NATURAL RESOURCE TRANSFORMATION: INCORPORATING IDENTITY
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Abstract
Natural resource issues provide a useful context for analysing and intervening in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because environmental destruction harms both Israelis and Palestinians given their close proximity in a small, ecologically fragile landscape. This article argues that because Israeli and Palestinian national narratives both assume a special relationship between their peoples and the land, a traditional natural resources management (NRM) approach treating land as a finite resource to be ‘managed’ or divided will not help to resolve the issue. Instead, politicians, scholars and practitioners should draw upon the principles of conflict transformation in designing intervention strategies and work to create a new ‘ecological’ narrative that weaves the long-term wellbeing of the two peoples together with the environment. Looking at the conflict over land in one location along the route of the separation barrier, the author applies a natural resource transformation framework in analysing the land conflict between Israeli authorities, the settlement of Zufin and the villagers of Jayyous.

Introduction
In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, natural, social and political resources are intricately entwined in issues of sustainable development and peacebuilding as well as in fuelling and escalating the conflict. Many analyses of the conflict tend to focus on only one of these dimensions: most frequently the competing claims for land or other natural resources (Nordquist 1985; Gasteyer 2005) or conflicting identities, which are often religious or political (Huntington 1993; Chapman 2002). Others suggest that one cannot separate the conflict over land from the conflict over identity (Aly, Khalidi; Rabinowitz 1997; Feuerverger 2001; Pappe 2004). Because a relationship with the land helps constitute Israeli and Palestinian identities, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key site for exploring the role of identity in natural resource-based conflict as well as alternative models for peacebuilding and development. This is especially true given that the conflict has destroyed thousands of olive trees, acres of crop land and precious water resources, particularly since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000.1

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rarely analysed in terms of natural resources. Although many see the conflict as being about land, their analysis focuses on political terms (i.e. conflict over territory and issues of national sovereignty) rather than on land as a natural resource. Several projects and conferences have addressed water resources, but most are highly technical and divorced not only from broader natural resource issues but also from questions of identity, social position and connection to the land (Massoud 2000; Assaf 2004).2 Rather than focusing on land as a tangible good, politicians, scholars and practitioners should draw upon the principles of conflict transformation in designing intervention strategies and work to create a new ‘ecological’ narrative that weaves the long-term wellbeing of the two peoples together with the environment.

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This article first describes what natural resource ‘transformation’ (as opposed to ‘management’) might look like by drawing on literature from both NRM and conflict transformation. Drawing on case studies from Israel/Palestine and elsewhere, it then briefly reviews the literature on natural resources (particularly land), identity and conflict. From this conceptual frame, the article explores a particular case of land and identity conflict where Israel’s separation barrier is being built on the lands of the Palestinian village of Jayyous. This case study draws on reports and presentations given by Israeli and Palestinian organisations as well as on material collected during nine months of fieldwork conducted in 2004-2005, which involved extensive participant observation of Israeli and Palestinian civil society groups and over 90 in-depth interviews.

Towards Natural Resource Transformation

Conflict transformation, as distinct from conflict management or conflict resolution, goes beyond seeking win-win solutions and re-framing positions to ‘engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict’ (Miall 2005:4). Consequently, conflict transformation approaches tend to be more comprehensive and wide-ranging than management-based approaches, looking at social and political systems as well as distribution of power rather than using narrow technical or practical definitions. While some approaches to conflict management see conflict as something never-ending, to be constructively ‘managed’ rather than eliminated, mainstream ‘Western’ approaches often draw upon strategies of ‘alternative dispute resolution’ (ADR) which are not always equitable or effective in local contexts. Some scholars note that ‘ADR may be counterproductive if the process only manages to get certain groups together to mediate their differences when the causes of the conflict and obstacles to resolution are beyond their control’ (Buckles and Rusnak 1999). Western and Middle Eastern approaches to conflict resolution differ in terms of who are considered stakeholders, who are considered trusted mediators, and how conflict – and subsequently its resolution (or management) – is defined. The latter tend to define conflict in terms of values and principles rather than interests. The former tend to be more individualist, focused on tangible resources rather than relationships, and to use professional outside mediators who are seldom familiar with the nuances and history of the conflict (Abu-Nimer 1997). Such differences are important to consider when planning natural resource interventions.

Contests over resources – from the conflict transformation perspective favoured here – are seldom just about the resource itself; they often have to do with the ways in which social identities are constituted in relation to place through policies, institutions and daily practices. Consequently, approaches to transforming a conflict must deal with such relationships, and seek to re-channel conflict dynamics into constructive outlets through increasing justice and promoting systemic social change (Lederach 1995:16-18). Often this involves extensive engagement with all stakeholders and participatory processes that engage local knowledge and decision-making practices (Buckles 1999; Bruckmeier 2005). Conflict transformation takes time and energy to transpire; often it cannot be neatly documented in the development project cycle. It also requires political and social will, especially when it involves issues of structural conflict. Processes of conscientisation (through public education campaigns, for example) and mobilisation may be part of the process of social transformation (Galtung 1996:89-101).
As one development agency has noted, ‘land is a central element in the varied and complex social relations of production and reproduction within which conflict between individuals and groups are bred’ (CMM 2005:1). A transformative approach to natural resource conflict seeks to engage with and transform social relationships, discourses and institutions in addition to exploring issues related to use of or competition over natural resources. In brief, it would encompass three main components of the conflict transformation approach: a) examining issues of power that are built into official structures and policies with managerial authority; b) exploring stakeholder values, worldviews and cultural understandings of natural resources, particularly as related to conceptions of identity; and c) looking at natural resource conflict as a multi-disciplinary, trans-sectoral, systemic problem.

Issues of power

The role of power distribution and asymmetry is often one of great importance in transformational approaches to conflict. Although some management approaches view differences in interests or faulty communication practices as contributing to conflict, transformational approaches tend to view empowerment as a key objective of interventions. Laue (1982: 34) argues that proportional empowerment, ‘a condition in which traditionally disempowered groups have developed their latent power to the point where they can advocate for their own needs and rights’ is a core ethical value for interventions. This approach is similar to Galtung’s, namely that one must pay attention not only to direct violence, but also to structural violence involving social, political and economic systems which prevent individuals from reaching their human potential (Galtung 1996). Sometimes power imbalances are hidden by the rational, interest-based approaches taken by Western international development agencies, which tend to work with official government institutions and often overlook or discount the importance of local consultation in the policy planning and implementation process (Tyler 1999). When such power imbalances are overlooked, interventions can fail as in the case of public education campaigns about land rights and land issues when people are powerless to defend those rights in practice (CMM 2005:11).

Certain practices, policies and government regulations are at variance with traditional resource use systems. This often creates conflicting criteria and priorities for resource and conflict management, criteria that are hidden by power differentials that rank some priorities as ‘more important’. In societies where resource conflicts involve the state or state institutions, government interventions are likely to exacerbate the situation and will not be viewed as neutral by some stakeholders. Conflicts should therefore be analysed in contextual terms, including their ‘relation to other problems and conflicts and to the situation of the stakeholders’ (Bruckmeier 2005:66, 67). Such analysis should include a focus on power relations, given that power can differ greatly among groups and that the survival of less powerful groups can be at stake. From a transformational perspective, ‘natural resources are...embedded in shared social space where complex and unequal relations are established among a wide range of actors’ (Buckles & Rusnak 1999). Indeed, altering power dynamics and establishing processes of institutional development in public and governmental agencies are among the most complicated and lasting elements of natural resource interventions. Often the success of natural resource interventions depends on governmental will to address the relevant land and property issues; this can make efforts to transform governmental power structures and practices all the more difficult (Bruckmeier
2005; CMM 2005). This is especially the case when one considers the role of NRM in a conflict zone like Israel/Palestine, where state planning and land use policy are intimately connected to the conflict and different systems of law apply to Jewish settlers living in the West Bank (who are governed under Israeli civil law) and the Palestinians living in the West Bank (who are governed under a mixture of Ottoman, British Mandate and Israeli military laws, as well as Jordanian and more recent Palestinian laws created by the Palestinian Authority since the start of the Oslo process).

**Values, identity and worldviews**

In contrast to some management approaches, transformative approaches to natural resource conflict do not assume that all stakeholders subscribe to the same worldview. Instead, they see natural resource conflicts as rooted in diverging values, needs and interests as well as being dependent on different worldviews and interpretations of ‘facts’. Such conflicts are not only political, but also involve cultural, social, economic and ecological dynamics (Bruckmeier 2005:66). Transformational approaches ‘must be rooted in and responsive to the experiential and subjective realities shaping people’s perspectives and needs’ and describe ‘how conflict emerges from, evolves within, and brings about change in the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions, and for developing creative responses that promote peaceful change’ (Lederach 1995:24, 83). Intervenors must be aware that even the identification of natural resource problems can be contested, depending on differing worldviews, sources of information and values. This is particularly so given that ‘natural resources are used by people in ways that are defined symbolically. Land, forests and waterways are not just material resources people compete over, but are also part of a particular way of life, an ethnic identity, and a set of gender and age roles’ (Buckles and Rusnak 1999: unpaginated).

All too often, however, international development practitioners focus narrowly on physical resources such as minerals, forests and land. Although the recent toolkits published by the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) highlight broader issues of power, governance and ethnic differences involved in natural resource-based conflict, they do not explicitly deal with local issues of identity and critical constructions of community. Similarly, international peace and conflict resolution practitioners often think more abstractly about identity, actors and issues, tending to focus on elite and semi-elite communities (like diplomats and civil society leaders) and often fail to engage with local grassroots communities connected to the land for their livelihoods. Dialogues on land and resource management that have brought together Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian scientists, for example, have not drawn upon the historical memory or the current reality of those living in the areas where they wish to ‘restore’ or ‘reclaim’ the environment. Given that moves to ‘restore’ often seek to turn back the clock to some earlier (fictional) time, such programmes are fundamentally political and grounded in assumptions about what the landscape was like and who was (or wasn’t) in control of it, and consequently favour one particular worldview (Pollan 1991).

Kenneth Bush and Robert Opp suggest that just as there is a distinction within peace and conflict theories between ‘management’ and ‘transformation’, within the field of international development there is a similar distinction between management-based and
transformation-based approaches. They call for a broad understanding of the term ‘resources’, one that includes a look at the ways in which ‘the boundaries of group identity may be manipulated and politicised as part of the struggle for natural, economic, or political resources’ (Bush & Opp 1999). Their approach to community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) asks critical questions regarding identity resources, power dynamics and conceptions of community that transcend traditional development approaches to NRM. The authors recognise that in many areas, ‘traditional’ villages and resettled communities compete for scarce resources, and approach concepts like ‘conservation’ in dramatically different ways. This brings to mind conflicts between European settlers and Native Americans in what became the United States as well as contemporary conflicts arising from different approaches to natural resources between camel herders and farmers in the Sudan. In such conflicts ‘natural resources’ and ‘identity resources’ cannot be artificially separated. A transformation-based approach to conflict assessment draws on assumptions similar to those in conflict transformation: namely that ‘intractable’ conflicts often deal with the lack of basic human needs (including those related to identity), access to resources (including those related to land, water and livelihoods) and distribution of power (Burton 1990; Galtung 1996; Fisher 1997).

Cross-disciplinary systemic change

A third major characteristic of natural resource transformation is an orientation to systemic change that cuts across disciplines and themes. Conflict scholar Adam Curle (1995:65) suggests that those seeking to transform violent conflict must ‘address both the social, economic, and political and above all, the psychological factors that create alienation coupled with the other set of conditions that adds cruelty and violence to the alienation’. Similarly, Galtung argues that direct violence must be examined in conjunction with structural (exploitation and repression) and cultural violence (Galtung 1996:35). This approach to a broader understanding of the causes of (and ‘solutions’ for) conflict is becoming more widely accepted in the field of international development. For example, in its Land and Conflict toolkit, CMM suggests that ‘land issues are multi-disciplinary, often cutting across traditional sectoral and thematic division’; yet it notes that most development interventions tend to be ‘narrowly framed in the context of specific thematic perspectives’ such as democracy and governance, economic growth and agriculture (CMM 2005:8-9). The authors recommend a more systemic or transformative approach to development in areas of land-based conflict by affirming the need to look more holistically at the way different sectors impact and reinforce the conflict, be it through agricultural practices, land tenure laws or unequal access to markets and/or capital. They observe that addressing one aspect of the problem alone, such as by providing a new land tenure law or a re-titling initiative, is not likely to mitigate the conflict if other related institutional components and services, such as credit, infrastructure and technical assistance, or the land law and policy regime do not change as well (CMM 2005:10).

Other scholars and development practitioners affirm the need to think broadly when analysing natural resource conflicts, by looking at the wider social and ecological context, by including a diversity of data from several disciplines (including non-scientific documents), by exploring multiple approaches to conflict mitigation to better integrate the perspectives of different stakeholders, and by documenting ‘dense’ descriptions of local resource management problems of all the stakeholders (Bruckmeier 2005:67). A multi-disciplinary approach also takes account of the cultural worldview and identity aspects of natural resource conflicts as well as power relations, given that such conflicts often have multiple dimensions or may be only one in a chain of related conflicts (Bruckmeier 2005). Furthermore, involving multiple dimensions in transforming natural resource
conflicts is a wasted effort if high-level policy, administrative or financial factors block local decisions (Buckles & Rusnak 1999). Consequently, every level of political authority in the entire system affected by the re-constitution of the problem — from the local to the elite — must be engaged if the conflict is truly to be transformed. While scholars and practitioners note the lengthy and arduous process this requires, they repeatedly iterate its importance for change.

Land, Identity and Conflict

How official national identity is assigned and administered is an important factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not only do Israeli government-issued identity cards determine each individual’s ability to move around the land – including which roads to use – but different legal systems prevail depending on the ID card one carries. A related challenge in examining the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a natural resource context is that it does not fit neatly in either the domestic or the transborder conflict categories used by donor agencies for classifying natural resource conflicts. The West Bank and Gaza Strip, which Israel occupied in 1967, are regarded as ‘occupied territory’ according to international law, but the government of Israel has repeatedly termed them ‘disputed territory’ and thereby challenged the applicability of international law to their case, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention (Hajjar 2001). The West Bank is ‘governed’ by two systems of law: Israelis living in West Bank settlements (east of the 1949 armistice line, also known as the ‘Green Line’) are subject to Israeli law; Palestinians living in the West Bank are subject to a mixture of Ottoman, British Mandate and Jordanian law (pre-1967) and Israeli military orders (Yehuda 2005), in addition to Palestinian laws over issues such as investment.5

Settler and farmer perspectives

Although Israeli and Palestinian societies are both diverse with a range of perspectives on issues of land and other natural resources, there are two main perspectives linking land and identity explored here: that of religious (ideological) Israeli settlers and that of Palestinian farmers. While most Israelis live in West Bank settlements for economic reasons and are not necessarily religious, those living deepest in the West Bank tend to be religious or ideological settlers. Such settlers believe that God gave them all the land of Israel (and even parts of Jordan), and that it is their religious duty to live on the land. For religious Jews, the West Bank is especially sacred given that it was the land of Abraham and his descendents, of holy places such as Abraham’s tomb and Jacob’s well. Many settlers believe that there are 22 Arab countries to which the Palestinians could go, whereas they have only the small state of Israel, a necessary refuge given centuries of anti-Semitism.

Palestinians, particularly the farmers, speak about the land as their mother, as the source of their life and livelihood. This is particularly the case for farmers from small villages like at-Tuwani which lack electricity and running water and whose entire existence depends on the crops they harvest and the sheep they raise. In the city and countryside alike, Palestinians use ‘images and proverbs concerning trees and plants…in discussions of politics, identity and communal memory’ (King-Irani 2000:42). For many Palestinians, the land of their ancestors is part of their soul, their identity. Olive trees which have been in the family for generations (the oldest are called ‘Roman’ trees, allegedly from that era), are beloved as family members and
stoic farmers cry at their ‘deaths’. The uprooting of trees and sealing off of agricultural land is not just a matter of economics or tangible resources for Palestinian farmers, but it is akin to losing an arm or a loved one.

Some Israeli settlers believe they are improving the land by introducing organic techniques or other kinds of ‘modern’, environmentally friendly farming. They contrast the donkey-powered farming techniques of the Palestinians with their superior technology and irrigation practices. Other settlers see the land of Israel as the legacy of their ancestors, promised by God, and the only place where many of the mitzvot (commandments) required of religious Jews can be fulfilled. In the course of my research I heard several settlers justify their right to the land by the success of their organic farming techniques. A religious Jew who immigrated to Israel from Canada gave an account of friends from Brooklyn who desperately wanted to live on the land in accordance with the Zionist mythos of the ‘new’ Jews of the Kibbutz movement, but had little idea of how to go about it, being city folks. He articulated their ‘real’ connectedness to the land while acknowledging it was an imagined one, and conceded that his friends would not know how to preserve or safeguard the land despite their love for it.

Natural Resource Conflict: The Case of Jayyous

Jayyous is a Palestinian village in the northwest of the West Bank, 6km east of the Green Line (1949 Armistice line). It was known as the breadbasket of the West Bank and served as a model agricultural community for Palestinian farmers with modern irrigation systems funded in part by the international community and maintained by local Palestinian hydrologists. Jayyous is located in the fertile agricultural lowlands of the Qalqilya area, astride a mountain aquifer. Although it is situated east of the Green Line, it is part of the 15% of the West Bank (22% of Mandate Palestine) that was not under consideration in Israeli Prime Minister Barak’s proposal at Camp David (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005). Legal battles over the agricultural lands of Jayyous (which are located to the west of the built-up area of the village) have been ongoing since 1988. Since 2002, when Israel began to build the separation barrier, the conflict has intensified. Involving issues of environmental destruction, legal manoeuvring and international involvement, Jayyous presents an opportunity to analyse conflict dynamics through the lens of natural resource transformation.

The Jewish settlement of Zufin, to the west of Jayyous and 3km northeast of the Green Line, was founded in 1989. The settlement has about 1,000 residents and 200 housing units; over the past eight years it has grown by 300 residents. The built-up part covers 200 dunums, but its jurisdiction encompasses 2,000 dunums, including large areas that are not contiguous with the built-up zone (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005). Jayyous is a village of 13,000 dunums with 3,200 residents. However, 550 dunums have been taken to build Israel’s separation barrier and another 8,600 dunums have been isolated behind the barrier (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005:27). The barrier isolates 75-90% of the fertile land of Jayyous as well as 120 greenhouses and the six water wells that Jayyous depended on. The village now must buy water from a neighbouring village, yet that provides only half of their needs and only for two hours a day in the summer (UNRWA 2006). So far, over 4,000 trees have been uprooted for the barrier and 125 acres of land have been leveled. Hundreds of trees have been uprooted in preparation for settlement expansion and over 15,000 citrus trees have...
died because farmers lack access to their fields to irrigate and tend them (UNRWA 2006). A Palestinian hydrologist remarked that as Jayyous residents ‘we find ourselves in the midst of an environmental disaster’ (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005:4). The planned construction of an Israeli industrial zone in the midst of the remaining agricultural fields is likely to compound the destruction. Given the damage already done to crop land and water resources, the likely introduction of industrial pollutants, hundreds of new residential units for Zufin and the additional roads and traffic that will result are likely to further damage an ecosystem once known as the breadbasket of Palestine.

Power and the struggle for the land

Several aspects of the land struggle between the village of Jayyous and the Israeli authorities demonstrate the role of power relations in perpetuating the conflict and a sense of injustice (which many scholars argue can lead to future conflict) on the part of the Palestinians. In 1988, the Israeli military governor declared to the mayor of Jayyous that 1,362 dunums of Jayyous land were considered state land and gave the village one month to appeal. Seventy-nine farmers were directly involved in the appeal; eight years later the High Court ruled that 18 farmers would lose their lands and 61 would not. However, several years later, farmers whose lands were not confiscated discovered that the Civil Administration (the offices of the Israeli army in the West Bank) had unilaterally redrawn the land boundaries in the intervening years. Sharif Omar, a farmer who has led a non-violent protest over the issue, learned of this when in 2004 an Israeli surveyor marked a route for a new road through his land. Only in December 2004 did Sharif Omar obtain a military map which showed that 15 dunums of his land had been transferred to another farmer’s holding. The new maps, which were not issued with the court’s authority and were printed several years after its verdict, employed a unique numbering system that matched neither the original Jordanian system nor that used by Israel after 1967. The Israeli settlers have produced no bills of sale for the parcels of land they claim to have bought in 2003 (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005). Islands of private Palestinian land in the midst of the jurisdictional area of the settlements continue to be confiscated. The Palestinians have no effective redress because the 40-day window to challenge the military declaration of ‘state land’ is too short and because there is no official land registry to authenticate land rights (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005).

The permit regime through which Palestinians apply to gain access to their lands (through gates in the separation barrier) shows a second dimension of power relations. In the first year, hundreds of Jayyous residents were denied permits, either for ‘security reasons’ or for failure to prove ties to the land. In response to international pressure, the number of permits issued increased. Unlike the practice in other areas, the vast majority of applications were for turned down for ‘security reasons’ (which are never explained) and not for failure to prove ties to the land, which implies indirect Israeli military recognition of the validity of Jayyous land claims (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005; UNRWA 2006). About 25% of permit applications are denied. In some families, only one woman is granted access to the land, which makes it difficult to tend crops. Permits are granted only for foot traffic; separate permits are required for trucks or donkey carts, further restricting the work that can be done. The four gates that serve the five surrounding villages are open for an average of 90 minutes a day at irregular intervals. However,
during Israeli holidays or for punitive reasons, the gates stay closed for weeks. An entire season’s harvest was lost when the gates were shut in September and October 2003. The army has meanwhile announced that the gate closest to the village of Jayyous will be closed permanently and farmers must go several miles north to access the Falameye gate, a five- or six-hour round trip, and then backtrack south to access their lands (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005; UNRWA 2006). Given that Palestinians cannot spend the night on the west side of the barrier, such restrictions render crop farming nearly impossible. The belief has grown among Palestinians that this is part of a plan to annex more areas, as land that is not cultivated for three years becomes ‘state land’, according to an old Ottoman law enshrined in Israeli statutes in 1979 (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005).

**Contending constructions of Israeli and Palestinian identity**

In terms of the land conflict in Jayyous, there are three major perspectives at play: that of the government (and the settlers) which argues that the land is taken in part for ‘security reasons’, but that the land is also ‘state land’ to be used for construction; the perspective of Israelis who see the route of the barrier as harmful to both Israeli security and the environment as well as contrary to Jewish values; and the Palestinian perspective which sees the land as a source of livelihood, physical security, recreation and family identity, as well as their political right under international law.

In contrast to other West Bank villages such as at-Tuwani, where the Ma’on settlers have violently attacked Palestinian residents (and their international accompaniers) and poisoned their grazing lands, the settlers of Zufin, largely a non-farming community, have had little to do with the conflict over Jayyous land, where a legal battle has been fought between the Israeli government, its Civil Administration and the villagers. The main thrust of the settlement expansion is not due to natural growth, as the settlement ‘outline plans’ envision a 200% expansion of 400 housing units which far surpasses the 40% growth over eight years that Zufin has experienced. Most of the new settlers will be recruited from within Israel (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005). The owner of the construction company involved in the Zufin expansion plan, Lev Leviev, is a wealthy member of the Lubavitch Chassidic sect, and has worked on other settlement construction projects (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005; Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005). For Leviev, God meant for all of the land ‘between the [Jordan] River and the [Mediterranean] Sea’ to belong to the Jewish people alone; by settling the land and removing the Palestinians, the Jews are ‘redeeming’ it and following God’s wishes. In July 2004 settlers came in buses with Israeli soldiers to put up signs of famous Zionists on tracts of land scheduled for confiscation (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005). Leviev and Israeli government officials claim that the land on which they plan to expand the settlement and build the industrial zone is state land: Palestinians can go through the courts if they wish to stake a claim. Besides, they claim, the separation barrier is routed for ‘security reasons’ and not to demarcate a political border; Palestinians can access their fields if they manage to obtain a permit.

A second perspective on the conflict in Jayyous comes from Israelis who feel the confiscation of Palestinian land and the restrictions on Palestinian access to land not only damage Israeli security, but are also contrary to Jewish values. One activist states:

*If Judaism is to retain its essence of caring, of heart, of respect for human rights, democracy, integrity, intelligence, empathy, compassion and soul…it has to stop this landaholic covetous madness…It has all gone too far, and the temple that is Israel, World Jewry and Judaism is under threat of being toppled by that pride, that hubris. We are all equal, all life an expression of God* (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005:11-12).
Other Israelis suggest that Israel’s land policy in areas like Jayyous damages Israel’s long-term security. Uri Avnery, a long-time leader in the Israeli peace movement (founder of the group Gush Shalom, or ‘Peace Bloc’) and former Member of the Knesset, linked the actions in Jayyous to Ariel Sharon’s plan to annex 58% of the West Bank, ‘which means never-ending war with the Palestinians and the entire Arab world’ (quoted in Godfrey-Goldstein 2005:6). Israeli human rights organisations like B’Tselem and BIMKOM claim that the route of the separation barrier in Jayyous actually hinders Israel’s security. This is not only because it causes high unemployment and poverty among the Palestinian community there — factors leading to unrest — but also because the chosen route makes the barrier longer, takes it through more complex terrain, and creates a security risk by creating a barrier that is lower than the houses of Jayyous. In a co-authored report, the organisations argue that if Israel had built the barrier just to the east of the built-up area of Zuﬁn rather than to encompass all of the lands of Jayyous and the areas of planned settlement expansion, the barrier would make Israel more secure by a safer route, by reducing the harm done to Palestinians, and by restricting the uncontrolled entry of Palestinians into Israel – a primary objective of the barrier (Lein and Cohen-Lifshitz 2005).

The arguments are framed in terms that articulate a concern for Israel’s security, yet also recognise that the security of Palestinians, economic and otherwise, is critical for Israel’s wellbeing. Many such claims are also waged in terms of Jewish identity and moral values. When speaking of their land, the Palestinian farmers of Jayyous refer to much more than the damage to their livelihood caused by the restricted access to their fields and markets, which has seen the price of a box of tomatoes fall from $3.50 to less than 30 cents and olives and olive oil selling for less than the break-even price. Of the 550 families in Jayyous, over 300 are now dependent on food aid (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005:5). Often discussions of the land are tied to memories of family, peace and recreation. As one farmer said, ‘People not only draw their bread from the earth, they also draw rest and tranquility from it.’ Another recalled that a plot destroyed by Israeli bulldozers ‘also had a wine press and a well dating from Roman times, which the tractors demolished. My best memories come from that place, where my family and I used to hike and relax’ (Lein & Cohen-Lifshitz 2005:31).

The connection between Jayyous farmers and the land was vividly depicted during a non-violent protest over the uprooting of 400 olive trees in December 2004. Hundreds of Israeli and international activists marched to the fields where the trees had been razed. Israeli military and riot police filmed them as they replanted the field with new trees, stating that they were breaking the law. The irony was not lost on the Israeli activists that the Jewish National Fund regularly raises money around the world to ‘plant trees in Israel’ in order to ‘make the desert bloom’ yet they were ‘violating the law’ by replanting trees uprooted by Israeli bulldozers. Although hundreds of Jayyous residents planned to participate in the march and replanting, the army kept the gates closed. Three activists were, however, allowed to carry one uprooted tree to the gate and pass it to its owner, a farmer who cried, kissed the tree and tasted the soil from its roots.

A multi-dimensional problem

The 20-year conflict in Jayyous is a complex, multi-dimensional one. While on one hand it is a dispute over land claims which is being waged in the Israeli courts, it also has political and economic ramifications that affect the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the ecology of...
the region. Jayyous farmers have been the hardest hit by the separation barrier because they have been cut off from their lands. This is a severe problem given that Jayyous was a model farming community that helped to subsidise the rest of Palestinian agricultural markets and taught new techniques for irrigation, etc. In addition, Jayyous residents have lost access to the wells on which they depended and they are forbidden from digging new ones. Rising unemployment and the desperate situation of the Jayyous residents have led to violent protests by village youths. At one time the northern gate was set ablaze, which resulted in the villagers being put under curfew, shot at and tear-gassed. Former Mayor Salim told New York Times reporter Steven Erlanger in 2005, ‘Of course I want peace and reform…but I also want my land and my water…which is more important to my people…It’s difficult to think of peace…in a situation like this. This is our reality on the ground.’ A relative added, ‘How can my sons think of peace when they’ve paid such a heavy price?’ (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005:6-7)

The Jayyous conflict is further complicated by Israel’s plans for consolidating its hold on major settlement blocks, particularly after an exchange between U.S. President George Bush and Israeli premier Ariel Sharon in April 2004. In May 2006 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert visited the White House and secured Bush’s partial approval of his ‘convergence’ plan for Israel to withdraw unilaterally from selected settlements in the West Bank, again demonstrating the role of the U.S. as party to the conflict. Although lobbying by international diplomats, international NGOs and Israeli human rights groups, along with regular non-violent protests by Jayyous residents, has resulted in limited changes – gates are open for longer and some battles continue in the courts – additional international involvement, particularly from the U.S., would likely be necessary for the land conflict to be justly adjudicated given the role of the Israeli government as a stakeholder – as well as rule-maker — in the particular resource conflict. Palestinians have been waging court battles for almost 20 years, but their economic plight has reduced their means to pursue costly trials. Israeli military and judicial authorities repeatedly deny Palestinian petitioners access to maps with redrawn boundaries, alleged bills of sale and other documents. In order to address the land conflict between Jayyous and Zufin, systemic change is needed to reassess the permit regime, the route of the barrier and current land laws.

Conclusion

Traditional resource management approaches that seek to expand the policy dialogue, or bring in a trained third party or trusted local organisation to encourage or train public officials to think differently about stakeholders and legitimate users of the contested resources are not likely to be successful in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the present juncture. While conferences and joint research projects that have brought together Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian water experts, agricultural specialists and academics to discuss resource issues and the peace process have made headway in building relationships and devising creative solutions, the prevailing power, policy and legal-political regime in Israel/Palestine is not conducive to bringing about the systemic changes required to put such solutions into effect. Besides, the restrictive system of permits and travel bans prevent Israelis and Palestinians in areas like Jayyous from meeting. An additional obstacle to creative and transformational approaches to dealing with natural resources is the interconnection between the land, constructions of identity and the security narrative, which makes it difficult to have ‘rational’ policy dialogue.

An additional obstacle to creative and transformational approaches to dealing with natural resources is the interconnection between the land, constructions of identity and the security narrative, which makes it difficult to have ‘rational’ policy dialogue.
Scholars and practitioners have demonstrated repeatedly that for natural resource-based conflicts to be resolved, more than one legitimate user (and, potentially, use) of the resource must be recognised. Local stakeholders must participate in the making and enforcing of decisions, and local social dynamics must be taken into consideration when devising viable alternatives (Buckles 1999; Tyler 1999; Bruckmeier 2005; CMM 2005). In the Israeli/Palestinian case, Palestinian stakeholders have been repeatedly excluded from information flows and from engagement in addressing the issues. Conflict transformation scholars argue that sometimes conflict escalation (which can be non-violent) is necessary to raise awareness of the issues at hand and to make visible latent power dynamics (Laue 1982; Lederach 1997; Buckles 1999). The awareness-raising and educational efforts of Israeli and international organisations like Ta'ayush, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), Ecumenical Accompaniers and B’Tselem are important in helping Palestinians bring cases to the Israeli and international courts, teach Israelis and internationals about the issues at stake, and to lobby political officials.

Transformational approaches that seek to reconfigure relationships and redistribute power are required in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because of the Israeli government’s role in creating and sustaining the land conflict and because of the integral role of the land in the construction of Israeli and Palestinian identities. Within both Israeli and Palestinian societies, additional work needs to be done to conceptualise identities that acknowledge both peoples’ claim to – and love for – the land of Mandate Palestine. Israeli and Palestinian social and cultural institutions have done a masterful job of perpetuating national narratives linking people to the land; they should – with the help of outsiders if necessary – be able to formulate and disseminate a modified, non-exclusive national story. Scholars examining the political, geographical and social dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should also keep the natural resource dimension in mind. Although Israeli and Palestinian societies both have active civil societies, neither has an active ‘green’ movement beyond a few small groups, like Green Action, Bustan l’Shalom and Palestine Hydrology Group; as a result, awareness of environmental destruction is overshadowed by the priorities of securing political borders. Increasing international attention to the environmental destruction that results from struggles over land may provide a more collective lens for examining land usage in a way that can benefit both Israelis and Palestinians.

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Increasing international attention to the environmental destruction that results from struggles over land may provide a more collective lens for examining land usage in a way that can benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. This can help bring awareness to the issues at hand and make visible latent power dynamics. Efforts of organisations like Ta’ayush, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), Ecumenical Accompaniers and B’Tselem are important in helping Palestinians bring cases to the Israeli and international courts, as well as teaching Israelis and internationals about the issues at stake.

Transformational approaches that seek to reconfigure relationships and redistribute power are required in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to the Israeli government’s role in creating and sustaining the land conflict. Both Israeli and Palestinian identities are deeply tied to the land, and work needs to be done to conceptualise non-exclusive identities that acknowledge both peoples’ claims to the land. Social and cultural institutions have perpetuated narratives linking people to the land, but they should be able to formulate and disseminate modified narratives.

Scholars examining the political, geographical and social dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should keep the natural resource dimension in mind. Although both societies have active civil societies, neither has a strong ‘green’ movement. Increasing international attention to environmental destruction can provide a more collective lens for examining land usage. Such efforts should work to challenge assumptions that view natural resources as zero-sum. Treating land and water resources without adequate consideration of environmental impact can have significant consequences. For example, the uprooting of olive trees and destruction of farmland for construction purposes can lead to increased desertification and reduced precipitation.

Israeli and Palestinian policymakers should be encouraged to think creatively about ways to share the geographical space of Israel/Palestine. Numerous scholars and practitioners have put forward innovative solutions for sharing land and resources.
and for creating national boundaries that do not necessarily line up with geopolitical boundaries. Such plans should be disseminated widely and public discussions held to raise awareness of the diverse array of options. Such exchanges should help Israelis and Palestinians understand the ways in which their lives are interconnected, despite their desire for separation, in terms of environmental issues such as water, air pollution and desertification. Donors should encourage the participation of those who farm and live on the land in studies of water and land resources because most scientists and scholars are far removed from the rural populace. In order for conflict transformation to occur, natural resources must be seen as just one part of a broader tapestry involving relationships of power, culture, politics and society.

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Endnotes


2 One of the technical committees established at the Madrid Conference in 1991 had to do with regional water issues. This group has continued to meet over the years, but its work is highly technical, dealing with such matters as desalination plants. Several groups of academics or NGOs have worked on second-track initiatives regarding the water issue, including the Israeli-Palestinian Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI) which has held several conferences devoted to the issue of water; available at www.ipcri.org


4 Indeed, if one looks at the recent USAID White Paper and other policy documents, such as the ‘Fragile States Strategy’, a distinction is made between ‘transformational development’ and development in failed, fragile or recovering states where the focus is more on ‘managing’ or controlling the situation and instituting reforms, institutions etc.

5 According to an interview I had with an Israeli lawyer who works with the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), this hodge-podge of law is the result of Israel occupying the West Bank and therefore not having the authority to modify local civil law. Criminal and security cases involving Palestinians are tried in military courts in the West Bank. Similar cases involving Israeli settlers are tried in a criminal court inside Israel. Administrative cases involving Palestinians can be brought to the Israeli High Court.

6 One dunum (about 1000 square metres) is equivalent to a quarter of an acre or a tenth of a hectare.

7 Often land deeds for Palestinians date back to Ottoman times and ‘re-districting’ or updating of the land registry was never completed entirely in many parts of the West Bank since that date for a variety of political reasons. The process of proving land ownership is an arduous one that Palestinians must do on an annual basis, requiring many levels of bureaucracy (Godfrey-Goldstein 2005).

8 These prices have fallen dramatically in part because of the travel restrictions placed on the farmers and their crops, which block direct access between Jayyous and its main markets (cities like Nablus, Tulkarm and Qalqilya). Farmers are forced to sell their goods on the local market. Restrictions also prevent cultivation, import of fertilizer and pesticides, etc. While wholesale prices have fallen, however, consumer prices have risen due to the lower quantity on the market (UNRWA 2006).
The U.S. is seen by many as a ‘third party’ to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in part because of the extensive military and financial aid — in the billions of dollars — it gives to Israel each year. The U.S. has also played an active role in intervening in the conflict over the years, although the George W. Bush administration has been less involved. Here, it can be seen that U.S. approval means something and is something to be sought after by Israeli leaders.

The land encompassed in the British Mandate of Palestine—between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea—which is now divided into Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank.

References


Yehuda, L. 2005, lawyer with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, interviewed by author 4 April, Jerusalem.