The "Urban Redesign" of Jenin Refugee Camp: Humanitarian Intervention and Rational Violence

Linda Tabar

UNRWA's reconstruction of Jenin refugee camp following the massive destruction by Israel in April 2002 was the largest humanitarian intervention during the second intifada. This article uses the Jenin project as a lens through which to critically examine the minimalist humanitarian paradigm underwriting the agency's relief-centered mandate. Reviewing the negotiations between UNRWA planners and local refugee committees, the author highlights the tension between the agency's politically "neutral" technical vision and the refugees' needs and wishes. While recognizing UNRWA's crucial role, the author regrets that in expanding its operations beyond relief provision, the agency opted for a more traditional (liberal) community-based development framework rather than a rights-based approach, resulting in a depoliticization that undermines the community's struggle for its rights.

In the early hours of 3 April 2002, Israel invaded Jenin refugee camp as part of a broader military operation to reoccupy the West Bank. For twelve days, the densely populated camp, sealed off and declared a "closed military area," was subjected to a brutal military campaign involving one thousand ground troops, columns of tanks and armored bulldozers, and aerial bombardments from Apache helicopters. The assault ended only after the Israeli army had systematically destroyed the center of the camp to make it "visible" so as to reach the fighters defending it. In the end, "the entire area, down to the last house, had been leveled,"[1] widespread atrocities had been committed, and over fifty Palestinians had been killed.[2]

As human rights groups condemned the devastating assault on a civilian population, Israel's invasion of Jenin camp entered military annals as a model of "urban warfare" and was quickly exported to the American occupation forces in Iraq.[3] Locating Jenin within the long history of colonial counterinsurgency wars, Eyal Weizman shows how the urban terrain

Linda Tabar is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and Research Fellow at the Centre for Development Studies, Birzeit University.

is "destroyed and reorganized" by the colonial power in order to facilitate the policing of the colonized and directs our attention to how spatial technologies of control are used to pacify a resisting population.[4]

In the aftermath of the Israeli assault, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) launched a massive emergency humanitarian operation to rehabilitate the camp and rebuild the destroyed refugee shelters.[5] As the largest and most significant humanitarian intervention during the second intifada, it also represented a turning point in UNRWA's more than sixty-year history by expanding its operations to include the large-scale reconstruction of a camp targeted by colonial and military violence. Today Jenin camp's reconstruction is hailed as the first "urban redesign" of a refugee camp in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Without discounting the importance of this humanitarian effort, this article examines the minimalist humanitarian paradigm underwriting UNRWA's relief-centered mandate. It investigates the intersection of bureaucratic agencies, their apolitical and often "antipolitical" paradigms,[6] and the realities of colonial violence and repression. In so doing, it sheds light on the implications and consequences of this mandate[7] and the minimalist concept of humanitarianism that frames individuals as passive objects of relief rather than as situated, rights-bearing bodies and "active agents in their emancipation."[8] In critically exploring the antinomies and contradictions of this narrow humanitarian paradigm and its interactions with a given set of power relations, UNRWA's importance to Palestinian refugees is affirmed, for critique of the impact of humanitarian operations on the ground is a necessary part of a dialogue aimed at strengthening the agency's relationship with Palestinian refugees.

UNRWA's Humanitarian Operations: The Shift to Camp Improvement and Its Limits

Any discussion of UNRWA must begin with a recognition of its centrality to the lives and well-being of approximately 5 million refugees, both materially, because of the essential services it provides, and symbolically. Moreover, despite its ambivalent relationship to refugees' rights (given the absence of a rights focus within its mandate), UNRWA is still crucial to the refugees' pursuit of justice and their right to return to their homes. The agency is widely regarded as an important marker of "international responsibility for the Palestinian refugee question."[9] For this reason, it is constantly under attack and the target of sometimes vicious campaigns, including one recently waged by members of the U.S. Congress calling for "the dissolution of UNRWA" as part of the broad attempt to erase the roots of the question of Palestine once and for all.[10] UNRWA therefore occupies a highly contested space, where it must constantly negotiate overlapping sets of power relations—including relations with its donors,

the host states, and state powers—even while fighting rear-guard assaults intended to undermine it and reduce its operations.

Before bringing UNRWA's humanitarian paradigm into focus, it is also necessary to acknowledge its history and the role of the dominant state powers in defining its mandate. The agency was created in December 1949 by the UN General Assembly with a temporary mandate to provide humanitarian relief for the Palestinian refugees forcibly displaced from their homes by the Zionist forces during the ethnic cleansing campaigns of 1947–48, on the basis of which the State of Israel was established. The United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), by contrast, had been established a year earlier to oversee the search for durable solutions and to *protect* the Palestinian refugees, including by facilitating their repatriation. However, faced with Israel's refusal to allow for refugee return and the international community's lack of political will to pressure Israel to uphold Palestinian refugee rights,[11] the UNCCP by the early 1950s had abandoned its larger mandate to focus on the strictly technical matter of assessing refugee property. This left UNRWA as the sole UN agency responsible for the Palestinian refugees, a status confirmed with the creation in 1950 of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), whose mandate for the protection of refugees worldwide specifically excludes the Palestinians.[12] UNRWA, however, has no mandate to protect the Palestinian refugees' rights, but only to provide humanitarian relief and assistance, including shelter, food rations, health services, and education.

Like other large, bureaucratic international agencies, UNRWA is structured hierarchically and operates from the top down. Many of the interviews I conducted in Jenin camp reflected this approach. An engineer from Jenin working on the reconstruction project, for example, had this to say:

> UNRWA is a very large international organization and the administration is too bureaucratic. They treat Palestinian refugees from above. The senior management in UNRWA does not have enough awareness of the local community, its situation, and the real issues facing Palestinian refugees. . . . There is too much of a gap between the institution and the people.[13]

The disempowering effect on refugees of the gap identified by this engineer is compounded by a mandate that traditionally defines humanitarian assistance as temporary "material help" severed from any discussion of rights.[14] In essence, the refugees are framed as ahistorical objects of assistance on the receiving end of bureaucratic power. According to another engineer on the Jenin project, "the people (i.e., the refugees) do not have a deep sense of trust towards UNRWA. They feel that on a human and social basis they are not getting their rights and their rights are not being supported by UNRWA."[15] Such aspects of the relationship

between the agency and the refugees are also obvious to outside observers. As a representative of the United Arab Emirates, which funded the reconstruction of the Jenin camp, noted:

> UNRWA is a very bureaucratic agency, people inside the organization want to implement things according to their books—they are not concerned with rights or strengthening accountability to refugees. The attitude of some of the senior UNRWA management involved in the Jenin project was "we cannot be seen as giving in to refugee demands."[16]

Yet the emergency operation in Jenin came at a time when actors inside the agency were beginning to rethink the traditional relief-centered mandate, including its way of relating to refugees as passive recipients of assistance. Starting from the premise that "UNRWA's vision is for every Palestine refugee to enjoy the best standards of human development,"[17] the new thinking eventually led to UNRWA's Camp Improvement Program (CIP) aimed at "improving living conditions in houses and camps through a more systematic and participatory approach."[18] Although the CIP, which represents a genuine attempt to alter this minimalist form of humanitarianism, was not officially unveiled until 2006,[19] the notions behind it very much informed the work of the UNRWA planners involved in the reconstruction of Jenin camp.

These notions included a humanitarian paradigm expanded to encompass the refugees' right to live in dignity[20] and a "human development" approach that shifts the focus to local realities. This approach would assure the refugees' basic right to decent living conditions, among which are reduced density in the camps and the improvement of housing and living arrangements. These last were prominent goals in the Jenin reconstruction project.

UNRWA's camp improvement program focuses on upgrading the urban environment as a way to cultivate* individuals *as active economic agents in their communities while ignoring and concealing broader political structures and power relations

However, as ultimately adopted by UNRWA in its final version of the CIP released in 2006, the notions underlying camp improvement suffer from clear limitations. The abstract concept of human development is underwritten by a liberal paradigm that defines development as a process that enables the refugee to attain "his or her full potential as individuals [*sic*]" and to be an "active and productive participant" in socioeconomic life.[21] It therefore focuses on upgrading the urban environment as a way to enable and cultivate *individuals* as active economic agents in their communities, while ignoring and concealing broader political structures, conditions, and power relations. UNRWA's operations thus remain within a minimalist humanitarian framework broadly in line with the dominant form of humanitarian assistance introduced in the West Bank and Gaza by donors and international

organizations in response to Israel's deadly colonial aggression against the Palestinian people since the second intifada—in other words, with humanitarian assistance packages centered on "relief commodities" and "material help."[22] Perhaps more crucially, the continuing dominance of the minimalist humanitarian paradigm means that the refugees are not acknowledged as actors with rights, nor are structures of colonial power and oppression recognized and brought into view. By extension, the community-based development approach embodied in the CIP is marked by a continuing ambivalence and lack of clarity vis-à-vis the refugees' right of return.

UNRWA has been criticized on both accounts. "Humanitarian assistance" has been seen as a palliative replacing efforts to pressure Israel to end its colonial and apartheid regime and to uphold the Palestinian people's inalienable human rights.[23] Other analysts have underscored the need for UNRWA to adopt "a policy or approach" to the right of Palestinian refugees to return as "a right under international law"[24] even as it incorporates development approaches into its operations. One can add that the current approach also fails to uphold a richer vision of humanitarianism modeled on the principle of solidarity and the moral imperative of supporting the struggle to end injustice.[25]

JENIN AS A RESISTANCE COMMUNITY: THE BUREAUCRATIC GAZE

Jenin camp was one of the main sites of subaltern resistance during the second intifada. As a community marginalized along class, refugee, and regional lines, Jenin became a center of popular organizing and resistance against Israeli colonialism. From being a radical space of collective opposition, however, in the course of the second intifada it gradually became the focus of U.S.-led Western-funded donor projects in the millions of dollars.[26] Palestinian Authority security forces, trained by Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, were deployed to police Palestinian resistance on Israel's behalf in exchange for "economic development." Mideast envoy Tony Blair was thus able to hail Jenin as a model "economic and security zone" despite the fact that this development took the form of industrial parks providing insecure, low-wage jobs for Palestinians.[27] In other words, resistance in Jenin over time was subdued by separately intervening technologies of power, including most notably a long colonial counterinsurgency campaign that was followed by donor-driven projects to revamp the camp and reestablish security collaboration with Israel.

Within such a context, the humanitarian intervention imposed on the camp was but a small moment in a far broader process. Obviously, Israel's military violence, its ongoing incursions into Jenin, and its mass arrests and assassinations of local activists were the main forces that slowly pacified the resistance. My concern, however, is the effect that *bureaucratic* interventions have in situations of colonial violence, and specifically the

effects that humanitarian interventions have on colonial histories and anticolonial struggles.

It is my contention that a bureaucratic humanitarian gaze, which does not see subaltern subjects as active agents in their own emancipation, not only silences the struggle of an oppressed community such as in Jenin refugee camp, but also renders this struggle unspeakable (in a Spivakian sense) during the course of its intervention. Judging subaltern national agency as "too political," this type of humanitarian gaze excludes nationalist modes of struggle from the permissible and valid, while insisting on the "neutrality" of its own technical approach, as was the case in Jenin camp. At issue here is the way this humanitarian gaze interrupts these struggles against colonial power introducing its own antipolitical effects.

Also silenced and rendered unspeakable in the bureaucratic gaze during the humanitarian operation in Jenin was the history of colonial strategies of pacification. Weizman locates Israel's invasion of Jenin camp within colonial counterinsurgency campaigns ranging from the French colonization of Algeria to British colonial rule in Palestine. In Algeria, the French gained control of the kasbahs "by destroying entire neighborhoods" and "sometimes breaking centres of resistance by reshaping cities, widening roads for military movements."[28] In Palestine, the British colonial forces during the 1936–39 Palestinian revolt "cut a large anchor-shaped 'boulevard' through the old city" of Jaffa to enable "deep patrols into the very heart of the city."[29] More recent is the counterinsurgency campaign waged by Ariel Sharon against the resistance in the refugee camps of Gaza in the early 1970s, during which some six thousand refugee shelters were demolished or damaged to "carve wide roads through the fabric of . . . Jabalya, Rafah and Shati" refugee camps to enable the colonial power to better exercise control over the refugee population.[30] Weizman calls this example typical of "planned destruction," whereby an urban terrain is refashioned to facilitate military surveillance and control.[31] The correlation with the Israeli army's destruction in Jenin camp is obvious.

If the above studies make the links between military strategies, space, and colonial regimes of control, my argument focuses on the effects of humanitarian paradigms and the way that humanitarian interventions can work with and advance these colonial designs. I now examine how these forces played out and what the consequences of this have been in Jenin.

REBUILDING GROUND ZERO

Operating within the minimalist humanitarian paradigm discussed above, humanitarian agencies invariably adhere to a technical "neutral" approach that refuses to countenance structures of colonial power and domination, rendering them invisible through its gaze. This is evident

in the Jenin reconstruction project, which insisted on addressing the redesign of the camp as a technical problem, eliding and obfuscating the complex articulations between space, power, and rights.

A review of the project immediately suggests that there was a conflict of vision between the UNRWA planners and the Jenin camp refugees from the very beginning. For the former, the camp was primarily an object of technical planning, a site of urban design, and a space to introduce "modernizing improvements." For the latter, it was the site of a devastating colonial aggression to which the world had turned a blind eye. The refugees' overriding concern was rebuilding their camp and their lives amidst ongoing Israeli colonial violence. The tension between these visions underpinned the project and was not resolved. In what follows, I suggest that the humanitarian gaze underwriting this operation—its insistence on addressing the redesign of the camp as a technical problem, eliding the relationship between space, domination, and rights—precluded the possibility of a consensus being reached with the refugee community. By excluding the structures of colonial violence from view, this humanitarian gaze was unable to countenance a form of subaltern nationalist agency struggling to uphold its overlapping rights. The humanitarian operation to rebuild Jenin camp largely focused on the Hawashin neighborhood at the center of the camp, the former Kasbah. This area, called "ground zero" by the refugees and constituting about 10 percent of the camp, is where Israeli bulldozers systematically leveled over four hundred houses irrespective of whether there were people inside. Toward the end of April, soon after the battle ended and the Israeli forces withdrew, a broad-based emergency committee (EC) was formed to deal with the devastation and represent the community. Selected by the popular committee, the camp's rather inchoate leadership structure, the EC comprised social leaders, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and leaders from the political parties and community centers.

Little time was lost in launching the reconstruction project. In July 2002, UNRWA signed a memorandum of understanding with the UAE, which pledged US$27 million to fund the project, stipulating that the reconstruction should visibly provide "better living conditions" in the camp.[32] Shortly thereafter, the removal of rubble and explosives got underway, and engineers began surveying the damage.

Consultations between UNRWA and the community began in September 2002. The UNRWA team organized a series of focus groups to survey the initial opinions of the refugees,[33] and mechanisms were set up to facilitate community participation. In the meetings with the EC and camp representatives, UNRWA introduced its vision of the reconstruction, basically the ideas that were subsequently enshrined in the CIP, which in turn enabled the refugees to debate the notion of camp improvement for the first time.

From the outset, the EC's position was that the camp should be rebuilt as it was. Fearful of any attempt to undermine the status of the space as a refugee camp, the EC insisted that the demolished houses be rebuilt on their former sites. The UNRWA team, for its part, maintained that from an engineering and technical standpoint it was impossible to replicate the dense, interconnected kasbah nature of the Hawashin neighborhood. Instead they proposed widening and extending a system of roads throughout the camp and purchasing more land to expand camp size and reduce density. The EC objected to the ideas proposed by the UNRWA staff, rejecting most vehemently the road network because it would mean opening up the previously closed kasbah, site of the harrowing colonial invasion of the camp. In the interests of upholding camp security (in the face of frequent Israeli assaults) and protecting the refugees' right to be safe in their homes, the EC continued to oppose the road network. The issue remained an ongoing source of contention, and when the UNRWA master plan was eventually approved in April 2003, a number of the members of the EC resigned in protest.[34]

UNRWA's chief planners, who had worked on the rehabilitation of Neirab camp in Syria where the notion of camp improvement was first tried out (in 2001), had anticipated that the refugees would initially be fearful and resistant to change. However, seeing themselves as agents of "progress" and bearers of "modernization," they believed that with time the refugees would "come around" and see the benefits of improvements in the overcrowded camp. According to Abu Ashraf, former Camp Services Officer (CSO) and a member of the EC, the debate over the camp's urban redesign and the conflict over the roads between the refugees as represented by the EC and the UNRWA planners lasted for six months. Throughout the course of the project, the UNRWA planners could not concede the legitimacy of the fears raised by the camp representatives or allow their concerns to articulate with their own vision of modernizing progress.

Meanwhile, lengthy delays and repeated interruptions had a strong negative impact on the negotiations on the Palestinian side, specifically the EC's efforts to defend the community's strategic concerns vis-à-vis UNRWA. The delays were largely driven by ongoing Israeli raids into the camp. These last included a full-fledged two-week operation launched against the camp and town toward the end of October, but the most costly with regard to the project was the killing by an Israeli sniper of the project manager, Ian Hook, on 22 November 2002, during one of Israel's incursions into the camp. As a result, the rubble removal and preconstruction phase was suspended for three months. The prolonged suspension of the project in its early preconstruction phase heightened the fears and anxieties of the displaced refugees, most of whom were living in temporary accommodations outside the camp. According to an UNRWA engineer, "people became stressed because it took so long to

remove the rubble. . . . They were outside of the camp for a long period of time and began to fear that they would remain displaced."[35]

It bears mentioning that differences of opinion within the refugee community had always existed. The notion of enhancing living arrangements in the camp overlapped with some of the refugees' own concerns to improve quality-of-life issues, such as overcrowdedness. Nor was the EC's position—that the camp should be rebuilt as it was before the invasion—unequivocally shared even by all members of the EC. Adnan al Hindi, head of Jenin's popular committee, for example, pointing to differences within the EC, explains that from the outset "myself and Abu Ashraf were for change and we agreed with the idea of improving the camp. . . . I was of the opinion that the roads will benefit the community for years."[36]

Despite these differences, the EC maintained a consensus and defended their strategic concerns until the long delays began to erode the unity within the camp. Among the refugees, the work suspension created a sense of lack of ownership of the negotiations with UNRWA, leading to fissures in the community's position concerning the agency's plans. Mounting fears of permanent displacement among the families that had been rendered homeless put an already vulnerable population in an even weaker bargaining position, making them more malleable and willing to sacrifice broader community interests. It was within this context that a second committee was formed to represent the families whose homes had been demolished. A member of the EC explains how this happened:

> The families were afraid. Three months had passed and the project had stopped working. Families asked why and discovered the emergency committee was protesting the designs for the camp. They then formed a second committee. The families feared they would lose out and that their homes would not be rebuilt. This also put pressure on the emergency committee—the families wanted to return to their homes, and wanted the camp rebuilt so they could return to work and resume their lives.[37]

In fact, it was a member of the EC, the former CSO Abu Ashraf, who encouraged the families to form the committee to oppose the EC's position and thus break the impasse between the EC and the UNRWA staff. According to his own account, "I proposed they form their own committee to represent themselves. I said the emergency committee says this, and I say that, give me something in writing with your position."[38]

The creation of the second committee changed the negotiating situation, which had previously been dominated on the Palestinian side by the EC. The second committee was anxious for the project to be completed as quickly as possible to end their state of displacement and effectively broke ranks with the strategic position defended by the camp representatives.

The second, more crucial, factor that undermined the negotiations and prolonged the deadlock between UNRWA and the EC—and which ultimately prevented a democratic consensus from being forged—was the planners' own conceptual lens. Confining themselves to the minimalist humanitarian paradigm that refuses to recognize structures of power or see actors as agents invested with rights, the UNRWA planners consistently dismissed as "too political" (and thus illegitimate) the attempts of the camp representatives to locate the proposed changes within a terrain of colonial violence and to ask for protection of their rights; UNRWA was unable to accept the validity of the EC's subaltern rights claims. A binary distinction between what UNRWA regarded as "neutral" modernizing improvements on the one hand and unacceptable "political" (i.e., rights-based) claims on the other was thus established. It was this binary vision that was largely responsible for the impasse over the redesign of the camp.

The binary distinction between what UNRWA regarded as "neutral" modernizing improvements and unacceptable "political" claims was largely responsible for the impasse over the redesign of the camp.

The rubble-clearing operations finally resumed in February 2003, at which point a key meeting was organized to discuss the basic parameters for the redesign of the camp. The two representative committees of the camp—the EC and the second committee comprising the refugees displaced from the destroyed houses—were both present at the meeting. From the minutes, it is clear that the EC had attempted to reach a compromise solution, agreeing to extend the space of the camp and acknowledging the benefits of reducing camp density. In return, however, the EC insisted that the roads be kept to a minimum, specifically no more than four meters wide on the outskirts of the camp and two meters wide in the former kasbah at the center. The EC proposal, motivated by legitimate fears that widening the roads would facilitate the Israel night raids that had long plagued the camp, would have effectively allowed one car to pass at a time, more or less keeping the center as pedestrian space even while relieving density and improving ventilation.[39]

The UNRWA planners tried to take some of these concerns into account, but they never agreed to keep the camp center a largely pedestrian zone. Indeed, within their minimalist humanitarian framework, they seemed unable to understand that the camp representatives' opposition to the road plan expressed a valid demand for the right to safe housing, which is recognized as part of the right to housing by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Culture Rights and other international human rights standards.[40] Interactions between UNRWA staff and the community made clear that the planners primarily perceived the roads as a form of linear modernizing progress based on so-called universal standards for urban design and common desires for "modern" urban infrastructure. An

UNRWA engineer's account of how he addressed refugee fears about the roads is significant:

> I told them that the Israelis don't need roads to enter the camp; they can lower their planes and reach your houses. The roads are for emergency purposes, to facilitate access to people's homes and enable people to reach their own dwellings. The Israeli army does not influence the engineer's designs—*these designs are based on universal human concerns and standards.*[41]

The attitude that insists on viewing roads as a neutral form of progress in keeping with universal standards—as opposed to local, context-specific subaltern concerns—was used to dismiss the legitimate fears raised by the population. This is succinctly expressed in an UNRWA staff member's comment that "We are designers. We do not draw plans with Israeli tanks in mind!"[42]

Despite the deadlock, in March 2003, Muna Budeiri, leader of the design team, presented UNRWA's plan for Jenin camp's urban redesign to the camp residents at a meeting attended by the EC and the second committee.[43] The EC's compromise request regarding the roads was not part of the plan. Rather, the plan Budeiri presented provided for internal roads four meters wide and main roads seven meters wide, which she said were the minimum possible (but about twice as wide as the refugees had demanded). Budeiri described the community's reaction as follows:

> They debated and argued amongst themselves. I told them this is the minimum size that the roads can be. Some political individuals said this should not be—it will open the door for the enemy. Others were saying, no this is the minimum. Ordinary people would come up to us after the meeting and say "these are political people; we are the ones who are suffering."

In fact, the families whose homes had been destroyed supported the UNRWA solution because it would mean the quickest return to their homes. Meanwhile, the camp representatives continued to assert their reservations. Faced with this ongoing stalemate, UNRWA told the refugees, according to Budeiri, "It's in your hands now, get back to us." A follow-up meeting in April did not bring resolution, but afterward, Budeiri recounts:

> I was told by the senior [UNRWA] management in the field that they [the refugees] had agreed to the master plan and this was also the decision of the Minister of Works (Azzam Ahmad) who intervened and made it clear that this was the minimum the roads could be, and the donor also could not accept less, in order to improve the living standard and the ventilation.[44]

Against this backdrop of prolonged deadlock, the EC decided to retreat from its position in order to placate the fears of the families and end the impasse.[45] The UNRWA master plan eventually went forward on the basis of the consent of the second committee. Yet despite its acquiescence, the second committee was criticized both by UNRWA senior officials and by refugees in the camp for acting in a very self-interested manner.[46] Even Abu Ashraf, who had encouraged the formation of the second committee, acknowledged that it "also took more for themselves and so people began to feel they were serving themselves."[47] As a final irony, after UNRWA planners refusing to find a common ground with the principled position of the EC, senior UNRWA staff cited the second committee's self-interested behavior to cast critical light on the merits of refugee participation, depicting the refugees as inherently "self-interested" and therefore untrustworthy participants.[48]

The road network continued to be a controversial topic and source of resentment long after the reconstruction project was completed in 2005.[49] When I did my research several years later, it still generated anger and frustration. An often repeated phrase in the camp was "these roads were not built for us." Most of the refugees I interviewed described the roads as exposing them to greater insecurity, violence, and night raids by Israeli jeeps. In the words of an EC member:

> Before the Israeli jeeps and tanks could not enter the camp. Now they have built the camp in such a way . . . that night incursions occur regularly. The jeeps enter very easily and can make their way throughout the camp.[50]

Even those who supported the plan and were generally happy with the result continued to have misgivings about security, as evidenced in the remarks of this man, whose home had been completely destroyed during the Israeli operation:

> Now the camp is better than before. They opened roads. Before, many homes could not be reached; there is more room and space. Before, we used to fight with our neighbors over space. Now they established order and a system, it is very difficult to build over these roads. A foundation was created. . . . But now the safety is afforded for the army through the roads. Each six houses are surrounded by roads. The army jeeps surround the houses from all sides. Before they could not enter this area.[51]

It is worth explaining that members of the EC who opposed the roads did not reject improvement to the camp as such; rather, they wanted this to cohere with other overlapping rights, particularly the right to feel safe in their housing arrangement. As one member explains, "There has to be improvements but not at the expense of other rights, included in this are the right to security and the right to feel secure in one's home. It should not be one right over the other."[52]

In the end, the UNRWA humanitarian operation rehabilitated Jenin camp after the enormous destruction caused by Israel. It also introduced a number of improvements, such as enhanced ventilation and increased access to sunlight. In addition, a number of communal facilities were built or rehabilitated, including a new mosque, a women's center, and an elementary school with a recreation space for children.

UNRWA's bureaucratic operation rehoused some four thousand displaced refugees, but it did so by re-embedding this vulnerable population in the same modes of Israel colonial violence that it had sought to address. Ultimately, the UN-imposed spatial order facilitated the colonial pacification of the camp. In other words, UNRWA's conceptual lens, with its inability to see Palestinian refugees as situated actors endowed with overlapping rights, meant that while the humanitarian operation mitigated the displacement caused by Israel's invasion of the camp, it reinforced the colonial regime and its modes of violence and control. Here I am introducing the notion of rational violence to refer to the way bureaucratic operations can "deepen and make more intractable the problems they seek to ameliorate,"[53] a bureaucratic form of violence in which humanitarian interventions can articulate with and reproduce colonial structures of dominance. In what follows, I will suggest that this bureaucratic violence also includes the depoliticizing effects that humanitarian interventions can have on an oppressed community.

EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE: DEPOLITICIZING A RESISTANCE COMMUNITY

In his critique of the aid regime, James Ferguson argues that international aid agencies generally suspend "politics from even the most sensitive political operations" and insist on framing these matters as "technical problems."[54] He describes these bureaucratic agencies as "anti-politics machines" and maintains that they depoliticize marginalized populations by promoting "professional" and technical responses to questions of injustice and denial of rights—in other words, to inherently political questions about powerlessness.

A process of depoliticization was already evident in Jenin refugee camp during the consultation process. An example is the UNRWA team's binary framework defining its technical plans and urban designs as "neutral" and "universal" (and therefore legitimate) while dismissing the EC's demand of the right to a safe habitat as "political" (and therefore unacceptable). Underlying this approach is the power of planners and bureaucrats to determine what is valid and permissible and, based on their own assumptions and conceptual frameworks, what is excluded from the terms of legitimacy.

UNRWA's portrayal of the opposition to the road network as coming from "political people," thus refusing to accord legitimacy to the camp leadership's perspective, and its implied dismissal of the demand for a

safe environment as a viable and legitimate community interest are by no means an inconsequential matter or a mere clash of visions. When one considers that humanitarian agencies represent a disciplinary form of power, the effects of this type of interdiction become clear, for it introduces a prohibition that prevents subaltern subjects from defending strategic community concerns and broader national interests.

It is important to mention that at the turn of the new millennium, when UNRWA was debating new policy directions centered on moving beyond its relief paradigm (i.e., the CIP), proposals were made to adopt a rights-based approach (RBA) to guide humanitarian programs and operations. The RBA would have substantially redefined UNRWA's relationship to refugees by bringing into view the root causes of the plight of Palestinian refugees. As Ann Nixon explains, a human rights framework is "capable of exposing unjust power relationships and structures and system of violence."[55] The RBA would have transformed UNRWA's humanitarian vision by reconceptualizing Palestinian refugees as rights-bearing subjects. In consequence, the agency would have had a basis on which to "respond to violations of rights" and help "over time build a protective environment" for Palestinian refugees, which would have brought it much closer to the "political" rights-based demands of the refugees in Jenin camp.[56] As we have seen, however, UNRWA's senior management opted for the CIP.

The CIP and the premises underlying it have inevitably led to a process of depoliticization in Jenin camp. This has been especially evident in some of the camp leaders, who seemed to adopt UNRWA's binary framework and embrace the abstract "professional" approach. CSO Abu Ali, for example, told me that one of the lessons he and others had learned from the project was that "we need *experts* when making these decisions." He also described the UNRWA plan as "more reasonable" and rational as compared with the "emotional response" of the refugees, explaining that "the local community needs to acquire the capabilities to be able to respond to these types of situations. The camp representatives may not have the experience, knowledge (expertise) to deal with these issues in a reasonable, rational manner."[57]

The CSO's comments reflect an acceptance of this binary distinction associating an apolitical stance with reason, progress, and the universal, and delegitimizing attempts to confront power as emotional, unprofessional, and excessively political. This reveals the onset of a form of depoliticization in which marginalized subjects concede a "neutral" professional position at the expense of their own community's situated interests and perspectives. Remarks by the head of Jenin camp's popular committee confirm this. In his words,

> If we left it to debate we would have needed another five years. We agreed with the UNRWA plan. The families I meet now are happier and they are happy with the roads.

> If the Israeli army uses the road once (a day), we use it 100 times a day.[58]

In depoliticized professional positions of this kind, improvements are embraced as ends in themselves, even if the improvements come at the cost of the refugees' exposure to greater insecurity and colonial violence.

The depoliticization of a colonized refugee population has long-term consequences and effects. The internalization by community leaders of an apolitical professional approach that ceases to question unjust power relationships undermines a community's struggle for its rights. The effects of this process in the territories Israel occupied in 1967 have already been observed. The donor aid system put in place to support the Oslo process gave rise to a professional nongovernmental organization sphere that disrupted the national movement by helping to sever the ties between social movements and organizations and the national struggle.[59] In light of this experience, it is all the more pressing for UNRWA to expand its definition of humanitarianism to encompass recognition of Palestine refugees' overlapping rights.

ENDNOTES

1. Human Rights Watch, "Jenin: IDF Military Operations," Human Rights Watch, May 2002, p. 10.

2. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International documented 52 and 54 Palestinian deaths, respectively, and Palestinian sources, including the popular relief committee in Jenin camp, confirmed that 56 Palestinians were killed. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International also documented cases of willful killing of civilians, individuals being crushed beneath their homes, and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. See http://hrw.org/reports/2002/israel3/; http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde151432002.

3. Stephen Graham, "Lessons in Urbicide," *New Left Review,* no. 19 (January–February 2003), pp. 63–77.

4. Phillip Misselwitz (interviewer) and Eyal Weizman, "Military Operations as Urban Planning," *Mute Magazine: Culture and Politics After the Net*, 27 August 2003, http://www.metamute.org/en/military_operations_as_urban_planning. Elsewhere, Weizman writes that Israel's pacification campaign had transformed the West Bank into a "giant laboratory of urban warfare." Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 188.

5. As of the beginning of 2003 the estimated repairs were as follows: 506 totally destroyed houses or commercial units, 421 cases of major repairs, 3,164 cases of minor repairs, in addition to repairing the widespread damage caused to infrastructure, including water and electricity system, telephone lines, and roads. "Minutes from Technical Coordination Committee (TCC), Jenin Camp Rehabilitation Project." Meeting No. 1, Jenin camp, 4 February 2003; donor report on Jenin Camp Rehabilitation Project, prepared by Paul Wolstenholme 25 March 2003.

6. Mahmood Mamdani, "The New Humanitarian Order," *The Nation*, 29 September 2008.

7. This article is based on lengthy interviews that were conducted with refugees and members of the popular committees in Jenin refugee camp, as well as with UNRWA staff in Jerusalem and the local staff in Jenin. The interviews were conducted between February and March 2007, during a consultancy in which the author was commissioned by UNRWA to analyze the reconstruction of Jenin camp.

8. Mahmood Mamdani, "The New Humanitarian Order," p. 2.

9. Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, "The Evolution of an Independent, Community-Based Campaign for Palestinian Refugee Rights." BADIL, Information and Discussion Brief, No. 3, March 2000, p. 7.

10. Terry Rempel, "Commentary: Donor Aid, UNRWA, and the End of a Two-State Solution?" *al Majdal*, no. 29 (Spring 2006), p. 7.

11. Harish Parvathaneni, "UNRWA's Role in Protecting Palestine Refugees," BADIL Working Paper No. 9, December 2004, pp. 5–7.

12. The UN's 1951 Refugee Convention, the most comprehensive legal document ever issued on refugee rights and which formalizes the UNHRC's mandate as the primary international instrument for protecting refugees, did not exclude Palestinians by name, excluding instead "persons who are at present receiving from . . . agencies of the United Nations other than the [UNHCR] protection of assistance" (Article 1 D, 1951 Refugee Convention).

13. Interview with project engineer, Jenin Camp Reconstruction Project, Jenin camp, 26 February 2007.

14. Hugo Slim, "Relief Agencies and Moral Standing in War: Principles of Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, and Solidarity," in Haleh Afshar and Deborah Eade, eds., *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxfam Great Britain, 2004), p. 200.

15. Interview with Mustapha Musleh, project engineer, Jenin Camp Reconstruction Project, Jenin, 14 February 2007.

16. Interview with representative of the United Arab Emirates Friend's Society, Jerusalem, 11 February 2007.

17. Muna Budeiri "Housing & Camp Improvement Unit: Concept Paper—Executive Summary," p. 1. Unpublished internal UNRWA document.

18. Muna Budeiri "Housing & Camp Improvement Unit: Concept Paper—Executive Summary," p. 1. Unpublished internal UNRWA document.

19. http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=31 (accessed May 2010).

20. The dialogue between UNRWA planners and refugee representatives at Jenin over the reconstruction plan reinforced this sense with UNRWA. When asked about the concept of camp improvement, the Camp Services Officer said that it overlapped with a debate that had been going in the camp for ten years. Agreeing with the vision, he said, "we are human beings. We should not have to live like animals to show that we are refugees." Interview with Nazmi A'bada (Abu Ali), UNRWA Camp Services Officer, Jenin camp, 22 February 2007. Others, however, continued to insist on the need for full transparency as to the relationship between camp improvement and the refugees' right of return, and argued that UNRWA should develop a clear policy on the right of return.

21. Muna Budeiri "Housing & Camp Improvement Unit: Concept Paper—Executive Summary," p. 1. Unpublished internal UNRWA document.

22. Hugo Slim, "Relief Agencies and Moral Standing," p. 200.

23. Terry Rempel, "Commentary: Donor Aid; Palestinian, Israeli NGOs Condemn 'Donor Complicity' in Israeli Rights Violations," *Maan News Agency*, 7 May 2009.

24. Asling Byrne, "Final Evaluation Report: Neirab Rehabilitation Project," UNRWA Internal Report, 2006, p. 6.

25. Hugo Slim, "Relief Agencies and Moral Standing," pp. 206–7.

26. On 8 November 2008, the United States announced it would provide more than US$14 million for new development projects in Jenin. The projects include infrastructure development, economic development, governance, and community support and will be implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development. "Rice in Jenin: 14 Million Dollars for Jenin Governorate," *Maan News Agency*, 8 November 2008.

27. Tony Blair, "Towards a Palestinian State," *The Office of Tony Blair*, 13 May 2008, http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/index.php/news/entry/104/ (accessed May 2010). For a critique of the industrial parks, see "Development or Normalization? A Critique of West Bank Development Approaches and Projects," *The Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign*, May 2008, http://

www.stopthewall.org/downloads/PRDPcritique.pdf (accessed May 2010).

28. Phillip Misselwitz and Eyal Weizman, "Military Operations as Urban Planning," p. 2.

29. Misselwitz and Weizman, "Military Operations," p. 3.

30. Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land,* p. 70.

31. Misselwitz and Weizman, "Military Operations," p. 2; Norma Masriyeh, "Refugee Resettlement: The Gaza Strip Experience," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 2, no. 4 (1995), pp. 59–64.

32. Quoted in Ronnie Chatah, "Institutional Memory and Evaluation of UNRWA's Role in Jenin Camp: April 2002–June 2004," UNRWA Internal Report, p. 52.

33. A participatory rapid appraisal was conducted by Jamal al Dali at the beginning of the consultative process and found that a majority of those surveyed agreed to the UNRWA proposal to purchase more land and expand the camp; Ronnie Chatah, "Institutional Memory."

34. Interview with a member of the emergency committee who resigned in protest, Jenin camp, 22 February 2007.

35. Interview with an UNRWA engineer, Jenin camp, 22 February 2007.

36. Interview with Adnan al-Hindi, head of the popular committee, Jenin camp, 21 March 2007.

37. Interview with a second member of the emergency committee who resigned in protest, Jenin camp, 24 February 2007.

38. Interview with Abdul Razak Abu al-Hajja (Abu Ashraf), former UNRWA Camp Services Officer and member of the emergency committee, Jenin camp, 25 February 2007.

39. "Minutes from Technical Coordination Committee, Jenin Camp Rehabilitation Project." Meeting No. 1, Jenin camp, 4 February 2003.

40. *Habitat Agenda Goals and Principles, Commitments and Global Plan of Action,* para. 39, www.unhabitat.org/declarations/habitat_agenda.htm; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "The Right to Adequate Housing," Art. 11 (1), 13 December 1991, General Comment 4, para. 7, http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument.

41. Interview with Khaled Hijab, UNRWA engineer, Ramallah, 6 February 2007.

42. Interview with Mustapha Musleh, project engineer, Jenin Camp Reconstruction Project, Jenin, 14 February 2007.

43. Prior to the start of consultations between the refugees and UNRWA back in September 2002, Budeiri produced a detailed assessment of the camp's destruction and, in her capacity as the head of UNRWA's design unit, developed three scenarios for rebuilding the camp (*Demolished Houses: Data Analysis & Study Options,* prepared by ECSD-DU headquarters, Amman, September 2002). Interestingly, one of the three envisaged that all the destroyed houses would be rebuilt in ground zero, the option the refugees had stated as their strong preference. Never throughout the entire dialogue, however, did the UNRWA staff present this scenario as an option.

44. Interview with Muna Budeiri, head of the design team, HQ Amman and leader of the initial design team, for the Jenin Camp Reconstruction Project, Jerusalem, 14 March 2007.

45. Interview with a second member of the emergency committee who resigned in protest, Jenin camp, 24 February 2007.

46. Interview with senior UNRWA engineer, Jerusalem, 5 February 2007.

47. Interview with Abdul Razak Abu al-Hajja (Abu Ashraf), former UNRWA Camp Services Officer and member of the emergency committee, Jenin camp, 25 February 2007.

48. A senior UNRWA engineer who took over the management of the project in 2004 described the participation as follows: "the involvement of the community led to massive problems. . . . We terminated community participation (after taking over the project in 2004). There were too many private requests." Community participation "was counter-productive. The community was divided and individuals were working to advance their own private goals." Interview with senior UNRWA engineer, ibid.

49. According to an interview I conducted with an UNRWA engineer on 6 February 2007, the infrastructure was completed in January 2005, the last houses were completed in April 2005 (exactly three years after the Israeli invasion), and the youth center and school were completed in July and October 2005, respectively.

50. Interview with a member of the emergency committee who resigned in protest, Jenin camp, 22 February 2007.

51. Interview with refugee whose home was completely destroyed, Jenin camp, 25 February 2007.

52. Interview with a second member of the emergency committee who resigned in protest, Jenin camp, 24 February 2007.

53. Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, "Introduction," in Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Margaret Lock, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, eds., *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 2.

54. James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine, "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 256, 270.

55. Anne Nixon, "UNRWA: A Conceptual Framework for Cohesive and Integrated Operations," Internal UNRWA Document, 2006, p. 1.

56. Anne Nixon, "UNRWA: A Conceptual Framework," p. 1.

57. Interview with Nazmi A'bada (Abu Ali), UNRWA Camp Services Officer, Jenin camp, 22 February 2007.

58. Interview with Adnan al-Hindi, head of the popular committee, Jenin camp, 21 March 2007.

59. Rema Hammami and Eileen Kuttab, "The Palestinian Women's Movement Strategies towards Freedom and Democracy," *News From Within* 15, no. 4 (1999), p. 5.