

Baladi

Rooted Resistance in Palestine

Sandra Guimarães
from Baladi – Rooted Resistance in Palestine – describes the effect of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian food production and positive food initiatives springing up in the area.

Food under occupation

Decades of ongoing military occupation and settler colonialism in Palestine have had a devastating impact on food sustainability and sovereignty. Israeli military zones, illegal settlements and the Israeli Wall are all stealing land and water resources from the indigenous population.

Add to this the restrictions on freedom of movement and regular attacks on farmers and crops by settlers and you can see how combined Israeli restrictions on agriculture have led the UN to consider 31.5% of the population to be food insecure.

The occupation is not only changing the map, it's changing traditional agricultural practices, pushing Palestinian farmers into monoculture, with associated heavy use of chemicals and commercial hybrid seeds, as they try to produce more food on less land.

Fighting the agri-business model

“Today, it's not just the military occupation that we live under in Palestine, but it's also

a greater political and economic system in the world that is causing us to be slaves to agri-business companies, to multinationals that want to dump their terrible food on us”, says Vivien Sansour when we meet at her Palestinian Heirloom Seed Library in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem. “Israeli agri-business has managed to sell the myth that agri-business all over the world is selling, that we need them and we need their seeds for more production. [...] Now you are not a producer, you're a consumer.

And what better way to enslave someone than make them your consumer?”

Our project, Baladi - Rooted Resistance in Palestine, is an ongoing multi-media exploration of initiatives to regain food autonomy in a country where everyday life is itself resistance to the occupation.

Sansour's Seed Library is one of these initiatives, saving native seeds from extinction and working with Palestinian farmers to preserve biodiversity and regain their autonomy.

This independence is crucial in a land where the markets are flooded with cheap produce grown in Israel or on West Bank settlements while at the same time it is made increasingly difficult for Palestinian's to grown their own food.

The Israeli Wall separates the Aida Refugee Camp from recreational and agricultural land.





Draguitsa Alafandi attends to her rooftop garden where she plants fruits and vegetables in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Bethlehem.

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The BDS movement

It is under these conditions that, inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, Palestinian civil society organisations in 2005 called for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) as a form of non-violent pressure on Israel until it complies with international law by meeting three demands: ending the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands and dismantling the wall, recognising the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality and respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

Endorsing the BDS movement is one of the most important ways that Palestinians have asked international citizens to support their resistance to the occupation and struggle for self-determination.

The garden on the roof

Meanwhile, in the crowded Dheisheh Refugee Camp we find a little oasis amongst the concrete and noise where Draguitsa Alafandi is growing vegetables on her rooftop to serve fresh food to her family. 15,000 people live in the camp, built in 1949 to house 3,000 refugees.

Growing food on her rooftop changed the way Draguitsa's family eats, she told us. "It became fresher. Now we have much more salads and soups." Even her young



A Palestinian family picking olives in the West Bank village of Burin. Villagers of Burin have faced many attacks by Israeli settlers living nearby, especially during the olive harvest season.

children enjoy picking herbs, leaves or tomatoes.

There are still worries of course: "let's not forget this is a refugee camp in Palestine. There are Israeli soldiers shooting almost every night here. Teargas bombs are flying everywhere. Our rooftop is quite high but I'm always afraid they would tear down the greenhouse. It would be a disaster."

"In Deheisheh I feel cut from everything. But having some plants to take care of, it's really nice. And having something to put on the table it's a big bonus. It's very therapeutic just to look

at them and see how they are growing", Draguitsa says as we sit on her roof eating loquats fresh from the tree that grows between the buildings.

Baladi – Rooted Resistance is an ongoing multi-media project by writer and vegan chef Sandra Guimarães and photojournalists Anne Paq and Craig Redmond.

For more information about agro-resistance in Palestine, visit the website www.baladirootedresistance.com or Facebook page 'Baladi Rooted Resistance'.