when he argued that in every society a small number of people exert domination over the masses, resulting in "dominated consciousness." To overcome this, Freire proposed an active teaching method aimed at creating an awareness which would allow the student to make choices that could contribute to structural transformation.

It is this approach that inspired the initial upsurge of the term in the field of international development by for example Friedmann (1992) in the Latin-American tradition who was one of the first to argue that poverty went beyond material terms and included social and political powerlessness thus making the case to empower on local level and focus on political participation in search for development. However, it found particular resonance with women in development at the time as presented in *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (Sen and Grown 1987).

Batliwala (1993), Kabeer (1995) and Rowlands (1995) joined the initial voices on women empowerment and critically reflected on the link between empowerment and power. These feminists looked at power dynamics beyond dichotomy of power as they started to differentiate between *power over*, *power to* and *power with* and even a *power within*, thus referring to different dynamics and forms of power like the collective form (*power with*) or self-confidence and capacity to instigate personal social change (*power within*).

These initial forms of women empowerment were grassroot oriented and aimed at structural and transformational change. However, with the rise of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) empowerment entered the mainstream development context and with it its interpretation of the concept faded, particularly in relation to power and power dynamics.

Batliwala (1994) noted: "It is one of the most loosely used terms in the development lexicon, meaning different things to different people – or, more dangerously, all things to all people" (1994 p.1). Rowlands (1995) further argued that hollowing out the term empowerment as had happened to other buzz terms in international development, further obscured the power dynamics, inequality and oppression at play, which are in fact the underlying causes and ongoing realities for those marginalised groups in society. A review of development literature highlights how the main development institutions including the multilateral and government donors started to use the term empowerment

from the mid-1980s onwards.<sup>14</sup> These mainstream development actors reconfigured the concept of empowerment to a one-size-fit-all approach. According to Cornwall and Brock (2005) this resulted in an a-politicised form that everyone could agree with while Mohan and Stokke (2000) added that it resulted in the partial neutralisation of development critique.

Anne Ferguson (2004) in her thought-provoking article elaborates on the concept and the different definitions:

The concept of empowerment of an individual or a social group presupposes that a state of social oppression exists which has disempowered those in the group, by denying them opportunities or resources and by subjecting them to an ideology and a set of social practices which has defined them as inferior humans, thus lowering their self-esteem. As a general goal, empowerment has been described as a political and a material process which increases individual and group power, self-reliance and strength. (p. 1)

Ferguson continues by defining empowerment in two different ways. The first one being an individual process aimed to increase access to resources to achieve certain outcomes in their self-interest. Ferguson concludes that such approach would assume that:

...economic, legal and personal changes would be sufficient for individuals to become empowered, and such a process does not require the political organisation of collectives in which such individuals are located. (2004, p. 1)

Contrary to that she identifies a second path which is “more influenced by empowerment as a goal of radical social movements, emphasizes the increased material and personal power that comes about when groups of people organise themselves to challenge the status quo through some kind of self-organisation of the group” (2004, p.1).

Sandenberg (2008) adopts Ferguson’s approaches and divides them into a ‘liberal empowerment’ and a ‘liberating empowerment’. The first one being influenced by liberalism including neoliberal economics, and although largely discussed from a women’s empowerment perspective it is applicable across the development field. As head of ActionAid Brasil, an NGO that has adopted Freire’s pedagogy, Romano (2002) claims such version of empowerment to be ‘empowerment without power’ in that it gives no space for changes in the existing power relations, nor in the structures of domination that are responsible for exclusion, poverty and disempowerment in the first place. Indeed, Sardenberg argues that,

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<sup>14</sup> Development here refers to the broad concept of international development denoting the idea that societies and countries have differing levels of economic or human development. It is the basis for international classifications such as developed country, developing country and least developed based on standard indicators and terms of measurement. It is also the basis for a field of practice and study that engages with international development processes.

It is an approach that de-politicises the process of empowerment by taking power out of the equation. Instead, the focus is on technical and instrumental aspects that can supposedly be “taught” in special training courses, for example. (2008 p. 19)

Liberating empowerment on the other hand is based on two conditions identified by Ferguson (2004 p.8):

There are two conditions for the existence of a liberating empowerment process: first, it must be part of an indigenous social movement. This is not to say that the movement itself may not be influenced in its values, goals and strategies by those outside the area or country in which the movement is located. Rather, the point is that the movement must be connected to a grass-roots constituency that involves some form of participatory democracy which gives it legitimacy to those it claims to speak for. Second, since social movements are never homogeneous, there must be some political way for individuals and groups within the social movement to negotiate conflicts of interest within the movement.

The debate on empowerment has thus been one-sided in the sense that what has been implemented by mainstream actors in development is a form of liberal empowerment lacking power dynamics rather focusing on the individual whereas the counter-voices have been those that see empowerment as a tool and process to transform power structures through a wider collective largely focusing on conscientisation and collective action.

Going beyond the liberal/liberating empowerment dichotomy is Glynn Williams’ article (2004) in which he argues that although it has severe shortcomings not everything is pre-determined even within liberal development there is scope to find space and time for empowerment. Nevertheless, he calls for the re-politicisation of empowerment to bring questions of politics and power to the foreground in order to hold powerholders to account and argues that:

Rather, empowerment should be seen as a relative (and reversible) process built from within longer-term political struggles. Development projects have their own trajectories, and political institutions have their own lifecycles: participation, and its potential for empowerment, should not be seen outside of these. (p.572)

Finally, there are Pettit and McGee (2019) who view power and empowerment as complex societal processes and merge theory and praxis in the field of power, empowerment and social change, arguing that:

Forms of agency and structure continually interact or indeed work holistically to sustain or subvert systems of power and power can be destabilised or created anew through collective awareness and through the articulation and enactment of alternatives. (p.7)

Their work is multi-disciplinary and has a wide body of empirical evidence on power. They move beyond the traditional *power over* as well and focus on challenging such power structures emphasizing that the power and empowerment debate has not just become a repetition or field of little added value but rather deepen the focus on the complexity of it. They do so by merging work from activists

and development workers and academics bringing reality to power theory on how change actually happens within all its complexities elaborating on cases where *power within* and *with* has been challenging *power over*.

This brings me to the work of Eileen Kuttub (2010) who, based on the example of the women's movement in Palestine, elaborates not only on the complexities of power and empowerment within neo-liberalism but does so within the framework of the occupation. She argues that

However, what becomes evident from the Palestinian context is the need to tie empowerment to the everyday resistance to the colonial occupation and see it as part of a comprehensive process that relates national resistance to social and economic independence. (p. 252)

While yet again as with most of the empowerment literature this is rooted in evidence collected across the women's movement in Palestine, I will argue in my research that it holds true for those marginalised and oppressed within a colonial system as in my case the fishermen in Gaza. Although the fishermen operate on different levels on the one hand within their own society focusing on social and economic rights within the liberal citizenship approach and on the other hand they resist against colonialism/ occupation and struggle for national liberation. I will demonstrate that through acts of everyday resistance combined with initiatives in collective action and consciousness raising, liberal empowerment can be re-politicized creating opportunities for transformational change and social justice. It is now that I turn to the third and last part of key concepts in this research evolving around aid critique.

#### Aid critique

Aid can be defined as a range of international, and sometimes contested, efforts aimed at reducing the impact of poverty in specific settings or across different populations. This part of the theoretical overview focuses on reviewing these contested efforts currently in existence within the literature.

Before heading into such a discussion, it is of importance to clarify the key concepts linked to aid and in particular the two that I use within my research, namely emergency aid and development aid. These two are typically different classifications of aid: in terms of urgency there is emergency or humanitarian aid often provided immediately after an emergency be it a man-made or natural disaster and secondly there is development aid which, in general is aimed at reducing poverty and has been subjected to different theories and approaches in terms of achieving its overall goal of reducing poverty. Both fall within the definition of aid as official development assistance (ODA) consisting of flows of resources to countries and territories on the Development Advisory Committee (DAC) list of

ODA recipients and multilateral institutions promoting and targeting the economic development and welfare of developing countries.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of my research and when writing about aid critique my research operates in both the development aid and the humanitarian aid spheres. Firstly, because Palestinians have been receiving assistance in the form of aid for over 70 years and this longevity has resulted in a dual aid approach with on the one hand their ongoing (development) needs and on the other hand their urgent (emergency) needs. Feldman has elaborated extensively on this in her *Life Lived in Relief* (2018).

Although the first international aid plan has often deemed to be the Marshall plan in which the United States financially supported the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War, it was not until after the independence of the colonised states that aid became a regular and defined initiative by mainly Western countries and organised and coordinated by the OECD which has been in charge ever since of monitoring and documenting aid flows to and from countries.

The theoretical debates around development and humanitarianism hover then between the realms of politics (international relations) and economics. This is indeed because aid at its best has been found to create limited development and at its worst has been used as an economic tool to achieve political objectives. Such heated debates occurred between the three dominant schools of thought from the 1980s onwards and in response to the perceived failure of the Structural Adjustment Programmes in, especially Latin and South America which had resulted in increased debt and inequality. The three schools of thought which occupied the stage were i) neo-classical development approach, ii) capabilities or human development approach and iii) post-development approach.

It had been the neo-classical approach that promoted the Structural Adjustment Programme as its flagship approach, but according to research conducted by Forster et al (2019) the International Monetary Fund has largely contributed to the inequality it aimed to resolve in the first place through fiscal policy issues, external sector conditionality, financial sector reforms, and external debt issues which negatively affected the Gini co-efficient (the most common measure for economic inequality). The majority of research related to SAPs has been using economic models and thus has been from a quantitative perspective. However, Pfeiffer and Chapman (2010) have done so from an anthropological perspective and put the case forward how adjustment programs have negatively affected public health systems and subsequently its services for the poor.

In his *Development as Freedom* (1999), Amartya Sen proposed a different approach in which human well-being takes on a more prominent role as opposed to economic growth alone therewith widening the development agenda. This *capability approach* has been adopted by, in particular the United Nations, and includes political, social and institutional interventions to advance progress in

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<sup>15</sup> For more detailed information on ODA and its specifications I refer to [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

countries. Sen's approach has thus been central to the development agenda and has been influential in the development of the Human Development Index, yet another type of measure as opposed to GDP/GNP alone as is the case in the neo-classical approach, however, it has not been without criticism. According to O'Hearn (2009), in principle Sen's approach is still rooted in western principles of market economy and individualism and therewith failing to address or question issues of power in development and economics which are detrimental in reducing inequality. Sandbrook (2000) then also calls Sen's *capability approach* 'pragmatic neo-liberalism'.

The third and last school of thought that I will outline here is then the post-development one. The post-development theorists question the idea of economic development all together as they view the whole concept and practice of development as a reflection of the Western hegemony over the rest of the world.

James Ferguson's, a post-development theorist in his ground-breaking book *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990), main lesson is that development interventions rarely achieve what they set out but there are unintended consequences and impacts of these interventions which are of deeper importance. Ferguson was one of the first to look at development through Foucault's framework of governmentality. His work, arguing for the failure of aid and its consequences particular in relation to consolidating bureaucratic principles and positions, served as a jumping board for others to challenge the dominant view that aid was good and was not political.

Escobar for example in his 1995 work *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, used Foucault's idea on power which is produced in and through all we do, thus also in development and also elaborated on and included Said's concept of *Orientalism* for imaginative production in his discussions and arguments, arguing that as a result, people were made subjects of development. Over the years he expanded his ideas further, giving increasing importance to local and indigenous knowledge and the pluriverse. Post-development theory has contributed to a search for more effective, relevant and contextualised forms of aid in which politics is taken into account but still is rarely acted upon. These acts and interventions, however, still occur within the dominant neo-classical development approach in which markets and individualism are key factors.

Because post-development theory not only brought power dynamics into the development debate but also rejected the development paradigm, it has also been criticised. Matthews 2007, Nederveen Pieterse (2000) and Kiely (1999), critiqued post-development theory for its radical rejection of the development paradigm and question how constructive such critique is in the absence of providing realistic alternatives. Although post-development theory has its shortcomings it is of use in my analysis as it is the only development theory that looks at the power dynamics at play within the context it occurs. In my research case, as explored elsewhere in this thesis, there are various forms of

power at play within Palestinian politics, the western hegemonic power of colonialism as practiced by Israel and within aid dynamics. If I would ignore these power dynamics in my research, I would fail to present an accurate and contextualised reality of the lived experiences of the fishermen.

## Overview of Palestinian Anthropology

Palestine as a geographical location has served for many decades as a research site as it indeed has been a centre of interest for the world. Numerous academic works have been written and it is in this section that I aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the main themes dealt with by anthropologists with an increased focus on the more recent history of Palestine highlighting key analytical concepts and ideas that have influenced Palestinian anthropology and other fields of study.

Palestine as an anthropological research site has seen a tremendous wealth of knowledge produced around memory, gender, popular culture, etc. And as I will evidence throughout, anthropological research on Palestine has been influenced by political events like the Nakba and the prevailing prolonged occupation and the ongoing struggle which continue to affect the daily life and the Palestinian experience. This is also true for my research but rather than continuing to give an overview of the wider literature available, I deem it to be more useful to situate my thesis within the Palestinian anthropology around the core issues I use in my research. I will thus aim to provide an overview of key works based on the themes coming to the fore in this research including i) Resistance and ii) Empowerment in Palestinian context, iii) Aid and Humanitarianism in Palestine.

However, I will start by drawing extensively from Furani and Rabinowitz's article (2011) to allow for a brief and succinct overview of Palestinian anthropology and its four phases of engagement, before elaborating on themes closer related to this research.

The four phases of engagement analysed by Furani and Rabinowitz seem to be interlinked with political context and European dominated trends of the time. Their analysis has been set in a chronological order and distinguishes:

a) the proto-anthropological mode, which depicted Palestinians as residual biblical relics who can be easily incorporated into a Christian-European patrimony, b) a secularised, scientific mode of engagement that generated Palestinians as Oriental objects, c) a mode in which mainstream anthropology disengaged from Palestine in the decades following 1948, facilitating a predominance until the 1970s of Zionist scholarship in Palestinian ethnography and d) a post-structuralist mode that has enabled, since the 1980s, the ethnographic admissibility of a Palestine absorbed in national struggle. (p.476)

As Furani and Rabinowitz (2011) article dates over a decade I would like to emphasize that over the past decade Palestinian anthropologists, and to some extent international anthropologists, have aimed to reclaim the Palestinian narrative to be at the fore of any research therewith countering the



previous periods of Palestinian absence and the limited focus on Palestinians as human beings with agency.

Before I further elaborate, I also have to draw attention to the potential politics involved in describing Palestinian Anthropology. Indeed, most authors, including Abuhav (2004) and Talal Asad (1973), both from different perspectives, chose to start their anthropological overview from the 1950s onwards. However, in my view, starting after the Nakba means omitting a crucial part of works developed before and during colonial rule in Mandate Palestine which have shaped some of the stereotypical views that are still in place today.

Furani and Rabinowitz (2011) thus step back further in time in their analysis in which they provide an overview of key works conducted before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Rabinowitz (1998), these works were merely studies focusing on agricultural economy or descriptions of village life with the aim to objectify contemporary Palestinians as living fossils, mumming a historiography that served Europeans. In that regard it is Tristram's work of 1894 which clearly spells out its biblical intent:

The notes which compose the following chapters have been put together by the author, who will feel richly rewarded if any observations of his may be permitted to subserve to the better understanding of the descriptions and allusions of the Holy Writ. To that book, the country, its features and its inhabitants, their ways and customs, are what the frame is to picture. (p.12)

Although other works have been named in Furani and Rabinowitz's article, the key point made by the authors is the fact that these exploratory missions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have contributed to establishing certain depictions of Palestinian life and mould it into a Christian / European viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, such viewpoints were common back in the days and these Eurocentric viewpoints have been analysed and challenged in Said's controversial and influential work '*Orientalism*' (1978).

It is thus of importance to highlight the existence of western literature about the Ottoman period / Mandate Palestine and before the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 as it evidences, albeit in a Eurocentric fashion, the existence of Palestinian ways of everyday life and living as 'just' another community. The existence of such literature also allows to shed light on the fact that, at the time, Jews and Muslims were living together sharing neighbourhoods and communities, trades and professions.

It is then no surprise that the anthropological field of Palestine has been intertwined with Israel because of its history and even more so because of the events that unfolded in 1948 and after. Up to 1948 the research had been relatively even spread with western researchers looking into both newly migrated Jewish communities as well as existing Muslim or Jewish communities. Indeed, both Furani and Rabinowitz (2011) and Abuhav (2004) agree that the pre-1948 literature has been produced mainly by western researchers and adhered exactly to such Orientalist approaches in which the 'local'

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<sup>16</sup> It is of importance to keep in mind the period in which this occurred. In those times depictions were often the only images available back in Europe and thus allowed for the institutionalisation of these ideas.

was subjected to new anthropological research methods. Both authors mention Granqvist as an early anthropologist who studied life under Mandate Palestine extensively. Most interestingly, she initially arrived in Artas, a small village outside Bethlehem to study biblical aspects, as those researchers who arrived before her had done. However, once arrived she found a Palestinian community with their own way of life which she started documenting. According to Falestin Naili (2008) Granqvist was well ahead of her time and her research was informed by the words of indeed these local experts themselves, something that only became fashionable in anthropology after the 1950s. Canaan (1929, 1931, 1932 cited in Furani and Rabinowitz 2011) was one of the first Palestinian researchers writing extensively about the diversity of communities and their daily lives within Mandate Palestine. He was a counter-voice against the Orientalist approach which dominated the literature of that time.

Whereas daily life had been documented to some extent, up til the mid-1930s, there would be no such efforts until a few decades later. Abuhav (2004) argues that Zionist funding allowed for the establishment of Departments of Anthropology within Israeli universities and attracted international anthropologists to work inside Israel and that such funding increased the focus on topics that were of Zionist interest, like state settlement and integration of new immigrants. These efforts allowed Israeli anthropology to flourish from the 1960s onwards, while simultaneously few works or studies were conducted with regards to the experiences of the Palestinians who had come through the Nakba and had become the largest refugee population in the world. Rather, as Furani and Rabinowitz (2011) point out, the absence of Palestine in anthropology would last for a few decades and the marginalisation of the Palestinian was evident in the absence of literature on both peasants and refugees studies, key fields for research in the 1960s. This thus resulted in the absence of the Palestinian narrative in the anthropological field which coincided with pro-Israeli western political interests, limited political agency of the Palestinians as a people at the time and thus the politicisation of the historical and anthropological narrative through a one-dimensional approach.<sup>17</sup> Only with the introduction of the 'new Israeli historians' in the 1980s who gained some mainstream territory in the 1990s, discourse was created introducing a different narrative, albeit still an Israeli one.<sup>18</sup>

Although very little literature had been produced about Palestine and the Palestinians between 1948 and the early 1980s, a few notable works include Cohen and Lutfiyya (1966), Nakhleh (1975), and Sayigh (1979) who give voice to Palestinians during these times. Sayigh in her 2015 article *Oral history, colonialist dispossession, and the state: the Palestinian case*, points out that oral history

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the support in the west for the newly founded State of Israel and therewith incoming funds to support Zionist interests facilitated the research agenda in the 1960s as evidenced by Abuhav (2004) and omitted the Palestinians from a similar narrative.

<sup>18</sup> The New Historians were led by Ilan Pappé (1988), Benny Morris (1987) and Avi Shlaim (1988) through their influential works which questioned the fundamental truths around the conflict and around the State of Israel.

however had been handed down from one Palestinian generation to the next but has hardly been recorded. According to Sayigh (2015), most oral history in the early period has been captured in the camps in Lebanon, hence her own focus in her 1979 book as it was one of the only countries where it was possible to conduct such anthropological work as possibilities were limited by either dictatorship in bordering countries or due to Israeli policies.

However, on a broader scale the works of Asad (1973) and Said (1978) were influential and allowed for a change to occur in the anthropological narrative on Palestine. Especially Asad's work challenged the longstanding relation between colonialism and anthropology whereas Said added to that the stereotypical depiction of the 'Orient'. These works challenged the longstanding stereotypes of ownership of narrative and created space for ethnographic engagements with Palestinians struggling for national sovereignty that reflected mainstream anthropological preoccupations (Furani and Rabinowitz 2011).

This new period of engagement coined 'admissability' by Furani and Rabinowitz (2011), indicate the concept of memory to be one of the leading research areas during this phase (Swedenburg 1991; Allen 2006, Feldman 2006). Besides many international anthropologists looking at memory, Sayigh (2015) also highlights the local efforts that gained momentum in Palestinian circles, like the teaching of oral history in Palestinian universities and the efforts undertaken by local NGOs in documenting oral history. One of the influential works which Sayigh (2015) highlights is '*Destroyed Villages*', based on oral testimonies by village inhabitants. In the Palestinian narrative, testimonies are increasingly important as a method of documentation and investigation to document Palestinian life before 1948 of which so little remained. Sayigh adequately points out that *Palestine Remembered*, is an example of such initiative in which history and collective dispossession of the Palestinians has been documented. A recent influential publication by Rashid Khalidi *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (2020) is bringing together the aspects of memory, history and owning the Palestinian narrative.

Relatively new areas of research such as gender, a trending topic globally in the 1990s, have been well represented in Palestinian anthropology, often focusing on the role of women in resistance, or the effects of the occupation on women in various aspects of their lives (Hammami 1994; Moors 1995; Jean-Klein 2000; Kanaaneh 2005; Hart 2008; Sa'ar & Yahya-Yunis 2008; Allen 2009)

Over the past decade or so, new research has focused largely on mobility and space, in line with the trends seen in the policies of occupation influencing academic research such as mobility restriction policies including checkpoints (Hammami 2015 and 2019; Peteet 2017 and 2015) and the experience with international law and human rights ( Allen 2013, 2016; Bisharat et al 2018) as well as

new forms of cultural resistance (Salih and Richter-Devroe 2014) and digital resistance (Arouagh 2011 and Arouagh and Tawil-Souri 2014) or the link to global solidarities (Hammami 2016; Allen 2018).

In addition, there are three key words, two of them that continue to occupy the literary space ever since the earlier decades, namely the research group of Palestinian refugees (Achilli 2015; Allan 2013; Gabiam 2016 and 2018; Salih 2017; albeit they are linked to different themes like live in camps, exile and identity, as well as literature related to women, gender and masculinities (Sa'ar and Yahya-Younis 2008; Salih 2017; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014). However, the third key word 'settler-colonialism' has seen a rise in knowledge production across various disciplines with the influential work of Wolfe (1999) as a starting point. In the Palestine anthropology an increasing number of published works use the settler colonial paradigm allowing it to be compared with New World white settler states (Busbridge 2018; Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury 2015; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2017; Shihade 2012).

Before heading into a more focused breakdown, I would like to draw attention to the fact that upon analysing the articles and books published over the last decade with regards to Palestinian anthropology and available in English, very few international publications elaborate on Gaza directly. There is indeed an anthropological silence, although few works have been produced in the fields of aid, politics and peacebuilding, some of them including ethnographic work which is very rare since 2007 (AlKahlout 2020; Sen 2020; Qarmout and Beland 2012; Darcy and Reynolds 2010).

This anthropological silence could be a result of the effective blockade in place since 2007 which has severely reduced the opportunity for foreign anthropologists to engage in fieldwork inside the Gaza Strip, e.g., Feldman (2018) highlighted that her elaborate work on aid and Palestinian refugees excludes Gaza as geographical area due to the inability to enter the territory. A second reason could relate to the fact that there are few anthropologists based in Gaza – indeed there is no department of anthropology at any of the universities in the Gaza Strip, resulting in a gap in the literature on the experiences of Gazans over the past decade or so.<sup>19</sup> Having said that, numerous local NGOs and journalists have issued various reports on life under the blockade, at times being the only 'voice from Gaza' and thus various of these reports have also been referred to in this research. Finally, a society of Palestinian Anthropologists was established in 2015 promoting anthropological research while keeping a focus on social justice.<sup>20</sup>

I will now turn to the breakdown with regards to the Palestinian anthropological literature relevant to my research highlighting key works that influence my research.

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<sup>19</sup> Within the various universities in the Gaza Strip none of them offers a degree in Anthropology. Within the realm of arts, humanities, and social science the focus is on Communication & Media, English language and Education. One university (AlAzhar) offers degrees in Sociology / Social Work and Political Science.

<sup>20</sup> [www.insaniyyat.org](http://www.insaniyyat.org) serves as a network, organises conferences, workshop and maintains a list with anthropological resources on Palestine and beyond.

i) Resistance in Palestinian context,

Due to its historical context, resistance, in all its forms, has been a well-researched theme in the literature related to Palestine and across different disciplines.

Within the anthropology resistance literature focuses in particular on the informal and cultural manifestations of resistance. Bearing in mind the increased focus on the everyday in the anthropological literature over the past decades, it is no surprise to find an extensive literature collection about everyday resistance in relation to Palestine. Everyday resistance thus meaning acts of nonviolent and often invisible resistance undertaken by Palestinians to preserve their own existence. Such literature is thus usually set within the dynamics of the prolonged occupation, as a hegemonic power, consequently researching for example the impact of the occupation on the everyday life of Palestinians, in all its myriad forms. Indeed, as Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) identified this might at times result in the romanticising of forms of resistance or seeing every aspect of life through a 'lens of resistance', but as one can imagine, if the occupation is an everyday occurrence affecting all aspects of life so its redress is an everyday occurrence using all aspects of life.

Numerous works have thus highlighted the myriad forms of everyday resistance which have been studied from within different groups in society, for example women and everyday resistance (Richter-DeVroe 2011, 2018) or Palestinians living inside Israel (Ali 2018 and Darweish and Sellick 2017). These studies in particular highlight the innovative ways of everyday acts of resistance and how such acts shape everyday life. In a way, looking at everyday forms of resistance from a Palestinian perspective allows us to better understand the underlying realities of the occupation as well as the ongoing daily struggles that regular people have to face as a result of prolonged occupation, even when such policies or acts are not directly aggressive. This has been particularly well highlighted by Simaan (2017) in her work on olive growing as a form of everyday resistance from an occupational perspective where she explored the motivation and strategies that farmers adopted to be able to continue their olive-growing as livelihood or occupation. Indeed, this is not very different from what I aim to do in this research albeit with fisherfolk and from an anthropological perspective as opposed to occupational science.

The concept of Sumud plays a central role throughout the literature on everyday resistance in Palestine. Sumud was introduced as a formal resilience strategy in 1978, when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) recommended Sumud as a way of helping people to remain steadfast in Palestine. Thus, Sumud became a national concept and strategy for Palestinians in order to prevent the uprooting policy, to preserve identity and to restore dignity in the struggle for national liberty (Teeffelen 2011). When looking at the literature around forms of everyday resistance and Sumud combined, the focus is on the invisible forms of action that happen on micro-levels. In Ryan's work

(2015) the focus is on women's resilience arguing that Sumud represents a form of 'resilient resistance', a tactic of resistance that relies on qualities of resilience such as getting by. Ali (2018) draws on Sumud as a social practice in her research with Palestinians inside Israel and Rotem and Gordon (2017) look at how being steadfast in the struggle for education is an extension of the struggle for land. These examples show the link between Sumud and the collective rights of the Palestinians as a community existing on the land. However, it also demonstrates the elusiveness of the concept of Sumud and that a single definition is insufficient. It was Dakkak (1988) who distinguished different forms of Sumud, the one more traditional and 'static form' of Sumud which ties to the land and another form which is "less orthodox and more aggressive approach" (p.289) which he identifies as 'sumud muqawim' or 'resistance sumud' (p.288). That Sumud is not an easily definable concept is accepted and argued by Meari (2011) who describes Sumud as "not a definable practice", as it encompasses a wide range of "significations, sensibilities, affections, attachments, aspirations and practices" (p.1). In a small unpublished research I carried out as part of my PhD programme I explored the dimension of Sumud amongst first generation Palestinians in the diaspora. The interviewees all indicated that they practice Sumud outside of the homeland and that it is central to 'being Palestinian', no matter where one is located. These findings are closely in line with Peteet's interpretation of Sumud who argues it to be "central to the Palestinian self-definition" describing how it is an indigenous practice that is part and parcel of being Palestinian and in my view this thus relates to collective lived experiences (Peteet, 2000, pp. 183-184).

Bourbeau and Ryan's article (2018) has been one of the latest attempts to explore the concept of Sumud further. Bourbeau and Ryan managed to challenge the existing view that, resilience and resistance are mutually exclusive. They did so by using the concept of Sumud as an example to argue for a relational approach instead which can operate in mutual assistance and thus allow for a more fluid relationship between resilience, resistance and infrapolitics. Their research is of particular interest as it has been conducted with an international relations lens and looked at resilience within the field of social work and development. Unfortunately, as of yet, there has been little ethnographic exploration on these concepts in the anthropology of humanitarianism.

## ii) Empowerment in Palestinian context

As explained in the theory and concepts section in this chapter, empowerment was introduced in development as a concept aimed to break power hegemonies and increase participation and inclusion for vulnerable groups, in particular women to create equal societies. However, empowerment was soon mainstreamed in development discourse losing its focus on challenging hegemonies and therewith undermining the radical power change it could bring.

As for Palestine the concept of empowerment is of interest as there are multiple powers at play, in particular the Israeli domination continues to affect all aspects of life and development and Hanieh (2016) has rightfully argued to what extent empowerment is possible when the various dimensions of structural power that shape the developmental processes in the South have gone undiscussed, or in relation to Palestine he argues:

Empowerment makes no sense unless it is in confrontation and conflict with systemic power; however, this is not the approach of most development work in the oPt, which tends to ignore the broader question of power completely. (Hanieh 2016, p. 35)

Eileen Kuttab (2010) takes a slightly different approach albeit she is as critical as Hanieh but looks at women empowerment and the meaning of it amongst women organisations in Palestine. She finds there is a good understanding of the concept with some focusing more on the individual levels of empowerment and others more on the collective empowerment which is a prerequisite for transformative change in society. What is of particular interest in her research is the realisation of the women organisations that they have been actively working on empowerment before it was 'introduced' as a development concept post-Oslo. Rather the interlocutors explain how the First Intifada allowed for deep agency and empowerment amongst women as part of their changing role in wider society, resistance and struggle.

Hanieh (2016) adds that "uncritical and dehistoricised development strategies lends materiality to Israeli power". Kuttab (2010) states that "These words can help to understand the situation of Palestinian women and the conditions under which they can be empowered through redefining empowerment to suit the context and not through adapting alienating concepts to distort reality." Therewith she argues for the adoption of a definition that retraces its historical roots in definitions emphasizing agency and radical change, she states:

What becomes evident from the Palestinian context is the need to tie empowerment to the everyday resistance to the colonial occupation and see it as part of a comprehensive process that relates national resistance to social and economic independence. (p. 252)

In my research I will take these views as departure points, arguing the fluidity between everyday resistance, Sumud and empowerment and the need to contextualise any development intervention in order to create change that is sustainable and just and goes beyond the individual.

In summary, Hanieh (2016) critiques development strategies which are de-contextualised and therewith aid the Israeli powers whereas Kuttab finds that forms of empowerment have been in place in Palestine before it was introduced therewith requiring a further contextualisation of the concept of empowerment linking it with everyday resistance. I would like to add that Sumud is part of such contextualisation, as in the case of the fishermen, their Sumud has been 'encouraged' through legal,

social and economic forms of empowerment but more importantly by creating space and bringing collectives together to take further collective action.

In the words of Kuttab (2010, p.248):

Such a concept does not adopt mechanically global definitions, but is linked to everyday resistance to occupation. It is framed within coping strategies and steadfastness. Such a definition would be more authentic and relevant in the Palestinian situation, and would speak to the everyday struggle for survival in Palestine.

iii) Aid and Humanitarianism in Palestine

Linking resistance, empowerment and Sumud brings me to the last field for exploration in Palestinian anthropology: humanitarianism. A lot of the research on aid has focused on its provision, distribution and the respective impact of aid within its political context– the majority of research conducted is then part of the field of political economy falling outside of the direct scope of anthropology. Taking into consideration that Palestine has been one of the main recipients of international aid over the past decades and whose population has been receiving aid since the early 1950s, it is then no surprise that influential works have been produced outlining the politics of aid and comparing pre- and post-Oslo aid regimes ever since approximately 1995 (e.g., LeMore 2008). With the relatively recent introduction of Anthropology of Humanitarianism the focus of aid and its effects is undergoing a shift from provider to recipient.

In her ground-breaking work *Life Lived in Relief*, Ilana Feldman (2018) has turned humanitarianism upside down and looked at it through a refugee lens providing insight into the daily challenges and opportunities of living in aid for generations. Moreover, she argues that chronic aid recipients can use aid and its distribution to make right claims and dubbing it the ‘politics of living’ as she evidences in her ethnographic work. In other works, she elaborates on thematics arising from chronic humanitarianism as experienced through the Palestinian case including the politics of aging (2017) or views into the future (2016). Some of her other works speak to Palestinian refugee lives in camps and the ethics of aid (Feldman 2018, 2015, 2012, 2010, 2009, 2007). Feldman thus identifies the Palestinian aid recipient first and foremost as the refugee rather than looking at aid recipients being part of other social groups or communities, who due to the chronic humanitarian needs have carved out their own practices in everyday life. Most of her recent works have not been able to capture the current situation in the Gaza Strip.

Beata Paragi also conducted ethnographic fieldwork on aid in Palestine using Mauss’ theory of the gift exchange to explore the relationship and power dynamics between donors and local NGOs (Paragi 2016 and 2017). Her research elaborates on the fact that Palestinians perceive aid to be more important in terms of human dignity than as form of economic development. She argues that there is thus an increased need to scrutinize such aid further (Paragi 2017).



Other authors in the field of anthropology and aid or humanitarianism have focused on research that includes development critique against donors and global policies at the expense and interest of local communities (Murad 2015), or have done so from a multi-disciplinary perspective, like Seidel and Tartir (2019) who in their publication brought together various authors who reflect on forms of settler colonialism and neo-liberal governance through for example international interventions and aid, and local resistance that have sprouted up as a result addressing issues around aid, peacebuilding and security.

The anthropological literature on aid in Palestine is relatively thin compared to for example the political economy of aid literature, however the works that have been published link to the critiques of development and explore the longevity of the humanitarian aid to Palestinians which makes it a unique case for further research. A vast amount of the literature still looks at the standard power relations between donor and recipient (NGO) as opposed to the inclusion of final beneficiary perspectives, besides Feldman who explores the effects of longevity of aid on refugees as individual and as a community.

Part of this research is aiming to contribute to the literature through non-refugee communities' experiences, which can be seen as of equal importance for everyday political and social survival when living in aid but of which little research has been completed. In my thesis the story of the Gaza fishermen serves as a unique example of how their livelihoods have been affected and how as a community, they experience everyday life under occupation and within the humanitarian paradigm. As of today, very little research has been conducted about the fisherfolk in the Gaza Strip or in the pre-1948 areas for that matter. There have been some unpublished sources both in Arabic and English that I have been able to use in this research, but which have mainly focused on the technical and environmental aspects of fishing and less on the cultural and social dimensions of the fisherfolk as a social group. It was only in 2020 that the Museum of Palestine issued a call for further research and artwork on coastal communities indicating this has been an underrepresented area in knowledge production on the history of Palestine.<sup>21</sup> The Palestinian Museum has also undertaken initiatives in 2021 to prepare for a Palestine Shores exhibition, focusing on the time period mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to 1948. This exhibition, called *A People by the Sea: Narratives from the Palestinian Coast*, launched on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2021 and aims to shed light on the life before the Nakba using archival images and video, historical artifacts from Palestinians' daily life, original artworks, interactive stations, maps, oral history testimonies, and historical documents.<sup>22</sup> The knowledge gap on modern coastal life has

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<sup>21</sup> For the specific call issued by the Palestinian Museum please look here: <https://www.palmuseum.org/open-call-for-proposals>

<sup>22</sup> For more information on the exhibition I recommend looking here: <https://www.palmuseum.org/exhibitions/forthcoming-exhibitions>

been deepened by the difficulties to gain access to the Gaza Strip to be able to conduct research first-hand thus resulting in, unfortunately, few ethnographic research. This study hopes to modestly contribute to closing this knowledge gap through its ethnographic research on fisherfolk in the Gaza Strip and their everyday challenges.

## Chapter IV Specificity of Aid in Gaza

It was 1997 when I entered Gaza for the first time, on a day trip for summer programme students organised by Birzeit University where I participated in Arabic and Middle Eastern Politics classes. Birzeit is a small village close to Ramallah in the West Bank. We drove off early and arrived the Gaza Erez border at 9am – a full programme ahead for the day to show us the progress which Gaza had made since the Oslo Accords had been signed. We passed by blooming strawberry farms, abandoned settlements ready to be repurposed, President Arafat's house, the Gaza beach and its potential and spoke to heads of buzzing NGOs, but what was most impressive was the Gaza airport in the Southern Gaza Strip, constructed with international aid money in support of a future independent state. A fleet of planes on the ground – *Palestine Airlines* in the colours of the Palestinian flag proudly painted on the side. I remember I wondered whether and when it would be possible to have a direct flight from Gaza to Amsterdam, it would make life much easier. A few flights did depart, not to Amsterdam but to neighbouring countries. I did not get to board once, it was destroyed before I could board a plane. I have a picture though in my album of that summer of 1997.

Fast forward twenty years and I head into Gaza again, I enter from Egypt this time, bypassing the abandoned and ruined airport, the symbol of a future independent state all in pieces, further north I witness the devastation of the local farms suffering under the pressure of the buffer zones and when heading into the local NGO offices, I meet the same project officers as back then, they are a bit older, but fighting the same struggle.

I ask them about aid, donors and funds and the responses are all the same – it is aid but no development. It is support but in the wrong area, it is not the aid we need nor the aid we want and worse, as a result of these painful interventions while condoning a full blockade our country is being emptied once more of its most valuable resource: young people. They leave and they do not come back, one of the local human rights directors says, “they prefer to join a refugee community elsewhere than to die in despair here. Look at us, haven't we become aid dependent?”

The little time capsule provided above highlights on the one hand the longevity of aid and the hope it provided and on the other hand describes the downfall of aid and the impact it has had on the local community. These are the central points in this chapter I aim to elaborate on by providing an overview and analysis of aid in Gaza and how it has affected those receiving it. Aid in Palestine is not new and has been the topic and focus of many researches over the years, however less priority has been given to the specificity of the aid situation in the Gaza Strip over the past decade.

Although indeed Gaza and the West Bank should be seen, politically and theoretically, as one territorial unit, in practice it has ceased to exist as such. Initially so, because of the territorial disunity

resulting from Oslo and then with the coming to power of Hamas this has been fully consolidated through the blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel. The geographical and political disunity and political interests over the past fifteen years or so have evolved into different aid architectures and operational systems for Gaza and the West Bank: parallel aid systems have been designed, implemented and institutionalised. Though the West adopted no-contact policy with Hamas, donors have favoured the PA in the West Bank and sidelined Hamas from the western aid system.

Qarmout is one of the few recent authors elaborating on the specificity of aid in Gaza and concludes that “aid has inadvertently and unintentionally, increased Gazans' dependence on humanitarian aid, impeded economic development, and enabled Israel to maintain its occupation and the blockade of Gaza” (Qarmout 2012). However, the question on what impact such aid policies have had on the local community remains largely unanswered and will come to the fore in this and following chapters.

## Aid and Palestine

Aid and Palestine have been a marriage of convenience for over seventy years. Following the Nakba, the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for the Palestinian Refugees was established by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 and has provided support to the registered refugees in Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in the form of temporary jobs and direct relief ever since.<sup>23</sup> Nowadays UNRWA is the largest provider of jobs and provides full services in the areas of health care, education and food assistance to Palestinian refugees. When a chronic situation requires aid for decades this will inadvertently affect both the political situation and the humanitarian condition. Ilana Feldman's concept of ‘the politics of living’, explains how disagreements over condition, politics and value are played out in recipient communities, or in her words, “it highlights the dynamics of being (surviving, claiming, acting) within it” (Feldman 2012).

The long-term aid provision has also resulted in blurring the boundaries between humanitarian assistance and development aid.<sup>24</sup> In other words, whereas humanitarian aid is usually of a short-term nature and aimed at saving lives, in the case of Palestine, it has also been used to improve lives (Feldman 2018).

Hever (2010) adds that although aid is a necessity in the absence of an independent and capable Palestinian economy, the large sums of money poured to the PA since its creation also work to

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<sup>23</sup> For detailed information about UNRWA and its mandate [www.unwra.org](http://www.unwra.org)

<sup>24</sup> In aid debates there is a clear difference between humanitarian aid provided based on fundamental principles of neutrality, impartiality, etc and development aid which in turn could have a political angle reflected in the donor agenda – the nexus between both is slowly evaporating.

‘undermine the Palestinians’ political struggle, ‘normalize’ the situation of occupation, and postpone a permanent solution to the Palestinian question’ (Hever 2010 p.28).<sup>25</sup> As evidenced by both Feldman and Hever, the intersectionality between chronic humanitarian relief and development projects in pro-longed conflict settings is sensitive to politicisation as aid is inherently linked to power.

#### Agenda-setting: Money is Power

The generally held view in academic literature and in development practice is that donors tend to be stronger than recipients in aid relationships as power manifests itself through the control and flow of the money. Riddell (2008) provides an overview of the key reasons why donors provide aid and summarizes them as follows:

(1) to address emergency needs in a recipient country; (2) to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction; (3) to show solidarity; (4) to further a donor’s own strategic and national political interests; (5) because of historical ties; (6) to strengthen global public goods and reduce the impact of negative global effects; and/or (7) to support human rights. (Riddell, 2008, p. 91-92)

When discussing aid in Palestine, academic literature commonly uses the early 1990s as the departure point. Mainly because the signing of the Oslo Accords resulted in unprecedented large aid flows becoming available to the newly governing body in an attempt to build the necessary governance institutions. Thus, as part of this peace initiative, the PA became one of the largest aid recipients (per GDP) in the world overnight.

Many of the funds were provided directly by Western donors to the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority, for the first time. Previously, funds for humanitarian service delivery would have been distributed via the UN agencies, in particular via UNRWA which has a clear humanitarian aid mandate, or following Riddell’s categorisation (2008) this would have been the rationale to address emergency needs in the recipient country. The introduction of *bi-lateral aid* between foreign governments and the PA changed this. Bi-lateral aid, through both budget support and civil society funds, are usually provided according to the focus areas identified by the international community in line with the expectations set out under the Oslo Accords.

The focus areas of these new aid flows were largely outwards looking, aimed at bringing the new Palestinian Authority and potential state within the realm of Western influence and economy. The initial focus was thus on stabilisation including state-building, good governance, normalisation and

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<sup>25</sup> Normalisation of the Occupation can be explained as a process in which the Occupation is made to be seen as normal and as part of everyday life, therewith stirring certain kind of behaviours. In the case of Palestine and Israel normalisation has been controversial as it seems one ‘accepts’ the Occupation and therewith loses political power. More recently this has become visible with the normalisation of political relations between Arab countries and Israel.

peace building and would be implemented in cooperation with newly arrived international agencies which grew in presence from 3 to 29 overnight (De Voir and Tartir, 2009).

Wilderman (2018) highlights the political sensitivities around donor reporting and aid in Palestine when he found that donors would focus on solutions and generic development terms rather than addressing the root causes of the problem, the occupation and conflict itself. He emphasised that very few donors included core elements of e.g., the word occupation in their reports. Rather, emphasis would be placed on human rights (EU and EU-countries) versus security and counter-terrorism (US and World Bank) as underlying reasons for lack of development and thus grounds for intervention.

#### Aid Architecture Gaza vs West Bank: Together Alone

Globally, aid is known to suffer from inefficiency and ineffectiveness which has resulted in various efforts being made on global level to streamline aid coordination.<sup>26</sup> The influx of large amounts of aid and the simultaneous rise in the number of organisations active in the Palestinian Territories required increased coordination and resulted in developing the architecture of the aid apparatus. The aid provided to oPt could be loosely defined according to two types of aid which have been mentioned above: i) development aid and budget support and ii) humanitarian aid, with the former being used for development projects and public budgets and the latter for emergency response.

The aid coordination efforts in Palestine occurred according to the type of aid, resulting in the establishment of various mechanisms for development funding and budget support. The most prominent amongst these is the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) established in 1993 and serving as the main strategic body. There are also a number of Task Forces and Committees to manage aid coordination on national and operational level. A Joint Liaison Committee which would manage the tri-partite aid relations between donors, PA and Israel was established but stopped functioning early in the second Intifada after which relations have been managed on bi-lateral levels. The tri-partite aid relations are an indication of the lack of sovereignty and imbalance of power as all aid needs to go through Israel which is under international law an Occupying Power as well as the 'Other Party' in the Peace Process, thus limiting the PA's aid authority which is in direct contradiction with best practices in aid that call for local ownership (LeMore 2004). Additional aid coordination mechanisms have been put in place for specific purposes. For example, after the 2014 war on Gaza and as a result of the boycott of Hamas, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) was set up as a

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<sup>26</sup> Various initiatives have taken root since the early 2000s including the High-Level Forums of Rome 2003, Paris 2005, Accra 2008 and Busan 2011 all aiming at improving aid effectiveness and efficiency. The last one in particular set a new trend as it culminated in the signing of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation by ministers of developed and developing nations, emerging economies, providers of South-South and triangular cooperation and civil society. [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

agreement between the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli government and the United Nations to coordinate the reconstruction efforts during the imposed blockade.

A report commissioned by the Local Aid Coordination Secretariat in 2016 on reforming aid management, indicated that: “By common consent, today's aid coordination system is incoherent, excessively complicated and ineffective” (p.8). In other words, the aid apparatus had outgrown itself and become disjointed and unmanageable. The report points to the urgent need to move away from the plethora of coordination initiatives towards an overall aid management approach under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority's Prime Minister's Office. The report continued by stating “The development administration of Gaza is bizarre, due to the political division between Hamas and Fatah and the PA, and donors' unwillingness to deal with Hamas as a conventional development partner” (World Bank and Representative Office of Norway, 2016, p.9).

Indeed, the situation in Gaza with regards to aid and funding changed dramatically when Hamas became the de-facto government in Gaza in 2006 but was not allowed to take over the functions which the PA had carried out before that in tri-partite agreement with Israel and the western international community. The Local Aid Coordination Secretariat Report highlights the absence of the Gaza authorities, (the de facto Hamas government), from the western-led aid coordination process mainly due to the no-contact policy in place since. The report is quite correct in recognising this as a “bizarre situation” which has shaped a unique aid situation in the Gaza Strip characterised by the existence of two parallel aid systems.

### Specificity of Aid in Gaza

Aid in Gaza is thus characterised by the existence of two parallel aid systems. One is coordinated by the western international donor community and mainly led by a tri-partite group run from the West Bank who continues aid operations in line with how they were conducted pre-2006 which I described above. This foreign aid architecture is implemented in Gaza without local authorities' involvement. The second aid system that has taken root is non-western and operates in direct liaison with the de-facto Hamas government, outside of the realm of western aid donors and at times outside of the realm of the PA, but with Israel's approval. Each one is thus operating in exclusion of the other as an immediate consequence of the western no-contact policy with Hamas. One constant actor in both aid structures are the Israeli authorities which approve entry of goods, people and funds into the Gaza Strip and does so through bilateral or joint procedures. The crucial role of Israel as hegemonic power thus also leaves a strong mark on aid flows to Gaza.

In order to clarify the functioning of these two systems and the effects they have had I will provide a short example of each: the western-led aid system with the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism as example and the liaison-led aid system with Qatar as example which has increasingly grown into a powerful actor in Gaza. It might become clear that both affect the sovereignty and ownership of the local authorities as well as the role of civil society in the Gaza Strip.

#### Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism

The involvement of western aid with systems of occupation can be exemplified through the workings of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism which official mandate is to:

...enable the parties to: provide security assurances to the Gol [Government of Israel]; work at the scale required in the Gaza Strip; enable the PA [Palestinian Authority] to play the lead role in the reconstruction effort of the Gaza Strip and assure donors that any investments will be implemented without delay.<sup>27</sup>

The GRM, the UN and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs all emphasize the unique collaboration method established after the end of the 2014 conflict which facilitated the urgent need for reconstruction in Gaza within the existing reality of Israel's security concerns.<sup>28</sup>

Some authors have found the GRM to be more political than humanitarian e.g., Barakat, Milton and AlKahlout (2018) delved into the politics of the GRM and the coordination triangle managing the GRM and concluded

...that it is a bureaucratic and cumbersome mechanism that has created new bottlenecks that are impeding effective reconstruction and have institutionalized and depoliticized the siege of the Gaza Strip by passing the responsibility for its maintenance on to the international community. (p.208).

Barakat and Masri (2017) further argue that the GRM serves as a mechanism that Israel can use as justification for controlling the goods that enter the Gaza Strip. Pietro Stefanini (2018) confirms that, rather than advancing the reconstruction of Gaza, the GRM normalised the Israeli blockade as it is mainly driven by Israel's security concerns. However, there is no evidence of its contribution to safety for the State of Israel.

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<sup>27</sup> Barakat, S. and Masri, F. (2017). *Still in ruins: Reviving the stalled reconstruction of Gaza*. Brookings Doha Center Publications. [online] Brookings Institute. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/reviving-the-stalled-reconstruction-of-gaza/>. Accessed 27 January 2021.

<sup>28</sup> [www.grm.report](http://www.grm.report) , <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Humanitarian/Pages/Reconstruction-in-Gaza.aspx> , <https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/supporting-the-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism-working-together-to-rebuild-after-conflict#:~:text=About%20The%20Gaza%20Reconstruction%20Mechanism,following%20the%20conflict%20in%202014.> All accessed on 28 January 2021



Although there is clear debate on the politics of the GRM, what is of importance to this particular research is that as a result of the established structure the international donors sidelined the de facto Hamas government and silenced Gaza's civil society therewith negatively effecting local ownership (Barakat and Masri 2018). This has been a thorn in the eye for civil society who had played a leading role in reconstruction efforts when they were professionally skilled and empowered in the first reconstruction period from 2008 onwards. According to Qarmout (2017):

...donors' interventions changed the role of CSOs in the strip, empowering them as quasi-veto wielding actors responsible for planning and implementing projects rather than as traditional within a democratic society of holding the de facto government accountable.

Already back then there was sufficient cause for concern as international donors failed to challenge Israeli restrictions imposed which would have facilitated a more sustainable and empowering development approach. Rather, the large financial allocations in the form of humanitarian assistance created aid dependency for both recipients and civil society (Qarmout 2017).

A number of local actors made their views known early on in the 2014/15 reconstruction process in which they highlighted the imbalance of power by undermining the engagement of local actors. For example, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), one of the leading human rights organisations in the Gaza Strip, together with civil society organisations and the private sector strongly criticized the GRM immediately after it was announced and considered it as 'institutionalization and international cover of the closure'.<sup>29</sup> Other civil society groups asked, fourteen months after the establishment of the GRM, in a joint letter to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to:

...publish the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) agreement and make it accessible to the public. We expect full transparency of all information and documents regarding this critical mechanism affecting our lives. Such transparency is necessary in order for us, the affected, to also participate in assessing the role of the GRM and its contribution to the reconstruction of Gaza. Since its creation in September 2014, the GRM agreement has not been publicized and Palestinians have been left without details or timelines, which in fact conflicts with the principles of transparency and accountability as well as fundamental human rights and humanitarian principles. Palestinians, particularly those affected, have a right to access the specifics and details of the agreement.<sup>30</sup>

According to Barakat and Masri (2017) the lack of consultation with local communities resulted in a non-inclusive process with decision power for those who did not have a large interest in the rebuilding process unless the Gazans themselves. Moreover, the exclusion of civil society in the process, which had been favoured in previous reconstruction processes, undermined their trust in the

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.pchrgaza.org/en/gaza-under-closure-and-rubble-un-mechanism-to-reconstruct-gaza-fails-and-the-only-solution-is-lifting-the-closure-2/> accessed on 28 January 2021

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.maan-ctr.org/en/article/158/Letter-to-UNSCO> accessed on 28 January 2021

aid providers and affected their own empowerment as agents in the reconstruction and development processes well as within the communities they operated in. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights organised a workshop five years after the establishment of the GRM involving only the local actors who concluded that progress had been slow, and too many political interests were served by the mechanism, in particular those of Israel and the PA. Although the need for reconstruction remained, the key recommendation out of the workshop was to call for halting the GRM.<sup>31</sup>

As a result of these type of complexities the Local Aid Coordination Secretariat report (World Bank and Representative Office of Norway 2016), which I referred to above, recommends for the humanitarian actor *to address PA operations in Gaza* (p.15). Unfortunately, the report does not elaborate on how *addressing PA operations in Gaza* could be operationalised. What this does indicate though, is a continuation of local governance authorities being excluded from the scope of (Western aid) implementation.

#### Qatari Humanitarian Aid to Gaza

During 2019 the growing influence and role of Qatar had become visible in the streets of Gaza where posters depicting Qatar's emir hang from buildings in the areas where reconstruction was taking place. In addition, many of the people I spoke to in that summer, discussed the then new hand-outs provided by Qatar consisting of US\$100 for selected families.<sup>32</sup> The discussions evolved about whether or not it would be ethical or decent to depict photos of the cash recipients in the media, these people were after all in their eyes 'the poorest of the poor' and it would do unnecessary harm to these recipients.

I had never before heard people in the streets speak about Qatari funds, but then Qatar's role in humanitarian aid has been relatively novel, at least on that scale and visibility. However, by February 2021 the Qatar Gaza Reconstruction Committee, established in 2012 and responsible for funding many humanitarian projects in Gaza, opened its new headquarters in Gaza in the presence of Hamas government officials, invited civil society members and others.<sup>33</sup> The allocation of land and the ability to build a headquarters in a continuously deprived Gaza Strip triggered social media statements by average Gaza refugees sarcastically criticising these developments, as one young man told me: "If

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.pchrgaza.org/en/pchr-organises-workshop-titled-five-years-after-the-un-gaza-reconstruction-mechanism/> accessed on 28 January 2021

<sup>32</sup> According to news outlets over 90,000 families benefited from the 100USD note hand-out. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/1/26/gaza-residents-receive-qatari-cash> accessed 28 January 2021

<sup>33</sup> 'Gaza Reconstruction Committee affirms Qatar's continuous support for Palestinians', The Peninsula, <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/05/02/2021/Gaza-Reconstruction-Committee-affirms-Qatar%E2%80%99s-continuous-support-for-Palestinians> accessed on 08 February 2021

Gazans can not be re-housed after the war but foreign agents can build palaces on our lands instead – who are we talking to?”

Academic literature on Qatar’s aid to Gaza is rather thin and official data hardly existent (Zureik 2018). However, in the two decades or so that Qatar has been part of the humanitarian arena it has supported several countries with the Palestinians ranking consistently high on the list of humanitarian aid recipients.<sup>34</sup> The Financial Tracking Service however seems to have insufficient data to assess where the Qatari money goes to in Palestine and does not provide any key recipient organisations in its data. The Qatar Gaza Reconstruction Committee’s website does share data on the type and location of projects implemented and combined with further media analysis it indicates that approximately 400 million USD of Qatari funds were allocated under the Qatari Committee for Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip by the end of 2017 (Abu Amr 2017). These funds have mainly been used for reconstruction, infrastructure and cash hand-outs, traditional humanitarian intervention areas.<sup>35</sup> According to Zureik’s research, Qatar between 2010-2016, and at times in conjunction with other donors, gave almost US\$800 million to Palestine with the majority of aid allocated to the essential needs of the Palestinians, mostly in Gaza, such as housing, health, education and poverty reduction. Zureik (2018, p. 791) also claims that the majority of these funds went to Gaza for two reasons:

Qatar has forged a closer relationship with Hamas in Gaza and, in this sense, it has perpetuated its close relationship with the Moslem Brotherhood of Egypt with whom Hamas has an affinity. Second, and more importantly, the Gaza Strip has come under punishing Israeli attacks that resulted in extensive destruction of Gaza. As such it was logical to divert Qatari funding to rebuilding Gaza.

The media has been reporting on the politics involved in the humanitarian aid provided by Qatar on two levels, on the one hand the politics between Israel and Hamas in which Qatar has taken on a role as a broker e.g. according to media sources Qatari aid included payment of Hamas government salaries and Qatari-financed fuel to be allowed into the Gaza Strip, which supported the facilitation of calm in Gaza, and which also allows Qatar to indirectly pressure the Israeli government on political

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<sup>34</sup> According to Financial Tracking Service (<https://fts.unocha.org/donors/87/summary/2020>) countries receiving aid from Qatar are Lebanon, Palestine, Ethiopia, Chad, Syria, Nepal, China, Sudan and Rwanda. Accessed 08 February 2021

<sup>35</sup> <http://q-grc.ps/Projects.html> is the website providing detailed information about the funds allocated and projects implemented in the Gaza Strip as part of Qatari Gaza Reconstruction Committee. Accessed 8 February 2021

issues.<sup>36</sup> On the second level it is the role Qatar plays in the region in terms of mediation and influencing regional politics especially after the Arab Spring. According to Barakat (2019) Qatar's aid is then also a form of humanitarian diplomacy subjected to geo-political interests and thus prone to change.<sup>37</sup>

Politics underscores the Qatari humanitarian aid relations involving Qatar, Hamas and Israel with as key influencing factor the geo-politics of the Gulf region. That politics prevails over humanitarian needs is not uncommon but the relationship with civil society can be altered as a result. LeMore (2004) already critiqued the aid apparatus at large before Hamas came to power arguing the dependence on Israel for the aid industry, which by then was already well established. Qarmout and Beland (2012) argue further and with specificity to Gaza;

Both actors aimed to weaken and isolate the Hamas de facto government in Gaza. While direct donor assistance resumed support for the PA budget and government institution building, aid to Gaza was channeled to humanitarian organisations, civil society actors and UN agencies. (p.38)

Although written at different times i.e. pre-Hamas and post-Hamas, both argue that the politics of (western) aid undermines local ownership and local power structures and consequently can have unintentional negative effects on the local population thus questioning its effectiveness and intent. The same can be said for the Qatari liaison-model, although with strong Hamas de-facto government involvement it results in reduced engagement with the secular civil society organisations. Although local ownership is always hard to achieve, the specificity of aid in Gaza, implemented through opposing but parallel systems by different political actors implementing their own political agendas is reflected in the changing roles of the NGOs in Gaza.

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<sup>36</sup> According to the Time of Israel of 12 January 2021, "*With Israel's approval, Qatar since 2018 has periodically provided millions of dollars in cash to Gaza's Hamas rulers to pay for fuel for the Strip's power plant, allow the group to pay its civil servants and provide aid to tens of thousands of impoverished families*", by Aaron Boxman, 'Hamas official says Qatar to provide aid to Gaza for another year', 12 January 2021, accessed on 25 January 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-official-says-qatar-to-provide-aid-to-gaza-for-another-year/>. The same newspaper a year earlier highlighted that Qatar threatened to end the payments in a bid to stop Israel from annexing parts of the West Bank. 'Qatar said threatening to end aid to Gaza in bid to pressure Israel on annexation', by Toi Staff, Time of Israel accessed on 25 January 2021 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/qatar-said-threatening-to-end-aid-to-gaza-in-bid-to-pressure-israel-on-annexation/>. AlJazeera, Gaza residents receive Qatari cash, issued on 26 January 2019, accessed on 08 February 2021 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/1/26/gaza-residents-receive-qatari-cash>

<sup>37</sup> Over the past year (2020) a process of normalisation has taken place between Israel and certain Arab countries including a number of Gulf States, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. This normalisation is based on geo-political interests which have the potential to also affect Qatar and therefore the potential aid flow to Gaza. Although not related to the current normalisation process, Barakat has elaborated on how the Gulf Crisis is affecting Qatari aid: *Priorities and challenges of Qatar's Humanitarian Diplomacy*, Sultan Barakat (2019), Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Brief no. 2019:07)

## NGOs and the Parallel Aid System

Parallel aid systems, characterized by different donor priorities, humanitarian diplomacy and irregular and ad-hoc engagement of local authorities and civil society transformed the NGO community in Gaza which had been at the fore of many aid initiatives until then. Up to 2005 Gaza's civil society and the local authorities in the form of the PA had played a similar role in development as their counterparts in the West Bank, which was characterised by largely donor-led aid initiatives and resulting in professionalisation and NGOisation (Jad 2007). Academic literature around the politicisation and professionalisation of the NGO sector in Palestine (Hammami 1995, Jad 2007, Dana 2015) suggests that the professionalisation process, an outcome of the disproportionate aid inflow and civil society growth, resulted in collective concerns being merged into technical projects. This reduced the political angle and increased focus on donor-funded initiatives aiming to promote civil society and the state-building project as such. Dana (2015) elaborates on this by arguing that it fundamentally changed the characteristics and function of civil society.

Lori Allen (2013) explains how in the West Bank political savvy Palestinians became institutionalised and were slowly forced to focus on the technical sides of development therewith reducing their own political agency in the process. This process referred to as NGO-isation was marked on the one hand by the 'professionalisation' of civil society in terms of expertise but on the other hand coincided with a reduction in political independence and agency amongst those involved in the development arena (Jad 2007). Although the professionalisation of NGOs does not need to give rise to de-politicisation, the problem in the case of Palestine has been that such professionalisation has insufficiently coincided with development of other forms of political action and representation like trade unions, or grassroots networks. According to Jalali (2013) who researched the case of Southern Africa, this makes constituency support irrelevant, and allows internationalization through financial assistance to transform conflict movements into consensus movements that follow an institutional, resource-dependent, non-conflictual strategy with no deep roots in the community. A comparable case can be made for Palestine as Arda and Banerjee (2019 p. 696) have found,

...international developmental aid played a key role in transforming grassroots movements to professional NGOs in Palestine resulting in depoliticizing the public sphere. Practices of professionalization and discourses of development also created new economic and social realities that resulted in a normalization of occupation where the focus was on improving living conditions under occupation rather than resistance. Grassroots organizations' long-standing strategy of resistance to occupation was transformed into policies of "good governance," "transparency," and "accountability" that enabled depoliticized and deradicalized NGOs to operate under occupation.

Jad (2007), Allen (2013) and Dana (2015) mainly drew their conclusions with regards to West Bank NGOs, but a similar situation transpired with regards to civil society in the Gaza Strip prior to 2005.

Since the imposition of the blockade combined with the deterioration of living conditions and a steep rise in the flow of humanitarian aid funds, the civil society organisations have been facing new challenges.

Years of state-building investment between 1995 and 2005 in Gaza were lost overnight by excluding local government structures from the aid processes. In turn it opened up space for civil society to engage even more directly with donors and have access to large amounts of funding as well, but this came at the cost of representation and engagement with local communities. The increasing role of civil society did not trickle down to the communities, who as a result of several wars, a decade of blockade and internal politics had become isolated, largely impoverished and unemployed. Rather, the civil society organisations took on a technical and implementing role in which the beneficiaries were often not included.

This western donor-civil society relationship altered drastically following the establishment of the 2014 GRM. The GRM was characterised by the absence of local authorities in the Gaza Strip and severely reduced engagement with civil society in aid distribution and design. The limited role of civil society in the GRM while also having been distanced from its local communities in the previous decade increasingly disempowered civil society organisations. Simultaneously, the increasing aid flow from the Qatari-led system, although large amounts being paid to private companies for reconstruction efforts, also included aid flows to Islamic charities in the fields of health, education and other primary intervention areas. According to the Palestinian NGO Network this resulted in two pillars of civil society, a western funded pillar and a Qatari funded pillar.

The complex and bureaucratic aid systems combined with top-down and donor driven agendas in the western model have thus contributed to a disconnect between donors, NGOs and the aid recipients. The presence of a simultaneous but separate aid system, the Qatari one, contributed to further disintegration amongst local civil society organisations. Such parallel systems have thus affected the unity and power of local actors as I will explain in the following chapters of this research.

One of the fisherwomen, in receipt of aid and who I spoke to, was able to put it in a single sentence when she stated that: “development has become a trade and a politics rather than focused on empowering people, on us as a people”. The disconnect between the projects that are implemented, and the lack of sufficient and appropriate engagement with local structures including the people they are intended to benefit is thus a direct implication of the aid-induced NGOisation process. The parallel aid system in place in the Gaza Strip has added another layer of disconnect – that of separating civil society organisations into two different groups, one funded by western funds and one funded by non-western funds.

Already since the beginning of the rise of the NGOs in the early 1990s, Jad (2007) claims that state building and the process of NGOisation led to more fragmentation and demobilisation of the grassroots movements. It was precisely these movements which had played a key role in the First Intifada and had served as a catalyst for awareness raising of rights and political consciousness (Hiltermann 1991, Jean-Klein 2008, Arda and Banerjee 2019).

Alashqar (2018) adds to this view that the transformation of civil society resulted in “a shift from a focus on national resistance within the politically motivated framework of Israeli–Palestinian conflict of the 1970s and 1980s to internal and depoliticized processes in the 1990s.” Dana (2015) argues that Palestine should be seen as an important case study because, while it has a significant history of mass-based civil society that operated at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle, its current foreign-funded NGOs have harmonized their functionality with the imposed political *status quo*. In all three instances Jad, Dana and Alashqar focus on the processes, institutions and structures that have been transformed, but to some extent overlook how this affects aid recipients themselves.

## Chapter Summary

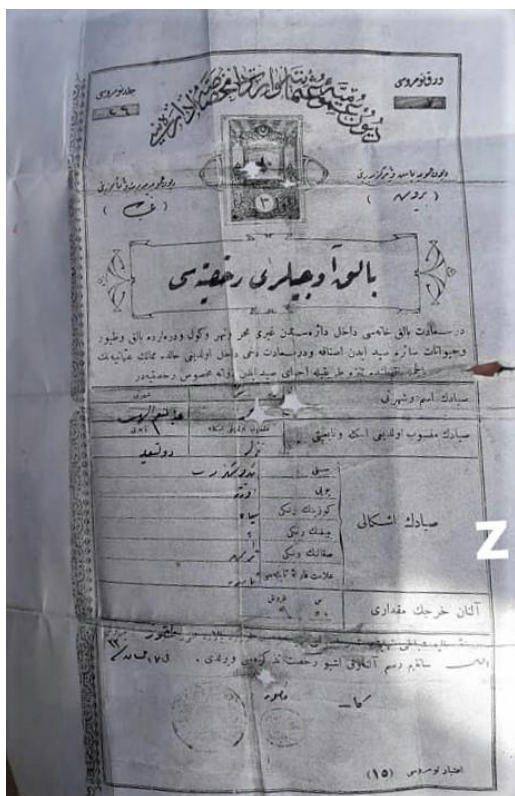
This chapter attempted to set out the specificity of aid in Gaza and its effects on civil society. Ever since the imposition of the blockade on Gaza, the international community has changed its aid approach towards Gaza, with an increased focus on political interests, therewith sidelining Hamas and disbursing aid through civil society organisations. As western aid has been managed via the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, this has resulted in a complex system of aid management mechanisms which have been deemed overly bureaucratic and inefficient. On the other hand, and with increasingly emerging needs, new donors have emerged like Qatar. Qatar has come to play an increasingly important role in aid allocation and distribution in Gaza, mostly as it directly engages with the de facto Hamas government. These parallel systems, in which Israel has a prominent role, are increasingly influencing Gaza’s civil society. The politics of aid in Gaza has thus taken over the emerging and ever more desperate humanitarian needs of the local population.

Although specific research on aid to Gaza since the blockade has been scarce, the literature available has focused on the politics and processes surrounding the aid process and disbursement processes. Yet, little is known on the perceptions and actions of the recipients of aid, something I will aim to address in the upcoming chapters.

## Chapter V Understanding Fishing Culture in Gaza

### Introduction

“I started fishing when I was 12. I never went to school and thus I am not literate. My life was at sea as was the life of my father, grandfather and great grandfather as evidenced by the fishing permit we carry with us from my great grandfather which dates to the Ottoman period.



Ottoman period fishing permit from al-Hissi family. Photo by Zakaria Bakr, October 2020

Myself, I went out fishing for the first time on a sailing boat in 1960, I was 12. We went as far as Bir il-Abd, Haifa and many other places and we would spend the five months of winter in AlArish (now Egypt) where we would sail to, catch fish on the way and transport back by road. We would catch a lot of fish, all types. The water was rich, and we were well connected to all fishermen like us. The sea was so rich that we only had to use big nets, made of natural cotton. Like everything else in those days it was as natural as it could be. We would not add anything to the fish just some salt. All our food was harvested in spring and summer and prepared for winter by using techniques of drying, preserving, curing etc. We used natural materials from the sea for curing diseases as well, like oil and sea mud and we knew that some fish would be healthier or better than others. Those days weren't easy but they were beautiful and we had few problems.

In 1962 my father would own the first lanche in Gaza and it would increase the fish catch tremendously. We would have a tonne or a tonne and a half of big fish every day. By 1967 there were 13 lanches roaming the sea making excellent catch and our situation was really good. We were living good lives.

I remember, a long time ago even before the Nakba, or so I was told, that the fish was so rich and good that people in Gaza did not even catch prawns or seafood. It was perceived to be an inferior sea catch. Only when the English came to Gaza during the mandate period, they introduced prawns as a delicacy which we then took on and started fishing for. Now it is the most expensive good in the seafood and fish market.

I also recall that during the 1<sup>st</sup> Intifada camps would be under curfew and people couldn't leave their homes to fetch food, but the beach, sea and fishing trade would not be under curfew and so we, the fishermen would use our boats to sail south and obtain fruits and vegetables to carry back home and share them with the local people in the camps to provide relief and reduce the impact of the curfew on the local population. We were in an excellent position back then”.



In this chapter I aim to describe the importance of fishing in the Gaza social and cultural context which has maintained a role as a contributor to the economy, but from there the fishing community has progressed towards a more pronounced and visible role in actors defying the Occupation. Their life under Occupation and the ongoing daily violations against them linked to their livelihood and culture have made them 'defenders of the land', in this case the sea, and their actions can be seen as a form of everyday resistance in life under Occupation.

Relevant literature usually describes the Palestinian connection to the land as one of the main characteristics of Sumud. However, I aim to demonstrate that the link to the sea is an extension of the Sumud practices amongst the Palestinian communities and in the case of the fishermen it should be understood as a form of everyday resistance against the Occupation and a vital ingredient to not just protect their livelihood, but to do so with dignity and therewith give meaning to their lives.

Through the words of Murad Al-Hissi a retired fisherman who used to own a large fleet and had several fishermen working for him I can explore the history of fishing in Gaza. He clearly remembers the olden days as memorable and pleasant albeit that they were tough as well. His story highlights the connections of the seafarers' and fishermen communities all the way from northern Lebanon to western Egypt, as he remembers the seas to be open and plentiful and the fishermen few. They would meet and connect on regular intervals and be aware of the communities' shortcomings and problems. He also shares examples of how the sea provided them with everything, food, medicine, friendship and how a strong sense of fishermen community and culture existed.

Murad al-Hissi's story provides further evidence that the life of the fishing communities in the Gaza Strip are connected to the fishing communities in the Mediterranean. Based on detailed research, Prieto (2017) specified and identified commonalities in fishing communities on functional as well as social levels. Especially with regards to the latter he argues that:

...fishing settlements can be defined as groups who identify themselves as maritime people but who perform a highly variable and different set of activities according to the available resources. Thus, they could be part-time farmers, part-time traders or part-time craft specialists.

In the case of the Gaza fishermen, they have indeed adapted to the changing context whether it being a result of politics or environmental change, however, the fishermen I spoke to would all firstly identify themselves as fishermen and being part of a fishing community. As Murad al-Hissi proudly presented, this is not a job, neither a trade, but rather a way of life that has been handed over from one generation to the next, hence the pride in the antique fishing permit belonging to the al-Hissi family. Other fishermen made the same claim albeit that it is increasingly difficult to continue their livelihoods and way of life. Nevertheless, this way of life is visible in for example the graffiti drawn on the fishermen houses' walls in the refugee camps which other than reflecting their ownership of a boat reflects their association with the sea and being part of the community.

Fisheries has been a main source of food for the local population as well as contributed to the economy through trade and export with Israel and continues to employ many across the sector. Whereas the fish trade and economic contribution was proportionately greater in the past, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, when the catch was high and population levels relatively low, the cultural importance of the fishing community remained largely unknown to the wider Gaza or Palestinian society until more recently. Although there are several factors that have influenced this, including the opening up of the community to the wider Gaza society, I will demonstrate that an increased struggle for survival as a result of the Occupation is reflected in increased recognition for the fishermen as *Samideen* and 'national signifiers' (Swedenburg 1990).

### Gaza's Fisheries Sector

When driving home after a day of work in the Northern part of the Gaza Strip, the driver takes the 'Beach road' as it is known, the road which has recently been upgraded, goes from Gaza city along the shore southwards. The sea on my right, the window of the car open we drive southwards. The food stalls which reign the boulevard in Gaza city fade away and soon the boulevard ends too. It is just sand and beach now, which must feel to all those who are suffering from the blockade that the sea could take them to the end of the world. Now and then I see a small wooden fishing boat lining the shore, reminding me that fishing is practiced from north to south and that it has been an integral part of life around the Gaza coastline for centuries. This has been due to its geographic location on the southern end of the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea combined with a moderate climate which makes the sea suitable for active fishing throughout the year. As Gaza has been a gateway between the Middle East and Africa and operated as a main trading centre throughout history, fishing was identified as a commercial activity, even if a small-scale one. The Gaza port was one of the four main ports on the Palestinian coast during Mandate times, namely: Acre, Haifa, and Jaffa, then Gaza. Other undeveloped harbour sites were in each of the governorates, these were mainly vacated spaces at the beach with very basic facilities, if any. These were open to the sea and thus unprotected. The harbour and wharf in Gaza's main port remained largely under-developed until later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When walking towards the Gaza seaport which is located right at the western end of Gaza city, I immediately noticed that the port is not suited for large scale fisheries. A number of restaurants and eateries are spread along the road leading to the port. A recently built bright white mosque surrounded by well-kept greens attracts the eye and serves as the entry point to the Gaza seaport.

Right upon entry to the port, a memorial site is placed in the middle of the roundabout to commemorate the 'Freedom Flotilla' members who died at sea.<sup>38</sup>

Once inside the port which takes the shape of a bay, many small artisanal fishing boats are lined up at the shore. There are a few larger trawlers that can be spotted in between the smaller boats. The beach serves as a workshop site where nets and other gear are lying around waiting to be repaired. I see that some of the fishermen are conducting fibreglass or painting repairs with material provided by donor agencies. There are several benches and coffee vendor stands on the pavement which also serves as a boulevard and outdoor recreational space for the numerous Gazans who have few other places to go. The port has become a mix of fishing and entertainment grounds. On the left side of the entrance are several wharf facilities where the fishermen can store their equipment and belongings and where men sit at the ground repairing nets by hand. In between the storage rooms there are some tables and chairs, and in summer mattresses are lying in the shade because the space also serves as a social meeting place for both the active and retired fishermen who come to have a coffee and chat about the days long gone.

In my first meeting with the local coordinator, which was held at that site, with coffee provided in paper cups from the vendor stall, he explained that the establishment of a modern Gaza seaport was initially agreed upon in the Oslo Accords in 1993 and construction did indeed start in the late 1990s, but was halted at an early stage due to a lack of construction materials. What had been constructed was partially destroyed by the Israeli army in September and October 2000 when the Second Intifada erupted. After the unilateral withdrawal by Israel from Gaza in 2005, construction works were planned to re-start. However, up to this day this has not been resumed and the current port is insufficient to support any economic development process.

Although the construction of the port has been halted, the partial update from very basic shore-based operations to the current status of the port did influence the fisheries sector. An unpublished project report in 2010 by Abdel Nasser Maadi highlighted some of these advantages of which the fishermen mainly benefitted through i) easier access to high waters and thus an increase in the number of days that they could go out fishing ii) no costs for towing and pulling the boats to the landing, iii) increase the life span of the boats that were previously subjected to wear and tear by the pulling and towing, iv) increased availability of port services.

The improvements in Gaza's main port, although some parts are now dilapidated, have also resulted in the largest share of fishing to land at this particular port. Maadi (2010) estimates this to be around 70-80% of the overall fish production in the Gaza Strip, whereas approximately 50% of the

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<sup>38</sup> The Gaza flotilla raid was a military operation in international waters on 31 May 2010, by Israel against six civilian ships of the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" who aimed to break the blockade. Nine activists were killed, and ten Israeli soldiers were wounded.

fishermen work and land at this port, including the largest boat owners as the other ports remain under-developed and shore based.

As a result, the Gaza port is the main centre of fishing activity in the Gaza Strip and the main auction and trading point for fresh fish in Palestine, it also serves both Gaza City fishing community and the fishing community from the northern parts of Gaza and thus has more activity than any other port in Gaza. It makes a good location to observe the fish trading process which starts as soon as the boats return and offload their catch in plastic and wooden boxes which are then loaded onto carts (drawn by mules) or in non-refrigerated cars to the wholesale market, located in very close proximity to the offload area. It is at this wholesale market that the auction process kicks in and where, according to Ottoman Law, *dhallals* (auctioneers) are required which are recruited by the municipality on an annual basis (Maadi 2010). According to the World Bank report (2020) and further elaborated on by the fishermen I spoke to, the revenues of an auctioneer come from two main sources. First as a middleman, the auctioneer takes 3% from the buyer and 3% from the seller for each transaction. Second as a trader, the auctioneer buys and sells for his account, making profit from the spread between buying and selling. The auctioneers currently have 31 employees, with an average monthly salary of about 1500 NIS (US\$434) per person (World Bank 2020). Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority does not tax the fishermen over their catch, instead the *dhallal* or auctioneer pays for the rent of the market hall. This way the municipality benefits from the fishing sector. This method similarly applies to the different municipalities where auctions take place and thus income there depends on the quantities of fish and the results of the tender.

After the wholesale process has been completed, merchants transport fish to smaller local markets to sell to consumers in the Gaza Strip, to some of the remaining high quality fish restaurants, or some traders pick high-quality fish and export them to Israel if permitted. While I was there, I also witnessed some subsistence fishers who were selling their catch outside the wholesale market and instead were standing on the boulevard with their catch of the day in ice-coolers which they try and sell quickly to then head off home and use the remaining bits for their own consumption.

Alternatively, across the Gaza Strip little vans pass through the refugee camps and sell their daily catch. I remember the sound of the vans and the crackly microphone through which the vendor yells 'sardines, sardines, kilo for 10 shekel'. This would be in the Bureij refugee camp but would be representative for camps, villages and towns throughout the Gaza Strip.

Although the processes have remained largely the same, the value of the fishing sector in the Gaza Strip has reduced considerably over the past decades. In terms of contribution to the Palestinian Gross Domestic Product, the most recent data compiled by the FAO (2016) indicate that the fisheries

sector in Gaza contributes less than 0,001% to the overall economy.<sup>39</sup> It is still seen to be of sufficient importance as a contributor especially as it serves as a source of employment. There are 110,000 people including fishers, retailers, exporters, owners of seafood restaurants, input suppliers, researchers, and transporters who rely on the sector in a context where unemployment is very high (World Bank 2020). As for the fishermen themselves, new types of menial small-scale jobs have been created such as net repair and fish scaling due to access restriction at sea or because boats are not seaworthy and in need of repair.

Rashad Al-Hissi, 76 years old is an example of job change and job creation as a result of damaged



and lost boats. His '*lanche*' (purse-seiner) was destroyed in April 2017 in which an Israeli naval ship trampled his boat while it was out at sea in the Sudaniyya region. The fisherman on board of the boat, Mohammed Al-Hissi was killed in the incident and his remains have not been found. Rashad and his family lost their source of income and were forced to look for other means of work. Rashad, who has

Photo: Zakaria Bakr, October 2020

limited literacy levels and no other skillset, started working with the nets which he repairs and connects into larger ones which he then rents out to fishermen who either had their nets confiscated at sea or whose nets have needed repair. In this way he and his family can guarantee a small income.

According to statistics of the Department of Fisheries in the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, the number of registered fishermen were 3,617 fishermen for 2018 with approximately 600 people occupying associated jobs.

<sup>39</sup> In 2018 Palestine's agriculture contributed 7.39% to GDP. In comparison Portugal's agriculture contributed just over 2% to GDP of which fishing represented 10% or 0,24% of GDP employing just over 17,000 people. Data from [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org) and [www.theglobaleconomy.org](http://www.theglobaleconomy.org)

**Table 5.1: Basic changes in fisheries sector in Palestine 2007-2018**

| Variable                           | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Amount of Caught Fish (metric ton) | 2701 | 2843 | 1525 | 1699 | 1318 | 2091 | 1929 | 2854 | 3226 | 3305 | 3206 | 3038 |
| Number of Fishermen                | 3060 | 3060 | 3551 | 3097 | 3346 | 3524 | ..   | 4341 | 3617 | 3617 | 3617 | 3617 |
| Number of Boats used in Fishing    | 723  | 614  | 1282 | 1283 | 1036 | 1490 | ..   | 1071 | 1261 | 1261 | 1261 | 1261 |

(..) : Not available

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, 2018. Ramallah, Palestine on [www.pcbs.ps](http://www.pcbs.ps)

These 3,617 fishermen, directly contributing to approximately 20,000 household members spread all over the Gaza Strip across the five governorates forming close communities.

**Table 5.2: Number of Fishermen in Gaza Strip by Governorate and Number of Boats in Gaza Strip by Governorate and Type of Boat, 2018**

| Governorate        | Number of fishermen | Total number of Boats | Type of Boat     |              |                  |                |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|
|                    |                     |                       | Hasaka with Oars | Hasaka Motor | Launch Shanshula | Launch Trawler |
| Gaza Strip (total) | 3,617               | 1,261                 | 422              | 772          | 52               | 15             |
| Gaza               | 1,888               | 692                   | 209              | 426          | 42               | 15             |
| Deir al Balah      | 610                 | 219                   | 70               | 148          | 1                | -              |
| Khan Younis        | 680                 | 180                   | 68               | 108          | 4                | -              |
| Rafah              | 439                 | 170                   | 75               | 90           | 5                | -              |

(-) : Not available

\*: Includes data of both North Gaza and Gaza Governorate.

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, 2018. Ramallah, Palestine on [www.pcbs.ps](http://www.pcbs.ps)

### Gaza's Fishing Community: Origin and Composition

According to the information shared by the fishermen and their families, a total of ten to twelve extended fishermen families originated from Gaza (city area) and have thus been practicing fishing as a livelihood for many generations. These families were not registered as 1948 refugees but had been living along the shore in the Gaza for centuries.

The process of forced displacement that the Palestinian people were subjected to in 1948, commonly known as the *Nakba*, especially those who fled from the coastal cities such as Hammama,

Joura, Majdal, Jaffa and Ashdod, brought large numbers of refugees to work at sea making up nearly 60% of the fishermen to Gaza. Groups of fishermen and their families thus joined the existing fisherfolk in Gaza where they started anew. Initially, in 1948 until the 1960s these families were relatively few and small but the population increased rapidly in line with the overall population growth of the Gaza Strip which more than doubled over the last decade alone. The large and instant influx of refugees had both positive and negative consequences for the fisheries sector in Gaza. The most important disadvantage is that a large number of boats and fishermen were squeezed into a relatively small area, reducing productivity, whereas the positive side was that the different cultures, dialects, cultural and intellectual heritage added to the richness of the fishing profession throughout the Gaza Strip.

All these fisherfolk families were well connected as many had known each other from before the Nakba (1948). According to the old fishermen of the Gaza fishing community, they had connections with fishing communities that lived in other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, between Beirut, all the way northwards in nowadays Lebanon and Tripoli, to all the way south-westwards, in western Egypt and, according to legend, even in Libya.

The above demonstrates that the fishing community is closely intertwined and connected, a tight-knit community, even though they originated from different places: i) original Gaza fishermen (non-refugees) who have been fishing for centuries along the shores of Mandate Palestine and ii) descendants of refugees of 1948 Mandate Palestine fishing villages who brought their livelihoods with them and continued these activities when settling as refugees in the Gaza Strip. Thirdly, the current community also consists of a very small group of fishermen who do not originate from fishing families but have taken up fishing or fishing-related jobs to ensure an income in a fragile social and political context. Nowadays, sixty to seventy percent of the fishermen are registered refugees. Many of the fishermen I interviewed indicated not to differentiate between refugee or non-refugee fishermen families, rather they would not use these distinctions at all. Maybe, I was told, just after the Nakba for the first decade it could have mattered as original Gaza fishermen used to have boats and gear whereas the refugees arrived with nothing and had to start anew, thus making it easier to differentiate. But as soon as they started owning boats and equipment again, the differences would fade. The fishermen told me that in a way they are forced to know each other and to collaborate as a result of the political and maritime circumstances, the difficulty of the profession and its associated risks. The fact that fishing as a profession is not easily accessible to outsiders makes the community rely on each other.

This has also been reflected in social processes like weddings. The majority of weddings in the Gaza Strip are often arranged and spouses are looked for within their own community or neighbourhood. In the past refugee and non-refugee has been an important criterion for weddings as

especially non-refugees would not marry refugee status holders. As for the fishing community they have engaged in the opposite manner. To them it was more important to marry within the fishing community than to differentiate between refugee / non refugee. As a result, the fishing community has been less preoccupied with their refugee status but overriding importance has been given to marry within the fishing community. One of the women I spoke to confided that indeed she has a refugee background, but her husband originates from a Gaza fisher family. She stated that although there are refugees and non-refugees, they all belong to the same class. Maybe nowadays the refugees even have a slight advantage because of the aid that is being provided. Nowadays weddings are no longer pre-arranged like in the past and income might matter nowadays but it shows the equality and solidarity within and amongst fisherfolk.

This specific fishing culture of Gaza is also reflected in numerous proverbs and songs.<sup>40</sup> The local coordinator informs me that there is even a song that merges the citizen with the refugee, serving as an indication of the connectedness and collaboration amongst all fishermen.

Although the fishing community themselves do not differentiate between the origins of its community, over the past decade aid providers have started to target fishermen community based on its refugee status. This occurs during the development and humanitarian aid process where projects are being developed and implemented targeting refugee fishermen alone for example. This is perceived to be problematic by the community as it can have a negative impact on the social structures within the community potentially creating new inequalities, the coordinator explained this further:

“Especially over the past decade a number of projects have been designed and implemented which have reinforced the distinction of refugee / non-refugee within the fishermen community. Several years ago, we witnessed the discrimination between citizens and refugees in temporary employment projects. It is clear that UNRWA employment projects only target refugees whereas other projects do only target non-refugees. Although the fishing community does not differentiate, the aid providers do, treating us differently.”

One of the fisherwomen supported this view when she stated she had recently married a fisherman from the Gaza families, and she found that having a refugee status allows for the provision of more aid through the main agencies who have a preference for aid provision to refugees.

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<sup>40</sup> The lexicon of the Palestinian fisherman’s song is full of words which meanings are unclear, neither can its origin be traced easily. However, such a song can be a communication tool for the workers and the Rayyes (the captain). For example, when they push the boat – the captain sings words which serve as a command to instruct the workers or serve as a rhythm for the workers to push the boat onto the shore, a clear example of which: Captain: Yes (Ya Layyes) (no meaning)/ Workers: Hey Hey! / Captain: Ya Layyes (no meaning) / Workers: Hey Hey! / Rayyes: Hala Lisa (no meaning) / Workers: Hey! There are various other reasons why fishermen sing, to ward off fear, to put their trust in God to overcome the fear and misery of the seas, to spent time reminiscing about their wives at home, to call for a good catch, to praise their arrival and good catch, etc. Time and season can also be presented in the songs for example referring to utter darkness (absence of the moon) and the difficulties in identifying good spots for fishing.



The fishermen stated to have lived very good lives right up to the late 1990s, or early 2000s when they belonged to, according to their words, the richest groups in Palestinian society – they owned their own buildings, wedded off their children in luxury and replaced their boats with new motorised ones and invested in the fish trade through the Tawfeeq Cooperative.

To learn more about the ins and outs of the good life and the downfall, Zakaria introduced me to Halima, a 66-year-old woman and one of the very few female fish traders in Gaza. She was going to tell me all about that on that morning in July when I had planned to meet her. She is a character and known in the fishing community of Shati camp as a real boss, or so Zakaria told me. He had known her ever since and thought she would have interesting stories to tell as her position is inside the house and as part of the fish traders, thus unique. I walked in the narrow alley of Shati camp leading to her house, when I realised how her house had been built to squeeze in, it appeared to have been constructed without proper planning. The house was small on the ground floor but then towered five floors high and overhung the ground floor level. Men were seated at the entrance of the house in what appeared to be a little corner, one of them was the husband of Halima who told me: “welcome, the boss is inside waiting for you.” Once inside the house I immediately noticed how full the house was with people, young and old, all laughing and excited about my arrival. I then felt the humidity and heat falling on me as the few windows were insufficient to let in much needed light or air during the long power cuts. Instead, I was offered a chair, a cold juice and biscuits and invited to sit next to Halima who started the conversation like a real saleswoman.

“I have been involved in the fishing business nearly my whole life. I was born a refugee in the Shati camp, but my father was a fisherman. Our house was right next to the beach, but it got destroyed and my parents moved to Al Arish (Egypt) as a result. Me and my sisters moved to Nuseirat initially but then I got married at an early age and I hardly knew how to cater for myself. The neighbours taught me most things I needed to know. I married Abu Riyala, whose father had married two wives and when he died, I was finding myself also taking care of his little ones. Then I fell pregnant myself (1971) and I went on to have ten children, seven boys and three girls, ilhamdulillah. My husband was a shore worker / day labourer. I used to go to the beach every day to help out, which was quite uncommon at the time, but I would help and take the fish and sell at the local market. We used to make good money and from the money we bought fresh vegetables and fruits that would feed our family. By the mid 1970’s we used our savings to buy our first non-motorised boat, a floka. As we were few, we bought it together with our neighbours, the family Al-Amouda, and life was good. When the children started to have school-going age we sold the sailing boat and became day labourers at the shore for a while, but still life was good at that time and we had sufficient savings to buy a motorised boat, a hasaka. This was only the beginning of our family fleet which consisted of eight boats for our seven sons to use for fishing once they had graduated. Although we obtained a total of eight boats, we would not catch as much fish as before in Port Said and Al-Arish. That was before 1995, when we used to sail there and there was a lot of fish – the Gaza waters appear to be too shallow for deep fishing. Also, back in the days there were fewer maggiat (vessel owners / fleets). Nowadays we have about 150 in the Gaza harbour alone and this puts a lot of pressure on the fishermen to all fish in the same space. Actually, we notice it with everything, this increase in population. For example, the house

we built was initially an asbestos roofed, single brick house which was common at the time. Over time we had to extend it so many times, it now consists of five floors as five of my sons are living here with their families, so now we are 54 people of which 34 children all in one house!

“But back to my story about the boats so, we used to have eight in our family fleet but three of them have fallen into repair after suffering attacks at sea and only just now in July (2019) they have been returned but they are in desperate need of repair for which we don’t have the funds. Really, the times are tough nowadays and even our family which has been doing so well over time is been having a hard time. Just today the seventeen fishermen in the family came back with a catch and I can show you what they brought.”

Halima walks over to the fridge which is off electricity for the whole time that I am there for and pulls out some baskets with fish. The fish she brings is tiny. She says: “Not fish worthy, in other countries even illegal to catch”. I asked what she does with such tiny fish and she continues her story yet again,

“I plan to make a sardine kufte from it. Have you ever eaten that? No, not meat kufte, fish kufte, sardine kufte to be precise! I watch her de-bone and open up a tiny sardine in less than three seconds while she continues to explain the recipe in full: “I will cut onion and garlic, parsley and mint and basil and add spices of coriander, cumin and dill seeds, black pepper and salt and then kneed the de-boned sardines with a bit of potato so they can brown in the oven. I will add tahini sauce to give it a distinct flavour and then we will eat it together with home baked bread. Each floor will have its own share delivered to their house as downstairs is too small for 54 people to eat! Of course, everyone has to help in the cooking! I think you should stay and eat with us so you can learn how to make it from scratch! The small sardines were the rest catch of the 17 men who went fishing. It is more profitable to take that home then to try and sell it. According to tradition we share the catch of the boat equally. And actually, they did not have a bad day as they nearly made a 1000 US\$, but we had 700US\$ outstanding and the fuel alone costed 350US\$, so we still fell short of our target.”

Her son Miflah then joins Halima’s monologue:

“A decent day would be if we have a catch of 700US\$ because that means that we would have 30NIS (approx. 8 euro) each a day. Of course, this is relative as we were once known to be the Saudis of the Gaza Strip when we earned up to 200NIS a day! That is one of the reasons we never looked or learned other trades and jobs. The sea has always provided to us!”

Miflah repeats Halima’s invitation and proudly states that they have celebrations in the house as two of the children in the house had excellent marks in their final exams. “We should all celebrate!”

The increased focus on results in education indicates that it is taking an increasingly important role in the lives of the fishermen, especially when he continues and states that he hopes that his son will be a doctor as he obtained 95% as a grade! In the meantime, he is planning to go out fishing at 4pm expecting to be back the following day. Hopefully it will be another good day!

## Gaza's Fishing Community: Organisation

Halima's story explains the changes in the lives of those working at sea. Fishing methods have differed over time and in the absence of boats fishermen used to employ traditional methods such as net-fishing by taking their nets out to sea to later pull them back in manually, followed by the use of manual boats like rowing and sailing which would take them further north and south and which was only to be replaced by motorised boats from the mid-1960s onwards. Several of the older respondents indicated that the life of the fishermen used to be simple but tough. They would go out and fish and would not return home for weeks on end. Those days the sea appeared, to them, to be uncontrolled by specific authorities and the availability of fish was unlimited, both because there were hardly any problems facing the fishermen and because non-motorised fishing resulted in lower catch and thus a natural balance between catch and reproduction rate was maintained. As Halima indicated, the rising numbers of both fishermen and *maggiat* has put pressure on fish production, which combined with the current political context results in low and irregular catch. However, the perceived good times of the past also resulted in the establishment of unwritten rules and laws which serve the community, even in hard times.

Further information collected provided an insight into the organisation and functioning of the fishing community with regards to ownership, asset-sharing and social protection which is affected by changing conditions. Like Halima, the other families I visited made it all quite clear that there is no individual boat ownership, instead the fishing business is a family business in which the father and brothers are partners in one or more boats, and the property is registered in the name of the father and the brothers or, at least, one of them. Most often it would be the eldest brother and then it works down the chain towards the youngest. However, there are examples of younger brothers buying out and instead focusing on studies. Although it is registered in a specific name, it is known that it belongs to all members of that family. Indeed, fishing is not a commercial business either, it is not run by companies but by families themselves and therefore ownership is distributed amongst the respective family members. In other words, the percentage of ownership varies based on the ownership of number of boats and the share of ownership for each boat and this is reflected in the earnings. This makes it susceptible to change and can affect social organisation structure and rules. The local coordinator elaborated:

“For larger boats (launches), their material value is divided into 24 shares, so you can find partners sharing a boat, either brothers, cousins or colleagues. The percentage of shares differs from one partner to another, for example, one fisherman has twelve shares, another one four and another one eight. However, if the boat is solely for siblings who work with the father, shares are equal like the inheritance law.<sup>41</sup> Half of the income of the boat for the owner and the other half for the

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<sup>41</sup> In Islamic law, inheritance is shared between sons and daughters in the ratio of 2:1

workers, and the skilled workers are distinguished by a reward from the boat's share and what remains is distributed according to shares. A fisherman can buy shares into a boat, but that is very difficult, especially if the majority of the boat owners are siblings. It is thus possible for the fisherman and his siblings to run a full boat alone or with a partner. However, the recent situation of the blockade has put a lot of pressure on the boats. Previously, when a fisherman's children would grow up, he would buy or build them a new boat, today this is no longer possible, not to buy neither to manufacture due to the blockade and lack of materials. As a result, all children of the father and his brother have to share the same boat. This adds a lot of financial pressure on one boat, for example 15 cousins might all be working the same boat and have to share the income from the catch which thus means a very small share, low income and therewith increasing difficulties."

The World Bank report (2020) adds that large owners tend to have three types of fishing vessels (trawler, *shanshula* and *hasaka*), while small owners typically have only *hasakas*. By owning different types, large vessel owners (called *maggia* in Arabic) can diversify their risks better. Diversifying risk can result in a more sustained income over time and is important as a social protection measure. Fishermen often depends on each other in the absence of formal social security or social protection schemes. Neither the official institutions nor the trade union has a system in place to support the fishermen financially e.g., when access to the sea is closed. The World Bank argues that owning different boats facilitates the existence of an informal social protection mechanism, as in hard time the income will be shared (World Bank 2020). This also means the responsibility is pushed onto the fisherfolk themselves.

The fishermen elaborated on the workings of such mechanism that there are unwritten and informal laws amongst the fishermen, either by mutual agreement or based on some form of customary law which ensures that fishermen can benefit from some form of protection. Such mechanisms are even valid when out at sea. According to the fishermen there is a custom that when one of the boats out at sea is broken, the nearby boats are forced to tow it to shore for free. In the case that the towing boat has insufficient fuel he takes from the damaged boat. There is even a custom called *Al-Nakhwa* meaning that if a boat breaks down or a fisherman gets lost, or if anything happens to fishermen, a large fleet of boats enters the sea to search at no cost.

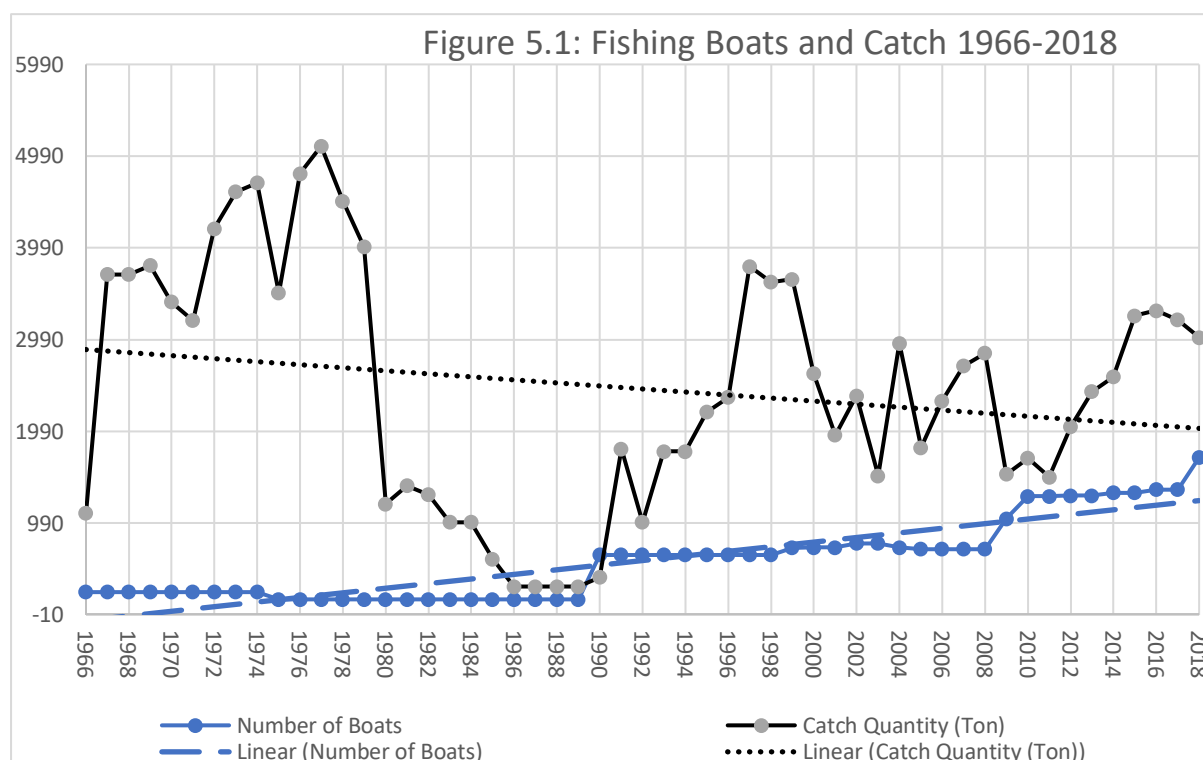
These mechanisms do not rely solely on the ownership of different boats but rather on the solidarity structures developed within the fishing community but set out and controlled by boat owners. These protection mechanisms are a result of the fact that fishermen do not earn daily wages or monthly incomes, but rather their income is derived from the catch and landings, meaning that income is distributed as follows: after paying the costs of fuel and any other costs related to the fishing trip, then the remaining amount is split into two: half for the boat owner and half is distributed equally to all the boat workers. After that, a fisherman who has been active and professional during the fishing trip can benefit from a 'tip', (*Ikramih*). Depending on his level of intensity, activity or professionalism, this could amount to a quarter of a share or half a share. It is even possible that it would amount to a

full share which is taken from the amount of the half of the boat owner. This provides an incentive for the fishermen to work pro-actively and intensely during the whole sea trip.

With regards to the loan that the fishermen can benefit from as argued by the World Bank, in most cases this is deducted from the half of the boat owner, and if the catch has been a lot, it would not be deducted completely, especially if the worker is loyal and committed. This rule applies to all workers of the boat, whether it is a member of the family or an outside worker. However, this mechanism has come under pressure over the last two decades as now the boat owner is in as much financial need as the boat workers.

In the years before the blockade, according to the custom of boat owners, a social protection scheme was in place which provided for the construction of housing for the fishermen. The boat owner would advance the costs and the boat workers would pay back proportionately from each earning. Weddings were organised in a similar manner; boat owners would advance, and the boat workers would be able to pay back proportionately over time. This protection scheme remained valid for as long as the boat worker remained committed to its owner. This was a common relationship and in the interest of both the boat worker and the boat owner. In the past the social protection scheme even covered the inability to work as a result of an incident at work in which case the boat owner would pay for the full earnings until the fisherman would be recovered and could go back to work.

Although the context has changed dramatically over the past decades, these informal laws remain applicable today, however, they are based on the income ratio which has deteriorated sharply over the past decade and a half and thus impacted these forms of social security. This has been exacerbated by the absence of any formal laws or social protection schemes in the sector or a fund to ward off risks. This can then be regarded as an important social protection mechanism for the fishermen as Maadi (2010) found that 93% of the fishermen rely on fishing as their sole source of income, whereas only 7% indicated to have 'another' job. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the decreasing share for each person on the boat, combined with the reduced fishing zones the immediate consequence would be that poverty levels amongst the fishermen community have skyrocketed since the beginning of the blockade. Maadi's study calculated that the average fisherman earned approximately 543 NIS per month in 2009, which equals 120-130 euros a month and which is highly insufficient to maintain a family consisting of approximately 6.5 people, the 2007 estimate for average Gaza family size according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. As a result, many of the households, 82% according to the Maadi survey, benefit from food support from different international NGOs. Since Maadi's study a decade has passed and the blockade is still in place and the situation of the fishermen has continued to deteriorate further resulting in increased poverty numbers currently standing at 95% according to UAWC project data collected in 2019.



Source: Palestinian Network for NGOs, Gaza Strip Fishermen: Continued steadfastness under Israeli occupation collective punishment, 2019, <http://pngoportal.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Gaza-Strip-Fishermen-Fact-Sheet-EN-Final.pdf>

Besides the effects on the economic and financial status of the fishing community in Gaza, the asset-sharing, an immediate consequence of culture, context and conditions, also has an impact on the future of the fishing community. The reduced ability and capacity amongst the fishermen have resulted in the family business becoming near obsolete although the majority of the fishermen remain committed to this business as there are very few other employment options for this mainly single-skilled community.

Although education records (Maadi 2010) indicate that literacy rates are average to high amongst the community, the fishermen remain single-skilled and operate first and foremost in the fisheries sector. The fact that unemployment in Gaza Strip is one of the highest in the world leaves them with few other options. Nevertheless, there is a recognition of the need for the younger generations to continue their education and look at alternatives that could provide a viable living. Some of the families I spoke to thus invested in the education of their younger sons with the hope to gain skills and find employment in other sectors, like the grandsons of Halima and the younger sons of Abu Adham. However, this community has been practicing fisheries and has been living off the sea for centuries

and has developed its own social protection mechanisms to resist any outside pressure. They are supported by their sustained belief that fishing is a way of life that they will not give up on.

Madleen's eyes lit up when she speaks about how the sea runs through her veins, ever since she has been a little girl, she has been helping her father. I was lucky enough to meet this 24-year-old woman, the only fisherwoman in Gaza who had already been in the eye of the media so many times.<sup>42</sup> She accepted my request as I came via friends and was willing to learn about her situation rather than writing a piece about the only fisherwoman in Gaza. When she opens the door of her in-law's house, she recently got married with a fisherman, I see a young, strong and determined woman at the doorstep who welcomes me into the house. We take a seat on the sofa in the visitor's room, the main space in the house with furniture. Another woman living in the house brings me a Seven-Up with a straw, freshly brought from the shop downstairs and thus still cold as opposed to the food in the fridge which only works a few hours a day. We take a seat on the sofa when Madleen, in an outspoken and determined manner, chats away about the sea and fishing. I realise there is not quite a sadness in her voice, but rather what I initially take as a sense of resignation about life in a fishing community. She tells me she is used to giving interviews, after all she is the only fisherwoman in the Gaza Strip, the international media loves to show that gender angle in a conservative society, but, as she claims, with that they lack the intent to describe the wider picture of the fishermen's struggle. It is then that I come to understand that what I initially took as her sense of resignation is rather a sense of resilience, when she claims that being a fisherwoman is not any different from being any fisherman as she is treated the same by the Israeli naval forces. She suffers the same and argues how this is a battle for livelihood, survival and existence to which both fishermen and women are subjected to the same extent. After all, she argues, they are the pawns in a political game.

She explains how she descends from a fisher family rooted in Hammama, 1948 Palestine but they fled to Gaza. She elaborates about the experiences of her father and grandfather who were all fishermen and how they had sailed to Cyprus, Egypt and Libya. She is the eldest and even though she had a younger brother she joined her father at an early age, to help out first at the shore and later on

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<sup>42</sup> Madleen has featured in numerous news articles explaining her reasons for fishing at sea including in e.g. Ghada Al-Haddad, 'Gaza's Only Fisherwoman Navigates Dangerous Waters', AlJazeera, 7 April 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/4/7/gazas-only-fisherwoman-navigates-dangerous-waters> , Elizabeth MacBride, 'Bravest Entrepreneur: How The Fisherwoman Of Gaza Built A Business In The Blockaded Seaport', Forbes 29 August 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/elizabethmacbride/2016/08/29/how-the-courageous-fisherwoman-of-gaza-is-building-a-business-in-the-blockaded-seaport/?sh=5b8dd11f4b4a> , and Catrina Stewart, 'The girl who became the only fisherwoman in Gaza', the Independent, 22 October 2011, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/girl-who-became-only-fisherwoman-gaza-2053580.html>

at the boat. When her father fell sick, she decided she would take on the breadwinner's role of her family. The community had been used seeing her around at the beach and on the boats and supported her initiative. She tells me that it was the outsiders working in the fisheries sector that had more problems with a woman fishing at sea. Although she had to struggle hard in the beginning, she has been able to provide for her parents and siblings catching 3-5 kilo of fish a day and she would take a few leftovers home for lunch. Now she is married and seven months pregnant worried about what life will bring for her baby. Towards the end of our chat we walk around the house and she shows me her room and the baby space she has carefully prepared. I also notice some awards. She explains that indeed she finished *tawjihi* (high school) and went on to obtain a certificate in secretary skills and administration. She does not have the certificate though, they owe too much money to be able to afford to pay the remaining 100US\$ to get the original certificate. She is determined and defiant when she says she will not need the certificate, she is a fisherwoman and that is her destiny.

### Sumud and the Fishermen

The Palestinian concept of Sumud can be used here to explain this steadfastness of the fishermen. Very little information and literature is available on the origin of the concept of Sumud, making it difficult to historicise and contextualise it. Adnan Musallam in an interview explains that during the British mandate time Sumud was there with the Palestinians as a collective consciousness, but not as a concept, slogan or label. It had not been examined as such and some leaders only started to use it as a slogan, in the 1960s, 70s and the 80s.<sup>43</sup> This was when it was introduced as a formal resilience strategy in 1978, when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) recommended Sumud as a way of helping people to remain steadfast in Palestine. Thus, Sumud became a national concept and strategy for Palestinians in order to prevent the uprooting policy, to preserve identity and to restore dignity in the struggle for national liberty (Teeffelen 2011). According to Teeffelen, Sumud as a rhetorical term has been used outside of Palestine, for example by Arab movements, such as during the revolution in 2011 in Tahrir Square. It is therefore not a strictly Palestinian concept but in the Palestinian context it has gotten several unique connotations because of the specificity of the Palestinian situation and struggle.

The term Sumud is closely associated with 'rootedness to the land' and therefore, initially, more often linked to peasants defending their land. Ted Swedenburg (1990) elaborated on the value of the peasant as a national signifier when he argued that:

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<sup>43</sup> <https://palestine-family.net/sumud-series-interview-adnan-musallam/> accessed on 05/09/2021



The figure of the Palestinian peasant has become the epitome of what it means to be *samid*, to stay put, anchored to the earth with stubborn determination. Palestinians fight colonization by stressing their rootedness in and love for the soil. (p.22)

Several other authors have applied the concept of Sumud on to different groups in society who are practicing everyday resistance and acts of resilience (Ryan 2015, Nijmeh 2018). In my view the fishermen have been practicing resilience and resistance at sea in a similar manner as Palestinian farmers and others have done in protection of Palestinian land and identity. The fishermen had not received a similar recognition as the peasants. Not until recently.

As for the peasants their engagement and mobilisation in various revolts and other forms of resistance dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>44</sup> The majority of Palestinians at the time were peasants, also known as *fellahin*, cultivating the land. And although fishermen existed along the shore of Mandate Palestine they have not been included in the narratives with regards to playing a significant role in these peasant-led collective actions. This is not to say that they did not participate in these events, I have not been able to establish from literature whether they did or didn't and if they did whether that was as a group of fishermen or rather as part of the peasantry. In Arthur Neslen book of interviews *In Your Eye a Sandstorm* (2011), the old fisherman Ragib al-Hissi, remembers the days of the Revolt when he was still in Jaffa, but indicated, as a fisherman not to have participated in it. However, the absence of any other relevant information tends to make one believe that the fishermen as a group at the time were rather insignificant in terms of their national role.

It had been the farmers who had been bearing the brunt of British colonial and Israeli policies throughout the decades. This further accelerated with the expansion of the settlements as a result of the occupation of Palestinian land in 1967 involving aggression against Palestinian agricultural farmers and their lands. The fishermen's position in Palestinian society has then altered in line with the fluctuations of access to the sea and their struggle to cope with that and combined with an opportunity to mobilise themselves. The fluctuations are linked to the exploitation of the natural resources, in the case of the fishermen, the access to the sea and the struggle for it is reflected in the number of targeted attacks and other daily violations the fishermen have experienced since. The change from fishing in relatively open and safe waters before the 1990s to being chased and targeted since, put the fishermen in the line of fire and made them frontline defenders of Palestinian territorial waters. These territorial waters only became part of the 'land' after the Oslo Accords and with it there has been a steady rise in the portrayal of the fishermen as national defenders or icons of the struggle. However, the first instance of collective action and mobilisation of the fishing community already

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<sup>44</sup> E.g., the 1883 revolt against Egyptian taxation policies and conscription consisted of peasant-led collective actions and the Great Revolt of 1936-1939 against the British Colonial Administration. Especially the latter which was initiated in 1936 depended largely on a second phase which started in 1937 and was led by the peasant-led resistance movement.

occurred in the early 1980s, not at sea, but on land when the Occupation tried to impose taxes on the fishermen for trading fish with Israel. Ragib Al-Hissi, the head of the Fishermen Association met with senior fishermen and together they decided they would continue fishing at sea but at the moment of selling the catch it would not be sold but rather it would be deposited on the beach and a strike would be declared. This occurred and remained in place until the Israeli authorities came and forced the fishermen to cancel their decision, return to work and call an end to the strike. The strike serves as evidence of collective action amongst the fishermen against the Occupation.

This collective action was initiated when access to the sea was still available but when the Israeli authorities were trying to interfere with the markets and trade. This narrative of collective action has intensified according to the number of challenges faced by the fishermen. The unity and cohesion in the fishing community also facilitated such collective action as can be recalled by the fishermen when they explain about the role they played in defying the curfews of the first *Intifada*. In the early days of that first uprising the occupation imposed a curfew on the camps, but not on the sea. The fishermen were thus able to continue to work as opposed to the population stuck in their homes unable to go out to earn a living. When the fishermen would come back from sea they would donate part of their earnings to buy goods and distribute them within the camps.

During the recent blockade the random full closures of the sea jeopardised the livelihoods of the Palestinian fishermen. Although Gaza society as a whole suffered from the blockade the impact it has had on the fishing community, in terms of pushing them into poverty while continuing to put their lives at risk when out at sea to defend the water and their fishing traditions, has drawn increased attention to their role in Gaza society as defenders of livelihood and land.

“We go out at sea whenever we can, and it is always a risk and a struggle to fish. Just being in the water means you can be a target, but we resist, and we find coping strategies to keep our livelihoods alive. Maybe they are not thriving, but everyone knows that fishing is here to stay. We will never give up our livelihoods. We have received support from different actors to carry out repairs and to fight court battles to get our confiscated boats back. But where and when possible, we also support each other, asset-sharing has come to play an important coping strategy and although it does not feed us, it keeps the trade alive. There are also people amongst us who lost their boats and had to look for different work, but they remain in the fisheries sector, they find other types of work, so they stay connected and rooted to their livelihood, to the sea”

The coordinator emphasizes the fight that the fishermen put up on a daily basis to keep their livelihoods alive, but more than stubbornly going out against all odds, the fishermen also find coping strategies to reduce, diversify or spread risk and still keep their family business going until better times come.

Upon visiting the port, I witness the destruction including damaged boats and broken equipment. Notwithstanding that the boats are unable to go out and the sea is being closed off, there is still a sense of fishing life. Maybe it is the fishermen having coffee together, socialising around a pile of nets

up for repair, talking about needed equipment to make the boats run again and providing updates on the latest court cases about the return of confiscated boats. Maybe it is the way in which they treat the boats that are under repair, with dignity and respect they fix what has been broken and make the boats seaworthy again. Although they know that their work might be undone in the outing at sea, the details are painted, the boats are like any other fishing boat and remain the pride of the family.

This reluctance to give in and the determination to not just get back out there on their boats but to do so with dignity to their own lives and livelihoods and therewith re-humanising themselves, their livelihoods and their lives is a determined act of resilience. To face the occupiers at sea when they are targeted by bullets, sprayed with wastewater or chased by naval ships while continuing to exercise their work and maintain their livelihoods are acts of everyday resistance.

## Chapter VI Fisheries Governance and Management in Gaza

### Introduction

Academic literature on fisheries management in Gaza between 1948 and 1995 is scarce. In one of the few articles available, Mohammed Abudaya et al (2013) explain the phases of management and governance that the fishing communities in the Gaza Strip have gone through. This part of the chapter aims to elaborate on these stages to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges of these phases and to what extent they are still relevant in today's management and governance of the fisheries sector in the Gaza Strip. The chapter in particular highlights the importance of the role, management and control of the artisanal fishery sector in Gaza.

Abudaya et al. (2013) have identified six phases flowing out of the fluctuation in the annual landing catch and coinciding with the political changes in the context and management of the land and water resources of the Gaza Strip. However, the article only identifies phases up to 1999. To understand the link between politics and fisheries management I have set the Abudaya et al. (2013) fish landing phases against the political context up to 2019 which then looks as follows:

**Table 6.1: Overview of Evolution of Fish Landings in Gaza Strip**

| Time Period | Governance of Gaza and sea   | Fish Landing Stage   |
|-------------|--|--|
| Pre-1948    | British Mandate  | Not available  |
| 1948-1967   | Egyptian Authorities   | Stage 1:<br>Time: pre-1978<br>Landing: average of 4000 ton/ year<br>Area: 75,000km <sup>2</sup> (Gaza and Sinai) |
| 1967-1995   | Israeli Authorities<br>This stage was marked by the withdrawal of Israelis from Sinai Peninsula, so the Gaza fishermen were not allowed to fish off the coast of the Sinai anymore | Stage 2:<br>Time: 1978-1985<br>Landing: 1200 ton / year<br>Area: Gaza waters only                                |
|             | The total catch declined to only 400 ton/year, this may be due to the establishment of settlements across Gaza strip and to the uprising situation (intifada)                      | Stage 3:<br>Time: 1985-1989<br>Landing: 400 ton/year<br>Access: Gaza waters only                                 |
|             | The increase here may be due to the growth of the fish population as a result of the previous period.  | Stage 4:<br>Time: 1990-1992/1994<br>Landing: 2000 ton/year<br>Area: Gaza waters only                             |
| 1995 – 2000 | Palestinian Authority (Fatah) (up to 20NM)<br>In 1994, after the Oslo agreement, the total production declined due to limitation of the fishing area                               | Stage 5:<br>Time: 1994-1996<br>Landing 1500 tonne / year<br>Area: 660km <sup>2</sup> (interim Agreement 20NM)    |

|            |  |   |
|------------|--|---|
|            | from 20 nautical miles to 12 nautical miles (fishing area 660 km <sup>2</sup> ) and maybe to the introduction of the Israeli military restrictions   |   |
|            | This stage is marked by 1) better reporting, since the Fisheries Department is responsible, 2) extensive use of seine nets 'shanshula' 3) the use of new equipment (sonar) and 4) the improvement of fishery techniques, supervised by international programs under co-operation of the Ministry of Agriculture. | Stage 6:<br>Time: 1996-1999<br>Landing: 3500 tonne/year<br>Area: 660km <sup>2</sup>     |
| 2000-2006  | Palestinian Authority (up to max 20NM)<br>This is a continuation of the previous period but with political upheaval and military restrictions  | Stage 7:<br>Time: 2000-2007<br>Landing: 2327 tonne/year<br>Area: max 660km <sup>2</sup> |
| 2006-today | Blockade period (de facto Hamas government) having detrimental effect on opening and access to the sea   | Stage 8:<br>Time: 2007-2019<br>Landing 2571 ton/year<br>Area: 0-660km <sup>2</sup>      |

Although the data and analysis presented in the table is based on scarcely available literature it did resonate with the fishermen when conducting the interviews in summer of 2019 in the Gaza Strip. Many of the fishermen I spoke to reiterated the importance of the link between the political context and fish landings, mainly reflected in the reduction of income. However, this would mainly relate to the recent context though 1995-2019, since the period of the signing of the Interim Agreement through to the blockade. Key in the table above is that the overall access to the sea has been reduced by 93% whereas the number of fishermen has increased substantially. However, some of the fishermen would reminisce about the days when they “were free to roam the seas” therewith referring to the periods before 1995 when they had full access to the sea albeit being limited to Gaza territorial waters only and subjected to different limitations like competition, class and market.

A second aspect highlighted by Abudaya et al. (2013), is the absence of artisanal and subsistence fishing data reported to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) annual data collection methods which thus only included large-scale fishing method data. This is of importance as Abudaya et al. (2013) demonstrate that the amount of fish landings obtained through artisanal fishing is substantial and thus required the adjustment of the data recordings. The overall landings, including large-scale, artisanal and subsistence fishing all together for the Gaza Strip were 2.3 times higher than the amount of what was originally reported to FAO. This historical under-reporting is of importance as it highlights

the absence of the catch of the Gaza artisanal fishermen in the annual uptake, and mis-represented Gaza's fisheries sector as the artisanal fishermen and their families make a significant contribution to the fisheries sector, if not the largest share (Abudaya et al. 2013). Therefore, the absence of representation and inclusion in past reporting is found to be troublesome. Cause for this is partially that the data was collected annually by the Israeli authorities which during that time controlled the Gaza Strip and thus, according to Abudaya et al. (2013), recorded the data to FAO only for the large-scale fisheries ignoring Palestinian fishermen of the artisanal sector as a whole as this was managed and controlled by Israeli authorities until 1995.

In practice however the fisheries sector in Gaza has been under control of three main actors, firstly the Israeli authorities up til 1995 followed by the Palestinian Authority, mainly Fatah, up til 2006 and then ever since by Hamas, the party in power in the Gaza Strip. These different powers have each shaped and left their marks on the control and management of the fisheries sector in the Gaza Strip through on the one hand occupational policies by Israeli authorities and on the other hand state-building and development initiatives by the PA and Hamas. In all instances the trend set with the absence of the artisanal and subsistence fisherfolk from the narrative has continued up til today as has the weakness in data collection for fish landings which thus cast doubt to overall numbers.

## History and Background of Fisheries Sector in Gaza

### Pre-1948<sup>45</sup>

Rishal Al-Hissi, a retired fishermen, sits opposite me. He is tanned from the sun and sea, and he is the head of a leading Gaza fisher family. He is wearing a traditional Arabic cap to cover his head from the sun. He is tall and charismatic and it is a pleasure to listen to his stories which defy time and politics. He shows me an old, faded piece of paper. The people in the room look at it even though they have seen it many times over. I am not yet aware of what it is and I can not make it out. He says:

“It has stood the test of time and proves that fishing has been regulated for decades, if not centuries here in Gaza. Indeed, this is the fishing license of my great-grandfather, a fisherman who used to roam the seas under the Ottoman Empire ruling Gaza. Back in those days we did need to obtain a license from the Ottoman rulers, the Turks. Management of fisheries has existed here for a long time. My great-grandfather fisheries activities were administered and governed by the Ottomans and then the British, my father's activities by the British and Egyptians and my

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<sup>45</sup> In the absence of reliable literature, the information predating 1995 and provided in this chapter rely on a mixture of data collected from fishermen.

own activities by the Egyptians and the Israelis and finally by the Palestinians. This license, my great-grandfather's license, is part of me and my heritage as a Gaza fisherman."

In his brief editorial the Fisheries Consultant Feidi (2018) distinguishes four time periods for the fisheries sector in Palestine. The first one speaking directly to Al-Hissi's great-grandfather's experience which is the time period up to 1948 when Palestine was first under Ottoman rule and then from 1920, British Mandate. The second time period kicked off after the establishment of the State of Israel and has also two time periods 1948-1967 and 1967 onwards. Therefore, before describing the present-day fisheries situation in Gaza it is useful to give a brief historical background.

According to Feidi (2018) the Mandate period focused on two main sectors in Palestine: (1) the marine fisheries along the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea with operations carried out from the main fishing ports of Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, Askalan, Gaza as well as from the Gulf of Aqaba in the south and (2) the fisheries activities in fresh and brackish waters and pond culture. Up to the 1930s the fisheries sector was not developed and had small-scale outputs generated mainly by families operating the business. Feidi (2018) explains that the low outputs were mainly due to the shortage of suitable harbours and the small size of the fishing boats and the fish trade was dominated by a group that had no incentive to increase the amount of fish. Although no breakdown numbers are available by city or region, Feidi (2018) describes that the number of vessels during the period 1921 to 1952 ranged from 91 to 280 boats of different sizes and different types of equipment, whereas the number of fishermen ranged from 534 to 982. These numbers include all fisheries operations along the Palestinian Mediterranean shore from Haifa to Gaza, thus indicating the small and under-developed sector at the time. Cohen Hattab (2019) sheds further light on the situation at the time, focusing on the growing Jewish presence in the maritime sector, including in the fisheries sector. Thus, indicating that the numbers active along the shoreline included both Palestinian Arab and new Palestinian Jewish fishermen, with the latter increasingly expanding and taking over the sector through for example the establishment of a new and modernised port in Tel Aviv in 1936.

Under the British Mandate, many of the Ottoman laws which had been in place for centuries, were amended or dissolved to make place for British Mandate rule. Palestine and its civilians were subjected to Civil Administration which was set out in a number of Ordinances that regulated daily life. As for the Mandate authority's administration of the Palestinian fisheries sector, this was based on an officially issued Fisheries Ordinance of 1937 and its amendments.<sup>46</sup> Although the Ordinance

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<sup>46</sup> According to Fisheries Ordinance of 1937 as summarised in English by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel (<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/1998/Pages/Fisheries%20Ordinance-%201937.aspx>), this period was characterized by the following legislations regulating the fishing process:

- A license is required to fish, with the exception of fishing from the seashore with a hook and rod. Fishing boats also require a license, which sets out the area in which a boat may fish and the methods by which the fishermen may fish.
- It is forbidden to use explosives to catch or kill fish; it is also forbidden to poison fish.

included rules and regulations covering inshore fisheries, the rules also included distant marine fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea, issuing of fishing licenses, unloading of fish from foreign vessels, regulating fishing methods, measurements of net mesh and gear, fish inspection including disease control, dealing with offences and other related regulations (Fisheries Ordinance 1937).<sup>47</sup>

Besides regulating the maritime and fishing activities the British Mandate Administration also largely controlled the economic inputs and development at the time. When looking at the impact of British Mandate rule in Gaza, Roy (1995 p.52) argues that economic development did take place but was largely unevenly distributed as the Mandate governance favoured capitalist approaches over the indigenous economic system. Although Roy focuses largely on the agrarian sector, representing the largest number of working society in Gaza at the time, and not on the fisheries sector, Cohen Hattab (2019) complements some of Roy's view albeit from a different angle, that the Jewish population at the time accelerated the development of the maritime economy including the fisheries sector, especially in Jaffa and Haifa and from the mid-1930s in Tel Aviv.

According to Sovich (2000), at the end of the Mandate period there was limited Palestinian worker's rights representation made visible in the low numbers of existing trade unions and those that did exist focused mainly on urban workers thus reducing representation of peasants. As a result, there was very limited opportunity for indigenous engagement or representation and thus the Gaza-based Arab fishermen did not benefit equally from the growth of the maritime economy and remained largely dependent on their traditional methods of fishing resulting in growing discrepancy.

The 1937 Mandate Ordinance would remain of importance as it continued to be one of the main legislative and administrative tools to govern the fisheries sector in Gaza for the next decades.

1948-1967

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 changed the Palestinian fisheries sector dramatically. Mainly because Palestinians had lost their land and were forced to flee leaving behind its main fishing ports along the Mediterranean, in particularly Jaffa and Haifa, as well as losing its inland fisheries.

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- The Minister of Agriculture is responsible for the implementation of this Law; in addition, he may promulgate regulations:

- \* forbidding certain fishing methods which may damage the development or threaten the survival of a species of fish; the Minister may also promulgate any regulation relating to the "preservation, protection and maintenance of fish as he deems necessary";
- \* limiting or forbidding fishing in certain areas or during certain seasons;
- \* setting out size limits for a species of fish;
- \* concerning the size and caliber of mesh of fishing nets;
- \* setting the price of fishing licenses.

<sup>47</sup> Inshore fisheries were also pursued by Palestinians at the time, in rivers but more so in Lake areas in what is now Northern Israel e.g Lake Kinneret.



Instead, many of the Palestinians were confined to the land-locked West Bank and at the time, the traditional and agriculturally oriented Gaza Strip. The only marine fisheries that remained partly active was that off the Gaza Strip where the Gaza port was the small but main fishing port in the governorate and then there were the smaller ports of Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younes and Rafah. Due to the difficult circumstances at the time, politically in terms of control and administration and socio-economically because of the influx of Palestinian refugees into the Gaza Strip the fisheries sector did not have a chance to develop.

Politically, immediately following 1948, Gaza was under Egyptian protection in a limited form of self-government known as the All-Palestine Protectorate. In reality, the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian administration which took full control and responsibility after Jordan annexed the West Bank.<sup>48</sup> Socio-economically the situation was unstable because of the influx of large groups of refugees on a small sliver of land impacting the class structure of what had been mainly a rural population and secondly because of the Palestinian collective coming to terms with the traumatic events of the Nakba. The fishermen I have spoken to, both original Gaza fishermen and 1948 refugee fishermen, recall some of those days and claim that between 1948 and 1967, the catch was large and the sea accessible. At the time, the fisheries sector was still traditional and the incoming refugees in the Gaza Strip who had practiced fishing before in their villages of origin e.g. Jaffa had to start anew. Others simply started to survive in a situation that was unknown to them. As a result, the equipment was basic and the boats were small, the number of fishermen did not exceed a few hundred, but the coast and shoreline were long as the fishermen had access to the shores of the Egyptian peninsula of Sinai as well, allowing to fish along 180km of shoreline. As the waters in front of the Sinai Peninsula are richer the Gaza fishermen would take their boats and set sail to Al-Arish, an Egyptian coastal town approximately 60km south of Rafah where they could fish in abundance. There they would catch large amounts without any further support or representation as opposed to the Egyptian fishermen who would be roaming the same waters and would benefit from Egyptian government support and subsidies. According to legend, the Egyptian government authorities in Port Said then halted the subsidies and support to the Egyptian fishermen claiming they could at least catch as much as the Palestinian fishermen who went without subsidies and financial support after all! This legend supports the fact that licensing and regulations were in place and were maintained by the Egyptian Authorities. Whereas the Egyptian fishermen would benefit from their own national authorities, the Gaza fishermen had been under a mixture of Egyptian civilian and military administration with no new laws extended to the Gaza Strip, thus the British Mandate Ordinance of 1937 remained in place for the

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<sup>48</sup> See Avi Shlaim, "The Rise and Fall of the All-Palestine Government in Gaza", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no 1 (autumn 1990) pp 37-53.

fisheries sector. Having been under Egyptian military rule and civil administration still based on the 1937 Ordinance, the Palestinian fishermen had no role in the management of their own resources, neither the sea nor any policies flowing out of it like licensing and general management, thus lacking any representation. At the eve of the Occupation the fisheries sector had not been prioritised economically, been deprived of investments and development and thus the fishermen remained small traders, families that had been working the sea either from the Gaza shores or the newly established refugees who started their fishing practices anew. The lack of economic development in the fisheries sector coincided with lack of representation and mobilisation amongst the fisherfolk. Unions did exist in the West Bank but they continued as they had started with a focus on Palestinian workers in particular and thus excluding peasants and fishermen, who had no other channels of representation and mobilisation at the time.

1967-1995

The group of fishermen I engaged with claim that there is a story that in order to avoid another Nakba in 1967, a group of fishermen who had become refugee in 1948, approximately 50 of them in about 20 boats, went out at sea to fish for four months non-stop to escape the 1967 war. They fished in front of the Egyptian coastline and only after the war had ended, they would return to Gaza indicating that they would not have been able to lose another livelihood, after all they had feared a repetition of the tragedy of 1948. When they came back, the Gaza Strip was occupied and life would never be the same. Or so the story goes...

The story although so short, indicates the level of suffering the refugee fishermen had experienced in 1948 but also demonstrates the (perceived) freedom and abilities they had in 1967 to sail out and away for four months along the Egyptian coast without interruption.

Although Gaza was occupied as a result of the 1967 war in which Egypt lost control of Gaza to Israel, the Gaza fishermen managed to continue to fish along the Egyptian shore for as long as the Israeli army had stationed themselves across the Sinai Peninsula. This would only change a decade later when Israel withdrew from the Sinai. As for the management and control over land and sea the Israeli occupation authorities established a civil administration system that was built on the previous ruling systems: Ottoman rule, British Mandate rule, Egyptian rule and a new addition of Israeli military orders creating a complex legal and administrative system that could be used discretionary.

Policies and regulations for the fisheries sector remained relatively the same and were still regulated largely by the British Mandate Ordinance of 1937 and its amendments. It was not until the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Sinai Peninsula in 1978 that there would be a direct impact on the fisheries sector as it would result in closing off the Egyptian seas for Gaza fishermen, therewith

greatly reducing their fishing area and thus their fish landings. Simultaneously, the occupation of the Gaza Strip also gave rise to the construction of the first Israeli settlements along the Gaza coastline, especially in the area between Deir al Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah. The establishment of the settlements brought about new security regulations and affected the size of fishing areas for the fishermen. It is assumed by both Abudaya et al. (2013) and Ali (2002) that this caused a reduction in fish landings. The occupation of the Gaza Strip effected full responsibility and control over all resources by Israeli authorities, including the seas off the coast of Gaza. Moreover, soon after, the first no-fishing zones were established on the northern and southern sides of the Gaza border. Although Israeli military rule allowed the fishermen to enter the sea up to 20NM this was under tight control and at times resulted in friction between the fishermen and the Israeli Naval Forces. The fishermen were not in a position to resist. As opposed to the Palestinian working class and their unions which were, although forced underground, increasingly active, the fishermen still only numbered a few and they were insufficiently organised nor engaged politically.

According to one of the fisher women I spoke to she stated that,

“the fishing communities had little political awareness and were not engaged nor associated with politics or rights. We just lived our lives by the sea and we were in no need for anyone or anything. We just wanted to go out and fish. Most of us were, in those days, illiterate and thus were not in a position to organise or mobilise ourselves.”

Overall, the management of the fisheries sector during Israeli Occupation became stronger regulated by adding military orders to the British Mandate Ordinance of 1937, which largely aimed at controlling key natural resources including water and land and therewith undermining any development in such sectors. Roy (1999) coined this process de-development, a process that started after the occupation came into being and, like a web, extended its reach to all of the Gaza economy obstructing any possible progress for autonomy or economic growth. The effects of the de-development process on the fisheries sector came to full fruition after the Interim Agreement when the fishing limit was set and movement restrictions at sea became more regular which coincided with a surge in violations against the fishermen at sea. Paradoxically, this occurred while the Palestinian Authority had finally come to rule the Gaza Strip.

## Organisation and Structure since 1995

### 1995-2007

With the introduction of the Interim Agreement, the management and governance of the fisheries sector was now for the first time in the hands of the newly established Palestinian Authority under the leadership of Fatah, the leading political party. The Interim Agreement signed between Israel and

the Palestinian Authority clearly set out the new limits and arrangements for fishing, including the maximum limit of 20NM and the security arrangements of the Maritime Coordination Council, the main controlling body. However, the introduction of the Palestinian Authority also meant that certain elements of fisheries management and governance fell on the Ministry of Agriculture under the General Directorate of Fisheries. The General Directorate of Fisheries, part of the Ministry of Agriculture, and its headquarters based in Ramallah, has a subsidiary in the Gaza Strip to be close to the coastal region. This General Directorate is tasked to deal with the legal, political and operational issues of fishing in Gaza as set out under the Fisheries Organising Law of 2005 and within the recognised limit set in the Interim Agreement (World Bank 2020).

It is thus the sole authority responsible for governing and securing the maximum utilization of fish resources through allocating the development inputs in this sector with the aims of increasing employment and increasing fish landings. The General Directorate is also responsible for the follow-up of fishery matters which need to be approved by the Maritime Coordination Council as set out in the Interim Agreement. Furthermore, the General Directorate oversees the movement of boats within the allowed areas and the sustainability of fishing activities through the application of efficient and effective use of fishing resources by specifying the fishing methods, designated times and tools in order to, as overall purpose, contribute to the process of national food security.

In summary, the General Directorate is thus in charge of the development, regulation and governance of fishing and aquaculture in Palestine within the boundaries set by the Interim Agreement. As part of these responsibilities the General Directorate develops strategies and policies and oversees the implementation of these in all its facets including the maintenance, sustainability, development, manufacturing and exploitation of fishery resources. In order to do that the General Directorate allocates financial resources to development programmes across the Gaza Strip. These financial resources stem from donor funds made available, in general, by western governments and international organisations like the United Nations.

Between 1995 and 2006 the management and governance of the General Directorate was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture which in turn was appointed under the auspices of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat. The General Directorate, being a government branch, suffered initially from lack of management capacity and increasingly represented an authoritarian approach and was highly personalised, characterised by weak institutions and ad hoc arrangements.<sup>49</sup> In response, the fishermen found the need to increase their representation and develop a counter-voice to the government to ensure better inclusion of their demands and needs, in

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<sup>49</sup> Brown, N. (2007). (Rep.). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved June 2, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12992](http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12992)

particular in relation to incoming development funds. As such a group of fishermen came together in 1997 to form the first Fishermen Syndicate. The formation of this syndicate was approved and in agreement with the five Gaza Strip governorates where the fishermen were active, in each of the governorates a sub-syndicate was established with equal and democratic representation thus allowing for syndicates to be formed in Northern Gaza, Gaza City, Central Gaza, Khan Younis, and Rafah (Southern Gaza). These sub-syndicates allowed for closer interaction with the respective fisherfolk.

The five syndicates in turn would feed into one Gaza syndicate, with a coordinating function, known locally as the Gaza Fisheries Syndicate. This main syndicate would consist of elected members of the local syndicates with elections occurring within each local syndicate every few years. Proportional representation was adopted as a fair method to ensure representation would occur according to geographical density of the fishermen, thus Gaza and Khan Younes would have more seats on the Gaza Syndicate than for example Middle and Northern Gaza syndicates where the number of fishermen would be lower. The overall aim of the syndicate would be to, for the first time, represent the local views and voices of the fisherfolk throughout the Gaza Strip and engage with the General Directorate about fisheries issues making it more responsive to the fishing community's needs. The overall idea of establishing this syndicate was to strengthen the engagement and serve as a voice against the increasing authoritarian Palestinian institutions, being the Ministry of Agriculture, however this was undermined as was the case with other similar initiatives operating in Palestine at the time (Sovich 2000).

The Gaza Fisheries Syndicate and its subsidiaries was no different from other unions and encountered various problems (Sovich 2000, Brown 2007 and Rajab 2017). In his AlJazeera post Rajab (2017) explains the shortcomings and challenges that such unions faced and in particular the clash between on the one hand the political / nationalist and on the other hand the unionist approach that was so common in transformative settings. In Palestine's case the rise of the trade unions during the establishment of the Palestinian Authority was merely political and thus, according to Rajab, few achievements had been made. Even more so, after the PA came to power the partisan element became of greater importance. The Gaza Local Committee coordinator stated to me in a straightforward manner the shortcomings:

"They do not represent anyone other than the political party they are affiliated to, thus reducing the impact and connection with the fisherfolk. Like, who controls the formation of the unions? Surely this is visible in the representation of the union members. Their main aim is not to represent us but rather to represent those connected to them. So, they are not fisherfolk-focused but they are partisan which makes it hard to get anything done."

Sovich (2000, p.72) article supports this further when stating that even the largest union, in this case the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, which represents all Palestinian workers in

the Middle East would not support a labour movement that would overtly challenge the government and employers through strikes and demonstrations. On the level of fisheries, the result was thus a Gaza Fisheries Syndicate with limited focus on workers' rights but with a focus on political priorities.

This approach has not been challenged and instead the status quo remained in place and with the power change from Fatah to Hamas in Gaza in 2007 these partisan challenges and political divisions left their marks on the syndicate. Although these challenges were not new, the situation of the fishermen had changed and they had greater needs than before which required action, but the Gaza Fisheries Syndicate was not representing its own members, leaving them increasingly disenfranchised and frustrated with greater worries for the future.

2007-2019

A police post has been set up right outside the entrance to the harbour, I see it when I first arrive. I was planning to explore the harbour area as a large, damaged boat caught my eye and I walk forward with my phone in hand to make pictures. I am immediately approached by the Palestinian Maritime Police and asked what the purpose of my visit is and whether I am a journalist making photographs. I am warned not to capture any data or photograph any naval or marine forces imagery. After I mention that I am not planning to do anything, I am let off and continue my walk – making a few pictures of the damaged boat, which represents an icon of times gone by.

The political division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, an immediate result of the election of 2006 and followed by the violence between the two parties has left its marks in the fisheries sector. Moreover, the Israeli imposed blockade isolated Hamas and limited other governmentalities and potential collaboration in administration of Palestine. The political division between Hamas and Fatah and the lack of reconciliation for over a decade has practically split Gaza Strip from the West Bank, as a result the fisheries sector in Gaza has been under administrative control of the de facto Hamas government alone.

The power stronghold in the fisheries sector is being implemented by three main governance bodies and/or structures: the fisheries department under the Ministry of Agriculture, the Marine Police and the third one the Fisheries Syndicate. These governance structures have been collaborating to consolidate power through being in control of policy and planning, policing and representation of the fishermen. As a result, the fishermen in the Gaza Strip have been disempowered and marginalised.

With the take-over of power by Hamas, the respective Ministerial departments in the Gaza Strip came under control of the de facto Hamas government as opposed to those controlled by Fatah in the West Bank. In the case of the General Directorate for Fisheries Resources, of which there is only one in all of Palestine and which is in the Gaza Strip, these were now administrated by Hamas and thus

became fully responsible for all operations, planning and policies related to fisheries in the Gaza Strip. They operate in collaboration with other institutions and governance structures in Gaza, all under the auspices of the de facto Hamas government.

The Hamas run marine police forces are the Palestinian law enforcement agents operating within the closed sea area and seaport area. Due to the Interim Agreement they have not been able to exert their influence and control further than the stipulated nautical miles but, according to the fishermen, they have a strong presence in and around the harbour where they check licenses and conduct regular but ad-hoc check-ups. This physical presence is a step up from the previous police forces, the Fatah-led forces, which were present but, according to the fishermen, were not as strict in carrying out the check-ups. Often, the fishermen feel that the presence of the marine police is to issue fines to obtain funds, but which rather results in intimidation of the fishing community.

Although the processes of lack of representation and lack of benefits were already well under way after the first decade of the Interim Agreement, they were accelerated by the split between the political factions and then furthered by the ongoing blockade thus linking the Hamas administration and governance directly to the further eroding representation and reduced benefits for the fishermen.

The fishermen are officially feeding into the governance structures through the five governorate syndicates (North, Gaza, Middle, Khan Younis and Rafah) out of which the Gaza syndicate is the most powerful one, as it is the largest. It is at the syndicate level that the control of the fisheries sector is obtained or validated, mainly because of the direct engagement with the sub-syndicates and the outreach and support of the fishing community in these syndicates.

As a result of the shift in power, the weaknesses of the Gaza Fisheries Syndicate came further to the fore and served as a base for deepening rifts and separation. The weaknesses were initially linked to lack of representation and partisanship over its unionist approach but were now further exploited by Hamas to consolidate their power base and a leader closely linked to the Hamas leadership in Gaza was selected to lead the Gaza Fisheries Syndicate.

Although in theory the sub-syndicates were independent and democratically elected in practice increasing pressure resulted in non-Hamas affiliated fishermen losing ground.

“I won, but they did not want me to win.” It is my first morning in the field, sipping a coffee in the harbour, in between the fishing nets and broken furniture, desperately trying to evade the sun burning on my black headscarf and black dress. I am being introduced to the main characters of what could have been a novel, but what turns out to be a daily reality of survival. “I won but they did not want me to win, he says again, I am not a Hamas affiliate, so I am not supposed to win the elections.” He looks tired and his face shows the wrinkles of having been out at sea for many years.

He recalls how he won but then lost the sub-syndicate elections of the Gaza City Syndicate. Elections are usually held within the governorate syndicates and the elected will be a representative at the Gaza Strip level.

“I clearly had sufficient votes within the branch to ensure that I would win the elections and would head the Gaza City sub-syndicate. However, the leader of the Gaza Fisheries Syndicate denied this and rounded up people to ‘outdo’ this democratic process. I have been attacked and harassed by higher powers as I am not politically aligned to the same party. As a result, I suffered a lot, I even went to court over it and filed a complaint with the Ministry of Justice but this was totally ignored as the Ministry of Justice also falls within the governance mandate of Hamas. These are thus supporting each other and consolidating their power. This demonstrates the political status of the syndicate and further contributes to the political isolation and under-representation of fishermen in Gaza”.

In an environment that has been marked by partisanship and increasing poverty the few resources coming in do not go very far. The fishermen continue to talk and express anger and frustration when they claim that fishermen are not represented and do not benefit in any way from government funding coming in via Arab countries. As explained in Chapter 4, nowadays, countries like Qatar and Turkey are amongst the few providing direct funding to the de facto Hamas government in Gaza – all western governments have been boycotting Hamas. Whereas the PA initially received huge funding for state-building, the de facto Hamas government could not avail of these funds and thus government funds in the Gaza Strip reduced dramatically. Moreover, the funds provided by e.g., Turkey and Qatar were not subjected to the same tight criteria as western donor funding and thus allowed for re-allocation on an ad-hoc basis. Although funds were received to be implemented for the project to the benefit of all the fishermen in Gaza, in practice this reality changed in light of the ever-worsening situation in Gaza. In the words of one of the interlocutors:

“Even though the Head of the Syndicate is affiliated to Hamas not all Hamas political affiliates amongst the fishermen benefit from the incoming funds equally. Surely the non-Hamas members have been side-lined since the beginning, but even those who have supported Hamas over the past decade are now increasingly excluded at times too. The incoming funds, aimed to support the fisheries sector, are further broken down by clan and family members, who benefit foremost. To further the stronghold over the syndicates the Head of the Fisheries Syndicate has installed seven maritime policemen – all Hamas – within the local syndicates, therewith further intimidating and controlling the decisions of the sub-syndicates.”

“It is really difficult for fisherfolk to now have access to support. Let me give you the example of the availability and use of gallons of fibre material for boat repair. In a project funded via the Ministry of Agriculture over 190 gallons of fibre were used to repair 25 boats. We, the non-affiliated fishermen who received the fibre via NGO support, made the same repairs to a similar number of boats with only 69 gallons of fibre. We then asked what had happened to the remaining number of gallons of fibre, they mentioned that these had been taken by the leader syndicate and the purpose and use of it is unknown.”



The syndicates have become an arm of the government and only represent those who are affiliated with Hamas. These fishermen remain supportive of the official structures but only as long as they benefit from it. The syndicates manage to consolidate their power as they can use their relation and collaboration with the wider ministries and governance structures to coordinate for funds that have been funnelled through Hamas e.g., the Islamic funds or Turkish or Qatari government funds, thus remaining in power through connection and financing.

With the increasing obstacles facing the fishermen in the blockade period under the de facto Hamas government, representation and inclusion have become more important but also more distant. A selective group of fishermen is benefitting from the administrative powers held by the Gaza Fisheries Syndicate and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries Department in the Gaza Strip. Such representation has thus become exclusive based on political affiliation, clan lineage and family ties.

## Chapter VII Israeli Occupation and Fishing in Gaza

### Introduction

“We used to go out every day, the sea was ours. Now, we hardly manage to catch any fish at all. If only the limit would have remained at 20 nautical miles, we could have managed. However, the total closure has destroyed our livelihoods. Even when the sea is open our lives are at risk”, says one of the fishermen I spoke to. He is seated on the sofa in his living room speaking loudly. He recalls the numerous moments his life has been in danger.

“I have been shot at and been treated inhumanely. At times they use water cannons to spray sewage or polluted water directly at us. We, the fishermen at our boats used to sing when out at sea and bringing in the catch but there is nothing to sing about anymore, we are too busy paying attention to the situation around us and hurry back once done.”

By having said that I asked whether he could sing some of the songs he used to sing, his eyes started glistering and his belly started shaking, he came to life and sang old fishermen folklore songs. His son, seated next to him and having taken over the boat from him some time ago, said: “Since I went out at sea I never sang, we do not have anything to sing about, nothing but risk and sadness”.

The lives of the fishermen at sea have been under constant threat. Even when there is clarity on the limits and zone available for fishing, incidents still occur. Data collected by human rights organisations indicated that between 2009 and 2019 ten fishermen have been killed at sea, shot by patrolling Israeli Naval Forces. That lives are in danger without posing any threat is demonstrated in a case study, part of a press release published in 2017 by the Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.<sup>50</sup> In 2017, Mohammed Zeyad Hasan Baker (32) witnessed the killing of his cousin and provided a testimony which served as a PCHR case study, in which he stated:

“At approximately 08:00, I sailed with my cousins ‘Omran, Fadi and Mohammed Majed Baker from Gaza Seaport along with another fishing boat manned by four fishermen. After 15 minutes, we arrived at al-Sudaniya area sailing within three nautical miles off al-Waha shore about 1.5 miles off the allowed fishing area. When we started fishing, I saw an Israeli gunboat accompanied with a rubber boat coming from the north and speeding towards us. ‘Omran turned on the engine, headed to the south and stationed off the Intelligence Service office. I then saw the rubber boat speeding towards us and it arrived in less than two minutes. There were eight navy soldiers, four of whom were masked. The distance between us was about two meters when two soldiers randomly opened fire at us while we were trying to avoid being shot. Ten minutes later, the soldiers directly opened fire at us from a three-meter distance. As a result, Fadi Majed Baker (32) sustained two rubber-coated metal bullets to the leg and abdomen. The Israeli gunboat continued chasing us, but suddenly appeared in front of our boat and the soldiers directly opened fire at the boat engine. As a result, the boat stopped, and Mohammed was wounded and fell down. We shouted to inform the soldiers that Mohammed was wounded. One of the soldiers then ordered

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<sup>50</sup> Press release Ref 40/2017, accessed on 20 May 2020 <https://www.pchrgaza.org/en/?p=9118>

us to come to the front of the boat while the other soldiers kept shooting over our heads. I carried Mohammed, who was seriously injured and he slipped into coma. The soldier, who was driving the gunboat, ordered me to carry Mohammed while two other soldiers took him to the gunboat, sailing towards Ashkelon. The other Israeli boat dragged our boat, which was hit with six live bullets, to the Gaza Seaport after an hour, but we lost the fishing net.”

A very similar testimony was provided seven years earlier by Rami Sami Omar Baker, 23, a fisherman from Gaza. During the attack described below, Rami’s cousin, Mohammed Mansour Baker, 20, was killed. Rami testified to the Gaza-based Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights (2010):

“At around 6am on Friday 24 September 2010, my brothers Rani and Omar, my cousin Mohammed Mansour Baker and I left our house and went to the harbour west of Gaza City. We filled the hasaka (small fishing boat) with fuel. We checked the cords and the hooks. We put food and water on the hasaka and sailed. We headed beyond the harbour’s gate out to the sea. We sailed for about three kilometers to the west and stopped; we’re always careful not to get close to the three nautical-mile virtual line. I switched off the hasaka engine and we took out our fishing hooks and started to fish. “I saw an Israeli military boat patrolling the sea about 400 meters to the west of us. Thirty minutes after our arrival, my brother Rani asked me to sail to the north as we were afraid the Israeli boat would fire at us. I switched the hasaka engine on and sailed to the north. We moved for about four kilometers north but were inside the permitted three-mile zone. When we stopped, we took our fishing hooks out and started to fish. I saw an Israeli military boat sailing from the north to the south. It was about 500 meters from us. Five minutes later, I heard gunfire and I saw bullets hitting the water around us. I switched the hasaka on quickly and sailed east towards the shore for about one kilometer. We stopped there and switched off the hasaka. “I then saw an Israeli military boat sailing from the northwest side from where we were. It was moving to the south, directly towards us. When it was about 600 meters from us, it started shooting. While the Israeli boat was approaching I saw the impact of bullets hitting the water around us. I switched the hasaka on and tried to flee. We sailed south for about 100 meters with the Israeli boat still firing upon us. At that moment the Israeli boat was just 200 meters opposite us. I saw the number plate area, with the number 884 written in black at the front of the boat. I saw about eight soldiers in dark green military uniforms standing on the deck of the boat. The boat was silver with red rubber at the bottom. The shooting continued as I sailed slowly. I heard my cousin, Mohammed, saying ‘I’m injured’. I looked at him and saw him pushing his hand against his abdomen. Blood was coming out from under his hand. We rushed back to the shore and to the Kamal Adwan Hospital. We carried Mohammed to the Emergency Room and laid him on a bed. I asked a doctor about Mohammed’s condition and he told me Mohammed had died just as when we arrived at the hospital. I don’t know why the IOF opened fire at us. We were fishing in an area that did not exceed the three nautical-miles zone. We were inside the fishing zone when the IOF attacked us.”

The testimonies are evidence of ever tightening restrictions and even when abiding by the restrictions the fishermen are still under imminent threat. This part of the chapter aims to describe the Israeli restriction policies and collective punishments and how these have shaped the conditions of the fishing community in Gaza.

## Movement Restrictions

It was not until the Oslo Interim Agreement was signed that the fishermen were first facing access restrictions to the sea. Before Oslo and as long as the fishermen could remember they indicated that the sea had been accessible and open and they had been able to set sail along the coast. Some of the fishermen recall that,

“In those days we used to sail south and meet in person with our Egyptian fisher friends, whereas now our relations have become virtual and we greet on Facebook. I haven’t seen any of the fishermen from Al-Arish for years. I heard they had to stop fishing there too, that is the Egyptian closure. We all feel like fish out of water now.”

Movement restrictions on land imposed by Israeli authorities have been a characteristic of the conflict since 1948. Following the 1948 war Israel adopted laws that restricted the rights of Palestinians inside Israel, mainly by curtailing their freedom of movement. Although the restrictions themselves were lifted in 1966, the regulations remained and thus after the occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank in 1967 those laws and regulations were incorporated into the military laws that were used to administer the occupied Palestinian territory. Detailed research has been done by scholars from various disciplines (Peteet 2018, Roy 1999) with regards to the checkpoints, the separation wall and the permit policies, all of these contributing to what Jeff Halper (2000) calls the matrix of control. For example, Peteet’s *Space and Mobility* (2018) is of interest where she explores and concludes that power defines space and mobility. Peteet’s work focuses on the variety of restrictions in the West Bank where there is a settler presence and thus larger segregation but there are similarities with the Gaza Strip as well, in particular in relation to the use of closure as a tool of colonial control. Little has this been explored in terms of restrictions at sea.

It was only with the introduction of the Oslo Interim Agreement that the first movement restrictions on the sea became a fact. Under that agreement, in article XIV, between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Israel agreed to extend fishing activities to 20 nautical miles (NM) or approximately 37 kilometres from the Gaza shore.<sup>51</sup> The Interim Agreement further set out that there would be three different zones, K, L and M each with separate dimensions and security arrangements and indicating the maximum number, size and power of the motorized boats to access these K, L and M zones. Those boats entering these zones should be in possession of a permit or license issued by the Maritime Coordination and Cooperation Center (MC) which was established to coordinate civil maritime activities and coastal police affairs off the coast of the Gaza Strip and which directly operates under the Joint Security Coordination and Cooperation Committee (JSC), the main

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<sup>51</sup> The full details of the Interim Agreement can be accessed on <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185434/>

body dealing with the security concerns of mutual concern regarding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (art III. 1a).

Besides the details for fishing arrangements, the Interim Agreement also outlined the security arrangements for both Palestinian and Israeli naval force and police, with Israeli navy having full access throughout the indicated zones K, L and M whereas the Palestinian Coastal Police could enter the sea up to 6 NM, and only in special occasions and with previous clearance, it could go up to 12NM. In addition, no details were set for the militarisation and armament of the Israeli naval forces whereas for the Palestinian Coastal Police specific targets were set including a maximum of ten boats with a displacement of up to 50 tons and maximum speed of up to 25 knots. The boats could carry weapons of up to 7.62mm calibre. In essence, these arrangements were never fully practiced as Palestinian fishermen would need license approval from both Israeli and Palestinian sources in the JSC before being able to go out at sea. As a result, not all Palestinian applicants received the necessary permits. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities would allow fishing within a zone of maximum 12 NM without any accountability or repercussions. This first decade of fishing under Oslo, thus marked the first deterioration of the livelihoods of the fishing communities and provided an indication of what else could be expected as the Palestinians did not have final or sole control over any of the sea. Sara Roy (1999) clearly set out the deteriorating conditions over this time featuring in particular the closure and physical separation of West Bank and Gaza lying at the core of the process of de-development. The fishermen I spoke to mentioned the impact the Interim Agreement had, but in particular the lack of accountability for Israel by not adhering to the agreed 20NM and instead adopting a loose interpretation of it and in the words of the fishermen 'playing with the NM at their will'.

While having a coffee and enjoying the sea view from their 5<sup>th</sup> floor apartment, the old fishermen told me that:

"one day it is 3NM, then 6 then 9NM and even worse, it can change while you have just laid out your nets at the 6NM mark and then a few hours later it is announced that the mark is at 3NM. By then you have lost your nets and your equipment and your fishing trip has been in vain, nothing but financial loss."

The imbalance of power laid bare in the Interim Agreement and the lack of accountability thereof have facilitated the disregard of the Israeli authorities to adhere to the limits set in the agreement, rather they continued to further restrict access and movement at sea, jeopardising the Gaza fishing communities' livelihoods and culture.

Although a limit of 20NM had been set in the Interim Agreement and indeed the fishermen uniformly agreed that 20NM would have been reasonable, it would have allowed for life to continue as fishermen, to feed their families, to make a living and to continue their lives. Instead, the first restrictions quickly resulted in the next series of restrictions which came into place approximately a

decade after the Interim Agreements. It was at the end of the Israeli disengagement from Gaza which involved the unilateral clearance of 21 Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of the settlers and the Israeli forces within the Gaza Strip. The unilateral withdrawal while maintaining military control over air and maritime space amongst others, allowed for ad-hoc and random reductions in the fishing zone. Over the course of that year 2005 – 2006 the fishing zone was reduced several times proving to be an indicator of the power imbalance which quickly resulted in a new negative milestone set when the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit got abducted and access and movement, yet again, became tools of collective punishment.

The fishing zone detailed to such extent in the Interim Agreement proved to be futile as the collective punishment measures resulted in a reduction of the fishing area to maximum of 3NM from the Gaza shore. The abduction of Shalit was swiftly followed by Hamas winning elections in Gaza and consequently, the Israeli imposed blockade on the Gaza Strip which resulted in an effective closure of all air, land and sea borders reducing the fisheries sector to barely existent.

Although curfews and closures had been common on land, they had not yet been regularly applied at sea and this was a first for the fishing communities who had managed to bypass even the tightest curfews of the First Intifada. Al-Hissi remembers fondly how the fishermen were the only ones who could leave their homes and head for the sea. He ponders how they would use this opportunity to transport food along the coast, otherwise impossible over land. He then realized how the sea closure is now affecting them and how they now have become, in turn, dependent on those living of the land or having small jobs instead.

While the sea closure is affecting the immediate fishing opportunities of the fishermen in Gaza, the general closure imposed on the land crossings has severely affected the entry of goods and materials needed to keep the fishing sector alive. The ban on dual-goods has resulted in a severe shortage of equipment and material necessary for the maintenance and repair of the fishing boats in Gaza. The occupation uses the closure as a form of collective punishment for fishermen in the Gaza Strip. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the Israeli measures are found to be:

...an extension of the collective punishment against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, which are aimed, among other things, at restricting fishermen and preventing them from carrying out their work and freely accessing areas where fish exists. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) affirms that the Israeli decision to reduce the fishing zones violates the economic and social rights of Palestinian fishermen and violates the right to work in accordance with Article VI of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>52</sup> (translation my own).

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<sup>52</sup> <https://pchrgaza.org/ar/?p=15698> accessed on January 22 2021.

When comparing data on fishing activity from before and after the blockade it indicates a steep decrease in the number of active registered fishermen with the Ministry of Agriculture. Whereas before the blockade up to 10,000 fishermen would have been active along the coast of the Gaza Strip, within a decade this had been reduced to a mere 2,000 active fishermen spread along the Gaza coast with the largest group concentrated in the Gaza City area. Although the access restrictions have had a major impact on the livelihoods of the fishermen this is further exacerbated by the challenges they face once they are at sea. Just between 2009 and 2019 a period in which ten fishermen got killed, an additional 167 fishermen were injured and 633 have been arrested for shorter or longer periods of time (PNGO 2019).

Table 7.1: Israeli Violations against Gaza Fishermen 2006-2019

| Year               | Death | Injury | Arrest | Boat Damage | Boat Confiscated |
|--------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------------|------------------|
| 2006               | 1     | 1      |        |             |                  |
| 2007               |       |        | 64     | 7           |                  |
| 2008               |       |        | 15     | 3           | 3                |
| 2009               | 1     | 9      | 14     |             | 3                |
| 2010               | 1     | 11     | 21     | 1           | 7                |
| 2011               |       | 3      | 32     | 3           | 9                |
| 2012               | 1     | 2      | 72     | 5           | 14               |
| 2013               |       | 4      | 17     | 1           | 3                |
| 2014               | 1     | 10     | 53     | 17          | 14               |
| 2015               | 1     | 25     | 73     | 7           | 17               |
| 2016               |       | 30     | 135    | 15          | 45               |
| 2017               | 2     | 21     | 39     | 21          | 13               |
| 2018               | 2     | 30     | 70     | 30          | 20               |
| 2019 <sup>53</sup> |       | 21     | 28     | 49          | 11               |
| <b>Total</b>       | 10    | 167    | 633    | 159         | 159              |

Source: Gaza Strip Fishermen: Continued steadfastness under Israeli occupation collective punishment, July 2019, Palestinian NGO Network

## Protection Issues / Human Rights Violations

These were no easy issues to discuss, but while in the living room of the fisherman family the eldest son spoke gently and calmly about the dangers they would face at sea:

“We do not know what will happen, anything can happen. I do not know when I leave in the morning whether I will come back home to my wife and children. We all have many friends and family members who got injured or killed, whose boats and nets have been confiscated,

<sup>53</sup> Data up to end of June 2019

fishermen who have been arrested and are still being held in prison. The sea has become a dangerous place for us, it is totally unpredictable.”

When the blockade at sea is eased at times, it coincides with increasing protection concerns of the fishermen. These protection issues relate to the discretionary enforcement of the fishing limits by the Israeli navy, and at times, the Egyptian navy. According to the fishermen, enforcement can include live firing at fishing boats, resulting in injuries and damage, chasing boats at sea or forcing fishers to leave their boats behind and swim towards Israeli vessels. They then are detained and their boats and fishing equipment are confiscated.

However, as recorded in many of the fishermen testimonies collected by Gaza-based human rights organisations like Al-Mezan and PCHR these violations do not only happen to enforce the fishing zone but rather happen within the allowed fishing zone without prior notice or warning and thus can be seen as a tool of intimidation to increase the fear of the fishermen to go back to sea. The majority of fishermen are well aware of the risks but would not consider staying ashore. As one of the fishermen told me, “our lives are at sea”.

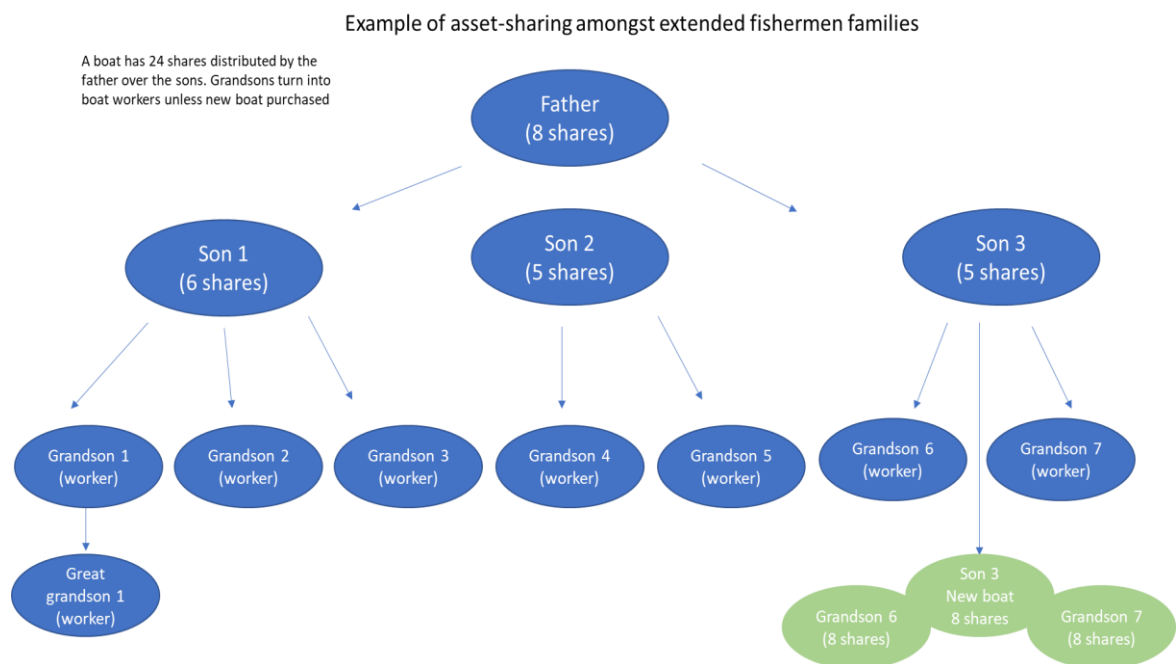
Especially during the blockade, the confiscation of equipment and the damage done to boats and materials is devastating as there are severe limitations on the imports of fishing equipment and materials. This means that once damaged, a boat cannot be repaired immediately and thus cannot be used for fishing resulting in reduced income for a whole household or family.

As presented in table 7.1 above, between 2009 and 2019, 159 boats and their equipment were confiscated and another similar number had been damaged. Three of these boats were returned in 2008 and 54 boats were returned between 2015 and 2018. These returned boats arrived without main equipment and gears (engines, navigation equipment and fishing nets), unfit for service and required complete maintenance. In May 2019, following a petition by human rights organisations to the Supreme Court, Israel was ordered to return another 65 fishing boats owned to fishermen from Gaza. While I was there in July 2019, some of these confiscated fishing boats were returned. The return of the boats was celebrated as a victory, albeit a sour one. The fishermen were happy as they had been waiting for months if not years for these boats to be returned to the rightful owner. The waiting included lengthy and, at times, costly legal proceedings, made further evident in the fact that the fishermen had to pay themselves for the transport of the boats from the Israeli location back to Gaza. As the majority of the boats was seriously damaged they could not be transported by sea and instead were transported over land through the Kerem Shalom crossing increasing the costs of the transport. The head of the fishermen committee explained to me that ongoing confiscation and damage to boats reduced the total number of boats in the fishing fleet which has put more pressure on the remaining boats in the fleet and resulted in asset-sharing between extended families. The asset-sharing (sharing of boats and equipment) by different fishermen households, although within the extended family, to



obtain a minimum income, contributes to over usage and thus an increased need for maintenance and repair. Asset-sharing, as I explored in chapter 5, is based on tradition amongst fisherfolk through which boat-shares are handed over within the family. Each boat consists of 24 shares which are distributed, usually equally and at times with a higher share for the eldest son. The reduction in number of boats available and the inability to purchase new boats results in more pressure on the 24 shares available. In an image this can be represented as follow:

Figure 7.1: Example of asset-sharing amongst extended fishermen families



Several households that I spoke to confirmed that the remaining boats are now shared amongst more fishermen households within the extended family, whereas previously such boats would have belonged to one household only. One of the fishermen stated that the families have expanded over the past decades and thus many household members rely on the income coming from the same boat. The extent to which several households would make an income out of one boat became evident through the return of previously confiscated boats during my field work period in July and August 2019.

At that time there were approximately twelve medium-size to big boats in Gaza harbour alone, in urgent need of repair. Each of these boats would provide an income to approximately fifteen extended families (father and sons and their families thus including multiple households). In addition, there were another 50 small to medium-size boats in the harbour that were in need of repair and maintenance which supported a total of over 300 extended families. In short, those approximately 62

boats provided an income to about 480 families.<sup>54</sup> The entry into Gaza of equipment and materials, including new engines has been prevented by the ongoing closure and as a result keeping the boats seaworthy has become costly affecting the livelihoods and income of the fishermen and their families in Gaza.

B'Tselem an Israeli human rights organisation based in Jerusalem has a number of fieldworkers documenting the rights violations and situation of the Gaza fishermen. One of their fieldworkers took the testimony of Ahmad a-Saidi, a 40-year-old fisherman from Shati refugee camp. His testimony, taken in 2019, explains in detail the challenges that the fishermen face on a regular basis.<sup>55</sup>

“Since I was eight, my life has revolved around fishing. I started working full-time as a fisherman when I was fifteen, along with my brothers. Back then, in the 1990s, we would sail up to twelve nautical miles from shore, which is the area where Israel allowed us to fish. There were fish of all kinds. We worked day and night. Work was good and we sold a lot of fish. We made a good living. In 2002, I got married and a built a house in a-Shati Refugee Camp.

In 2000, after the Second Intifada broke out, the Israeli navy started gradually restricting us. They limited the permitted fishing zone to less than twelve nautical miles. After [Israeli soldier Gilad] Shalit was abducted in 2006, the navy wouldn't let us into the sea at all, for at least three months at a time. Then they reduced the permitted fishing zone even more, first down to six nautical miles and then just three. We didn't know any more when we were allowed to fish and when we weren't allowed to go out to sea. The Israeli navy kept limiting our access all the time, even though we have nothing to do with political matters. We're just fishermen who want to make a living.

In 2012, the Israeli navy arrested my brother and another three of my relatives who were working with my hasaka and confiscated it. I had to buy another one so we could work. Over the years, we suffered a lot of harassment by the navy: summer and winter, day and night. They chased us and fired at us from time to time. We had to work under very difficult conditions, which meant putting ourselves in danger. We were always afraid they'd chase us, arrest us, or confiscate our boat. Also, whenever there's a war, Israel forbids us from sailing altogether.

About a year ago, while I was out fishing with my nephew, the navy arrested me and confiscated my boat. That was when my life started going downhill. I was left with no way to earn a living and my family has nothing to live on. Since then, I've spent most of my time sitting at home or by the door to my house, watching people walk down the street and thinking about my life and how it came to a halt. This forced unemployment has also caused trouble between me and my wife, because we don't have money. I can't meet my family's needs, such as food, clothes and the expenses of the new school year.

We can afford to buy meat and chicken only once a month, and even that only if I manage to get work with other fishermen, sometimes for a day, sometimes for a few days. If I don't get lucky

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<sup>54</sup> According to PCBS data the average household size for 2018 is estimated at 5.7 for the Gaza Strip. Based on this scenario 2,736 people would be dependent on the income of those boats.  
([https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_10-7-2019-pop-en.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_10-7-2019-pop-en.pdf))

<sup>55</sup> 2018: Plight of Gaza fishermen after Israel's gradual destruction of their sector, BTselem, 2019, [https://www.btselem.org/gaza\\_strip/20190211\\_gaza\\_fishermen\\_plight\\_due\\_to\\_israeli\\_restrictions](https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/20190211_gaza_fishermen_plight_due_to_israeli_restrictions) accessed on 26 May 2020

and find that kind of work, we have no income at all. Even fish, which our diet was always based on, we now have to buy in the market. We have to buy fish! And even that, only once a month.

We've become a burden on society. I get refugee aid from UNRWA, such as food items. I've become a beggar. I feel humiliated and wretched when I ask people for money. I used to never need anyone, but now we're begging for help. Our financial situation is really tough, and there are no jobs in Gaza. Anyway, I have no professional skills other than fishing. The Israeli navy is holding onto my boat and has driven my family and me into poverty."

## Impact of Israeli Policies on Gaza Fishing Communities

Although restrictions on movement have long affected the Palestinian population in general, the Gaza fishing community has only been experiencing severe difficulties from the mid-2000s onwards when restrictions were being enforced at sea. This was exacerbated by the introduction of the full closure of the Gaza Strip when Hamas came to power in 2007. The blockade affects air, land and sea and thus affects the fishermen disproportionately by creating a triple threat to the livelihoods of the fishing communities through: i) restricted access with increased risk to fish in the specified fishing zones, ii) lack of incoming material and equipment to repair the fishing fleet, iii) inability to export fresh fish or fish products because of movement restrictions on land borders.

These three conditions have severely impacted the lives and livelihoods of the fishermen to the extent that the number of fishermen active today has reduced by a near 75%. Whereas there used to be 10,000 active workers in the sector before the blockade, as of 2019 this number has gone down to less than 2,000 registered and still active fishermen in Gaza according to the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza.

The impact has been so severe that by the end of 2019 the fishermen in Gaza were classified amongst the most vulnerable groups in Gaza society with nearly 90 percent of fishers to be considered either poor (with a monthly income of between US\$ 100 and US\$ 190) or very poor (earning less than US\$ 100 per month), which constitutes a sharp increase from 2008 when 50% of fishers fell into these categories (ICRC, 2010). This has effectively sent them into deep poverty and making them dependent on aid from international aid providers such as the World Food Programme, UNRWA and international organisations bringing on new challenges as I will explain in the next section.

In order to keep afloat and survive in an ever more difficult context, fishing families have been forced to create alternatives in the fishing sector through for example asset sharing but also by taking increasing risk at sea to earn an income and feed their families which has meant loss of life, severe injury, arrest and imprisonment and confiscation of equipment. Notwithstanding these severe challenges the fishermen explained to me several times over: "the sea is our home and that is how we make a living. We have never learned anything else. When we were young, we dropped out of school

and joined our fathers on their boats and until before the blockade our sons joined us the same. We have no other skills then being at sea.” As a result of the constraints the fishermen are looking for potential alternatives to the work at sea, through for example pursuing further education, they put their hopes for a better future on educating the next generation, even though Gaza suffers from unprecedented high unemployment rates.

When visiting some of the families in July 2019 it coincided with the graduation of high school which is one of the biggest annual celebratory moments in Gaza. Most of the families were anxiously awaiting the results and planning the lives of their sons and daughters. One of the fishermen, in the presence of over twenty of his family members, cheered on his son saying how smart he was and how he would turn into an engineer *insha'allah*. However, as one of the other fishing families described, “now it is almost too late to change course as we have no more funds to send our son to tertiary education”. The 19-year-old boy of that family is completing his first year of accounting in university in Gaza and he was so excited to be the first one in his family to go to university and pursue a different life, a different future. However, the ongoing blockade and reduced income the university fees are too much to be paid right now and he had to drop out. When in the car leaving the Shati camp, he joined me in the back of the old taxi and said: “I will spend the summer on the boats at sea. One day I will continue my education, *insha'allah*.”

I recall the words of his mother who said her goodbyes to me at the doorstep and whispered in my ear how sad she was to have to disappoint her son in taking him out of university. She whispered – “oh look at him now, I worry for the future, if he won't succeed, who will?”

The short anecdotes and dialogues by the fishermen and their families provided in this chapter account the difficulties in remaining steadfast as a fishing community in one of the most challenging contexts. The triple threat has increased their daily suffering. This triple threat combined with the lack of alternatives for employment in other sectors has forced the fishermen to continue fishing. The access and protection issues have overtaken the normalcy of their daily lives, increased their suffering and ultimately contributed to the dehumanisation of the Palestinian fishing community.

## Chapter VIII Aid and Fishing Communities in Gaza

### Introduction

It is early in the morning when I thank the taxi driver and get out of the car on the wrong side of the road. I asked the driver to stop as I have to go to the Tawfeeq Cooperative, the only fisheries cooperative in Gaza. Although I have been in Gaza many times over, I had never paid attention to this Cooperative. It is located right next to the fish landing and auction site. It appears dilapidated as a result of the humidity and sea air making the building look older than it really is like, I am thinking, with many other things in Gaza.

I cross the street and arrive a little early at the local cooperative where I am supposed to meet with a group of well-established fishermen, the Director of the Cooperative, two retired fishermen, now Board members and the deputy director of the Cooperative. Some of them already arrived before me and they welcome me by asking whether we shall go upstairs to make use of the board room. I follow and take seat in an old swivelling chair at a big table with Mediterranean Sea view, coffee with cardamom is being served in small cups.

In this chapter I will focus on the aid delivered to the fishermen community. I will start off with a short overview of aid, the donor agenda and the fishermen, demonstrating that the fishermen were self-sufficient and economically independent until the early 2000s. However, the increase of aid into the Gaza Strip also affected the fishing community. To demonstrate these effects, I will focus on the different actors representing the fishermen community in the receipt and distribution of aid. While doing this I will not evaluate these projects but rather analyse how aid projects were designed by pre-determined donor agendas and how aid was distributed through already existing local structures with economic and political authority and power, the local Tawfeeq Cooperative and the Fishermen Syndicate in particular. These closed 'local networks', resulted in exclusion and lack of participation for those fishermen not engaged in either of them, and combined with a de-politicised humanitarian aid approach, it reduced their abilities and opportunities to not only benefit from the incoming aid to maintain their livelihoods but also to build their agency and voice as individuals and as a community.

This local exclusionist approach pushed the local fishermen community further into poverty, making them dependent on small and irregular hand-outs and aid initiatives that did not target them or were insufficiently reflecting their growing needs as they had not been involved in the design process.

Through my argument that international aid is often dependent on existing local structures for further distribution and implementation of projects, such as identification of beneficiaries, local price

schemes and identification of needs, I aim to highlight that these local structures often exercise power and authority over parts of the community they represent thus impeding fair and just distribution of aid and leaving the local community outside of the local development process therewith distancing those most in need and reducing the chances of long term success.



Ragib Al-Hissi, Founder Tawfeeq Cooperative. Photo: Zakaria Bakr

The director kicks off the meeting by speaking to the origins of the Tawfeeq Cooperative which was founded in 1973 by 32 fishermen. The founder, Ragib Al-Hissi, was one of the Gaza fishermen with the largest fleet at the time who established the cooperative with the aim to organise the collective and strengthen market access of the fishermen. Raghil al-Hissi was one of the fishermen who introduced the trawler to the Gaza seas, which are the largest in the Palestinian fishing fleet and are owned by major fishermen and are only found in the fishermen's port in Gaza.

At the beginning of the seventies, two fishermen's societies were established, namely: Al-Tawfeeq Fishermen Cooperative Society and Al-Fidelity Fishermen Society. One of the goals of these two societies was to help fishermen in marketing their abundant fishing catch. In its first years of existence, it managed to sell the production of its members, in particular sardines, to five canning factories in Israel. However, by 1982 the Israeli authorities imposed taxes on fish sales and the fishermen stopped their sales. In response the Israeli authorities overturned the tax requirements, but the Gaza fishermen decided to end trading fish with Israel out of fear of deceit. The Tawfeeq association continues to operate until now, as for the other Association, it was dismantled several years after its establishment.

The membership-organisation has seen a ten-fold increase since its inception, starting with 32 members in 1973 and increasing to 180 in 2006 and reaching 440 in 2019. These numbers fluctuated over time and depend on the political and economic situation of the fishermen.

Initially, in the 1970s and 1980s, membership was obtained by paying into the cooperative an equivalent of 5% of the annual fish catch of the respective fishermen. Nowadays this has changed to a standard fee of 180US\$ which buys you a share into the cooperative. Although this is a substantial sum for most fishermen, especially under the circumstances, they have an interest in doing so for various reasons. Firstly, because cooperative elections are coming up and one can only be elected or vote if you are a member. Secondly, and maybe even more important, is that until 2017, membership provided you with the opportunity to avail of low-interest rate loans or mortgages with the local bank

Bank of Palestine, as the cooperative acted as a guarantor. This resulted in a reduced interest rate of 2.6% per annum (the commercial interest rate is 5.5%), but subsequently the program stopped because many fishers still could not repay the loans despite the soft terms. Currently, the accumulated debt is about NIS 401,000 (US\$114,285) (World Bank 2020). Such loans and mortgages are crucial for the fishermen. Any fisherman who owns a fishing license can buy himself into the cooperative. However, this is based on buying shares and thus linked to financial ability and therewith a level of exclusivity.

The cooperative, a number of the buildings of which have been funded by foreign aid, provides fuel, and fishing supplies to its members who can also avail of the port side cold storage facility and ice factory. The cooperative, according to the Director, owns more than US\$50,000 in assets which are being used to support and fund the fishermen to keep on managing and sustaining their livelihoods in the direst of circumstances. The Director explains how the role and the situation of the Cooperative has changed over time:

“In the 1970s and 1980s our situation was very good. The number of boats increased, the cooperative was established and there was good organisation resulting in a high catch which was converted into wealth for the wider community.

For example, the exported tuna to Israel which would be used to make tinned preserves would fetch US\$100,000 for each catch that they would drop. The sky was the limit and our lives started to get used to the amount of money that was flowing in. People would build houses, use taxis instead of transport, no one was poor. Even those who did not own boats would earn a fair share and live a relatively good life. There was thus little need for aid that would transform our lives. Rather the focus of the aid which had been provided by donors like UNDP and Japan in 1986, focused on infrastructure and supply chain development of the fishing industry like the development of the cold storage and ice facility which were aimed at professionalisation and economic development of the sector. Actually, that is the only funding we received in those days and it wasn't until the 2000s that we started to receive funding from other aid providers like the United States Agency for International Development and Catholic Relief Services. Some of those funds would be material contributions in the form of steel wire and mesh (2005 USAID-funded project) whereas CRS provided short-term job opportunities for the fishermen because we were unable to generate an income from the sea. By that time our situation had changed dramatically and whereas we were financially independent and sovereign before now aid had become a centre piece of our lives.”

The words of the Director of the Cooperative provide a detailed insight into the perceived growing need for aid by the fishermen which had never been the aim of the Cooperative in the first place. Rather, the aid provision to the Cooperative seems to coincide with western foreign aid policies and their aid agenda to the Palestinians which have been explored in Chapter 4. Foreign aid, in particular

western aid, provided to the Palestinians has been influenced by a variety of factors in particular political context, specific donor interests and diplomatic considerations.<sup>56</sup>

The pattern of aid to the Palestinians can, in most instances, be matched to the global phases of aid and development which have been recognised and identified by various authors and institutions.<sup>57</sup> Although not all of these phases have been suitable to the needs of the Palestinians, let alone to the fishermen, I describe them below to provide an overview of the political implications that this aid has had, with an increased focus on the case of the fishermen in Gaza highlighting their perspectives and perceptions on shifting paradigms and aid distribution including the humanitarian actors involved.

### Pre-Palestinian Authority (1950-1993)

It is generally accepted that the first phase of global aid ran from the early 1950s til the mid-1960s and is known as the capital and growth period after the Second World War. This period concurred with capital investments to stimulate economic growth in most countries by increasing personal income for consumption. For the Palestinians, the 1950s dealt with the aftermath of the Nakba and the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for the Palestinian Refugees, the first independent aid mechanism established to administer aid to the Palestinians.

The aid provision by UNRWA had been set out in the Economic Mission Survey reports of 1949 which specifically recommended socio-economic integration of Palestinian refugees in their host communities. The aid then had a double focus, one the one hand it provided basic services like health, education, shelter and sanitation to ensure minimum living standards within the refugee camps. On the other hand, it supported such socio-economic integration through the creation of work opportunities (Al-Husseini 2000), this thus being in line with global growth initiatives.

The second phase started in the mid-1960s and lasted to the early 1980s and has been dubbed the basic needs approach, in line with the first attempts to develop a coherent approach based on the assumption that when basic needs are ensured more focus can be placed on economic production. As for the support provided to Palestinians during this period, the main provider was UNRWA which continued to ensure the provision of basic services. Ever since its establishment in the early 1950's UNRWA's mandate has been focusing on provision of basic services in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation and shelter. Although there have been changes over the past decades, overall

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<sup>56</sup> The factors underlying aid provision have been described in Chapter 4. The term 'aid' is used as according to the OECD/DAC criteria

<sup>57</sup> Browne, Stephen. The Rise and Fall of Development Aid, Working Paper 143, The United Nations University, The World Institute for Economic Research, September 1997, <https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/WP143.pdf> accessed on 01 July 2020



the mandate remains the same and has been funded by foreign governments. As for the position of the fishermen during this time, they benefited from a relatively good fishing period when the seas were open and the catch was still rich. In addition, the fishermen only just started to organise themselves in their first Cooperative which focused on furthering their economic status.

However, the Director of the Tawfeeq Cooperative indicated to have received international funds already in the mid-1980s for the first time from the UNDP and the Japanese government to support the construction of the Cooperative buildings and adjacent infrastructure such as the ice / cold storage facility. Some of these funds were recurrent but mainly for the maintenance of the buildings. These funds can be marked as the first phase of international donor support to the fisheries sector in Gaza, roughly running from the 1980s until the Interim Agreement. These measures of support were aimed at stimulating economic growth, increasing production and further professionalisation of the fishing industry, which was still small-scale and artisan. These donor approaches were strongly aligned to the global structural adjustment period which ran throughout the 1980s until the end of the Cold War.

At the time the Gaza Strip was under full control of the Israeli Civil Administration therefore these funds had to be channelled through mechanisms that would be 'political safe' for the Western donors, away from any Palestinian political activity. This, in turn, facilitated the engagement of the Tawfeeq Cooperative with the donors as it was an a-political private business organisation with the main aim to strengthen the economic development of the fisheries sector and its community.

The donor support to the Cooperative only benefited the members of the Cooperative itself which were the larger Gaza fish traders who would catch sufficient fish for trade and auctioning as opposed to the artisanal and subsistence fishermen who were thus excluded from the professionalisation and economic growth initiatives. It also set the stage for the flow of donor funds to occur through existing institutions and channels that were not representing all fishermen in Gaza. In the absence of Palestinian local authorities, or non-political civil society groups, the Cooperative benefited a few times from project funds mainly aimed at economic development but with a limited reach to the wider fishing community.

#### Rise in aid as a result of the PA (1993-today)

The development period after the Cold War can be identified as the institutionalisation period defined by an increased focus on good governance and capacity development within national and local institutions. The Palestinian state-building concept slotted into that concept very well and lauded in the big change in aid provision to the Palestinians. The establishment of the Palestinian Authority also ensured a first official aid recipient. This was accompanied by the sharp rise in the number of NGOs

which all benefitted from the incoming foreign funds contributing to the state-building and civil society initiatives, which were prerequisites of the donor agenda flowing out of the Oslo Agreement.

The fisherfolk would also have their hopes up for a better future and welcomed the initial initiatives to construct the Gaza Seaport as well as the numerous environmental projects that focused on e.g., Gaza Coastal Management. According to the Tawfeeq Director this initial hope turned into a watershed moment for the fishing community and the fisheries sector as many could see what their future would entail when the fishing limit was set at 20NM under the Interim Agreement. It came then as no surprise for the fishermen that with every additional restriction of access to the sea the need for aid would increase accordingly for the fishing community.

The state-building process comprised of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and its institutions including the Ministry of Agriculture which was responsible for the fisheries sector. As part of the state-building process, which was largely funded by the international community, funds for development would be transferred through the Ministry down to the General Department for Fisheries and from there allocated to different projects under the auspices of the respective Ministry. As described by several authors (e.g Knudsen and Tartir 2017) these funds focused on progressing certain priorities such as democracy, governance, gender and economic growth with the aim to establish and strengthen governance systems through training and capacity building and construction and development of infrastructure to prepare for a future Palestinian State.

As a result of the institutionalisation and state-building approach, which was a heavy donor-led initiative aimed to align the future Palestinian State to the global economy, limited emphasis had been placed on the political aspects of the conflict. As Tartir, Bahour and Abdelnour (2012) argue, this is part of the neo-liberal economic policies that have been imposed on many other developing countries. In the case of Palestine, by ignoring the political aspects and root causes in favour of economic impulses, aid started to 'de-politicise' the context and its recipients. As a result, the Palestinian politics of liberation, that had been so omnipresent in the actions of the Palestinians since the 1960s, was side-lined for incoming aid which was now the driving force for the Palestinian Authority.

Taghdisi Rad's (2015) economic analysis supports the view that the Palestine State became a development project in itself, when comparing pre- and post-Intifada economic data Rad concluded that it not only undermined Palestinian development prospects and territorial integrity but it has normalised the occupation and reduced the urgency for a political settlement to the conflict. This period of institutionalisation and state-building relied heavily on funding through the newly established ministries and democratic institutions. As the latter part of the 1990s was still favourable for the fishing community in terms of income and economic development, little efforts were made to include them in any development process. Rather the small amount of incoming aid for the fisheries

sector was channelled through the Ministry of Agriculture on to the Fisheries department which allocated funding to capacity building, administration and governance of the fisheries sector as a whole.

Besides the Ministry of Agriculture and its subsidiaries, this period also gave rise to the establishment of the Fishermen Syndicate as a counter voice to the newly established administrative structures.<sup>58</sup> This Syndicate became aware of the increase in aid to the fisheries sector. According to several fishermen I spoke to the Fishermen Syndicate initially served as a counterbalance and aimed to represent the fishing communities' needs with regards to the incoming aid. However, this was very short-lived, and the political and partisan problems rising in the Syndicate (elaborated on in Chapter 6) also affected the aid distribution efforts. In a number of instances, they had been responsible for the identification of beneficiaries for various projects, to prepare the lists and to hand them over to the aid provider, thus playing a mediating role. The Syndicate's partisan issues were criss-crossing with the beneficiaries' lists they were compiling. The Syndicate's problems quickly resulted in another exclusionist aid channel, this time in relation to the identification of beneficiaries.

This international focus on state-building and institutionalisation lasted until the early 2000s when the development agenda changed in favour of securitisation as a response to global developments in power, order and politics. For the Palestinians this period coincided with political developments of the Second Intifada (2000 – 2006) followed by the political division between Fatah and Hamas (2006-today), the Gaza blockade and subsequent wars and the ultimate failure of Oslo. The development paradigm in Palestine was marked by two key developments: firstly, the security reforms driven by the Palestinian Authority as a response to the international agenda, secondly the increasing humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip as a result of the blockade and the four wars (2006, 2008/09, 2012 and 2014). It also lauded in the turning point for the fishermen. Hever's data (2010) leaves space for interpretation that this can be seen as the moment that international aid to Palestine changes from development to humanitarian aid, entering a new phase.<sup>59</sup>

Knudsen and Tartir (2017) argue that the PA adopted donor-driven security sector reforms as the lynchpin of its post-2007 state-building project resulting in a highly securitised development process evidenced by nearly one third of the aid being allocated to the security sector.<sup>60</sup> However, the situation in the Gaza Strip differed greatly as Hamas came to power in 2006 and a political divide between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip occurred. On the one hand, the PA effectively governed the West Bank

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<sup>58</sup> The establishment of the Fishermen Syndicate has been elaborated on in Chapter 6 of this research.

<sup>59</sup> Before the beginning of the Second Intifada, the foreign aid amount devoted to long-term development projects outstripped those earmarked for humanitarian assistance by a factor of 5:1. In 2001, total foreign aid to Palestinians nearly doubled, yet the ratio shifted to 7:1 in favor of humanitarian assistance. Hever, *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation*, p.23

<sup>60</sup> This would be donor aid to the PA and thus not applicable to the Gaza Strip which was under rule by Hamas.

and was the official recipient of international aid and on the other hand in the Gaza Strip, Hamas was in power, which was boycotted by the majority of the donors. As a result of the boycott only emergency relief and humanitarian intervention projects were allowed to proceed in a no-contact setting with the de facto Hamas government. This also affected the fishermen on different levels and was the real turning point in aid provision to the fishermen, a mere 6 months after the commencement of the blockade which had put their livelihoods on hold.

Turning point: from self-sufficient to 'vulnerable'

In December 2007, just months after the blockade was imposed, a rapid assessment was carried out by the World Food Programme (2007). It included the review of credit reports of the Tawfeeq Cooperative which revealed that just over 94 percent of the fishermen had a total debt of NIS 729,402 (approximately US\$182,000) to the cooperative for boat fuel they bought on credit. The overwhelming majority of these debts were accumulated over four months only.

Initially, the fishermen used up their savings and then resorted to borrowing and buying on credit to ensure that they could buy fuel and material to go out to fish. The fishing community expected the blockade to be temporary and that they would be able to make up for the losses later on when Israel would remove the restrictions. Within four months the credit they owed was substantial and put them at risk of food insecurity and poverty.

Whereas before the blockade, the Cooperative could rely on a large pool of assets and financial resources as a result of years of prosperity which were used to support the fishermen, these financial resources eroded quite quickly leaving the cooperative with physical assets only, whereas there was a growing need amongst the fishermen for more support. One of the fishermen highlighted their increasing insecurity and growing financial debt at the local gas station;

"We used to come to this gas station ever since as it is next door, close to the boats and we know the owner well. We always paid for the fuel and had no money standing out that needed to be paid before the blockade. When the blockade started, at first, we managed a bit with our savings, but we soon found that buying al-dein (accrued to be paid later) and pay back later was our only way to keep going out to sea. However, we accumulated and although we paid back little bits the owner refused to extend or renew al-dein. This meant that it became harder to maintain our livelihoods as we needed to source funds for the fuel which costs about 100-150US\$ for a fishing trip. We had no access to such funds severely jeopardising our livelihoods and income."

The financial support to fishermen thus needed to be accelerated and this occurred when Gaza fisherfolk were identified as most 'vulnerable', which was in the first six months after the commencement of the blockade when the World Food Programme (2007) rapid assessment claimed that,

The second mostly hit sector is agriculture and fishing..... The fishing sector should be supported through fishing inputs, fuel subsidies and exporting options combined with increased advocacy to allow safe and unhindered access to deep waters.<sup>61</sup>

The labelling of the fishing community as ‘vulnerable’ by the WFP, UN agencies and other humanitarian actors thus resulted in the acceleration of the provision of emergency aid but within identified project designs and frameworks. The pre-identified projects themes were funded by the international community and left little space and representation for Palestinian voices, or fishermen voices in this instance. Instead, this aid was donor driven and thus required local organisations to apply with projects that fit into such a portfolio or framework rather than making funds available for projects that are needed and identified by the respective communities themselves. In addition, the emergency aid flow occurred in a specific manner and under specific conditions which were agreed upon by Israel, the Occupying power.<sup>62</sup> As not yet all NGOs were eligible for the aid some of them resorted to advocacy work which linked the fishermen to the human rights NGOs active in the Gaza Strip.

According to Agamben (1998) ‘humanitarian organisations can only grasp the human life in the figure of bare or sacred life, and therefore, they maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to be fighting’. Although high-profile statements, recommendations and international campaigns were launched to end the blockade, the root cause of high levels of poverty and suffering in the Gaza Strip, this had been followed up with very limited action and the blockade remains in place until this day. Thus, the international agencies favoured the short-term protection of civilians over political solutions therewith accepting its inability to address the political context.

As for the fishermen, their increased needs resulted in aid provision through international and national NGOs (either directly or indirectly) by addressing the symptoms and providing short-term solutions. For example, the WFP rapid assessment also recommended ‘Food for Work’ to support the fisherfolk in ensuring food security while their own livelihoods were under threat. In the dialogues I

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<sup>61</sup> Although no definition has been included in the assessment to define *vulnerability*, the basic definition of the International Federation of the Red Cross which has also been used as a key term in development is useful here and states: “*Vulnerability, ..., can be defined as the diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazard.*” When applying this definition to the group of fishermen in the WFP rapid assessment this definition can be further defined in terms of food security according to WFP realm of work: “*It is defined as the probability of an acute decline in food access or consumption levels below minimum survival needs. It is a result of both exposure to risk factors - such as drought, conflict or extreme price fluctuations - and also of underlying socio-economic processes which reduce the capacity of people’s ability to cope.*”

<sup>62</sup> The maximum amount of calorie intake for a Gaza adult was set at 2,279Kcal per person by the Israeli government and which was used as a measurement to calculate food supplies to enter into Gaza. This has been documented by various news outlets and human rights organisations including GISHA which claims that Israel calculated the calorie needs for Gaza’s population so as to restrict the quantity of food it allowed in. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/17/israeli-military-calorie-limit-gaza> accessed on 22 September 2020

have held with the fishermen they clearly stated that they do not *need* to be food insecure, as it is the blockade that does not allow them to practice their work and generate an income. The aid recommendations also acted against the will and deeper self-identified needs of the community. Many of the fishermen I spoke to see the blockade as the main obstacle to continuing their livelihoods. They refer to the period ‘before’ and ‘after’ the blockade indicating their previous self-sufficiency. Thus, by labelling them as vulnerable and focusing on food security, ad-hoc cash-for-work schemes and other temporary aid initiatives, it hampers their ability to continue the lives and livelihoods they are accustomed to. Rather being labelled as ‘vulnerable’ and benefiting from humanitarian aid effectively strips the fishing community of their agency to act on their own behalf while simultaneously the aid fails to address the actual, political, issues affecting their livelihoods.

#### Humanitarian Aid and De-Politicisation

It is recognised amongst different scholars (Kennedy 2005, Malkki 1996, Terry 2002) that the provision of emergency aid has a number of negative effects, including that it often contributes to further ‘victimisation’ by de-historicizing and de-politicizing the conflicts by reducing them to balance sheets of human suffering as the aid provided is not addressing the root causes of the problem but rather are short term aid injections to relief the immediate suffering. This has left the Gazan population and thus the fishermen in dire circumstances as Ophir (2010) calls a ‘*state of suspended catastrophisation*’ meaning a state of chronic need which is impossible to exit from but also insufficient to make the local system fully collapse. Hence, the descriptions in the numerous humanitarian reports have continued to describe the situation in Gaza being ‘on the brink of collapse’ or indicating that Gaza would be unliveable by 2020, furthering the humanitarian narrative.<sup>63</sup> This chronic need soothed through humanitarian aid initiatives has been described by Linda Tabar (2016) in her article which explores the effects of food aid on the Palestinian farmers in the West Bank. She concludes that;

“By reducing the problem to one of widespread hunger and chronic malnutrition, large-scale humanitarian assistance depoliticized the colonial realities—masking the increasingly perilous struggle of the indigenous population to remain on the land, their society intact—and promoted an anti-political paradigm that narrowly focused on basic needs. The international food aid program that was mobilized in the early years of the second intifada, and which is now institutionalized, reduces structural problems faced by indigenous Palestinians to an economic issue, deflecting the political reality at their core.” (p. 20)

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<sup>63</sup> A report by the United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian territory August 2012: Gaza in 2020. A liveable place?

Although Tabar's article is set in the context of the Israeli invasions during the second Intifada in the West Bank, the Gaza fishermen identify themselves in these aspects as they stated at several occasions that this humanitarian aid, although currently necessary to survive, is not a solution in itself and misleads or deflects from the political cause. One of the women I spoke to clearly stated that "food baskets are welcomed and yes it helps us in feeding our families, but it doesn't help in solving the problem." Another woman I spoke to showed me her food credit cards which are issued by the WFP to non-refugee status holders, are topped up every few months and can be used in the local supermarkets. She said, "look this is what we get, it is a credit card which I can use in the supermarket to buy goods for the household. It is good to receive something but it is insufficient to live off and meanwhile I have become a 'card holder'." In both instances the women self-analyse that these forms of aid, although providing immediate relief, also perpetuate their inability to re-establish their livelihoods as insufficient progress has been made in finding long-term political solutions to both the occupation and the blockade. They find themselves therefore in a perpetuated state of aid dependency. Knudsen and Tartir (2017) in their meta-evaluation argue that international agencies side-line their own priorities at the cost of more durable initiatives,

...although it was found that the agency successfully responded to chronic food insecurity and acute crises, the difficult environment, the PAs institutional fragility and lack of adequate data further compelled the WFP to prioritise immediate needs. By setting aside strategic and operational priorities, the WFP compromised its ability to promote sustainable livelihoods.

Similarly, by focusing intensely on provision of emergency aid, the revival of the livelihoods of the fishing communities was compromised, instead making many of them dependent on aid initiatives. The negative impact of humanitarian aid in the form of dependency, victimisation and de-politicisation is further fuelled by the inability to effectively and meaningfully participate in aid distribution or to be included in these processes at local level. The women who I spoke to about receiving different forms of aid, tended to only elaborate on the food aid component as this occurred through two main channels depending on a person's refugee status. In the case of being a registered refugee with UNRWA, the household would get quarterly food baskets provided by UNRWA, as opposed to non-refugees who would benefit from the credit card / voucher system, most often provided by the World Food Programme.<sup>64</sup> A number of other NGO-led initiatives might have run alongside this, but on a small-scale and irregular basis and insufficient for the fisherfolk to identify as sustained sources of food aid. For example, fishermen who engaged in cash-for-work schemes, or other short-term relief

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<sup>64</sup> UNRWA is a household name in the Gaza Strip as UNRWA provides relief to Gaza refugees since the early 1950s, whereas the presence of the WFP only intensified after the blockade. Both are UN agencies which, overall, have larger budgets than many of the international NGOs providing support in the Gaza Strip

projects easily mixed up the names of the various, in particular, international NGOs that were operating in the community on an ad-hoc basis. More worryingly they also referred to projects which had supplied unsuitable fishing nets to the fishermen. To me this was an indication of lack of connections and participation in those respective projects, rather the fishermen and their families had become 'bare' recipients of short-term humanitarian aid and having become a 'vulnerable victim'.

#### Negotiating Power in Aid Distribution

The perceived vulnerability and victimisation of the fishermen community as a result of humanitarian aid also had its bearings on the communities' engagement with local power structures involved in aid distribution. The Fisheries Department at the Ministry of Agriculture was one of the main aid recipients before the boycott of Hamas and the blockade. Although funding was mainly allocated towards establishing governance structures and capacity building initiatives, the Fishermen Syndicate at the time held close connection with the Fisheries Department. The international aid providers made use of the existing channels, as they did with the Tawfeeq Cooperative, to kick off projects and distribute aid. This resulted in strengthened existing power structures and relationships in which the fishing communities themselves played no significant role due to these institutions either being partisan (syndicate) or not focusing on the wider interest of the fishing community (cooperative).

The Fishermen Syndicate for example was the main connection between the government authorities and the local fishing community, indeed it was aimed to represent the full fishermen community. By having been established to represent all fishermen it was in a perceived unique position to have a deep understanding of the local fishermen dynamics as well as the needs in the community across the Gaza Strip. Its close relationship with the local authorities thus made it an excellent partner for implementation of projects as they would be able to select and inform participants for specific activities and engage with the communities as well as obtain feedback if and when necessary. As a result of this unique position the Fishermen Syndicate obtained a privileged role with regards to aid and local fishing communities. This allowed them to put together distribution lists and participants' lists facilitating patronage and clientelism.

According to the fishermen, the Syndicate was less interested in the needs of the fishermen and more interested in being connected to centres of power (the Fisheries Department). This was reflected in the fact that one of the first Presidents, after a few years, took on a position as a Director within the Ministry of Agriculture. As I explained elsewhere, the Fishermen Syndicate operated increasingly in an exclusive manner due to partisan politics. Consequently, this affected the design of projects and distribution of aid as a more select group of fishermen were represented at the cost of the wider community. The Fishermen Syndicate was a structure that had preceded the aid distribution to the fishermen and it thus had a form of power and control within the community that no other



organisation or institution had at that time. This is in no way a unique phenomenon in aid distribution. For example, Hastrup (2011) pictures a similar situation albeit in a different context, in her ethnographic research on the everyday post-Tsunami life in a small Tamil fishing village in Southern India. She found that the panchayat played a crucial role in the distribution of aid funds as a result of its local authority and knowledge of the demographic composition of the village arguing that there was hardly an option to distribute aid without their involvement (p. 87).

Both Hastrup's panchayat case as well as the Gaza Fishermen Syndicate case share similarities in terms of having authority and insight into the conditions and demographics of the community therewith playing a key role in aid distribution at the expense of the fishermen themselves who are being excluded from such process. With regards to the Gaza Syndicate and only until 2007 they had a form of proximity to the aid providers that could not easily be acquired by other actors, thus putting them in a unique position in which they could negotiate power and had control over resources therewith affecting the daily lives of the fishing community. In the case of Gaza, these power differences and the continuous solidifying of such unique positions were furthered by the power vacuum when Hamas came to rule, mainly as a result of the then faltering relations between the Syndicate and the fishermen and the new sources of funding flowing to the de facto Hamas government from e.g., Turkey and Qatar. The new sources of funding received by the de facto Hamas government had very limited restrictions and lacked therefore accountability mechanisms – both towards the donor as well as to the recipient. Fishermen I spoke to claimed that at times it was unclear where the funding would go at all. In their words they would state that the “funding coming from specific sources included materials needed for repairs, but it would be largely overestimated, but then where did the left-over go?” Some of the respondents thought that these leftovers would either be sold on the black market to generate income for those members of the Syndicate close to the leadership or be used for individual purposes outside of the scope of the fisheries sector. It should be noted these are mainly perceptions and no evidence is available other than the fact that with similar amounts of materials the fishermen themselves indicate to be able to carry out many more repairs than what e.g., the Syndicate indicated to do. A reason for this lack of transparency can be found in the absence of direct accountability of certain donors towards the funds as well as lack of accountability towards the fishermen themselves. In other words, when both the upward and downward accountability are unclear it facilitates the misuse of funds and projects. Both the lack of accountability and exclusivity in aid operations creates further disadvantages for the recipients of aid. Many of the fishermen who were increasingly in need of aid knew of limited opportunities and organisations to turn to, even though it became one of their main ways of at least obtaining some sources of support and income when they were in dire need. Thus, fishermen who I spoke to

mentioned coping with the difficulties they faced by a) resorting to organisations that provide humanitarian assistance, b) reducing their household expenditures, and c) seeking other jobs after they return from their fishing ventures. These options are often decided on based on patronage or clientelism, they will opt for the choice where they know someone best. This further contributes to the exclusivity of aid.

Abu Adham was one of those fishermen resorting to these strategies. His household consists of himself, his wife and nine children. He has five sons and four daughters, two of his daughters had married and moved out. The two eldest sons were married, the eldest, Adham 30-years old, had three children while the other, Mohammed, had two children, one of them a half year-old baby who had died a year before in a housefire caused by poor electricity. Adham took over the boat of his father which he now works together with Mohammed and Ibrahim another younger brother.

I could see in Abu Adham's eyes that life was tough. He was seated in a big comfortable chair while his wife was seated next to me in a traditional arrangement on the floor. She, although looking tired, radiated nothing but warmth. He looked out at the sea and said:

"Life used to be much better, but we had to start looking for a different income. We initially used our savings, then we borrowed but we could not pay back. For years my son and I paid for petrol every single day at the same petrol station, we knew the man well, we had always paid. But now it was different and we could not pay. Then we borrowed day after day until that ended too. We were unable to re-pay these debts". His wife completes his thoughts, "now we reduce our expenditure, we used to buy lots of fruits and vegetables but now we pool all the money together and buy once a week, that way we can get better prices and it helps a bit. We prepare the meals together since they moved back in to save on the rent."

Umm Adham refers to the fact that her sons and daughters in-law were forced to move back into the parental house due to financial insecurity and thus merge into a single household to reduce basic costs of rent, bills and food. This pooling of funds can be seen as an economic coping strategy, but it has been insufficient to create a sense of sustainability whereas such initiatives might put other pressure on the family relations. Whereas such coping strategy seems unsustainable, simultaneously the young men are usually unable to go out fishing or when they do go out the catch and profits are too low to support the family. Abu Adham concludes:

"We were really in need of financial help as the boat remained on shore for days on end and we generated no income. Of course, we had the UNRWA support but that is also insufficient, it is mainly basic food support. As we have not learnt any other trades and my sons did not finish high school because they worked the seas from an early age, we are in no position to compete for the few scarce jobs currently available in Gaza. Life is really hard now. There are some forms of humanitarian assistance. Some organisations started to take an interest in the situation of the fishermen, I don't know their names, but they provided some short-term solutions like cash-for-

work for example. Although that was only for a few days or weeks, it did provide some relief. When they left or would not select us, we would be back at square one.”

Abu Adham’s words speak to what have become the chronic needs of the fishermen leaving them with no choice then to try and engage with service providers or aid providers although, by having been side-lined and excluded, they lack the capacity and networks to do so. His testimony describes the limited opportunities and the difficulties they face in a context that has faced de-development for over half a century. It thus seems that the fishermen have been left to cope on an individual or household basis depending selection of participation in projects that have been designed without their inputs, which have been ad-hoc and not addressing the underlying causes of the fishing community’s malaise.

## Chapter Summary

Aid continues to be mainly a top-down process with the recipients of the funds always ranking at the bottom of the supply chain. Whereas accountability has encouraged transparency and reduction in corruption within aid, it has insufficiently addressed the issue of meaningful participation of recipients in the aid process. This is of particular importance as without meaningful participation one falls in the trap of disempowerment and de-humanisation of the victim. Efforts have been made over the years to address this and focus on increased localisation and ownership of aid within receiving communities.

Especially after the humanitarian aid delivered in response to the Tsunami evaluation reports highlighted the shortcoming of localisation and ownership in delivery, Cosgrave (2007) in one of these reports highlights that there is a second and deeper element which is linked to localisation and ownership of aid:

The international humanitarian community needs a fundamental reorientation from supplying aid to supporting and facilitating communities’ own relief and recovery priorities ... This change will only be possible if the affected population “owns” the relief response and aid agencies hold themselves accountable to affected people (p.22).

In 2016 the international initiative of the Grand Bargain was established to specifically address some of these shortcomings.<sup>65</sup> Although it might be too early to evaluate the Grand Bargain in full, data so far illustrates that seven out of 62 signatories, 11%, have indicated to have increased their

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<sup>65</sup> The Grand Bargain, launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, is “a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.” For more information on the Grand Bargain, I refer to Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Grand Bargain on <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-the-grand-bargain#:~:text=The%20Grand%20Bargain%2C%20launched%20during,efficiency%20of%20the%20humanitarian%20action.>

localisation efforts. Although the annual independent reports indicate progress made so far, they insufficiently challenge the overall approach of humanitarian aid as a top-down or donor-to-beneficiary method. This is further coming to the fore when looking at the achievements under the 'Participation Revolution' a key objective of the Grand Bargain which aims to include participants views and feedback to strengthen programming. The annual independent report for 2019 highlights that only 16 out of 31 signatories reported to have systemic links between feedback and corrective action to adjust programming. Similar surveys conducted in 2018 had similar results with the majority of affected people feeling that their views were not taken into account in the design and the delivery of the programmes (p.45-46). These results thus resonate with the views and perspectives of the fishing community in Gaza who, living in an increasingly politicised context, have not benefited from support in a manner that has been supportive of their lifestyle neither substantial enough to rebuild their livelihoods. Rather, the aid provided has been a band-aid handed-out on an ad-hoc basis removing the political context from the problems, while simultaneously the crisis has become chronic, further exposing the precarity of the fisherfolk.

In general, aid is often analysed either on an economic level or mainly from a provider's perspective be it a State or international organisation. Until recently much less emphasis has been placed on the perceptions and understandings and impact aid has had on local communities. This is also the case with regards to the Gaza fishing communities. Too often the recipients have been excluded from the discussion which has been *about* them but *without* them. According to those fishermen who I engaged with, very few participated in discussions, plans and programmes related to their communities. Rather the existing institutions and authorities had occupied the main space and served either as a direct link or filled a mediating role to the aid provider, thus reducing participation and understanding of local communities' needs and dynamics. For various reasons aid providers continue to rely on such established channels and actors to feed into programme development and design and therewith exclude the final recipients from any such processes, making them the 'bare recipients' of humanitarian aid.

A key question then to answer is how did the fisherfolk respond to the effects of aid which contributed to de-politicisation, de-humanisation and victimisation of their community and everyday life?

## Chapter IX Aid, Empowerment and Everyday Resistance, the case of fisherfolk in Gaza

Before the NGOisation of the mid 1990's political awareness was a crucial ingredient of grassroots activities and the underlying purpose and aim of Palestinian civil society in general, but, after this having been eroded by the international community, has only been re-inspired by the closing of civil society space and the continuous absence of representational and democratic institutions throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>66</sup> As a result, local committees have contributed to rebuilding the political conscientisation of the communities and strengthened/furthered Sumud amongst the most marginalised communities in the Gaza Strip. The case of Gaza fishermen provides us with an example of how empowerment and conscientisation have turned the tide in a society that has been caught in between, on the one hand, the oppression of the occupying power and, on the other hand, the lack of democratic governance and representation due to internal strife while simultaneously living in chronic crisis.

It is the summer of 2021 now and I am back in Gaza, two years after my initial research started, I have managed to return to validate the results of my research with the fisherfolk and respective NGOs. Although the streets all look the same, I remember the sandy street leading up to the NGO where I have been working with the fishermen. As soon as I enter, I am welcomed like nothing has changed in the past two years. The smell of Arabic coffee, small cups of thick coffee with cardamom, is everywhere. The air-conditioning is trying to keep the oppressive heat out of the office, but August is the worst month of the year. I notice the non-stop buzz in the office with people coming and going while I set up my computer in the small office downstairs squeezed in the corner where I get ready for the final stretch of this research.

It is here in this office where programmes are designed for agricultural sector development through empowering farmers' and fishermen's Sumud and resource sovereignty within a sustainable community based liberational development framework. The organisation was established in response to the socio-political vulnerabilities affecting farmers resulting from the expansion of the Israeli settlement programme and policy in the early 1980s. The walls still depict pictures of the 1980s.

The Union was founded as a non-profit organisation by a group of volunteers and agronomists and initially focused on the struggle against Israeli policies that affected agriculture and its

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<sup>66</sup> The term NGOisation has been used by various scholars to describe the situation coming into existence the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the conclusions laid out in the Oslo Agreements. Large inflows of aid resulted in the creation of hundreds of NGOs changing the civil society landscape. This has been explained in chapter 4.

infrastructure. Soon afterwards it professionalised its operations, expanding its activities to relief the economic pressure of the farmers including activities such as establishing cooperatives and job creation. Although their work has mainly been a response to these economic pressures, the Union firmly believes that the relation with the land, which is deemed to be an integral part of Palestinian culture, and the aim to reactivate the national role of the farmers in Palestine is of crucial importance for the liberation struggle in Palestine.

UAWC's empowerment approach is implemented on grassroot level. They support grassroot communities in conscientisation and provide tools and opportunities to build joint platforms and initiatives aiming to build a social movement based on national sovereignty while simultaneously supporting these groups to raise their voices on relevant issues on both national and international levels. Their funds for these initiatives come from international organisations linked to different sources including trade unions, allowing a bit more flexibility in the implementation of activities. These donors are less rigid in terms of results-based management and other development jargon and do not necessarily impose approaches and initiatives that have become fashionable over the past decade. Rather, the funders themselves are aligned with rural movement or workers movements having as overall aim to shift power and control of resources from the rich to the poor.

Together with Zakaria I review pages of the chapters that have been sitting in my folders, we fill missing data and review Arabic words. It is part of a process that has been ongoing for three years now and we both feel the end is near. Zakaria loosens up once more, it is impressive to see how he has improved his presentation skills and combined with his knowledge of fisheries and the local community, he is now a common voice on local and international TV. He elaborates:

"You know that I have been involved in fisheries ever since, indeed my whole family has been. Where I am now would not have been possible without the NGO that is providing the direct support to the fisherfolk. I have come a long way, of course I have always fished the seas of Gaza and I love the seas of Gaza, it is my way of life, but now I am able to protect the way of living of the fisherfolk in my community. This is something that is bigger than myself or even bigger than my own community. I witnessed and experienced the downturn of the fisherfolk and how we started needing aid which was often inappropriate and not useful, we accepted it out of need but it was nothing but a temporary solution, as they say a band-aid on our wounds. What we are doing now is different though, it allows us to strengthen our community and not only work towards temporary solutions but build a community that is aware and can take of ourselves, we build resilience and Sumud. This is especially important because of the two main threats we face, on the one hand the Israeli occupation and the violations that happen to us, the fisherfolk, on a daily basis, and secondly the under-representation of us in the local structures that are in place. Now we have found a platform that allows us to come together and where we have learnt to raise our voices to make claims both in terms of aid provision and our rights. This is something we could not have done previously. That I am able to play an important role in it is a great privilege. Of course, this allows me to grow as an individual, but it also allows me to put our community first and we now have a greater understanding of how our issues of social justice are linked across contexts. More importantly we are able to speak out against such injustices and although we have

not been able to create change in terms of ending the violations against us at sea or changing the access to the sea, our ability to understand, unite and mobilise as a community is what this is all about. We have moved from isolation and acceptance to a politically active community where we continue to grow and challenge existing structures. I once already explained to you that by being united we are a counter-voice against the existing structures in place within the fisheries sector. You remember the events in which we managed to 'outdo' the official fishermen union and put ourselves on the scene, we broke the power structure there and then, and ever since, we have made our voices heard. That is a huge victory for a community which had hardly ever engaged in politics and it also really helped us to work harder to get more done. I think we have even reached a stage that we understand and work with other groups not only to protect our rights but to work towards the creation of fairer systems across the globe. That is why it is important for us to be linked to for example the La Via Campesina, they are a social justice movement for peasants and so we share the same values on social justice. Of course, certain international initiatives have helped and paved the way or provided a space, like recently the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, which has facilitated our engagement."

Zakaria has been working closely with the Programme Coordinator of the NGO who has been supporting the fishermen and it is he, sitting next to Zakaria, who continues and elaborates on Zakaria's story, giving it a different perspective. A flag of La Via Campesina is covering the wall as there are pictures of international solidarity groups who have been supporting the work the NGO has been doing. While he is pouring coffee from a thermos into tiny paper cups, he raises his voice not only to exceed the noise of the rumbling ventilator, but in a manner of passion and weight, while slowly sipping his fresh cardamom-infused coffee;

"This Declaration gives us a basis to work with and claim rights on. We train different communities about the rights pertained in this Declaration for them to be better able to understand their rights and speak out for them. However, we also support them in realising these rights by providing incentives and support in advocacy and campaign events. This is one of the reasons why we set up the local committees. Although they are not fully financially independent and they do rely on our inputs, in terms of finance and resources, it allows for increased self-organisation and empowerment within their existing coping and resilience strategies and within their political context."

His phones rings, as it has been every five minutes or so with yet another request or another call for a meeting. It lasts about 45 seconds and then he continues:

"Our aim is not to train for improvement of income just to overcome the temporary blockade, even though that has become a chronic crisis, but rather to build a movement across Gaza (and the West Bank) that can be a critical mass claiming their rights in terms of social protection but more importantly in terms of food sovereignty and contributing to our rights as a people. This will outlast any blockade and serve the community for larger things."

The experiences as told by Zakaria and the Programme Coordinator demonstrate the empowerment approach that is needed to engage with different political power structures, both the Palestinian authorities and the Israeli occupation. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this research Eileen Kuttab (2010) already argued that "it is necessary to tie empowerment to everyday resistance

and see it as part of a comprehensive process that relates national resistance to social and economic independence.” (p. 252)

Although Eileen Kuttab’s argument holds true, both Zakaria and the Programme Coordinator’s views add another layer by tying empowerment not only to a process that relates national resistance to economic independence but also to rights to be obtained within the Palestinian power structures such as tax exemption and financial compensation mechanisms thus creating a form of empowerment that has national liberation at its core but in a just manner for the fisherfolk, addressing multiple issues and power structures at once. This is not an easy task and Ferguson (2004) links it to ideas and influences by radical social movements who challenging the status-quo through self-organisation of specific groups.

The programme coordinator explains that this has been the rationale behind the set-up of the Local Committees (LCs) which were established in 2009/10 under the guidance and as part of an NGO grassroots initiative by the Union of Agricultural Work Committees in Gaza.

“After increasing funds became available for the fisherfolk community who had been hit hard by the blockade, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees developed a project aimed at building sustainable livelihoods and Sumud amongst the fisherfolk to maintain and support their way of life. A first step was the establishment of the LCs, one in each governorate, thus five in total: Northern Gaza, Gaza City, Middle Gaza, Khan Younis and Rafah. We view the local committees as an informal popular community structure parallel to the official support and management structures in place for fisheries in the Gaza Strip. The five governorates each have their own local committee which consists of between 7-14 representatives of the community, depending on the size of the community. These representatives are elected annually with the potential for re-election through a democratic ballot process in which each member has a vote to cast. Each local committee then has one main representative, also elected, who come together in the Gaza Strip local committee.

We opted for the LCs to have a participatory and democratic approach which allowed for direct engagement and inclusion of all the fishermen, especially because other aid channels had been excluding them. This might sound like I am talking in development language but really it is about empowerment and building understanding of key concepts in the process through which they gain understanding of their position in the current context. The LC’s main aims are to empower, to document the situation at sea in particular in relation to the violations faced by the fishermen and to build solidarity and community support in the re-building of livelihoods amongst their communities. These initial activities have been powerful, especially the documentation of violations through which the fishermen claimed a voice, initially across NGOs and the local community and increasingly on different levels, indeed global levels.”

The local committees were established with the aim to promote Sumud and support their livelihoods and was implemented through a number of smaller scale projects. Initially, the aim was to raise awareness on the plight of the fishermen whose suffering increased dramatically as a result of the blockade implemented at sea. Awareness raising required the collection of data on violations at sea and in order to do so the fishermen were trained in basic human rights to be able to identify when and how violations occurred and then these were documented, firstly in regular reporting, but later



on through the development of an online system and a dedicated website and Facebook page through which regular reports are issued.<sup>67</sup> The capacity building exercises in human rights education served as a first part of empowerment of the fishermen. Taking into consideration that many of the fishermen dropped out of school early to join the fisheries sector and to support their families and thus they have had little opportunity to explore and learn about more global issues. As a result of the training in documenting violations and the preparation of reports by different stakeholders reflecting the violations and the situation of the fishermen, the fisherfolk became more aware of their own situation and the context they were operating in. The next step then was that the documentation of the violations were linked and supported by legal aid initiatives that started cases against the State of Israel for compensation or return of confiscated property.

This bottom-up approach of self-documenting and promoting of their own rights, resulted in legal aid support and brought cases to Israeli courts. This strengthened the fishermen self-belief in what they were doing was contributing to saving their livelihoods, it was something they could undertake themselves and it was their own responsibility to maintain efficient manners for the documenting and reporting of these incidents.

The process of witnessing a violation to turning it into data happens directly through the local committees, thus adhering to a hierarchical but democratic structure. The fishermen document and report immediately to the representatives of their committee who forward to the overall coordinator of the five governorates and who uploads in the various systems necessary for the different purposes. This documentation mechanism has reached the international media and thus the fishermen committees have become an important go-to point for journalists and international delegations visiting the Gaza Strip and who are aiming to gain an understanding of the situation of the fisheries in Gaza.

The local committees thus play a crucial role in voicing needs in a democratic manner. The committees are well known in the communities and the representatives are the voices of the communities. The committee's community presence and engagement allow them to identify the key issues and problems in the communities which is done in their monthly meetings. The committees then are also a source for data collection in needs assessments allowing for useful and relevant information to flow to NGOs or other aid structures.

Miflah, one of the fishermen who is a member of the LC in Gaza governorate reflects on that when I sit with him sipping a cup of sweet tea:

“The Local Committee has been a tool to us, a platform, which we have used as a jumping board to engage in other areas where we can speak about our situation and claim our rights. For

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/fishermengaza/> accessed on 15 November 2021

example, I have also been selected to be part of the local refugee council in Shati camp. This is a council, set up and managed by UNRWA, where residents participate in the decision-making of local planning and development in the camp for example with regards to improvement of infrastructure. It is true that fishermen were underrepresented here before, or maybe we even lacked engagement at all, however over the past years we have not only increased our skills and abilities as individuals but have increased our representation as a folk and used our voice in different political forum. Our presence has resulted in the voices of the fishermen been heard and included in such local processes. Of course, this has been a long and difficult process, I did not get into the refugee council overnight of course, but our self-organisation in the LC which was facilitated by the NGO that supported us put us on the right track. We started off with learning and taking action on the documentation of violations perpetrated against us at sea. We learnt about our rights and how this is linked to the political context. Indeed, we are aware of the effects of the occupation which have hampered our daily work at sea ever since but even more so since the blockade. It is then that we started receiving support to take note and register the violations. This initially brought us, the fishermen, together in the training and then in the collection of the data and the stories around the human rights violations. It contributed to building solidarity amongst us. We knew we all were exposed to these violations but when we started to organise, it changed our perception and we could start identifying trends and approaches, for example when the access to the sea would be reduced and how it coincided with the political context even if the fisherfolk had nothing to do with it. Our awareness of this political context strengthened our understanding of our role as fishermen at sea and with the support received through for example small initiatives, we were able to continue to go out even in the direst of times. We had never thought about it really, but it helped us to continue to remain samid (steadfast) we would never give up on our lifestyle after all, but what used to be our simple livelihood turned into a form of defying the blockade, defying the Israeli occupation.”

Miflah’s perception of how change happened is linked to an increased understanding of the political context and its effects on the fishermen at sea. In his elaboration on this he demonstrates that them going out to sea to fish, to pursue their livelihoods has become a political act, in which they resist the power of the occupation by going out at sea, continuing their way of life and their livelihoods and turning it into a form of everyday resistance.

In my view it is this inclusive and participatory approach of these LCs, which are established in already tight-knit communities, that consolidated their solidarity and added a political consciousness to their work as fishermen while also serving as an outlet where they could learn and discuss to raise their voices to gain support for the struggle against the ever more threatening situation to the fishing sector.

One of the unintended negative consequences of the fishermen’s empowerment and challenges against power structures is the negotiation and manipulation of aid. The fishermen have gained a deeper understanding of the functioning of the aid arena and its operations and they have become more sensitive to the different NGOs which ones are reliable and provide long-term aid, and work bottom up and which only provide band aids. Their ability to negotiate and manipulate the needs assessment and there with the aid flowing into their communities is an immediate result of political empowerment and conscientization of the powers affecting their daily lives. This has turned them

from 'bare recipients' into a community with agency negotiating their own aid and keeping their livelihood alive. The manipulation of aid is demonstrated through the engagement of fishermen through needs assessments. Needs assessments are a first point and method to identify the needs in a community to design a project. According to NGO workers they have found it difficult to carry out need assessments with the respective fisherfolk community directly because they can easily make claims about their engagement in previous activities which would rule them out of new activities or they manipulate their own data about for example income earned as this is not officially registered, making their situation seem worse than it is in order to be able to benefit from the next round of aid.

Although this manipulation of aid seems morally wrong one should note that the needs are high on all levels and the actual supply of aid and relief to these communities is low and irregular, so for example if one family member would have benefited from a cash for work initiative for a period of a few days over the past six months it would easily rule out participation of other family members in similar activities for the next six to twelve months, thus actually further jeopardising their income. Another factor is that the actual income of a fishing family is hard to measure, something I have also found to be an obstacle in my research. Firstly, because of the irregularity of fishing as an activity and secondly because there are few official systems that register the fish catch and derived income for the fishermen, thus making it easy to state lower income than actual income. Lastly, the poor relationship and understanding between fishermen and NGOs allow for this discrepancy to occur. The fishermen are thus trying to make use of the limited activities that are being proposed, exerting their knowledge and ability to manipulate and negotiate with the different aid actors for the benefit of their families and their fishing livelihoods. According to the programme coordinator whereas other NGOs have thus suffered from collecting data from the fishermen to assess their real needs, the LCs have played an important mediating role in this regard. The LCs have served as a buffer between community and NGO and are a first point of call to collect data on needs within their community. However, the programme coordinator stresses that they collect the data in partnership, together. Firstly, to try and avoid or reduce manipulation of data and secondly because the LC does not have the full capacity and tools to carry out such needs assessments. It is the levels of partnership that matter here as trust is established between fisherfolk, LC and supporting NGO rather than one-off engagement and initiatives, thus allowing the fisherfolk to be aware of future engagements and work collaboratively on such actions as the aim is always to keep the livelihoods and build Sumud. Indeed, the LCs reach out to the programme coordinator with requests for support which are then validated in partnership in the field. This is a more inclusive manner to collect data for needs assessments and means the voice of the fishermen (*Sawt asSayad*) is being heard and responded to. This is made visible in another activity, the rehabilitation of boats.

In the summer of 2019, a first batch of boats that had been confiscated ever since the beginning of the blockade, were returned by Israel and rehabilitation of these boats became a key priority. As data has demonstrated elsewhere in this research (see Chapter 5 Table 5.1) the number of boats compared to the number of fishermen is disproportionate due to the inability to import necessary equipment and materials. Such rehabilitation work, although emergency-related aid, is thus of utmost importance to keep the fishing float alive.

In 2019 I visited Mohammed Al-Najjar, a fisherman from Shati Camp, while he had just received materials to rehabilitate his boat and was actively working to bring the boat back to previous standards; fibreglass was used to cover and fill the bullet holes as well as layers of paint in the traditional colours of white, red, blue and yellow to bring the boat back to its original glory. His *hasaka* was his only hope to keep on making a living which became more evident when he elaborated on the importance of the support for repair work:

“Because of the blockade we do not have access to new equipment and materials. We hardly have access to the most basic materials to maintain our boats. Of course, boats suffer from overuse and at times need maintenance or repair, like anywhere else. However, due to the various violations against us fishermen, including the shooting against the boats, other more serious damage occurs which is more difficult to repair and can also be very costly. Some of these boats that have been confiscated and then returned to us have been damaged in the process of confiscation at sea and then have been kept at an unknown site in Israel. Although Israel returned the boats they are in dire need of repair; they have bullet holes, lack engines and in some instances the damage is beyond repair. However, if they remain in their current state they are useless to us and under the current conditions in Gaza we do not have any other options to obtain an income other than by making use of our key skill: fishing. Thankfully there are some support initiatives, especially through the LC which helps me to repair my boat and keep my livelihood going. The LC plays an important role as they assess our needs and engage with the respective aid actors, so rather than receiving items we cannot use, we receive aid which we asked for, and which helps us to keep afloat our boats and our lives. It gives me pride and dignity to work on the repairs of my boat and I will be happy when my boat is ready to go back to sea. Also, as you can see, I am not the only one repairing my boat, all the owners of the returned boats come here at this wharf to repair their boats, this also provides us with a sense of unity and solidarity in our daily struggle.”

Mohammed Al-Najjar’s awareness of the importance of the solidarity and unity amongst the fishermen is a result of another component stimulated by the LCs. Indeed, solidarity building amongst the fishermen and farmers in the different governorates across the Gaza Strip further consolidates and strengthens the LC’s empowerment approach. As a result, they have learnt to mobilise jointly, with support, to make their claims heard on issues of importance to them. The NGO and the LCs organise joint activities such as clean up events and exchange meetings often culminating in forms of collective action such as protests and marches in which they claim their rights.

Miflah explains that this is the *Sawt asSayyad* (the voice of the fishermen) while he recollects events from 2015 in which the local committees with the support from some local NGOs started an

advocacy campaign aimed at raising awareness about the plight of the fishermen. As part of the campaign, they pitched a protest tent at the seaport area. The general fishermen syndicate found this to be inappropriate and undermining their powers and thus disagreed with this form of action. As a result, the syndicate called on the marine police force to intervene and close the event. The leaders of the campaign then invited the marine police force themselves and told them they are welcome to dismantle the huge tent which served as a central meeting point for the campaign. Thousands of fishermen were present in the tent, which was not dismantled, and the campaign continued. The example provided by Miflah demonstrates the steps that are so crucial in the empowerment approach adopted by the LCs: solidarity-building, mobilisation, collective action, challenging power structures as in this case the power is reflected in critical mass. Or in other words, the LC at that time is a movement of fishermen making claims around issues pertaining to them and their livelihoods, indeed a movement of fishermen which had previously been invisible and voiceless.

The humanitarian space in which the development of the LCs has been established, after all they are donor-funded, has also become a political space, indeed a platform for claim making. The humanitarian and political thus merge in this space with on the one hand direct, and at times, inadequate aid provision often served as a form of initial outreach on grassroot level and as immediate relief of the increasing poverty rates. However, on the other hand and often immediately after initial relief, political conscientisation and empowerment are stimulated outside of neoliberal development and partisan politics, thus focusing initially on issues pertaining the fisherfolk and therewith building unity and voice around common interests.

Both within the humanitarian space and the political space the fisherfolk have proven to have agency and act collectively by i) manipulating and negotiating with aid actors, ii) making claims to the right to livelihood and food sovereignty, iii) resisting the source of their oppression and suffering, and iv) humanising their struggle on national and international level. Through conscientisation their collective action has politicised their existence, strengthened their Sumud and made their fishing under occupation a form of everyday resistance.

The fishermen experience demonstrates that aid programmes, claim-making and everyday resistance are not mutually exclusive and can go hand in hand through building a movement from power within.

## Chapter X Conclusion

Building on anthropological critiques, in this thesis I examined how the fishermen and wider fishing community in Gaza have responded to prolonged humanitarian crisis. I have used a three-pronged approach of aid critique, empowerment theory and resistance theory which allowed me to describe the multitude of factors affecting the everyday life of the fishermen in the Gaza Strip. I have used ethnographic methods and theoretical insights to examine the historical, social and political factors that have impacted the livelihoods of the fishermen in Gaza. This study reflects deeply on the relationship between these local conditions and the socio-political environment in which they are embedded.

In this chapter I will summarise the main findings of the study, relating them to the specific research questions set out at the beginning of the study. I will also elaborate on the study's main contributions to the field of anthropology and other relevant disciplines. Finally, I will present indications for future research.

### Revisiting the research questions

In order to address the overall research question of this thesis namely, how humanitarian aid might be aligned with self-organised resilience and empowerment in order to further everyday resistance and dignity during prolonged conditions of hardship, I had to develop a series of sub-questions to gain sufficient insights into the different factors and complexities shaping the everyday reality of the fishermen. Therefore, in order to come to an overall answer, I will set out the sub-questions below and answer them individually then culminating in an overall answer.

#### Research question 1

The first sub-question "*What is the social and cultural role of fishing in Gaza?*", was geared towards developing deeper insight and understanding of a specific social group in the Gaza Strip and the importance of fishing to the residents of Gaza as a source of food, income and linking it to socio-cultural identities. Unfortunately, academic literature has been thin on the experiences and existence of the fishing communities in the Gaza Strip, or even in Mandate Palestine (pre-1948). However, fishing as such has played an important role throughout history. Although fishing has been of continuing importance occurring along the shores of the Mediterranean, it gained in prominence with the introduction of movement restrictions at sea which were further tightened and severely affected

the Gaza Strip since the imposition of the blockade in 2007. As described in Chapters 5 and 6, fishing was a way of life in which the fishermen would engage with fishing communities across the Mediterranean and as one interlocutor said 'although life was hard it was simple and beautiful'. Fishing rose to prominence when the blockade in Gaza, in 2007, affected the sea as well, and kept boats and fishermen ashore or when out at sea resulted in regular human rights violations directed at the fishermen and their equipment.

I attempted to analyse the social and cultural role that fishing, and the fishing community has played in Gaza using the thin academic literature available and backed it up with first-hand accounts by fishermen who witnessed the Nakba and continued their livelihoods ever after. The analysis indicated that the characteristics of fishing remained largely the same with some crucial difference. Whereas in pre-1948 Gaza was not a main harbour, instead Jaffa and Haifa were, ever since the Nakba it has been the main harbour for the Palestinians. Nevertheless, the sector continues to be small-scale and artisan-oriented run by extended families. The fishermen consist of both refugee and non-refugee status holders (*lajjeen* and *muwatineen*) a result of the Nakba and the dispossession of the Palestinian people. Out of those who fled to the Gaza Strip, fishermen from e.g., Jaffa and other coastal cities, continued their trade but started from scratch whereas other refugees started working in the sector as it was the only source of income available. With the continuation of Occupation and the difficulties facing the wider economy in Gaza, fishing remains for many the sole source of income. The inability to upgrade materials, equipment and other gear necessary to expand the fleet has resulted in only a few large-scale vessels being available and instead the majority of fishermen work in an artisan manner on small boats.

Participant observation highlighted the importance of the harbour in Gaza, with plans to have been upgraded which never occurred, as it plays a central role in the life of the fishermen. The proximity to the auction site and the Tawfeeq Cooperative indicates the economic importance whereas the fishermen use the site to socialise before and after work, as well as a place to conduct repairs and store equipment. This practice continues today even though there are fewer boats and fishermen as a result of the blockade, the socio-cultural relevance of the harbour and the fishing site remains.

## Research question 2

The second question to be answered focused around "*how the situation of the fishing communities has changed since 2006/07?*". The purpose of this question was to look at the differences that have affected the fishing community as a result of the change in government in Gaza, with Hamas gaining power, as well as the imposition of the blockade. This question is a continuation of the first research

question as it elaborates on the role and the situation of the fishing community pre and post blockade. To answer this question, I made extensive use of UN and NGO reports in the absence of academic literature which has been very limited for the period of the blockade. In addition, first-hand accounts were used and where possible academic literature has been consulted to facilitate triangulation and cross-checking of data.

The results demonstrated a clear economic deterioration in the situation of the fishermen and their families. This was a direct result of the closing off the seas and the lack of access to the sea to practice their livelihoods combined with the fact that, for many, fishing was their sole source of income. Initially, the fishermen expected the blockade to be temporarily and thus opted to borrow funds to keep on going out at sea when possible. Fishermen referred to borrowing funds to purchase fuel or buy *al-dein* (accrued costs to be paid later).

Moreover, the situation of the fishermen also deteriorated in terms of rights and protection. Although before the imposition of the blockade there had been movement restrictions which at times affected the sea, these had been rare and of short duration and did not have an impact on the daily lives of the fishermen. However, the imposition of the blockade which included the presence of Israeli naval ships in close vicinity of the maximum allowed fishing zones, made fishing a dangerous occupation with fishermen regularly being shot at, injured and arrested and with boats and equipment being confiscated. Besides the emotional and psychological effects on the fishermen it also resulted in further economic pressure.

This economic pressure, in good times, had often been dealt with through fishermen customs and traditions which allowed for social protection schemes such as compensation payments in case someone got injured while out fishing. However, the economic deterioration jeopardised these customs and traditions and left those fishermen who were no longer able to go out at sea due to injury in an economic vacuum.

The inability to renew resources for fishing such as boats, gear and equipment also resulted in increased pressure on the existing resources available and the ever-expanding size of the number of fishermen making a living off the sea. Another tradition, the one of asset-sharing, had always served as a manner to overcome financial insecurity and ensure the trade could be continued from one generation to the next. However, in the absence of new resources to be employed in fisheries combined with expanding families (new generations), more households became dependent on the income of one boat – thus exacerbating the economic pressure on the families.

The solutions employed by the fishing community were not sustainable in light of the continuing blockade. Indeed, it was early on in 2008 when the WFP identified the fishing community as one of the most vulnerable groups in Gaza society.



Research question 3

My third question was: *“What is the current structure of fisheries management in Gaza?”* The intent of this question was not to just describe how fisheries management occurs in Gaza in terms of Palestinian governance but in addition I also aimed to document the complexities on conducting fisheries management under Occupation and thus describe how fisheries has been influenced by Occupation restrictions, laws and mandates. Literature review, interviews and observation indicated that there were several barriers which not only prevented an effective and efficient management but also affected the fisheries sector as a whole. Detailed information about fish landings has been used to analyse the impact of each respective fishery administration of the time.

Fishery management kicked off during the British Mandate in which Fisheries Ordinance 1937 was introduced and which is still relevant and applicable today. It is since the early days that the fisheries sector has been controlled and managed as a source of economic benefit, initially by the British under colonial control, followed by the Egyptian administration between 1948 and 1967 and then under the auspices of the Israeli Administration as part of its Occupation policy until 1993. Under all three administrations the fishery sector in Gaza had not been economically prioritised, rather it suffered from a lack of economic investment and development, an immediate result of the absence of Palestinian sovereignty over its own resources.

Only with the introduction of the Palestinian Authority in 1993 has the fishery sector been directly managed by its own Ministry of Agriculture, General Directorate for Fisheries. The Interim Agreement signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority clearly set out the new limits and arrangements for fishing including the maximum limit of 20NM as well as the security arrangements of the Maritime Coordination Council, the main controlling body. Although this has allowed for certain levels of sovereignty, it has been heavily influenced by the limitations set out in the Interim Agreement, external funding policies and limited Palestinian governance capacity.

The Gaza Fishermen Syndicate was introduced as the first representative entity for the fishermen in the Gaza Strip and served as a counter-voice against the newly reinstated Palestinian government and Ministry which was benefiting from the influx of large amounts of foreign aid into the sector under the governance and state-building programmes. For decades the fishermen had been absent from decision-making or participation about the development and inputs in their own fishery sector, lacking voice and agency in a one-sided narrative. The Syndicate was supposed to change this, but internal problems and lack of capacity resulted in little tangible change for the fishermen.

When Hamas took control over the Gaza Strip in 2006 the internal rife and partisan politics between Hamas and Fatah was also reflected in the management of the Ministry of Agriculture which fell under Hamas. Moreover, the Gaza Fishermen Syndicate increasingly aligned itself with Hamas

policies rather than focusing on the needs and priorities of all fishermen. The fishermen thus were once again isolated and underrepresented, yet at a detrimental time when the blockade proved to be the biggest obstacle yet for the Gaza fishermen eroding their rights and pushing them into poverty.

#### Research question 4

The fourth question I have attempted to answer in this study has been *'how and in what forms aid has been provided to and received by the fishing community?'*, indeed the main purpose of this question was to gain insight into the needs of the fishermen and how these were addressed and in what forms. This has been of importance to better understand the relationship between aid provider and aid recipient. I have made use here of different project reports and project data as well as interviews and focus group discussion. The data sources demonstrated firstly the evolution of how the fishermen were identified as vulnerable, early on in the blockade, and how as a consequence this resulted in an increased aid flow to the fishermen. Initially, efforts were made by INGOs and the UN who attempted to provide direct support in the forms of for example food aid, fishing nets and other forms of equipment. What transpired was the difference in identification and categorisation of aid recipient according to those fishermen who were either registered as UNRWA refugees or those who were not. Whereas the former relied on food aid from UNRWA the latter received food aid from different sources and in different formats, like a 'voucher card', provided by the WFP. This demonstrates how the fishermen community was categorised by refugee status and treated as such although their needs were similar. This was in direct contradiction with how the fishermen self-identified in their communities, they responded they were first and foremost fishermen.

Several respondents then pointed at the complexities in gaining access to different NGOs, an immediate consequence of the lack of inclusion of the aid recipients in the project development and implementation processes. These difficulties were further exacerbated by the complex aid delivery mechanisms in place in Gaza as a result of the boycotting of Hamas by western aid providers, thus creating parallel aid delivery systems where on the one hand Hamas received direct aid from e.g. Qatar and Turkey and whereas INGOs and local NGOs were funded directly by western donors. This facilitated partisan aid politics within the Gaza Strip.

Whereas the fishermen community perceived the aid to be initially flawed in failing to address the underlying causes of why they needed support to begin with, thus the political aspects of the blockade, they did also highlight that activities and support were welcomed although they were mainly a band-aid in times of emergency. This changed when local organisations started training the local fishermen on their rights and human rights violations documentation methods combined with efforts

to bring them together and look jointly at possible solutions and ways to keep their livelihoods alive. This was a turning point for the fishermen.

#### Research question 5

The fifth question immediately flows out of question four and was aimed at understanding the impact that the aid which had been provided had had on the organisation of the fishing community. This part of the research relied heavily on in-depth interviews and observations and has been the key part of the ethnographic research. The finding then highlighted that as a result of the increased capacities and closer engagement with the local organisations, PCHR and UAWC, the fishermen started to organise and with the help from UAWC democratically elected local committees were established in each of the Gaza Strip governorates. The LCs served as a platform for the fishermen community to learn about their rights, discuss their key issues, empower themselves to speak out and in turn mobilise to act. At times this has been done by the fishermen alone, at times with other similar structures like the farmer committees but in general within the wider objective of focusing on social justice. Representatives of these committees have managed to engage on other levels such as being representatives in the refugee camp committees where they were able to present fishermen issues and influence decision-making whereas on international level, through UAWC prioritising fishermen issues, their issues have been represented in international fora like for example La Via Campesina.

#### Research question 6

The last question of the research has focused on how the organisation of the fishermen has affected their position and situation vis-à-vis official management structures and incoming aid. This question aimed to assess to what extent their organisation changed their position and / or their actual situation as fishermen in Gaza firstly with regards to existing power structures such as the de facto Hamas government and the Israeli authorities and secondly with regards to the different aid providers. To answer the question data was collected through in-depth interviews as well as press releases and project data. Findings indicated that the fishermen local committees had not only filled a void in terms of representation, but also in terms of holding to account. This occurred on two levels, on the one hand against the de facto Hamas government in terms of governance issues and socio-economic rights within the realm of that de facto government and on the other hand against the Israeli authorities by filing court cases for the crimes that had been committed against them. They were thus able to use their newly acquired skills not merely to organise collectively but to challenge existing power structures. This enabled them to not only become a counter-voice for better national legislation and

minimum standards but also to strengthen their Sumud to face daily challenges of fishing at sea under the blockade.

The fishermen local committees were increasingly seen as a reliable platform for engagement with actors outside of Israel and Palestine and indeed international delegations, unable to meet with the de facto Hamas government, relied on information provided by the spokesmen of the LCs. The fishermen thus increased their outreach and managed to put their issues on the international agenda.

The fishermen community's empowerment through a conscientisation in rights, power and social justice issues, was also employed in their engagement with different aid actors. In several of the interviews I conducted the fishermen stated that they were not only better able to navigate the complexities of aid delivery but did so in a way which could be seen as manipulating such aid. I say so because they acknowledged that they were better able to understand how aid was delivered and on what criteria households would be selected in e.g., cash-for-work activities. This knowledge allowed them to prefabricate answers facilitating their selection and participation in activities. It should be taken into consideration that data on income of the fishermen has been incomplete and ad-hoc ever since and this has served as a facilitating factor for the fishermen to manipulate aid provision. However, this could not have been done without the increased knowledge on power dynamics, aid delivery and rights. But it has also been a result of living in a chronic humanitarian crisis in which their views and needs were unaccounted for and in turn they have used their ability to reclaim space and activities for the good of their communities and in favour of their Sumud and social justice.

#### Overall conclusion

I have attempted to answer the research questions above one by one, but I would also like to elaborate on the overall question of the research which focused on the effects and implications of prolonged aid provision and how this can obstruct or reinforce indigenous everyday resistance and resilience methods. The questions above contribute to this overall question and set out how inclusive aid with a political conscientisation approach in empowerment activities can contribute to increased self-organisation and challenge prevailing power structures. In the case of the fishermen this has resulted in them not only being empowered to speak out and mobilise out of the sea, but they have done so by going out to sea every single day to protect their livelihoods knowing that right is on their side. To them, as elaborated on in the UAWC project documents, the delivery of adequate and relevant aid (legal assistance, equipment, solidarity and empowerment) has enabled them to remain samid (steadfast) in the face of the biggest obstacles. Their role as fishermen in the Gaza Strip then changed from going out fishing to obtain an income, to going out fishing as a form of everyday resistance. They

have become aware that fisheries justice is larger than the right to food and that it is linked to political sovereignty.

One of the interesting aspects in this research has been that in resistance theory resistance is always seen as an opposition against a power rather than a tool for social change. In the field of development and aid the original form of empowerment (see Chapter 3) aimed to bring skills, knowledge and awareness to counter such power dynamics, which are underlying society's inequalities. Resistance then in essence, is also about inequality. In the case of Palestine resistance has been viewed as opposing the Occupation and empowerment has been introduced to better social change within Palestinian governance. However, as the fishermen case proves the two can be interlinked and mutually reinforcing— mobilising for social change effects resistance and resistance effects mobilising for social justice.

### Contribution to Anthropology and Humanitarianism

This study contributes to the anthropological literature in two ways. Firstly, the study aims to add to a growing body of knowledge on the anthropology of humanitarianism and secondly by addressing gaps in the historical, social and cultural knowledge of Palestine from an anthropological perspective.

This study contributes to the anthropology of humanitarianism by adopting an ethnographic approach in a prolonged humanitarian crisis setting. This in essence is not totally new as e.g. Ilana Feldman in her numerous works has demonstrated (2012, 2018), however one of the innovative aspects is to look, not only, at how aid has been received, perceived and used by the recipient but also how aid activities can be used to build political consciousness. In my study I have aimed to look at the relationships between aid, empowerment and resistance, which is only possible in a situation characterized by ongoing humanitarian crisis, prolonged Occupation and local dissent. This study thus fills a void in the literature around aid, action and micro structures through following and documenting the lived experiences of fisherfolk who have benefited from aid initiatives under blockade in the Gaza Strip.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the wide variety of literature on Palestine, in particular on aid and Palestine. Indeed, the majority of the literature looks at the processes and structures and only few have adopted an ethnographic approach, even less have done so by moving beyond the 'Palestinian refugee' as an aid recipient. Instead, this study looks at a different group in society, the case of the fishermen, who have become new aid recipients based on, by now, a chronic crisis. Thus, my research aims to move beyond the refugee and aid debate which has been dominating the ethnographic aid literature on Palestine.

The locality where the research has been conducted is another contribution to the literature. Indeed, due to the ongoing blockade it has been nearly impossible for international scholars to

conduct first-hand ethnographic research in Gaza and as such this study provides a detailed description of the everyday life of a community under blockade. Using a case study set in a prolonged humanitarian crisis which is simultaneously experiencing ongoing Occupation, I have been able to examine the complex relationships between aid, empowerment and resistance, the roles of the different actors in these processes and identify fishermen responses to the threats against their livelihoods.

This study also answers a recent call by the Palestinian Museum for building knowledge on Palestinian coastal communities.<sup>68</sup> As this research has evidenced there is very limited literature available on the social, cultural and historical aspects of fisheries, fishing and coastal communities in Palestine. This study has only scratched the surface of the wealth in culture, custom and tradition that exist within these communities in Gaza. I have done so through an ethnographic approach therewith not only answering the call of the Palestinian Museum, but I have also adhered to the wish of the fishermen themselves to document and preserve their everyday lives which are under increasing threat.

### Recommendations for Policy and Future Research

Based on the results from this research I can offer several recommendations for policy and management as well as for future research directions. However, before I provide some recommendations, I would like to state that in my view, there will not be a long-term solution as long as the political status-quo is not addressed. The calls to end the blockade have not brought the required results and although the blockade is intrinsically linked to the Occupation, there is a need to change the narrative and approach currently in place. The reductionist approach of turning a national liberation issue into a single issue in the form of 'ending the blockade', does not offer a long-term solution, as it will not bring sovereignty nor ownership to the Palestinian people. It is crucial that underlying issues are addressed for all parties involved.

I divide the recommendations into three levels; the first is with regards to the international community which should look at holding the perpetrators of crimes committed, in this case against the fishermen, to account and take immediate action to end the blockade. Secondly, on a national level, the Palestinian political parties should re-focus their political agenda and restart a national liberation project, beyond partisan politics. Finally, on the grassroot level, the local communities should be supported to exercise their political rights in favour of social justice and national liberation,

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.palmuseum.org/open-call-for-artists-and-cultural-institutions> accessed on 11/11/2021

as the one is not achievable without the other. In order to achieve this there are intermediate steps or recommendations to be made.

In particular, the role of aid and the delivery of aid to the Gaza Strip should be re-assessed. The current aid delivery mechanisms are embedded in a highly politicised setting. This has had unintended but severe implications for the aid recipients in the Gaza Strip.

Also, in line with the international aid agenda, aid should be increasingly localised within the Gaza Strip. And as part of that the Israeli Authorities supervision and oversight of existing aid delivery mechanisms should be counter-challenged by the international community.

Localisation of aid should not only focus on the further professionalisation and inclusion of NGOs in the wider aid agenda but should also actively engage and include local aid recipients. As this research has proven, they are communities with agency and awareness who are best able to identify their needs and priorities. The inclusion of aid recipients could happen through active outreach and support to grassroots initiatives which have been established by the local communities, in the case of the fishermen this has occurred via the Local Committees. It will be of importance that any aid provided is in line with the three policy recommendations above.

Most feasible in the short term however, is the design and implementation of empowerment activities that also adopt a political conscientisation approach as defined by Freire. This recommendation is a micro-step into achieving the policy recommendations outlined above. As the Local Committees have evidenced, political awareness combined with power within, have not only allowed the fishermen to mobilise, speak out, connect globally and become an active actor, but has strengthened their Sumud and served as a tool in their everyday resistance against the Occupation.

The policy recommendations above should not be seen in isolation but can also be linked to areas for further research. For example, within anthropology there is space to be more inclusive and adopt a more action-oriented research approach. In the case of Gaza, this would be of importance as local voices can be included and actively participate in research, even though or especially so since Gaza remains under blockade. Inclusion, part of the recommendation above in terms of localisation, is thus valuable for both research focus and policy recommendation.

Furthermore, this study has also demonstrated that there is a knowledge gap on coastal communities in Palestine, both in the past and in contemporary society. My research has focused on the fishermen community as aid recipient but has shed light on the social and cultural customs and traditions that are still in place today. However, there is a need to research and investigate this further and deeper for different reasons. Firstly, to ensure that these traditions, which are dynamic and reinvented, other customs and indeed local knowledge on fishing can be documented and lessons can be drawn from them. This in order to increase sustainability in fishing communities, as well as to better

understand how to support these communities and lastly, to ensure that this cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.

Finally, I would like to call on researchers, both those in the field of resistance as well as those studying the fields of humanitarianism, and those working on local knowledge, to explore the relationship between indigenous practices, customs and local forms of resistance, like Sumud, and aid. The relationship between aid and local knowledge deserves more attention and having a better understanding of how one can either reinforce or benefit from the other, might result in more effective, sustainable and dignified solutions for aid recipients. Indeed, it might result in a shift in existing aid narratives and contribute to a review of the current aid paradigm.



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