مرصد السياسات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية
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Dialectics of Dependency: Struggle Over the Fuel Imports Market in the West Bank

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Position Paper

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Instroduction

The fuel crisis in the West Bank, is not to be understood as the effect of market fluctuations, nor dedevelopment imposed by settler colonialism alone. The crisis, we propose, can be udnerstood as an advanced stage of dependency, wherein the contradictions in the relations of production, have risen to the surface.[1]

Last July, the West Bank experienced a shortage in fuel imports (or its supply at least at the onset), followed by an unforeseen rise in demand, due to public uncertainty. Official discourse attributed the shortage to a dramatic rise in demand, inability to deposit cash in local banks, and blockage of deliveries by military checkpoints.[2] Popular discourse, on the other hand, seemed to interpret the issue in relation to what appeared as a feud among political-economic elites.[3]

Framing the issue as a temporary error, both analyses overlook the structural limitations of the Palestinian economy. Histories of dispossession and violence, and regimes of control founded by which, have shaped the function and boundaries of the Palestinian economy.[4] From

1 The main argument draws on Brazilian thinker Mauro Marini's concept of the "dialectics of dependency," which holds that dependency is not a stable relation, but one marked by fundamental contradictions, particularly in the relations of production within the subordinate economy (e.g. constant depreciation of commodities produce in the periphery). These cotnradictions are settled via "compensatory mechanisms" based on the exploitation of workers. See Mauro Marini, *Dialectics of Dependency* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2022);

Dependency literature generally examines postcolonial relations of exchange between core countries and their former colonies. Yet its analysis is useful for explaining the movement of goods and capital between the areas under the Palestinian Authority and Israel. In this regard, Yusif Sayigh applies dependency theory to the Palestinian economy while accounting for the differences in the colonial context. See Yusif Sayigh, "The Palestinian Economy under Occupation: Dependency and Pauperization," *Journal for Palestine Studies* 15, no. 4 (1986): 52-55;

For relations of production in the West Bank, see Tariq Dana, "Crony capitalism in the Palestinian Authority: a deal among friends." *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 20 (2022): https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1618705

2 وكالة الأنباء والمعلومات الفلسطينية، "هيئة البترول: توريد 3 ملايين لتر وقود يوميا والعمل جار لزيادة كميات وتعزيز المخزون الاستراتيجي". 27 تموز 2026، تم الوصول بتاريخ 16 أيلول 2026.

https://www.wafa.ps/news/2026151136/27/7/?utm.

3 ألترا فلسطين، "خاص | نقل رجل الأعمال طارق النتشة إلى المستشفى مع قوة أمنية". 10 أيلول 2026. تم الوصول بتاريخ 23 أيلول 2026.

https://ultrapal.ultrasawt.com/خاص-نقل-رجل-الأعمال-طارق-النتشة-إلى-المستشفى-مع-قوة-أمنية/أ

4 The history of dispossession and development can be divided into three stages: the British Mandate, marked by land confiscation and control over resources; the Nakba and military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, marked by land dispossession and De-development; and the Oslo Accords, followed by the consolidation of dependency through neoliberal policies. For each stage, see:

British colonialism to the Paris Protocol of 1994, the productive capacity of the Palestinian economy has been eroded, and sovereignty over its borders foregone. Dependency therefore is a fundamental property of the Palestinian economy in its present form. By dependency, we refer to an economic relation between two spheres of production, by which the first functions in service of the second's interests, and only in so doing can reproduce itself. Founded by force, dependency eventually takes the form of entrenched structures, that limit the access of a subordinate society to its assets, or the capacity to utilize them freely, and redirects their flow towards the enhancement of the subordinating economy.[5]

In situating the fuel crisis in the material and historical framework by which it was produced, this paper demonstrates its structural causes, and the contradictions it illuminates in the Palestinian economy. We argue that the crisis did not emerge from market fluctuations, nor barriers to the production and movement of labor and goods alone, but from relations of production within the Palestinian economy, which reproduce and normalize the former conditions.[6]

We conclude that the fuel crisis reflects a rising contradiction in class relations in the West Bank, which have enjoyed relative stability in the past two decades, due to systematic impoverishment carried out by Israel since 2023.[7] Fuel, an essential and highly taxable

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Badil – Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, "Land Ownership in Palestine/Israel (1920-2000)," *Al-Majdal Magazine*, no. 5 (2000), https://badil.org/publications/al-majdal/issues/items/409.html;

Sai Englert, "Settlers, Workers, and the Logic of Accumulation by Dispossession." Antipode 52 (6), 2022;

Toufic Haddad, *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* (London: I. B. Tauris, SOAS Palestine Studies Series, 2016).

5 For dependency theory, developed by Latin American theorists in the second half of the twentieth century, this article draws on a primary reference:

Mauro Marini, *Dialectics of Dependency* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2022), 117.

6 Marini argues that explaining dependency through supply and demand or extra-economic forces, such as military power, alone is misleading. Dependency is reproduced through the global economic system based on exchange value, in which competition requires dependent spheres of production. Dependent capitalism therefore relies on the increasing exploitation of workers, despite the declining prices of its products.

Marini, *Dialectics*, 125-126.

7 According to World Vision, the share of families living below the minimum standard of living in the West Bank rose from 21% to 74% after the 2023 war.

World Vision, *The Unseen Crisis* (2025), 4. Accessed on 16 September 2026, https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/The%20Unseen%20Crisis_02072025.pdf.

commodity, emerges as a site of contestation between political and economic elites, whereas the former seeks to expand its tax revenue, and the latter seeks, via tax-evasion, to grow its profits. Palestinians facing impoverishment end up compensating, from their wages and time, for the losses of dependency.

Mechanisms adopted by the public and private sectors to manage the fuel crisis, we demonstrate, only prolong the crisis and entrench dependency. There can be no solution to the fuel crisis, without abolishing the relations of production that entrench dependency, which requires a total economic and political transformation. In the immediate term, this means investing in productive sectors to lower reliance on services, and in turn, dependence on imported essentials. It also calls for investment in the labor force, particularly youth, and their capacity to access education, develop complex skills, and participate in productive sectors, rather than sacrificing their future to sustain a system that can no longer hold.

The Crisis' Structural Causes: How Dependency Adapts to Impoverishment

The cause of the crisis lies in the following irony: Palestinians purchase fuel for the second to third highest price in the world, from a supplier who confiscates over half of Palestine's revenue, and the main culprit behind the systematic impoverishment of Palestinians in the West Bank since 2023. This irony represents the logic of dependency, where "unequal exchange" becomes the only solution for poverty and the absence of sovereignty.[8]

The Paris Protocol (1994) stipulated the terms for such irony three decades ago. While it granted the Palestinian Authority (PA) the liberty to import fuel from Jordan and Egypt, it vested Israel with exclusive authority over the ports of entry and, consequently, over tax collection on all imports, including those destined for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Per the agreement, taxes collected on the latter are transferred to the PA via Clearance Revenues (also known as *al-Maqasa*).[9] The former clause, granting the PA the liberty to import from elsewhere, is hollowed out by the latter arrangement, in a context of settler colonialism

8 Marini uses "Unequal Exchange" to explain how trade can entail material losses while remaining rational within a dependent economy. See:

Marini, *Dialectics*, 16-20.

9 وليد حباس، "احتجاز إسرائيل أموال الضرائب الفلسطينية: الأسباب والآليات المستخدمة" مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية 147 (صيف 2026)، 95-96.

and economic dependency. Even more so as local production plummets, along with taxes collected by the PA directly, and as the colonial apparatus of control and dispossession intensifies.[10] Taxes on imports, against this backdrop, are at once the PA's largest source of income and its most fragile, constantly subject to Israeli confiscation since the late 1990s, and withheld entirely as of May 2025.[11]

Clearance Revenues are thus instrumentalized, on the one hand for purposes of political coercion (such as terminating social security for families of prisoners and martyrs; and removing parts of the national curricula), and on the other to reproduce the status quo.[12] For Clearance Revenues, withdrawn and confiscated as they may be, present themselves as an exit out of the trap they produce, i.e. the fiscal crisis. Through arrangements between the Israeli public and private sectors, the PA can utilize withdrawn Clearance Revenues, to maintain the flow of essential goods, as became the case with fuel in the past three years.

The Palestinian General Directorate of Petroleum (GDoP) imports fuel from Israeli distribution companies, such as PAZ and Dor Anon, and operates as a middleman between the former and Palestinian distribution companies.[13] Israeli companies settle all due taxes upfront, including the Sales Tax also known as the "Blu Tax" (NIS 3.66 per liter) and the Value-Added Tax (17%).[14] The GDoP then purchases fuel from Israeli companies at a gross price (all taxes included), in designated monthly quantities, upon already collecting their worth from Palestinian companies. Taxes collected on those quantities, are then meant to be transferred to the PA via Clearance Revenues.

In the past three years, the PA has experienced a fiscal crisis, due to the withdrawal of Clearance Revenues (NIS 325 Million a month and complete withdrawal in 2025), depriving

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10 Services account for 60% of the Palestinian economy, compared with 6% for agriculture and 10% for industry. See the 2025 Central Bureau of Statistics report:

PCBS, "The Performance of the Palestinian Economy during 2025 & the Economic Forecasts for 2026," (30 December 2025), Accessed on 16 September 2026, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/en/post-details/?postId=23311.

11 حباس، "احتجاز إسرائيل أموال الضرائب الفلسطينية"، 97-98.

12 On the use of clearance revenues to alter social welfare policies and curricula, see: ibid.

13 For the mechanism of fuel supply to the West Bank, see:

أحمد قباجة، "سوق مشتقات البترول والغاز في الضفة الغربية" (معهد أبحاث السياسات الاقتصادية الفلسطيني، 2013)، 8-5.

14 These percentages are reported in studies and statistics on clearance revenues. See:

حباس، "احتجاز إسرائيل أموال الضرائب الفلسطينية،" 96-97.

over 290,000 employees of 50-70% of their salaries.[15] Simultaneously, around 200,000 workers were denied entry to work in lands occupied in 1948;[16] 40,000 were displaced and their assets destroyed in refugee camps in the north of the West Bank;[17] while land confiscation and destruction of homes, cattle, equipment, and harvest of farmers remain at a record high.[18] Ultimately, poverty in the West Bank has tripled since 2023, and income per capita plummeted by 20%[19]. This in turn has shrunk purchasing power, as well as production rates, along with taxes collected by the PA on local products.

Against this backdrop, the fuel import market in the West Bank takes on added significance. It presents itself as one of the few solutions available to the PA, given that fuel is an essential and highly taxable commodity that entails large monetary flows. Through facilitating these flows, we estimate that the PA is able to divert a portion of the funds to address urgent fiscal deficits, while entering into debt with Israeli companies and granting them the right to recover their receivables against the PA's withheld clearance revenues.[20]

Nonetheless, only a limited amount of fuel can be purchased on credit, and the GDoP must make a minimum payment to import the quantities required by each area of the West Bank. Therefore, when demand rises suddenly, as in July, the GDoP struggles to secure

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15 حباس، "احتجاز إسرائيل أموال الضرائب الفلسطينية،" 99، 100-101؛

وكالة الأخبار والمعلومات الفلسطينية، " الحكومة تواصل الضغط للإفراج عن أموال "المقاصة"" (11 أيلول 2024)، تم الوصول في 16 أيلول 2026، https://wafa.ps/Pages/Details/103399.

16 لميس فراج، "جدلية العمال الفلسطينيين في الداخل المحتل" مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية، 144 (خريف 2025).

17 عصري فياض، "كارثة نزوح المخيم والجوار هائلة ودور الحكومة باهت ومتخبط"، مقابلة، مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية، 25 أبريل 2025.

18 رجا خالدي وآخرون، "الاستيطان الإسرائيلي: تكلفته الاقتصادية والاجتماعية وآثاره في الأراضي الفلسطينية"، معهد أبحاث السياسات الاقتصاية الفلسطينية، 14 تشرين الأول 2025.

19 International Labour Organization, *The two-year war in Gaza: Impacts on employment and livelihoods in the West Bank*, Bulletin No. 6 (2025), 1, https://doi.org/10.54394/ARNQ2778.

20 The Palestinian Authority's debts to Israeli companies appear in their financial reports, though precise figures cannot be calculated because the Authority's receivables and payments are included under "transactions outside Israel," which also covers other customers. See:

Paz Retail and Energy Ltd., *Interim Report for the Second Quarter of 2026* (2026), https://cdn.financialreports.eu/financialreports/media/filings/6977/2026/RNS/6977_rns_2026-08-17_5bfe34a3-82df-437b-bfcf-a14b93ce791a.pdf;

Paz Retail and Energy Ltd. *Immediate report concerning an event or matter outside the ordinary business of the corporation: Extension of the agreement with the Palestinian Authority for the purchase of petroleum product*, Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (July 2026). https://mayafiles.tase.co.il/rpdf/1758001-1759000/P1758976-00.pdf.

additional supplies. To this end, the GDoP renewed its contract with PAZ in late July, increasing the credit available to cover the GDoP's debt and expanding PAZ's market share, ultimately entrenching dependency even further.[21]

Fuel smuggling through illicit channels that evade taxation and contractual obligations also emerged as a topic of popular discourse, particularly as a means of meeting rising demand.[22] Smuggling, in this case, deprives the PA of urgently needed revenues while increasing private-sector profits by an estimated 40–50%. This issue is particularly significant given that local fuel demand declined sharply between 2023 and 2024[23], alongside a broader contraction in consumption by 31% (16.9% in the West Bank).[24]

More than anything, the fuel crisis therefore reflects shifting dynamics among political and economic elites, as the former faces a fiscal crisis and the latter faces plummeting demand, leading to a conflict of interests. If one hypothesizes that a previous arrangement involved overlooking instances of fuel smuggling in exchange for lower prices, thereby conserving resources for the former and increasing profits for the latter, this arrangement ceases to function under current conditions. The PA's fiscal crisis compels it to reduce operational costs as much as possible while increasing tax revenues.

This struggle between the private and public sectors, in the context of dependency, utilizes

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21 Ibid.

22 For fuel smuggling in the West Bank, see:

Walid Habbas, "Fuel Smuggling in the West Bank (2018-2021): Palestinian Economic Agency under the Israeli System of Spatial Control," *Middle East Critique* 33, no. 2 (2024): 283-297, https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2024.2302777.

The Palestinian Customs Office periodically reports fuel seizures. One seizure involved approximately 38,000 liters. See:

Palestinian Customs Office, "Customs Police thwart Smuggling of 38,000 Liters of Fuel in Bethlehem," (July 2026), https://www.palcp.ps/home/News/2329?culture=en-US.

23 Gasoline and diesel imports into the West Bank fell by 24.51% and 40.44%, respectively, between 2023 and 2024. See the Central Bureau of Statistics energy tables:

PCBS, *Energy Tables 2023*, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/Energy_Tables2023.pdf;

PCBS, *Energy Tables 2024*, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/Energy_Tables_2024.pdf.

24 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Performance of the Palestinian Economy, 2024* (Ramallah, 2025), 17, https://www.lacs-mopic.ps/public/files/LACS%20Weekly%20Update/LACS%20Weekly%20Update%202025/May%202025/PCBS%20Performance%20of%20the%20Palestinian%20Economy%20%202024.pdf .

a strategic and essential commodity as a means of advancing competing interests, fails to address the underlying crisis, and ultimately reproduces it, while shifting the liabilities it creates onto the most vulnerable segments of the population, such as those living outside urban centers, the working class, and small business owners.

Those Who Pay the Price: Super Exploitation and Class Polarization

The notion that the fuel crisis resulted from high demand overlooks a sharp decline in demand for fuel, and most commodities, since the onset of the Genocide. This is largely due to falling incomes, the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis and inability to pay employees, restrictions on workers in lands occupied in 1948, and the destruction of sources of income in villages, Bedouin communities, and refugee camps.

Over 90% of fuel in the West Bank is consumed by the transport sector.[25] Since the onset of the genocide (and following earlier increases linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine), transport fares have risen by an approximate 20%.[26] Checkpoints and rising crude oil prices have driven up costs. At the same time, travel between cities and villages has declined amid rising settler attacks.

It is clear that Palestinians are travelling only when necessary. What constitutes necessity, however, varies across people. University enrolment has declined for instance by as much as half.[27] While this decline has multiple causes, transport costs are a major factor.

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25 قباجة، "سوق مشتقات البترول"، 21.

26 Fuel prices rose by 5% in early 2022 due to higher global prices, and by 15–20% in early 2025 during the war on Iran. Fares also rise when checkpoint closures force longer routes, by an estimated 2–5% of the original fare. See:

وفا، " وزارة النقل والمواصلات: تعديل مؤقت على تعرفة المواصلات"، 1 أبريل 2026، https://www.wafa.ps/144832/1/4/news/2026؛

وفا، " وزارة النقل والمواصلات تقرر تعديل تسعيرة النقل العام، 2 شباط 2023، https://wafa.ps/Pages/Details/65038.

27 وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي، الكتاب الإحصائي السنوي لمؤسسات التعليم العالي 2024-2025، VI، https://www.mohe.pna.ps/Portals/0/MOHEResources/Docs/Statistics/AnualStatBook20242025.pdf?ver=8n3pk-avMmyDYNSbcm4cew%3d%3d

وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي، الكتاب الإحصائي السنوي لمؤسسات التعليم العالي 2022-2023، IX، https://www.mohe.pna.ps/Portals/0/MOHEResources/Docs/Statistics/StatisticalYearbook2021_2022.pdf?ver=ngGjAGthsul35nVQXBB85g%3d%3d

To illustrate, consider a worker who travels daily between Nablus and Ramallah and earns 135 NIS a day, the average wage in the West Bank in 2026. Assume their wage has stayed the same since 2023. Transport fares, however, have risen from 17 NIS in 2023 to 30–35 NIS today. This raises the share of transport costs by 20%, bringing it to 40–47% of the daily wage. If the worker works 8 hours a day, and waiting at fuel stations and checkpoints costs an additional billable hour, the cost of "reproduction" and simply showing up rises to 63–70% of the daily wage. Given rising unemployment and soaring prices, this becomes a best-case scenario for much of the working class, which bears the cost of the crisis in economic dependency, and the relations of production by which it is sustained.

Rising fuel prices also directly affect the price of locally produced goods, both in manufacturing and agriculture, by increasing operating and transport costs. Earlier this year, during the rise in fuel prices linked to the Israeli-American war on Iran, the General Union for Industry issued a statement committing not to raise prices to protect consumers (or because demand was already too low to absorb further increases).[28] While large companies can absorb these costs, small businesses and those with little savings or property, or burdened by loans, are more vulnerable to being pushed out of the market.

Conclusion

Dependency can be established through extra-economic force. It may appear as an imbalance in supply and demand. But its essence lies in the relations of production that make this imbalance possible and reproduce it, despite the losses it imposes on the subordinate economy. In Dialectics of Dependency, Marini emphasizes that dependency rests on "compensation mechanisms," often based on the "super-exploitation" of labor. This occurs by extending the working day, intensifying labor, or exhausting workers, by appropriating their wages or the time necessary for their reproduction.[29]

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28 وكالة معا الاخبارية، " اتحاد الصناعات الغذائية يعلن عدم رفع أسعار المنتجات حتى نهاية نيسان" (5 ابريل 2026). https://www.maannews.net/news/2159188.html

29 Marini, *Dialectics*, 13-136.

The causes of the recent fuel crisis in the West Bank can be understood, not simply as a byproduct of military-settler hegemony, or market fluctuations, but by examining the existing relations of production in the Palestinian economy and how they have changed over the past three years. These changes include the gradual confiscation of clearance revenues and the impoverishment of the West Bank through the destruction of assets and economic activity.

The impact of the crisis can also be grasped, and the mechanisms adopted to manage it by the private and public sectors analyzed, by identifying the compensation mechanisms that sustain an economy of dependency, and turning to the groups that bear the greatest costs in income, time, and their capacity to survive.

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