

APPLICATION OF THE ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION PRINCIPLE TO THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE RELATIONSHIPS

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This paper seeks to highlight the relationships between the process of *accumulation by dispossession* described by Harvey in 2003 and the land occupancy policies in Palestine, which in our opinion show clear similarities to this theory. The principle formulated by the British geographer draws on the *primitive accumulation* processes described by Marx, but has been adapted to explain the more recent rationales of the capitalist system, especially the problems arising from the over-accumulation of capital and the need to expand to new markets.

To address this issue, the concept has been transferred to a different problem: the processes of accumulation by dispossession not at the level of economic policy, but rather at the more tangible level of land. The intention is to maintain that the principle of accumulation by dispossession is equally applicable to the arena of international relations, particularly to this specific case.

According to Harvey (2004: 103) “[i]f the surpluses of capital and labour power exist within a given territory (such as a nation state) and cannot be absorbed internally (either by geographical adjustments or social expenditures) then they must be sent elsewhere to find a fresh terrain for their profitable realization if they are not to be devalued. This can happen in a number of ways. Markets for commodity surpluses can be found elsewhere. But the spaces to which the surpluses are sent must possess means of payment such as gold or currency (e.g. dollar) reserves or tradable commodities”. In the case under examination we have found how the process of building the State of Israel (*National Home for the Jewish people* in the Balfour terminology) was precisely guided by the same parameters. The report made in 1937 by Lord Robert Peel, head of the Palestine Royal Commission, revealed the clear intention to occupy the Palestine territory with Western capital and companies that would allow the disposal of surpluses produced in the 1930s and would guarantee a background to respond better to crisis episodes, such as the one that occurred in 1929. Obviously, this process is not

exclusive to Palestine, but common to other colonising phenomena in the world too. There are, however, two factors that make the Palestine occupation a very significant example. On the one hand, the implication of the Rothschild Bank, which is essential to guarantee the success of the enterprise, especially to acquire land (Izquierdo, 2007) and to shape the great economic funds, such as the Keren HaYesod, is striking. On the other hand, while in other colonising processes (in Africa or Asia) the access of colonies to independence means the replacement of physical occupancy by a different occupancy of a commercial nature (the so-called *colonial pact*), in the case of Palestine the independence from Israel has aggravated the processes of accumulation, now in the shape of occupancy.

In fact, after the Independence from the State of Israel in May 1948, the processes of accumulation by dispossession had to be reoriented; it is no longer a matter of the major European banks locating new spaces for the expansion of industrial capitalism at the beginning of the 20th century or acquiring devalued land (*devalued assets*, according to Harvey) or disposing of production surpluses. Now the main goal of accumulation by dispossession, sometimes under the guise of *conflict between religions* and sometimes under the argument of security, is to control the territory by the newly-born State under the premise that it is the only way to guarantee its survival.

Without specifically referring to this, Harvey's postulates do not, however, fall far away when he points out that "new dynamic spaces of capital accumulation ultimately generate surpluses and have to absorb them through geographical expansions" (Harvey, 2004: 104). Indeed, the occupation of new territories is one means to absorb capital surpluses, and in the case of Palestine it has served to generate a series of valuable and economic assets: 150,000 Palestinians would enter Israel every day coming from Gaza and the West Bank before the huge Russian migratory flow in 1993. The massive arrival of one million Ashkenazi Jews after the fall of the Soviet bloc has limited the need for the Arab labour force, which has always been considered suspicious –for being *fifth-columnists*– and has enabled their confinement in urban ghettos and enclosed spaces. They are assets that are no longer necessary to maintain the system.

This is how we should understand the process initiated in Oslo; what was offered apparently as a territory assignment for an embryonic Palestinian State hid, however, a complex mechanism of Bantustanization, that is, of space compartmentalization to enable the occupation of fertile land or land with water resources (Area C of the 1995 agreements) and to separate the largest possible amount of Arabs in ghettos (Area A). For the system to work as best as possible, it requires a physical enclosure by means of erecting a wall/fence that measuring over 700 km long will prevent or hinder internal movements. Also, together with the accommodation of half a million people in illegal settlements, it will shape a scenario of pressure that will invalidate any attempt to achieve sovereignty by Palestine or to gain economic viability without Israel. Despite being the best-known, these are not the only tools used. In December 2012 the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in occupied Palestinian territories (OCHAoPt) showed its concern about the 642 *obstacles to movement*¹ existing in the West Bank a euphemism that encompasses complex

1 The 532 obstacles in the West Bank (excluding the 110 located in Sector H2 of Hebron) are distributed as follows: 9 checkpoints on the Green Line, 59 full checkpoints, 28 partial checkpoints, 106 steel gates to roads, 62

checkpoints to fences, through trenches, gates closing a road, obstacles on the road network (concrete blocks, ditches, etc). From these, only 9 checkpoints are set on the Green Line, the other 633 obstacles are located within the occupied territories and not on the border line between Israel and the West Bank, which invalidates the security argument. The situation in Hebron is especially noteworthy, as 151 of these obstacles are in its city centre or surroundings, with a further 110 obstacles set specifically in sector H2, occupied by Jewish settlers (OCHAoPt, 2013).

This process fits seamlessly into Harvey's definition (2004: 115) when he remarks that "[c]apitalism internalizes cannibalistic as well as predatory and fraudulent practices. But it is, as Luxemburg cogently observed, 'often hard to determine, within the tangle of violence and contests of power, the stern laws of the economic process.' Accumulation by dispossession may occur in a variety of ways and there is much that is both contingent and haphazard about its modus operandi. Yet it is omnipresent in no matter what historical period". Undoubtedly, the principle of accumulation by dispossession is present in this case and enables a wider—not only geopolitical but also economic—interpretation of the theory postulated by the geographer from Kent.

The height of such dispossession is reached in Jerusalem, a landmark for the Jews but with an Arab majority (mainly Muslims and, to a lesser extent, Christians), until the Six-Day War. The demographic processes that currently take place in this city are extraordinarily interesting and spiralling, such as the progressive colonization by ultra-Orthodox Jews (especially in some neighbourhoods bordering the Green Line, such as Mea Shearim) and the proliferation of Jewish settlements in the surrounding area (such as the gigantic E1 complex on the East). At the same time, the Arab community, considered as *resident* but without citizenship², experiences a high vegetative growth but is restrained by means of a complex system of permits hindering their movements and their interpersonal relationships. Moreover, as we have seen, it has found its highest expression in the demolition of their homes.

spots of the road network blocked with roadblocks (concrete blocks), 185 spots of the road network interrupted by earthmounds (mounds of rubble, dirt and/or rocks), 24 spots interrupted by earthwalls (walls or fences), 8 spots of the road network broken by trenches or ditches, 50 road barriers built in as many spots of the Palestinian road network (OCHAoPt, 2013).

2 The term *resident* is applicable to the non-Jewish population only and is usually used to refer to the Arab community in East Jerusalem. The Jews are not *residents*, but *citizens*. Thus, the administrative terminology hides a segregation language. The words Arabs and Jews, or Muslims, Christians and Jews, are not mentioned, but instead only *residents* and *citizens*. Although apparently these terms are devoid of discriminatory connotations, they actually entail different rights (for instance, residents cannot vote in Israeli legislative elections) and result in major differences regarding legal and procedural safeguards.

