EXISTENCE, RESISTANCE, HOPE: FRAMING RAWABI

Randall G. Rogan
Department of Communication, Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, North Carolina, United States,
rogan@wfu.edu

Ananda Mitra
Department of Communication, Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, North Carolina, United States,
mitra@wfu.edu

Jack Nassar
Ramallah, Palestine, *jacknassar@aol.com*

Abstract

The seemingly intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict has ebbed and flowed for more than 100-years, often characterised by extreme violence countered by intense internationally facilitated negotiations for peace, contrasted with periods of seeming calm and stability. Over the course of time, both parties have crafted multiple collective identities and continually evolving narratives in support of those identities and to justify their actions toward the other. One particularly powerful Palestinian identity to emerge is as victims to Israeli occupation and oppression as the essential cause for their lack of agency and self-determination. Yet for the last several years, a private sector development initiative has been unfolding in the West Bank: the project is the city-building project of Rawabi, considered to be the first-ever planned Palestinian city. Rawabi is more than a massive construction project; it is a grand symbolic expression for Palestinians. Employing several on-site focus-group interview sessions, this study sought to discern how individuals living and working in Rawabi regard the project via the frames they used in their narratives to describe the project. Findings from the sessions are presented and the implications are discussed as they impact the meaning of the city for Palestinians residing in the West Bank.

Keywords: framing, social change, agency, identity construction, Palestine

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been characterised by extreme violence and periods of seeming calm and stability. Over the years, both parties have crafted narratives to justify their actions toward the other (Ellis, 2015; Khalidi, 1997; Malek & Hoke, 2014; Said Aly et al., 2013). One particularly powerful Palestinian narrative is being the victim and lacking agency for self-determination (Scham, 2006; Susser, 2012). This victim identity that Israeli occupation inhibits Palestinian self-determination is often offered as the reason for the low quality of Palestinian living conditions and societal struggles (Mana et al., 2015; Romirowsky, 2017). Yet for the last several years, a private sector development initiative has been unfolding in the West Bank: the project is the city-building project of Rawabi, which means "The Hills" in Arabic (Nassar, 2016). Situated nine kilometer north of Ramallah, in-between Jerusalem, and Nablus, Rawabi is considered to be the first-ever planned Palestinian city (Nassar, 2016; Segel et al., 2016) and a potential threat to the agentless Palestinian victim narrative.

Rawabi is more than a massive construction project; it is a grand symbolic expression. Not surprisingly, differing interpretations of Rawabi's meaning exist among various audiences. According to Nassar (2016), some individuals regard Rawabi to be a capitalist project that will benefit only wealthy Palestinians and lead to a normalisation of relations with Israel. Based on their interviews with members of the Rawabi development team, Rogan and Nassar (2020) concluded that Rawabi is viewed as a symbol of hope for a better future. Others consider it to be an important step in building a sovereign and economically viable Palestinian state (Kozaczuk, 2016). And still, others regard it to be a denial of the reality of Israeli occupation (e.g., Grandinetti, 2015). Such analyses offer interesting perspectives about the project, yet they fail to tell us what Rawabi means to Palestinians living and working in the city.

It is an accepted axiom that as symbolic beings, humans create narratives that manifest their perception of reality (A. Fisher, 1978; W. Fisher, 1989; Halverson et al., 2011; Watzlawick et al., 1967). Central to narrative construction is framing; the process by which individuals and institutions impose their cognitive schema onto an issue, object, or person(s) via verbal and nonverbal cues to represent their definition of the topic in question (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick et al., 1967). With the question of what Rawabi means to Palestinians, this study sought to explore how individuals living and working in the city frame their perceptions of the project. Towards this end, several in-person focus groups were conducted.

The paper begins with a discussion of the genesis and scope of the project. This is followed by an overview of framing theory as the theoretical and methodological lens for this investigation. The research question informing this study is articulated and the methodology is explicated. Findings from the sessions are presented and the implications for future research are discussed.

The Story of Rawabi

In 2007, the leadership of the Portland Trust, a British not-for-profit organisation devoted to promoting economic growth in the Middle East (Segel et al., 2016) met to discuss options for developing affordable West Bank housing for Palestinians. The outcome was a goal to facilitate the construction of a community of 5,000 houses (Segel et al., 2016). On a parallel track, Bashar Masri, founder of Massar International Holding Company was working on plans to develop a 6,000-plus house city in the West Bank. Masri had established himself as a successful builder of affordable homes with projects in Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt (Nassar, 2016; Segel et al., 2016). Masri shared the Portland Trust's vision for sustainable economic growth. Given his achievements, the Portland Trust joined with Masri to assist in advancing his initiative. Masri's team, along with other Palestinians, developed a city master plan funded by the Portland Trust (Nassar, 2016; Segel et al., 2016). The plan drew upon internationally recognised urban planning principles and integrated them with region-appropriate architecture to create a community with state-of-the-art infrastructure which could serve as a model for other regional development projects (Kozaczuk, 2016; Nassar, 2016).

The municipal boundary of Rawabi encompasses 6,300,000 square meters of land. At present, 90% of the land of Rawabi is situated in Area A, with small portions of the remaining land in Areas B and C (Kozaczuk, 2015; Nassar, 2016). To overcome a challenge with land acquisition, Masri petitioned the Palestinian National Authority (PNA or PA) to enforce a decades-old Jordanian eminent domain law that had never been enforced, to eventually acquire the needed land (Segel et al., 2016).

Construction of Rawabi began in 2012 and is progressing in phases. As of late 2022, five neighbourhoods have been completed, with the sixth one near completion. Currently, over 5,000 individuals reside in Rawabi. The Rawabi English Academy opened in the fall of 2016 with an enrolment of 120 students and today has more than 450 students in kindergarten through tenth grade. In 2016, Rawabi's outdoor theatre hosted two performances attracting a combined audience of more than 30,000 individuals from the region (Rawabi Foundation, n.d.). The summer of 2017 witnessed the opening of the QCenter, the commercial district of the city, with more than 30 retail stores and over 100 international retail brands, alongside an indoor entertainment arcade, and several cafes and restaurants. Finally, some 500-plus employees are working in one of the 10 or so businesses occupying one of the commercial buildings (Rawabi Foundation, n.d.).

The first stage of the completion of Rawabi will consist of 6,000 housing units across 22 neighbourhoods housing 25,000 residents; additional residential construction planned for subsequent phases will make Rawabi home to 40,000 residents (Nassar, 2016; Rawabi Foundation, n.d.). When completed, the city will have a medical centre; art, recreation, and entertainment facilities; a mosque and a church; fibre optic networking; a hotel and convention centre; and a winery and outdoor entertainment (Nassar, 2016; Rawabi Foundation, n.d.).

The PA agreed to provide funding for the provision of basic infrastructure and services, including health services, roads, education, security, and public utilities. Sadly, the PA has yet to fulfil its contribution (Nassar, 2016; Rogan & Nassar, 2020). Consequently, costs for all construction aspects of the city are supported by Massar International and the State of Qatar. According to Nassar (2016) investment in Rawabi will ultimately exceed $1.4 billion while construction of the city will create up to

10,000 jobs making it the largest private sector undertaking in Palestinian history (Rawabi Foundation, n.d.).

Because of Rawabi's geographic location, the road accessing the city needed to pass through approximately three kilometres of land controlled by the Israeli military. Sadly, the road barely accommodates the volume of construction vehicles coming and going daily (Nassar, 2016; Segel et. al., 2016). Additionally, use of the road requires annual permit renewal from the Israeli military, which can be denied.

An adequate water supply is perhaps the most pressing challenge. The lack of sufficient water almost shut the project down in 2013. Because of Rawabi's location, a pipeline needed to go through Area C, controlled by Israeli military. According to the Oslo Accords, water supply issues in the West Bank are governed by the Israeli- Palestinian Joint Water Commission (JWC). (Gvirtzman, 2014; Siegel 2015). For two years, Israel opposed the creation of water supply lines to the city, nearly causing the project to fail. ("New City of Rawabi", 2015). At that time, some 640 homes had been built and sold, but the uncertainty resulted in 450 of the purchase contracts being cancelled (Reguly, 2017). Eventually, following a political media campaign by Masri and his associates (Kozaczuk, 2016; Segel et al., 2016), Israel approved the completion of piping to the city. Still, the current supply is considered inadequate to meet the long-range demands needed for the city to flourish (Reguly, 2017; Nassar, 2016).

Perceptions of Rawabi

Critics of Masri and Rawabi are plentiful. Some accuse him of failing to reflect authentic Palestinian heritage in the architecture of the city, claiming that it looks like an Israeli settlement (Nassar, 2016; Rogan & Nassar, 2020). West Bank Israeli settlers, and some Israeli politicians, have fought to halt the project (Kozaczuk, 2016; Nassar, 2016). Still others, such as the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel have called for a boycott against Rawabi and Masri alleging that the project only serves to benefit Masri and his investors and that he is normalising relations with Israel (Kozaczuk, 2016).

Grandinetti (2015) investigated Rawabi's promotional material and concluded that Rawabi is striving to create a new generation of moderate middle-class Palestinians who seek a peaceful co-existence with Israel. She viewed Rawabi as a sign of modernity and a new form of nonviolent resistance that promises to improve the quality of living for Palestinians. However, she strongly criticised the project for being a neoliberal capitalist venture that depoliticises Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, precludes other forms of economic resistance, and negates Palestinian identity rhetoric grounded in their struggle against Israeli occupation.

Nassar (2016) investigated how urban space and urban planning have historically functioned as a form of colonialist dominance over an indigenous population. He posited that from a Marxist perspective, urban space can also be used by a colonised population as a form of resistance in a "trans-colonial" context, such as the West Bank. According to Nassar (2016), Israeli settlement construction is a form of colonialist domination while Rawabi is a form of resistance, making them polemic opposites on the continuum of colonialist power expression and colonial resistance and state-building.

Kozaczuk (2016) similarly investigated Rawabi as an urban space phenomenon and concluded it to be a manifestation of neoliberal peacebuilding grounded within a neo-realist economic reality of economic interconnectedness" (Kozaczuk, 2016, p. 10). Critical to her argument is the development of economic business elites playing a central role in counter-colonialist urban planning processes on behalf of an oppressed population. She noted how the Palestinian National BDS Committee denounced the project as undermining the Palestinian struggle for sovereignty by normalising relations with Israel, but counter-argued that although Masri and others involved with the project constitute the Palestinian new business elite, the project constitutes a critical economic force that makes Rawabi an embryonic dynamic in the Israeli-Palestinian neoliberal peacebuilding process.

Through a series of individual interviews, Rogan and Nassar (2020) explored the discursive stories of members of Masri's project team, including Masri, to understand how they view Rawabi and its potential impact on Palestinian identity. They discerned the dominant narrative to be that Rawabi is a city of building and hope. Though the construction of an entirely new city is the physical manifestation of this building narrative, its existence transcends its physical and structural presence. Symbolically, Rawabi is creating a new Palestinian identity and narrative, changing the image of Palestinians from that

of terrorists to peace-seeking, democratically minded builders of the future. Furthermore, they see Rawabi as altering the collective Palestinian identity as victims to that of being agents for their destiny.

These studies paint a picture of Rawabi as an economic and urban planning project that manifests both positive and negative attributes. But what do the individuals living and working in Rawabi say about it? How do they frame their perception of the city? Exploring these questions was the focus of this study. Toward this end, several focus group sessions were conducted with individuals living and working in Rawabi to uncover its meaning via the frames they use to describe the city.

Frames as Definitions of Reality

Given the broad-based application of framing theory to various communicative phenomena, it is no surprise that the construct of framing does not have a singular meaning but has been conceptualised in different ways according to its operationalisation within specific research domains (i.e., media framing, interpersonal communication, conflict interaction). While framing is often regarded as principally relevant to understanding how media constructs stories about the events upon which it reports (e.g., Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015; Cacciatore et al., 2016; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999), framing is also central to human communication pragmatics (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Framing was first introduced by Bateson (1972) who posited that human communication operates at multiple levels of abstraction. On one level exists messages about language itself. Bateson defined this form of communication as metalinguistic communication that functions to comment on language behaviour. The second level of abstraction involves the communicative devices (verbal and nonverbal) that convey a person's definition of an object, and which also comment on the nature of the relationship between interactants. This level constitutes meta-communication and is the essential focus of Bateson's notion of framing. For Bateson, communication functions as a map of meaning, where the map does not consist of those objects that it denotes but rather functions as a mechanism for guiding interaction and creating shared meaning. In this way, a frame is "…a class or set of messages (or meaningful actions)" (1972, p. 186) that provides clues about how interaction is to be understood and how to interpret the communicative acts within the specific context.

Building upon the work of Bateson, Goffman (1974) advanced a conceptualisation of framing whereby a frame is an element of organisation for defining a "strip of activity" (1974, p. 10). While frames are primarily socially constructed, they reflect individual intentions, cultural and historical understandings, and natural forces. Goffman differentiated between natural and social frames, defining the latter as frames that are subject to human control. Within this framework, Goffman identified primary frames as the principal definition functioning for a specific object or interaction. Yet primary frames are such complex entities that only certain aspects are brought into focus by keying (i.e., constructing a structural definition for an event (Goffman, 1981).

Tannen (1986, 1993) offered a sociolinguistic perspective on frames, which built upon the work of both Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974). According to Tannen (1993), frames are "structures of expectations" about the world and one's interactions within the social environment. More precisely, frames are cognitive structuring devices by which "…one organises knowledge about the world and uses this knowledge to predict interpretations and relationships regarding new information, events, and experiences" (p.16). Tannen (1993) argued that frames are manifest in linguistic and paralinguistic cues and function as meta-messages about human interaction. According to Tannen and Wallat (1993), frames function on multiple levels, from the broadest level of interaction context and activity "…to ideas about episodes and actions, to objects and people" (p. 41). They noted that terms such as schema, script, prototype, and have all been used to denote the frame concept. While generally regarded as individually constructed, frames can also be a result of a person's experiences in a specific socio-cultural context, thereby accounting for possible variability across cultures.

Most extant literature bifurcates frames into either negotiated definitions of meaning, which aligns most closely with Bateson's (1972) original conceptualisation, or as linguistic cues that function as representations of individual cognitive schemata (Dewulf et al., 2011; Putnam & Holmer, 1992). Interactionally frames are definitions negotiated by parties during interaction (Dewulf et al., 2011). As linguistic cues, frames are the devices by which individuals articulate their conceptualisations of themselves, another party, the interaction, or some issue (Dewulf et al., 2011).

In summation, a frame is a cognitive mechanism by which a person interprets and defines an interaction or an event. In this way, frames function as mechanisms for interpreting social interactions, yet frames are also linguistic devices reflecting expectations about specific animate and inanimate objects. Frames are, therefore, structures of definition, such as adjectives and adverbs that proceed, follow, or bookend other linguistic cues, while framing is the process by which individuals assign such meaning (Dewulf et al., 2011; Donohue et al., 2011; Gray, 2003).

The question informing this study is: How do Palestinians living and working in Rawabi frame what the city means to them?

Method

Context of the study

The study was conducted in the city of Rawabi which is situated in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, approximately nine kilometers north of Ramallah, in-between Jerusalem and Nablus.

Research design

In-person focus groups were conducted with six small groups of six or seven individuals living and working in Rawabi. Each session was guided by a set of pre-constructed questions with follow-up probing questions asked to obtain as full articulation as possible about the issue queried. The sessions averaged 50 minutes.

Participants

Participants were 37 persons of whom 21 were female. Other demographic information (e.g., age, education level, marital status) about the participants was not collected as this information was not deemed relevant to the study. All the participants were fluent in English allowing for the interviews to be conducted in English without translation. Participants were recruited and sessions were arranged by the Communications Coordinator for the City of Rawabi. Participants were permitted to decline participation in the study, thereby protecting the participants' ability to withdraw from the study.

Instrumentation

A slate of open-ended questions was reviewed and approved, without change or alteration, by the Communications Coordinator for Rawabi. The questions sought to explore individual perspectives on several aspects of the project, including specifically what Rawabi means to them and the potential implications of Rawabi for Palestinian – Israeli relations. It was within the context of broader conversations about Rawabi that the question of "What is Rawabi?" was explored.

Procedure of the Study

The researchers conducted the focus groups in a conference room of a business in Rawabi. Following a brief introduction, the researchers reviewed the consent document and answered any questions participants had about the study. Participants signed the consent document. The researchers began by asking the pre-set questions, followed by probing questions to explore the participants' comments. Upon completion of each session, the researchers thanked the participants for their involvement and answered any final questions. Interview recordings were downloaded onto the researchers' encrypted computer. The final recordings were reviewed to remove any personal information that could reveal the participants' identities.

Analysis

The audio recordings were transcribed by a professional transcribing service (Landmark Associates Inc. [LAI], https://www.thelai.com/). Once transcribed, a multi-step analysis was performed. First, the individual sessions were aggregated into a single .txt file and analysed using WMatrix (Rayson, 2008) to produce a word frequency report for the word "Rawabi" to determine its presence in the aggregate file (n=782). Briefly, WMatrix is a web-based corpus linguistic program that analyses the semantic content of text in three stages. The first step involves a part-of-speech tagger in which words in the text are categorised into a word type category (e.g., noun, verb, adverb, adjective). The second step assigns a semantic tag to every word in which semantically meaningful elements of the text are grouped into units such as names, places, expressions, and organisations. The third stage categorises each word and phrase according to a 21-item taxonomy of major semantic domains and 232 refined categories (Prentice et al., 2012). Once these steps are completed, Wmatrix counts the words, phrases, and semantic tags identified in the text.

Using Rawabi as the keyword, the second step involved the computation of a concordance analysis on the aggregate transcript to produce frame contextualisations. The concordance dimension was set at 180 characters (90 characters on both sides of the keyword Rawabi). This produced 782 frames for Rawabi. These concordance structures served as the macro units of analysis from which 63 words and word pairs describing Rawabi were then identified; typically denoted by the phrase: "Rawabi is…". These linguistic cues were evaluated for commonality of meaning to produce eight overarching thematic frames, including Capitalist, Economic Development, Hope, Inspiration, Quality of Life, Progressive, Resistance, and Social Change. Two reviewers coded each of the 63 words or word pairs into one of these frame categories. The reviewer percentage of agreement for the frame coding process was .95 with Cohen Kappa = .94. 19 of the original words were determined to be too general to be coded into one of the eight frames. Because of the direct linkage between the individual words and word pairs with the eight frames generated in the preceding step, each of the 782 concordance frame structures for Rawabi was directly coded as one of the eight frame categories, resulting in 782 frame codes.

Findings

Results for the individual frequency and aggregate percent of each frame are, in order from most frequent to least: Quality of Life: n = 177, 22.7% followed by Social Change: n = 136, 17.3%, Resistance: n =116, 14.8%, Hope: n = 110, 14.1%, Inspiration n = 110, 14.1%, Progressive n = 70, 9.0%, Economic Development n = 55, 7.0%, and Capitalist n = 7, 1.0%. centres.

Quality of Life

Participants were profusely positive in their comments concerning the overall quality of life offered in Rawabi. They noted how organised and planned the city is, with distinct residential areas with individualised neighbourhoods, bordered by green space and recreational/athletic space, clearly differentiated from commercial/business and entertainment areas. Comments about the city's infrastructure were common, with participants noting how they value and benefit from ubiquitous underground gas, water, and electricity networks, fibre-optic internet, well-constructed streets, buildings, and public areas. Many of their comments focused on the aesthetic quality of the city, and emphasised the absence of visual pollution, the presence of flowers, trees, uncrowded streets, and a commanding view of the surrounding countryside from essentially all parts of the city, because of its location on a hillside. Of note were comments about the absence of litter and trash in the city, an unusual condition in most Palestinian communities. The Rawabi English Academy School was specifically mentioned as a critical feature in helping to create a desirable and high quality of life in the city. A visit to the city or online viewing of some of the photos of the city reveals the aesthetic quality of Rawabi. Some sample comments include:

> *Rawabi is beautiful. Rawabi is nice; there is no visual pollution.*
> *Rawabi, it's planned, and organised, so you have proper infrastructure, you have nice sidewalks.*
> *We need to build and prepare for a better life; Palestinian infrastructure is poor, institutions are poor.*
> *Anybody can live in Rawabi, as well as anywhere, if he decides to live in Rawabi, he will follow a quality of life.*
> *The value of Rawabi is the quality.*
> *Rawabi is providing a safe place, peaceful, and organised.*
> *It's the only green space. Now, here in Rawabi, roses, flowers, plants, and trees are everywhere with a very amazing and unique landscape.*
> *Rawabi is a new, good-looking, organised city.*
> *Rawabi is the first organised Palestinian city that looks nice, it's beautiful.*

Social Change

The second most common frame was how the city and its construction are promoting social change within the broader Palestinian community, limited, however, mostly to the West Bank. Participants were effusive about how Rawabi promotes and accommodates new ideas and new ways of doing things uncharacteristic in Palestine. Participants commented on such things as Masri's focus on new technology employed in the construction of the city, as well as its central presence as a dominant source of employment in the form of the technology hub. Of particular note, participants were quite proud of how Rawabi is creating change for women in the workforce, specifically in engineering and construction. It was noted how it is a concerted purpose of Masri to ensure that over a third of the leadership roles are filled by women. Additionally, it was shared that Rawabi is changing the behaviour of Palestinians outside of Rawabi. For example, it was noted that because of the attention to trash pick-up and the absence of littering in Rawabi, visitors to Rawabi are returning to their home communities and changing their behaviour, and aspiring for cleaner cities. Some of the specific comments offered include:

> *Rawabi represents new ideas and new ways of doing things, never before seen in the West Bank.*
> *This is a traditional Eastern society. It's changing slowly, but because of Rawabi, it has changed rapidly, faster.*
> *Rawabi is a place that accommodates new things, and new ways of thinking.*
> *Rawabi is a newly built city, bringing new technology, new knowledge, and new everything.*
> *Bashar Masri believed that the female's percentage should be equal to the male.*
> *In Rawabi, we are reaching more than 30 percent of females on construction sites.*
> *Rawabi is the first thing that will change this culture.*
> *Actually, it's a new society. Rawabi, it's a new society.*
> *We are pioneers. Rawabi is the pioneer and the flagship*
> *One day, we have plenty of cities like Rawabi for our kids, in the future, to change the lifestyle that we have in this country.*

Resistance

Because of the longstanding political conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, manifested most dramatically by Israeli military dominance and control of the West Bank, the issue of occupation and the Palestinian struggle for an independent sovereign state was a significant topic discussed during the group sessions. Participants primarily framed Rawabi as an act of resistance to Israeli presence. They tended to define Rawabi as an act of resistance merely by existing, by saving lands from Israeli settlement construction and expansion, creating jobs for Palestinians, and building homes. In other words, because Rawabi exists, it is a fact on the ground that cannot be ignored or denied. Yet, the perspective of resistance is viewed as something positive, peaceful, non-violent, and building as

opposed to destruction in the form of violent conflict. While functioning as an act of resistance to Israeli occupation, simply by existing, Rawabi is commonly regarded as a national state-building endeavour. Thus, while it is a brick-and-mortar construction initiative, participants define it more broadly as a significant form of resistance and ultimately as state-building. Some of the comments offered include:

> *Its state-building.*
> *Rawabi is resisting in a different way. Resistance does not have to be armed resistance. You can resist by saving the lands.*
> *Rawabi is resisting by creating jobs.*
> *We are resisting by building homes for Palestinians.*
> *Rawabi is here, building our own state because Rawabi is also if you want to call it, resistance.*
> *Just being a fact on the ground is a success.*
> *Rawabi. I believe it's something great for us as Palestinians, for our state-building.*
> *Rawabi is a type of existence on our land.*
> *Rawabi, it's an addition to the West Bank, so I think it's a national project.*
> *I think Rawabi is or is trying to change the whole concept of the occupation.*
> *I see Rawabi as a pilot state-building project.*
> *Rawabi exists, we exist.*

Hope

The emphasis on Rawabi as hope was another dominant frame theme throughout the sessions. Because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, manifested by uprisings, conflagrations, and reprisals over nearly a century, the opportunity for Palestinians to be hopeful about their future is grim. Political instability and conflict within the Palestinian political entities, along with issues of corruption and fiscal mismanagement over the decades have caused most Palestinians to be less than hopeful about their prospects for a stable, secure, and peaceful existence. Yet, somehow Rawabi has sprung forth in the Palestinian countryside and is offering hope.

As noted earlier, sadly the PA has failed to provide promised financial support for the city project. Yet, Rawabi is being built. For the participants, it shows that Palestinians are striving to build their future, regardless of the myriad hardships and challenges that beset them. For many, Rawabi is not only a new city, it is a new future; it's a vision for the future and it is offering hope for that future. And, the school is viewed as a significant part of that hope as it strives to educate students to build a positive future. Some sample comments include:

> *Rawabi came out of nowhere like a spring.*
> *Rawabi is creating, showing that Palestinians want to live, want to contribute.*
> *Rawabi is great, Rawabi will have people investing in the future.*
> *To say it bluntly, Rawabi gives hope for the Palestinian community.*
> *Rawabi is not only a new city. It's a new reality for our people, a new future.*
> *The way I see Rawabi in Palestine, I see it as hope, as a vision of the future.*
> *That's how I saw Rawabi. Its progress. It's a new vision. It's a new community.*
> *The idea is that Rawabi is the hope.*
> *Rawabi is the future of Palestine.*
> *Rawabi, I think I can describe it that the city of the future.*

Inspiration

Along with offering hope for a brighter future, Rawabi is widely defined as inspirational. Participants framed their perspective of Rawabi as inspirational in terms of it being a history-making project; transforming extant Palestinian society into a modern existence. Most regard its simple presence and level of completion to date as a grand success. The construction practices, design, infrastructure, and environmentally sustainable practices are inspiring residents and community leaders in other cities to adopt some of Rawabi's innovations. In this way, it is raising expectations within the broader Palestinian

society of how they can live their lives. Since the city is being built by Palestinians, with minimal external assistance, it is causing Palestinians to be proud of themselves by empowering them in believing in what Palestinians can do for themselves. In other words, Rawabi is empowering and offering a sense of agency that disrupts an all-too-often narrative of Palestinians being agentless victims and engaged only in destruction and violence. Participants commented on how Rawabi is highlighting a true image of Palestinians as builders, who only desire freedom and peace.

Two specific features of the city that participants noted as inspirational include the Rawabi English Academy (REA) and the number of women in key positions in the city. Participants commented on how the internationally grounded curriculum and co-ed nature of the school, along with the visible presence of women in leadership roles in Rawabi are mutually reinforcing and function as inspirational models for young Palestinian girls. Quite simply, respondents are proud of being Palestinian, of all that Rawabi is creating, and inspired by its present level of success. Some of the key comments offered include:

> *Inspiration, the word is inspired.*
> *Yeah, Rawabi is inspiring people, other cities, other mayors, and municipalities.*
> *Rawabi is showing the other face of Palestine. The real face of Palestine.*
> *Rawabi is showing us that we are people full of life. We want freedom. We want peace.*
> *Rawabi is already a success.*
> *Rawabi is history in the making.*
> *Rawabi was a dream of Mr. Masri, but now it's a dream for everyone.*
> *Rawabi, this is a newer Palestine.*
> *One of the really good things from Rawabi is that philosophy of giving young girls an opportunity to shine.*
> *Number one, Palestinians come here and they look at Rawabi and they're like, Wow! This is for us?*
> *Their fellow citizens, it's their neighbours, it's their classmate that is building Rawabi and there is a great sense of pride.*
> *Okay, so, it's raising expectations of what Palestine should be or could be.*
> *Rawabi, Palestinians deserve to live, and this is what I like.*

Progressive

In addition to providing residents and workers with a pleasant and positive environment in which to work and live, participants commented on how Rawabi is creating a progressive and international community. Being an entirely new city, people from throughout the West Bank, and the world, are moving to Rawabi. In the respondents' minds, this is serving to create a tolerant, liberal, secular, and international city. Participants noted how the city is open and welcoming to people from different backgrounds and with different beliefs and perspectives. The role of the school, women's leaders, the tech centre, a mosque and church, and the various retail businesses are helping to create this progressive community. While this is defined as a consequence of the project itself, this type of community is the direct result of Masri's intended plan for the city. He is described as seeking to create an open, secular, liberal, and progressive democratically managed city that models for the rest of Palestine, and is the critical foundation for building a future Palestinian state. Some of the comments offered include:

> *Rawabi is open, it's tolerant, it's liberal*
> *It's going to be open for all different perspectives, all different backgrounds.*
> *Rawabi is a modern international way of doing things.*
> *By coming to Rawabi, you are part of something which is new.*
> *Some people have moved to Rawabi for the school.*
> *Rawabi is very modern, and unique.*

Economic Development

Although it was not a dominant frame, Rawabi as economic development was widely conveyed by the participants. The creation of thousands of well-paying jobs, both in the construction of the city itself and in working in the numerous businesses in the city is viewed as an exceptionally meaningful economic opportunity for Palestine. The bulk of the funding for the building of the city is coming from Masri himself and the State of Qatar, with very little international assistance. It is impacting the broader Palestinian economy and society by reducing the level of unemployment, creating jobs for young college graduates in the tech centre, and demonstrating what Palestinians can do for themselves in creating a sustainable economic foundation for a future independent state. Some of the specific comments include:

> *It's not just a commercial project, it's a development project.*
> *The development of Rawabi Tech Hub is making Rawabi the first Palestinian business cluster, specialising in IT.*
> *When we do projects like Rawabi, we reduce the unemployment rate.*
> *All the vendors of Rawabi are local contractors and local engineers.*
> *Everyone that built Rawabi is from West Bank.*
> *I guess Rawabi is the biggest project ever in Palestine, budget-wise.*
> *Rawabi creates thousands of jobs.*
> *Rawabi fits right into the economy part. That's the main goal of Rawabi.*
> *Rawabi will have a massive impact on the economy.*
> *If you look at it in terms of job creation, Rawabi creates an average of 10,000 direct and indirect jobs over a 12-year period.*

Capitalist

Finally, the capitalist frame was something noted from participants' comments regarding some of the opposing perspectives about Rawabi. Specifically, respondents noted how some Palestinians view Rawabi as a place only for affluent individuals. The homes in the city are often seen as too expensive for most families and the retail shops cater only to high-end shoppers. Some international critics have labelled the city as a capitalist denial of the true Palestinian plight serving only to benefit Masri and his fellow business associates. The participants noted, however, that the cost of living in Rawabi is lower than in Ramallah. They further commented that it is often the case that once people visit Rawabi and explore what it offers that they change their minds and become fans and supporters of the city. They further noted that some people will always despise and be critical of the project for their political interests and ideology. Yet for the participants, this denigration of Rawabi is regarded as denying Palestinians the life and future that they deserve for some esoteric future political ends. They want to pursue their future of building an economically viable and politically stable state now. Some of the few comments offered include:

> *Do you look at it if you are socialist or Marxist, of course, you can be against Rawabi because it's a capitalist project.*
> *Yes. Rawabi is an entrepreneur project, which is huge.*
> *Rawabi, it's is all expensive shops.*
> *Can we say rich people come to Rawabi?*
> *They see Rawabi as a capitalist, ugly-rich people.*

Discussion

So how do Palestinians living and working in Rawabi frame the city-building project? On the most basic instrumental level, Rawabi is a private-sector urban development project. As Nassar (2016) concluded, Rawabi is a multi-dimensional initiative undertaken with the intent to alleviate some of the growing demand for suitable housing in the West Bank; to create an entertainment, recreation, retail, employment, and educational destination for Palestinians; and to be the first-ever completely new Palestinian city built in the West Bank.

Because of the planned design of the city, along with the high quality of construction and innovative environmentally sustainable practices, Rawabi is creating a quality of life for Palestinians that compares favourably to other modern Middle East cities and which is completely new to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. At the most basic level, Rawabi is a major economic development project that is helping to redress some of the pressing economic issues currently challenging the Palestinian people. More broadly, the city also serves as a model of how Palestinians can live and is raising expectations about the aesthetic aspects of their communities. Equally important, it is influencing change within the broader Palestinian community by offering a progressive and modern lifestyle that embraces tolerance, secularism, and equal opportunities for women. Taken together, Rawabi is deemed to be the Palestinian city of the future.

Yet Rawabi is much more than the instrumental physical attributes of clean streets, well-organised neighbourhoods, clear delineations between residential and commercial/retail activities, and a bustling centre city. Rawabi can also be described as an existential phenomenon that is constructing a potentially new future for Palestinians. Symbolically, and perhaps most notably, Rawabi is actively offering hope and inspiration to Palestinians about their agency and their future. In fact, if the two frames of Hope and Inspiration are merged, the singular frame accounts for more than 28% of the frame codings. On one level, Rawabi is reframing the international image of Palestinians from one of being interested only in killing and destroying to that of progressive, democratically-minded builders of the future. On another, equally critical level, Rawabi is helping to construct a new sense of identity among Palestinians themselves. Just as Masri is building an entire physical city, his project is constructing a new Palestinian identity and narrative.

According to Susser (2012), Palestinian identity has long been grounded in the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe) during which Palestinians experienced a loss of homes and land, military defeat, and exile as refugees. These early events, combined with the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank following the 1967 war (Said Aly et al., 2013), have come to define Palestinian identity as one of victimisation (Ellis, 2015; Khalidi, 1997; Malek & Hoke, 2014; Susser, 2012). This identity narrative is often noted as the essential determining factor for the current living conditions in the Palestinian Territories (Mana et al., 2015; Romirowsky, 2017; Susser, 2012). Rawabi threatens to undermine this narrative and the supporting collective identity as it inspires Palestinians to be active agents for their future by reframing them as builders of their future.

Rawabi is also seen as contributing to the ultimate creation of an autonomous Palestinian state. With the creation of construction jobs, as well as the myriad other new job opportunities in the various administrative, service, and commercial dimensions of the city, Rawabi is helping to create a vibrant economic base for the aspirational state. Simply by existing and achieving success, Rawabi is advancing the Palestinian cause for independence and sovereignty. The city's existence in the contested West Bank is a significant form of resistance to Israeli control. It is a bold Palestinian relational power frame about their hopes, dreams, and claims for their future country.

It is widely understood that frames are linguistic representations of perception and consequently serve to structure and define reality (Dewulf et al., 2011; Donohue, et al., 2011; Watzlawick et al., 1967). As a result of our investigation of the frames that residents and workers in Rawabi use to define their perception of the city, we gained insight into how they define the reality of the project and its impact on them as a collective people. It is from these definitions that we witness the emergence of a new identity and narrative for the Palestinian people as builders for the future, as existing and resisting, imbued with hope and optimism, and most importantly, as agents for their fate.

Limitations and Future Research

The use of only 37 persons in six focus groups provides a very limited perspective of opinions about Rawabi. The fact that the participants were all residents or day workers in the city further potentially skews the findings in a positive direction since they are in some way directly involved in the city-building initiative. As such, they likely have a vested interest in seeing the project succeed for their personal and professional interest. Consequently, future research should seek to explore the opinions and attitudes of other Palestinians not directly involved in the daily functioning of the city. A more diverse corpus of opinions about Rawabi is essential in gleaning a more comprehensive sense of the

average Palestinian's thoughts regarding the project. One option would be to explore social media posts about the city to discern what the broader Palestinian community thinks about Rawabi.

Conclusion

Rawabi means different things to different people, but to those living and working in Rawabi, it is a city that is creating hope for a better future for themselves, their families, and their fellow Palestinians. It offers a modern and progressive lifestyle with a focus on the future. It is creating social change and opportunities for women and young girls that are mostly unique to Palestine. It is changing how Palestinians are viewed by others and how they see themselves. It is creating a new narrative of Palestinian self-agency. In toto, it is an expression of their continued existence and resiliency.

Despite the lack of active engagement by the PA, Masri is moving forward with his vision. Will Masri and Rawabi succeed? Will it positively impact Israeli – Palestinian relations in a way that benefits Palestinians and helps to secure peace? Will it ultimately help Palestinians to secure an independent sovereign nation of their own? That is what we have to wait and see.

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

References

Ardèvol-Abreu, A. (2015). Framing theory in communication research: Origins, development and current situation in Spain. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, *70*, 423–450. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2015-1053en

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Ballantine Books.

Cacciatore, M. A., Scheufele, D. A., & Iyengar, S. (2016). The end of framing as we know it … and the future of media effects. *Mass Communication and Society, 19*(1), 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1068811

Delia, J. G., O'Keefe, B. J., & O'Keefe, D. J. (1982). The constructivist approach to communication. In F. E. X. Dance (Ed.), *Human communication theory: Comparative essays* (pp. 147–191). Harper & Row.

Dewulf, A., Gray, B. Putnam, L., & Bouwen, R. (2011). An interactional approach to framing in conflict and negotiation. In W. A. Donohue, R. G. Rogan & S. Kaufman (Eds.), *Framing matters: Perspectives on negotiation research and practice in communication* (pp. 7–33). Peter Lang.

Donohue, W. A., Rogan, R. G., & Kaufmann, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Framing matters: Perspectives onnegotiation research and practice in communication.* Peter Lang.

Ellis, D. G. (2015). *Fierce entanglements: Communication and ethnopolitical conflict.* Peter Lang.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4)*,* 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Fisher, B. A. (1978). *Perspectives on human communication*. Macmillan.

Fisher, W. R. (1987). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action*. University of South Carolina Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. *The interpretation of cultures* (pp. 3–32). Basic Books.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Grandinetti, T. (2015). The Palestinian middle class in Rawabi: Depoliticizing the occupation. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political, 40*(1), 63–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375415581259

Gray, B. (2003). Framing of environmental disputes. In R. J. Lewicki, B. Gray & M. Elliott (Eds.), *Making sense of intractable environmental conflicts: Frames and cases* (pp. 11–34). Island Press.

Gvirtzman, H. (2014). *The truth behind the Palestinian water libels* (BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 238). Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. http://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/perspectives238.pdf

Halverson, J. R., Goodall, H. L., & Corman, S. R. (2011). *Master narratives of Islamist extremism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Khalidi, R. (1997). *Palestinian identity: The construction of modern national consciousness*. Columbia University Press.

Kozaczuk, D. (2015). *The hegemonic ideal of neoliberal space of peace: Rawabi, Palestine, a case study* [Masters's thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London]. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286035297

Malek, C., & Hoke, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Palestine speaks: Narratives of life under occupation*. McSweeney's Books.

Mana, A., Sagy, S. Srour, A., & Mjally-Knani, S. (2015). On both sides of the fence: Perceptions of collective narratives and identity strategies among Palestinians in Israel and in the West Bank. *Mind & Society, 14*, 57–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11299-014-0159-3

Nassar, J. (2016). *The context of urban planning in the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence under Israeli*

colonization [Master's thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, England].

New City of Rawabi gets connected to water supply. (2015, March 6). The Economist. https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1542938938&Country=Palestine&topic=Economy&subtopi_2

Prentice, S., Taylor, P. J., Rayson, P., & Giebels, E. (2012). Differentiating act from ideology: Evidence from messages for and against violent extremism. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 5*(3), 289–306. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-4716.2012.00103.x

Putnam, L. L., & Holmer, M. (1992). Framing, reframing, and issue development. In L. L. Putnam & M. E. Roloff (Eds.), *Communication and negotiation* (pp. 128–155). Sage.

Rawabi Foundation. (n.d.). Rawabi. https://www.rawabi.ps/en/about-foundation

Rayson, P. (2008). From keywords to key semantic domains. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, 13*(4), 519–549. https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.13.4.06ray

Reguly, E. (2016, March 18). *Rawabi: A city of dreams for hopeful Palestinians*. The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/rawabi-take-a-look-inside-the-city-of-palestiniansdreams/article29287005/

Rogan, R. G., & Nassar, J. (2020). Rawabi: The Palestinian city for the future. In O'Hair, M. J., O'Hair, H. D., Geegan, S., & Hester, E. B. (Eds.), *Applied communication research: An engaging process* (pp. 747–764). Wiley-Blackwell.

Romirowsky, A. (2017, October 7). *How Palestine "occupies" itself* (BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 606). Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/palestine-occupation-strategy/

Said Aly, A. M., Feldman, S., & Shikaki, K. (2013). *Arabs and Israelis: Conflict and peacemaking in the Middle East.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Scham, P. L. (2006). The historical narratives of Israelis and Palestinians and the peacemaking process. *Israel Studies Forum, 21*(2), 58–84. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41804951

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, *49*(1)*,* 103–122. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x

Segel, A. I., Agrawal, S., Brandt, N., Kuhagen, D., Reithinger, T., & Eiran, M. (2016). *Rawabi* [Unpublished manuscript]. Harvard Business School, Cambridge, MA.

Siegel, S. M. (2015). *Let there be water: Israel's solution for a water-starved world*. Thomas Dunne Books.

Susser, A. (2012). *Israel, Jordan, and Palestine: The two-state imperative*. Brandeis University Press.

Tannen, D. (1986). *That's not what I meant!: How conversational style makes or breaks your relations with others*. William Morrow & Company.

Tannen, D. (1993). What's in a frame?: Surface evidence for underlying expectations. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Framing in discourse* (pp. 14–56). Oxford University Press.

Tannen, D., & Wallat, C. (1993). Interactive frames and knowledge schemas in interaction: Examples from a medical examination/interview. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Framing in discourse* (pp. 57–76). Oxford University Press.

United Nations. (2010). *The human right to water and sanitation*. http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf

Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. H., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. W. W. Norton.