

Mapping Connections

Oliver Hayakawa

**“WE ARE OUTSIDE OF THE STATISTICS”: WHY A
STUDY OF CHINA-PALESTINE TRADE CANNOT
BE ONE OF OFFICIAL NUMBERS**

Working Paper No.03 | September 2023

Working Paper Series of *Mapping Connections: China and Contemporary Development in the Middle East* at the University of Exeter's Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies.

Copyright © Oliver Hayakawa, 2023

This Working Paper has been published online and can be downloaded from <https://www.china-mena-connections.org/blog/n8nrzyd9agsniehh2nucj6ijnyfh2e>

The Mapping Connections working paper series serves to disseminate the results of work in progress prior to publication in order to support the creation of new knowledge about China and the Middle East and strengthen academic collaboration between scholars working in (and on) the Middle East and China. . Inclusion of a paper in the Working Paper Series should not limit publication in any other venue.

Suggested citation:

Oliver Hayakawa. "We are outside of the statistics": Why a study of China-Palestine trade cannot be one of official numbers." Working Paper Series "Mapping Connections: China and Contemporary Development in the Middle East", Working Paper No.3. Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, 2023.

Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies
Mapping Connections: China and Contemporary Development in the Middle East
University of Exeter
Stocker Road
Exeter
EX4 4ND
United Kingdom

Mapping Connections: China and Contemporary Development in the Middle East is based at the University of Exeter's Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York and implemented in collaboration with the Arab Council of Social Sciences (ACSS) and the InterAsia Partnership.



University of Exeter
Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies



“WE ARE OUTSIDE OF THE STATISTICS”: WHY A STUDY OF CHINA-PALESTINE TRADE CANNOT BE ONE OF OFFICIAL NUMBERS

Oliver Hayakawa

Abstract

This working paper sidelines the use of official trade data in a study of China-Palestine commerce for an ethnography informed methodology that offers an alternative perspective on globalised Palestinian economic exchange. This approach is anchored in an exploration of the nuanced motivations, fears, ambitions, and associated practices of lesser acknowledged actors who mediate the Palestinian trade economy. The findings are based on participant observation and both semi and unstructured interviews conducted in trader cities in China, the ports and checkpoints governed by Israel, to the markets in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), during research trips from 2015-2022. The early implications of this working paper firstly highlight the invalidity of formal trade data given the commonality of under or non-declared economic activity in globalised commerce in general, and Palestinian trade in particular. Secondly, rather than demonstrating a complete separation in the functionings of the formal and informal economy we see how their interdependence is complicit and collaborative in achieving globalised trade. Thirdly, it indicates the pervasiveness of Israeli policy across all aspects of Palestinian life, and how even the day-to-day trade in Chinese goods cannot be removed from the prism of Israeli occupation. As such, China-Palestine trade cannot be untangled from many important elements of the conflict such as the current absence and potential future viability of Palestinian economic (and by virtue political) sovereignty. Insights that can scarcely be revealed through ‘statistics’ alone.

Keywords: Globalisation from below; Informal trade; Israeli occupation; Palestinian economy; Economic anthropology

Contact

Oliver Hayakawa
Beijing Foreign Studies University
Email: o.hayakawa@bfsu.edu.cn
Tel.: +44 (0) 7480638234

CONTEXT

"We are outside of the statistics": Mohammad shared these words with me during one of our first meetings in the Chinese market city of Yiwu. As we sat in his newly refurbished office in one of the city's most reputable downtown commercial high rises it seemed a world away from his home village of Ya'bad on the outskirts of Jenin, the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). This was not lost on Mohammad who spoke fondly of his life in this "small but simple" city where "you can feel that you are something". Mohammad had arrived in China only six years earlier in 2011 under the instruction and financial backing of a close family friend, a well-known Palestinian trader and importer of Chinese goods, who wanted a trusted man on the ground to facilitate his business interests while also tapping into the expanding market of visiting Arab traders who similarly needed a local mediator. Mohammad was sent to become the latest 'agent' to coordinate business between visiting traders and Chinese suppliers – a potentially lucrative venture given the burgeoning rate of China-Middle East trade. Mohammad laughed about how he arrived in the country with just a laptop, no background in commerce, no Chinese language, and just a handful of contacts to show him the ropes of how to set up a business, and a life, in China. Unbeknownst to Mohammad, his venture to China would not only define his life thereafter as now a successful business owner with a "good reputation" and expertise in China's economy, but he would also become an integral cog in the wheel of a lesser acknowledged world of globalised commerce. An actor with a behind the scenes perspective on the true nature of trade and those that mediate it in China, Israel, and the oPt.

INTRODUCTION

The lives and insights of Arab merchants like Mohammad bring a greater depth to more conventional understandings of China-Middle East economic relations. They offer a window into alternative forms of interaction mediated by lesser acknowledged actors, and their affiliated practices, who represent the truer nature of day-to-day contemporary ties between China and the Arab World - quite differently to what is presented when limiting analysis to the role of state level exchange. In the case of Palestine, the focus of this paper, it is indicative of how a select number of Palestinians have found themselves at the centre of globalised commerce with a behind the scenes view of its multiple manifestations - in so doing offering some a lucrative avenue for economic gain and others a critical opportunity for economic survival. And while other country case studies could offer similar insights on a smaller scale, as Palestine's predominantly second or third largest source of imports (fluctuating with Turkey in recent years), China is a preeminent contributor to transnational Palestinian commerce through its provision of affordable goods that are found in abundance across the Palestinian marketplace.

Yet the value of this transnational trade is impossible to calculate, as official statistics mask the complex web of transactions and practices that traders navigate as they pursue the fruits of globalisation – often aided by agents such as Mohammad. That is, an attempt to explore this world from a ‘top down’ perspective - such as through official trade data - does not provide an accurate picture of the quantity and origins of imports, rather a ‘bottom up’ approach offers a framework to engage with the varied social, economic, and political processes, and subsequent trajectories, of those engaged in this cross-border trade; individual and collective experiences that can scarcely be appreciated through statistics. These more nuanced and human scale interpretations of globalisation challenge the predominant focus on ‘macro’ level processes that have historically drawn attention away from the ‘local’ perspective in favour of the ‘global’, and specifically discounted the importance of everyday human agency in global connections (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, p.7; see also Knowles 2014; Mathews and Alba Vega 2012; Ribeiro 2009; Rivoli 2015; Barndt 2008)

The underlying premise of this paper is to highlight how China-Palestine commerce needs to be studied from ‘below’ if one is to fully appreciate its multiple dimensions. In accordance with such logic, this means sidelining a predominant engagement with formal trade data but focusing on other, generally more humanised, facets of globalised trade. Yet I contend that the process of invalidating trade data is itself a helpful entry point to understanding the value of a ‘bottom up’ approach while giving insights that can instigate broader enquiries. In the case of Palestine, how the pervasiveness of Israeli occupation permeates virtually every facet of Palestinian economic activity. For this reason, the focus of this paper is to take the reader on a ‘journey’ from a market town in China towards the marketplace in Palestine.¹ By looking primarily at the different ways that the under declaration in China-Palestine trade occurs I will further reveal the interdependence of formal legal and extra-legal practices, specifically how the actors of these two worlds often seamlessly interweave between the legal/illegal and licit/illicit (Schendel and Abraham 2005). In so doing, I will also point to the broader political conditions that determine this trade, factors that render a study of China-Palestine as far more significant than just that of ‘numbers’. This journey begins, at the Chinese market city of Yiwu.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS: YIWU

“You cannot research this; you will never know the number. It is impossible to know”: As I heard these words amongst a group of Arab traders in the Chinese market city of Yiwu it became abundantly clear that a study of

¹ It is beyond the scope of this short working paper to study every aspect of the ‘journey’, specifically, discussions on phenomena identified in the Palestinian marketplace will be left until the final paper.

China-Palestine trade could not be a study based on official 'numbers' (Field notes, Yiwu, June 2017). And so, it was time spent with traders such as Mohammad, over the course of my various trips to China, that showed how by following the basic procedures of doing business in cities like Yiwu how before even stepping foot in Palestine the true value of trade was already lost in a web of tampered order forms, falsified commercial invoices or the blind eye of customs officials. While numerous "under the table" tactics, such as backhanded payments or various shipping container packing techniques to evade proper inspection, highlighted the hidden trade of products, such as counterfeit clothing to everyday trinkets, that are sourced in abundance in China.

It is beyond this paper to scrutinise every facet of doing business in Yiwu that contribute towards the under-declaration of commerce, there are, as Mohammad stated, "many combinations". But in general, it all begins twenty minutes' walk from Mohammad's office at the International Trade Centre (ITC), also known as the China Commodity City (CCC) or most commonly the Futian Market, where traders convene from all corners of the world to source that which is 'Made in China' and what has made Yiwu, a once none assuming county level city in China's Zhejiang Province, to today the home of 1.4 million residents and an epicenter of globalised commerce.

The Futian Market is a trader's 'supermarket' that covers 5.5 million square metres and is home to more than 75,000 stalls that vend over 1.8 million different products. It is the preeminent contributor to Yiwu's designation as the 'world's largest wholesale small commodities market' where Middle Eastern traders are offered a unique entry point to small scale transnational trade characterised by the purchasing of a low quantity of low-priced goods (Pliez 2012; Choplin and Pliez 2015). It is a world of trade held together by loosely governed paper trails dependent on flexible and willing participants who are happy to take formal procedures of the state into the informal world that circumvents it. Mohammad proceeds to take me through the "paperwork".

It starts from the point of purchase as few transactions at the Futian Market are recorded by official invoices. This is because the Chinese vendors either pay no tax, or a standardised, and very low, monthly tax rate, so there is little reason to formally register their commerce for the purposes of submitting data to the local governing authorities (Jacob 2016). This is further complicated as though vendors in the market might be small family run wholesalers or factory outlets, they only accept payment to their personal, not company, bank accounts – never entailing formal registration of the transaction with state officials. In earlier years, some visiting traders might simply pay them in cash. And so, even at this earliest stage in China-Palestine commerce, the Chinese government is neither capable of, nor seemingly concerned by, monitoring just how much business each vendor is doing. But instead, facilitates a practice of informal commerce that allows

its traders to maximise profits from both domestic, but particularly, international trade.

It is, however, not at this stage that under-declaration formally occurs as, officially, traders are not sourcing from these Futian Market vendors. This is because most vendors in the market do not hold an export license, and so cannot provide the necessary documentation or payment facilitation necessary for international trade.² Such a license requires additional registration, regulation, and tax liabilities that they prefer not to engage in. A trader must therefore seek the services of an 'import-export agent' to formerly process their goods through Chinese ports and onwards to Palestine. The import-export agent will accumulate all the different purchases undertaken by a trader at the Futian Market and register them as one transaction under their company name as if they were the sole supplier; no record of the transactions between the trader and the various Futian Market suppliers. It is at this stage where the credibility of official China-Palestine trade data truly begins to unravel due to the import-export agent's willingness to manipulate the shipping documents, specifically the commercial invoice.

Quite simply, the Chinese import-export agent will put down whatever value a trader requests for the commercial invoice that will be provided to the Israeli customs authorities who will first process Palestinian imports. Alternatively, Palestinian agents in Yiwu, such as Mohammad, who liaise with the import-export agent on behalf of visiting merchants, note that: "the import-export agent will often just send us their company branded excel spreadsheet and let us fill it out" (Interview, Yiwu, May 2019). As a result, traders in Palestine often showed me copies of commercial invoices that they presented to Israeli customs that could be at least 20-30% of the real value of the goods – Mohammad confirmed similar rates of undervaluation. This is possible because it makes little difference to the import-export agent or Chinese customs as there are essentially no export taxes in China to encourage heightened external trade, and so it is largely irrelevant what cost the goods are declared. A former Chinese customs official told me in no uncertain terms: "China does not care about its exports; it cares about imports. This is how China makes its money. If China stopped this, it would be a disaster" (Interview, Shanghai, June 2017).

A trader's indifference to what their agent declares in China is further reflective of the absence of reliable data sharing between customs authorities as the commercial invoice provided to the port in China does not need to match the one presented once the goods have arrived at the port of destination. The result of such disparities is, partly, evident by looking at China-Palestine 'mirror trade' data. That is, the value of Chinese 'exports' to Palestine found in the Chinese National Statistics Yearbook in

² Such as receiving USD transfers from foreign merchants.

comparison to Palestinian 'imports' from China as presented by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. In the case of 2021, Chinese 'exports' to Palestine were just 24% of the value of Palestinian 'imports' from China: over \$128 million compared to \$531.7 million. Such variances are particularly interesting when comparing China-Israel and China-Palestine 'mirror trade' over the 2007-21 period: in the former, Chinese 'exports' to Israel were on average 24% *higher* than the reported Israeli 'imports' from China, while Chinese 'exports' to Palestine were a staggering 78% *lower* than Palestinian 'imports' from China'.³ These sizeable differences are significant because it is generally accepted by international reporting institutions that a reasonable range is approximately 10% (UN Comtrade).⁴

Though a heightened propensity for Palestinian traders to under declare is regularly attributed to these disparities, it is also indicative of a particular experience faced by Palestinian importers vis-à-vis Israeli traders as both have their imports processed at the same Israeli ports of entry and should, officially, be subject to the same levels of scrutiny. This arrangement a byproduct of the Israeli occupation preventing any operational Palestinian ports of entry (airport or seaport) nor Palestinian control over land crossings, resulting in all Palestinian trade initially being processed and recorded by the Israeli authorities. The Israeli ports, therefore, provide a further entry point to identify the unique challenges faced by Palestinian traders, but also how such conditions further embolden traders to provide false data. The result is not just undervalued China-Palestine trade, but also the proliferation of 'indirect' commerce through Israel, leading to Palestinian imports from China being accounted as China-Israel and subsequently Israel-Palestine transactions. These insights were only available to me through my interviews and by exploring the precise process of trade between China and Palestine, and in each case, further skewing China-Palestine trade data before goods have even reached the oPt.

³ Personal calculations based on UN Comtrade data.

⁴ These figures highlight a particular experience when considering Chinese imports, as in a 2016 World Bank report it was estimated that on average Palestinian imports from third countries were undervalued by 32%. In the same study, Israel's rate of undervaluation with third countries was 23%. Note potential discrepancies between how the World Bank and I have calculated 'mirror trade' data.

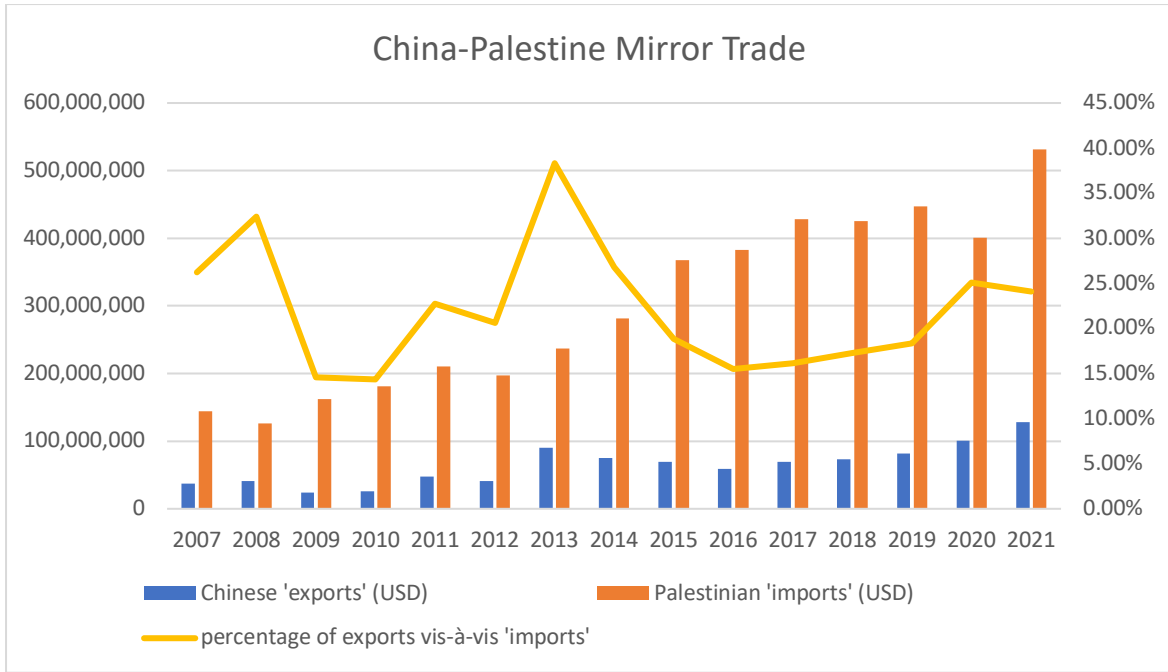


Figure 1. Graph showing the disparity in China-Palestine mirror trade

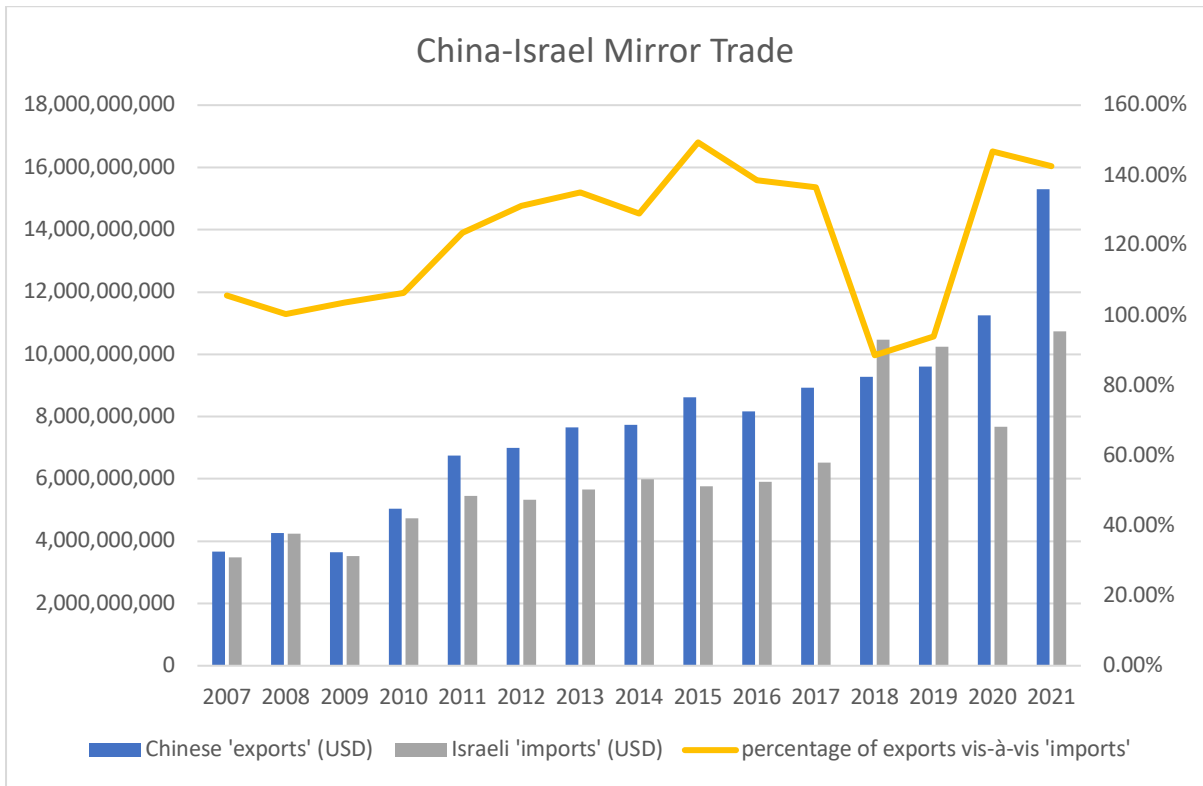


Figure 2. Graph showing the disparity in China-Israel mirror trade

THE JOURNEY TRANSITS: ASHDOD PORT, ISRAEL

“They hate to see the word Palestine”: at first, I did not fully understand the implication of Mohammad’s words as he showed me a collection of shipping documents for Palestine bound containers (Interview, Yiwu, May 2019). On almost every document it identified the Palestinian city where it was destined, e.g., Jenin, but only had Israel not Palestine as the destination. What Mohammad showed me was a key piece of a puzzle that had for a long time evaded me in my pursuit to explain the sizeable variations in China-Palestine ‘mirror trade’. By adopting Mohamad’s technique, it meant that at Chinese ports Palestinian bound containers would be documented as ‘exports’ to Israel, and once the containers arrived in Israel, they would be re-registered as Palestinian ‘imports’ by the Israeli authorities who were able to recognise the real destination through the trader's Palestinian VAT number. This phenomenon helped to explain why China's ‘exports’ to Palestine were so much lower than Palestinian ‘imports’ from China. Conversely, why in the case of Israel, it’s ‘imports’ are lower than Chinese ‘exports’ as these goods are more accurately recorded once they have arrived at Ashdod.

Shipper		Booking No.	B/L No.
TRADING COMPANY LIMITED 18 LUARD ROAD WAN CHAI HK*		M23238	YM
Consignee WAEL ADD: ISRAEL-ASHDOD-JENIN VAT: 9368 TEL/FAX: 04243		Export References	Forwarding agent references
Notify Party SAME AS CONSIGNEE		Point and Country of Origin of goods	ALSO NOTIFY
*Prepared by	*Place of Receipt	Onward inland routing	
Vessel Voy No. 022W flag	NINGBO		
YM WINNER	Port of Loading	Delivery status	
Port of Discharge	NINGBO		
ASHDOD	*Place of Delivery		
	ASHDOD		
PARTICULARS FURNISHED BY MERCHANT			
MKS & NOS/CONTAINER NOS	NO OF PKGS	DESCRIPTION OF PACKAGES AND GOODS	Weight and Volume
	1 CTNR	SHIPPERS LOAD AND COUNT	68.000 CBM

Figure 3. Copy of a bill of lading for a Palestine bound container labelled as destined for Israel

This practice is, in part, motivated by the rationale that it is simply easier for Chinese customs to correlate the allocated port in Israel (e.g., Ashdod) with the destination country of Israel. It is more practical to simply omit the word ‘Palestine’ to avoid confusion, because as mentioned earlier, all Palestinian goods will first be shipped to Israeli ports of entry given the absence of Palestinian alternatives. But also, because merchants actively

ask not to put down Palestine to avoid their container being flagged by the Israeli customs authorities. Mohammad talked of Palestinians he knew who shared stories of Israelis who reluctantly used the word Palestine, or at worse, claimed that Palestine did not exist – a particularly problematic yet not uncommon trope (Field notes, Yiwu, May 2019). For them, there was a belief that this attitude overflowed into the trading world, whereby even though the Israeli authorities were able to identify a shipment's final Palestinian destination, it was preferable not to put the word Palestine to avoid heightened scrutiny:

One time my customer put everything, like Hebron, West Bank, Palestine. But after this he told me never to do it again. I think he faced many problems at Ashdod (port in Israel). My buyers tell me never to put Palestine. I don't think I ever put Palestine. (Interview, Yiwu, May 2019).

Such a decision is, however, not primarily driven by sentiment but by extensive and tangible experience. As though Palestinian and Israeli trade should be subject to the same levels of scrutiny by Israeli customs – enshrined in the Paris Protocol signed in 1994 to regulate both Israel-Palestine economic relations as well as Palestine's commercial ties with the rest of the world – the reality is notably different. A range of studies confirm that both the formal and informal procedures that dictate the evaluation of Palestinian containers result in a Palestinian trader facing more challenges at the port than an Israeli importer. A World Bank report estimated that a Palestinian container might take four times as long to clear and three times the transaction cost compared to Israeli goods (2016, p.6).⁵ Some estimate that only 5% of containers in the world undergo proper examinations at ports (Nordstrom 2007, p.118), anecdotally such a statistic scarcely seems to apply to Palestinian imports as one Palestinian customs broker responded to me when I presented this figure: "For an Israeli, 90% [of their imports are] cleared without anybody seeing the goods. For Palestinians, maybe not 5% [are] checked but 95% [are checked]" (Interview, Ramallah, Oct. 2017).

The delays are largely attributed to the need for Palestinian trade to face more 'security' checks yet there is also a *financial* and *political* incentive for Israel to ensure heightened control of Palestinian containers – in both cases further motivating traders to under-declare their goods to protect their profits or import (in) directly from Israel. *Financially*, a 2017 World Bank Report noted the additional customs inspections and extended storage periods a Palestinian paid could lead to an additional \$538 per shipment compared to an Israeli container (p.6). A Palestinian import file is therefore far more profitable to an Israeli clearance agency than an Israeli one (Peres

⁵ "The import and export of the Palestinians through the points of exit and entry in Israel will be given equal trade and economic treatment" (Protocol on Economic Relations, Article III (13)).

Centre for Peace 2017).⁶ The Israeli state similarly benefits as the 3% administrative fee it collects for processing Palestinian goods was worth \$64 million in 2014 alone, covering over a third of the budget of the Israeli customs and VAT department, even though Palestinian trade constitutes just 6% of their work (World Bank 2016, p.20). Simultaneously, as most Palestinian traders cannot access the port this has historically allowed for them to be taken advantage of. For example, even when their container is cleared by customs the Israeli clearance agent who Palestinian traders are forced to use might state otherwise and fabricate additional fees that the trader is forced to pay before receiving their goods (Field notes, Ashdod, Oct. 2017). As one Israeli broker aptly stated when he reflected on times when such practices were particularly common: “the Palestinians were there to be cheated” (Interview, Ashdod, Oct. 2017).

The heightened cost, in both time and finance, means that it is often simply faster and cheaper to buy from the Israeli market than to face the formal and informal procedures related to importing to Palestine. This is also influenced by factors such as restrictions on Palestinians importing certain goods from China, such as ‘dual use’ items, even though they are often allowed to purchase them from the Israeli market (Field notes, Yiwu, June 2017). Alternatively, the difficulty in clearing containers encourages Palestinians to ask Israeli merchants and middlemen to import on their behalf so that goods are treated as Israel bound. Once the goods have been cleared the Israeli will then “re-sell” the good to the Palestinian. In each of the scenarios, the initial importation of goods will be classified as Israeli trade with China and will, thereafter, be lost in the calculations of ‘indirect’ imports to the oPt, where they are destined. This practice is highlighted by a study in 2014 that showed an estimated 35% of Palestinian imports from Israel were from third countries (UNCTAD 2004; 2011; Elkhafif et al. 2014).

7

The *political* dimension to Israel’s control of Palestinian globalised trade derives from Israel’s position as the collector and disburser of the various taxes and fees owed to the PA from its international trade. These clearance revenues, that once constituted just 31% of PA revenues (2007) but today represent around 64.4% (2021), play an integral role in funding Palestinian development yet are routinely withheld by Israel as a punitive measure against the PA (Arafah 2018, p.3; PMA 2022). This adds a further complexity to Israeli practices at the port because elevated scrutiny for ‘security’ is rarely paralleled with heightened financial ‘re-evaluation’ of Palestinian customs invoices, as traders argue that an inclination not to re-evaluate Palestinian imports is tied to a motivation to mitigate the potential revenues that the PA can generate from its trade sector. Traders identify this practice as an opportunity to avoid scrutiny in relation to their (under)

⁶ As an example, this report highlighted that Israeli clearance agencies received up to 50% commission from private port storage companies – thus encouraging delays.

⁷ Excluding water, electricity, and fuel.

declared value of trade: "Israel don't need the Palestinian trade or economy to grow, so they accept undervalued invoices". (Palestinian agent, Yiwu, June 2017).

These issues are exacerbated by the inability of Palestinian customs to access Israeli ports of entry to enact their authority, so they must wait until Israeli customs notify them that Palestine bound containers have been released, at which point, it has often already passed into the oPt and the goods sold or disseminated (Mr. Al-Deek, Custom Dept., Ramallah, June 2017). Moreover, with the PA's restricted access throughout the oPt and the many unregulated passageways into it, it is impossible to monitor many of the containers that enter the area (Garb 2015). A Palestinian trader can, therefore, navigate these various administrative regimes from the Israeli ports of entry through to the oPt marketplace in a manner that limits any effective oversight from the perspective of accurate trade valuations.

This alludes to a further issue in relation to the inaccuracy of trade figures as presented by Palestinian institutions. That is the Palestinian customs authority almost full dependence on the services of Israeli customs while Palestinian trade statistics are invariably dictated by what the Israeli authorities declare to them. This is, however, additionally challenged by inconsistencies and inadequacies in data sharing. For example, until 2009, only at the end of each month would Palestinian customs receive an e-mail with the value of clearance revenues they would be transferred and a paper document with the customs declaration details of all goods formerly destined for Palestine (USAID 2008). Therefore, at no stage before this were they knowledgeable of what was being imported, let alone in a position to challenge the customs declarations.

Astonishingly, this was an improvement on the mechanism adopted in the years following the rise of China-Palestine trade in the mid-late 1990s. During this time the Palestinian customs authority would simply receive a hard copy document at the end of each month with details of the various import duties that they would be transferred; no information about the Palestinian trader nor the goods that they imported (Mr. Al-Deek, Ramallah, May 2019). Unsurprisingly, traders considered this part of the "golden ages" as they felt comparatively carefree in the values they declared (Palestinian customs broker, Ramallah, Oct. 2017). The extent to which Chinese imports to Palestine were undervalued during this period and skewed overall trade statistics is unquestionably significant. Since only 2014 have Palestinian customs received data daily (not live) and have been able to adopt more advanced online data sharing systems (World Bank 2016, p.15). As Palestinian customs officials are, essentially, always playing catch up in the monitoring of trade, Palestinian merchants can exploit such inadequacies by registering falsified levels of trade that can regularly go unchallenged.

REFLECTIONS

And so, having walked me through the business practices found in Yiwu, the conditions that govern Palestinian trade upon their arrival in the ports of entry in Israel as they prepare to pass through to the oPt, Mohammad helped to show that China-Palestine trade data has limited credibility before goods have even reached the Palestinian marketplace. Yet we explored just some of the “many combinations” that render void a study of globalised Palestinian trade based purely on ‘statistics’, while importantly, alluding to more questions about the interconnectivity of state bureaucracy and true everyday economic practices, but also the unique conditions faced by Palestinians in their engagement in globalised trade.

The different sites highlighted not just the globalised nature of this trade, but also how the formal and informal interweave on multiple occasions across numerous geographical locations. Indeed, rarely was the pursuit of conducting business in one way completely at the cost of the other, rather, one form was often dependent on the other. This included, for example, the use of legally registered import-export agents in Yiwu to formally document otherwise unregistered and informal trade. This meant that such ‘illegal’ commerce was still embedded in the official trade figures as accumulated by the agencies of the ‘above’ – even if at highly undervalued levels. Similarly, the actors of the ‘above’ and ‘below’ were regularly complicit and collaborative agents in achieving globalised trade.

Simultaneously, the preceding analysis alluded to particularities in China-Palestine trade that could not just be explained from ‘above’ or ‘below’. For example, the journey showed how the mere use of the word Palestine could have notable implications on how a trader’s shipment will be processed, while the PA’s inability to access Israeli ports or govern the spaces that goods transit throughout the oPt showed its lack of sovereignty in economic affairs. It is, therefore, integral to consider the ‘beyond’ that specifically frames the economic and political conditions that define this commerce. A consideration of the ‘beyond’ in this study therefore goes far beyond an analysis of the trade of goods, but a humanising of the Palestinian political economy by drawing attention to the varied voices and experiences of a subjugated people, and the broader impact of the Israel-Palestine ‘conflict’. In so doing, highlighting the pervasiveness of Israeli policy across all aspects of Palestinian life, and how even the day-to-day trade in Chinese goods cannot be removed from the prism of Israeli occupation. As such, China-Palestine trade cannot be untangled from many important elements of the ‘conflict’ such as the current absence and potential future viability of Palestinian economic (and by virtue political) sovereignty. These insights can scarcely be revealed through “statistics” alone.

REFERENCES

- Arafeh, N. (2018). *Long Overdue: Alternatives to the Paris Protocol*. Al Shabaka Policy Brief.
- Barndt, D. (2008). *Tangled routes : women, work, and globalization on the tomato trail*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Choplin, A. and O. Pliez (2015). The inconspicuous spaces of globalization. *Articulo-Journal of Urban Research*. (12).
- Cissé, D. (2015). African traders in Yiwu: their trade networks and their role in the distribution of 'made in China' products in Africa. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 7(10): p.44-64.
- Elkhafif, M. A., Mussayaf, M. and Elagraa, M. (2014). *Palestinian Fiscal Revenue Leakage to Israel under the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
- Garb, Y. (2015). Porosity, Fragmentation, and Ignorance: Insights from a Study of Freight Traffic. In: Abdallah, S. L., and Parizot, C. *Israelis and Palestinians in the Shadows of the Wall: Spaces of Separation and Occupation*. Ashgate. p.89-107.
- Inda, J. X. and R. Rosaldo. (2008). *The anthropology of globalization : a reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jacobs, M. D. (2016). *Yiwu, China: a study of the world's largest small commodities market*. Paramus, New Jersey: Homa & Seke.
- Knowles, C. (2014). *Flip-flop : a journey through globalisations backroads*. London: Pluto Press.
- Mathews, G., Lins Ribeiro, G. and Alba Vega, C. (2012). *Globalization from below: The world's other economy*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Natsheh, B. and Parizot, C. (2015). From Chocolate Bars to Motor Cars: Separation and Goods Trafficking between Israel and the West Bank (2007–2010). In: Abdallah, L. S. and Parizot, C. *Israelis and Palestinians in the shadows of the wall: spaces of separation and occupation*. Ashgate. p.109-128.
- Nordstrom, C. (2007). *Global outlaws: crime, money, and power in the contemporary world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA). (2022). *Annual Report*. Research and Monetary Policy Department. Ramallah, Palestine.

Peres Center for Peace. (2017). *Strengthening the Palestinian Private Sector through Reducing Trade Transaction Costs: A Comprehensive Research and Advocacy Program*.

Pliez, O. (2012). Following the new silk road between Yiwu and Cairo. In: Mathews, G., Lins Ribeiro, G. and Alba Vega, C. *Globalization from below: The world's other economy*. London; New York: Routledge. p.29-45.

Ribeiro, G. L. (2009). "Non-hegemonic globalizations." *Anthropological Theory*. 9(3): p.297-329.

Rivoli, P. (2015). *The travels of a T-shirt in the global economy : an economist examines the markets, power, and politics of world trade*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley.

Schendel, W. v. and I. Abraham. (2005). *Illicit flows and criminal things : states, borders, and the other side of globalization*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

UNCTAD. (2004). *Transit Trade and Maritime Transport Facilitation for the Rehabilitation and Development of the Palestinian Economy*.

UNCTAD. (2011). *Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the occupied Palestinian territory*. (15 July).

United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2008). *Customs and Value-Added Tax Leakage: Trade Facilitation Project*. (8 December).

World Bank. (2016). *Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee*. Washington, D.C: World Bank Group. (April 19).

World Bank. (2017). *Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee*. Washington, D.C: World Bank Group. (Sept. 18).