

JQ ROUNDTABLE

Shrinking Spaces, Excluded Communities, and Transformed Environments: Exploring Health and Environment among Palestinians through Eco-Social Approaches

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This roundtable emerged out of panel at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual conference and was sponsored by the Palestinian-American Research Center (PARC).

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Abstract

Ecosystem degradation and land alienation for native populations are inevitable products of the settler-colonial process. The loss of sovereignty over land, the change of landscape, the transformation of trees, herbs, and livestock are ubiquitous in different settler-colonial settings. These changes have their effect on human health. As is characteristic of settler-colonial contexts, a key feature of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine has been the continued expropriation and fragmentation of Palestinian land through various means, including bureaucratic and administrative control of land, water, populations and localities. Exclusionary policies and measures, including multiple forms of violence, aimed to increase control and erasure of the native population are continuously employed and shape the lived realities and spaces that Palestinians inhabit. The continuous colonial engineering of space has transformed the environment, including altering natural ecosystems, expediting urban sprawl, and producing environmental hazards to vulnerable populations. While these environmental transformations in their own right are a subject of study, they also have important, and often overlooked, implications for the health and well-being of Palestinians.

Ecosocial theory urges us to understand the health of populations, including health disparities between settler and native populations, as a product of historical trauma, land alienation, exposure to racism, socioeconomic disparities and other processes. Political, environmental, societal, and economic conditions interact with community, family, and individual conditions to produce health conditions. Our bodies reflect these structures that shape our bodies and the spaces in which we are born into, age, become sick or disabled and eventually die in.

A growing body of literature speaks to the effects of war, conflict, and settler colonialism on the health and well-being of populations, including in Palestine. While this literature has made important contributions, much of the focus tends to be on direct, and oftentimes acute, exposures to various forms of political violence. Examinations of the interplay between environmental transformations, resulting from exclusionary spatial policies and settler-colonial encroachment, and health in the Palestinian contexts are less common. In this roundtable, we center the discussion on the environment and the conceptualization of how settler-colonialism impacts health. We explore how settler colonialism as an ongoing process in Palestine has largely shaped the habitat, landscapes, behaviors and movements, and social ecologies of Palestinians in all of the fragmented geographies of Palestine and how that translates into different health conditions, including avoidable diseases and disabilities. Our speakers will explore the intersections between environment (including built environment, pollutants), social worlds, and health in various fragmented geographic contexts ranging from the West Bank to Jerusalem, Gaza and '48 Palestine.

Keywords

Settler colonialism; Indigenous health; environment; ecocide; occupation; Palestine; Israel.