Depoliticizing the Palestine Question through the Defunding of UNRWA:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Trump Administration on the defunding of UNRWA.

Word count: 19,703

Silke De Pauw

Student number: 01713820

Supervisor: Dr. Sigrid Vertommen

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Conflict and Development Studies

Academic year: 2020 – 2021

Deze pagina is niet beschikbaar omdat ze persoonsgegevens bevat.
Universiteitsbibliotheek Gent, 2022.

This page is not available because it contains personal information.
Ghent University, Library, 2022.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This master's dissertation starts from the research question: 'How does the Trump Administration legitimize its decision to quit funding UNRWA, and which tensions in humanitarianism does this decision bring to the front?'. This question intends to study the specific case study of the Trump Administration's decision to cut funding for UNRWA within the wider debate on humanitarianism, which is very dominant in the social sciences' academic world. The aim is to find an answer to this question through a Discourse-Historical Analysis of texts released by the Trump Administration, which includes a critical historicized and politicized analysis. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that keeping humanitarianism alive would be beneficial in the eyes of the US as it creates passive victims, who would not be able to oppose the Middle East Peace Deal. But it would have to be removed from the framework of UNRWA, to do away with the feelings of national identity and political agency UNRWA creates and reiterates.

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

Acronyms and abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DHA	Discourse-Historical Analysis/Approach
ESM	Economic Survey Mission
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
oPt	occupied Palestinian territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
UN	United Nations
UNCCP	United Nations Conciliation Commission on Palestine
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
U.S.	United States of America

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

Table of Contents

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

On the 31st of August, 2018, Heather Nauert, the former Spokesperson for the United States (U.S.) Department of State, announced that the U.S. would completely cut funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). This followed the already restricted funding of $60 million for 2018 (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019; Nauert, 2018). It is clear that the U.S. uses the withholding of funding as a means of pressure to overhaul UNRWA in an attempt to reach their desired version of peace in the Middle East (Espín Ocampo, Moreno Melgarejo, & Navarro Zapata, 2020; Irfan, 2019; Yahaya, 2020). However, UNRWA and the Palestine Question are two very complex givens that cannot just be overhauled by any desire the U.S. may have. There are multiple actors involved, such as Israel, Palestine, the host countries, and the European Union, and the Agency has an impact on over 5 million refugees in the Middle East ("United Nations Reli. Work. Agency Palest. Refug. Near East," 2020). One can imagine how many and what kind of repercussions this decision may have.

This research started from an interest in a specific field of tension in humanitarianism, but more specifically in UNRWA. Existing literature has pointed out that on the one hand, Palestinian refugees need UNRWA and the United Nations for the recognition of their refugee status and their right of return ("194 (III). Palestine -- Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator," 1948). But on the other hand, the existence of UNRWA as a humanitarian organization may contribute to the creation of victimhood and the denial of the agency and self-determination of the colonized Palestinians, (Tabar, 2016). This can partly be blamed on the developmental paradigm which is adopted within humanitarian aid. This paradigm focuses more on neoliberal textbook solutions to 'underdevelopment', such as economic development and the development of institutions and laws. Not taking into account what caused this situation of 'underdevelopment' in the first place. It is also important not to forget that current day humanitarianism flows out of a long history of colonial practice and thought that still has its repercussions on humanitarian organizations' working ethics (Skinner & Lester, 2012). This research, however, follows authors such as Tabar (2016) and Feldman (2012b) who analyze the Palestine Question from a settler colonial point of view, taking into account the long history of Zionist settler colonial practices which forcibly expelled many Palestinians from their homeland. Instead of analyzing the Trump Administration's moves from a developmental paradigm, the starting point is thus to analyze it from a more historicized, settler colonial point of view.

The aim of this research is to find a connection between these two opposing characteristics in the specific case study of the Trump Administration's new way of going around the Palestine Question and cutting funding to UNRWA. To guide this research, the question that has been formulated is: 'How does the Trump Administration legitimize its decision to quit funding UNRWA, and which tensions in humanitarianism does this decision bring to the front?'. To find an answer to this question I took a closer look at how the Trump Administration frames UNRWA, Palestine, Israel, and itself in its discourses. Next to this, I also looked at which specific tensions in power relations and solutions this specific framing made prominent and how it impacts Palestinian refugeehood.

The amount of research related to humanitarianism is already big and there are multiple studies on humanitarianism that start from a settler colonial viewpoint. These are thus the starting point of the literature review. The Trump Administration's decisions, however, have been mainly studied in their effects on the Agency itself and its beneficiaries. Consisting out of rather monotonous cause and effect studies thus. The amount of research on this topic is also on the lower side, as it is still very recent, even though his presidency is normally coming to an end coming January. This research thus aims to offer a different perspective by analyzing the more conceptual level of humanitarianism and its linkages with the current strategy of the U.S. under Trump. Bringing the two together and situating Trump's decision within the debate on humanitarianism is something that has not been done yet, and I hope to be able to offer new insights by doing this.

In the first part of this dissertation, I will delve deeper into the existing literature. This literature review is roughly divided into four parts, which are all necessary to build a contextual background for the empirical research. The first chapter will give a short historical overview of the origins of the Palestinian refugee crisis. The second chapter will give a theoretical explanation and historical overview of UNRWA, with its characteristics and difficulties. The third chapter goes deeper into the debate on humanitarianism, outlining, for example, its positive and negative consequences. The last chapter in the literature review will touch upon the turn in handling the Palestine Question under the Trump Administration and its decision to cut funding for UNRWA. The literature review will end with a short conclusion that brings these different topics together to formulate the hypotheses and a transition towards the empirical research.

The second part is a theoretical explanation of the research methodology that has been chosen for the empirical research. In order to analyze the Trump Administration's discourse, I have chosen for a Critical Discourse Analysis from a Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). This approach analyzes four levels from a critical point of view, being: text, discursive practice, social practice, and history.

To formulate a thorough and critical analysis, these last two steps are indispensable. This chapter thus explains DHA and why I have chosen it for this specific type of research. Following the approach, this chapter also includes the research object, being press releases and Congress Bills from the Trump Administration, and the research framework, which explains how the findings were coded and includes an overview of these different codes.

The empirical findings are discussed in the third part. The information that was gathered during the DHA is critically analyzed using the existing literature reviewed in the first part of this dissertation, to attempt to answer the research question. This information is then forged into a comprehensive conclusion. The conclusion includes a discussion of the research based on the research question, a critical reflection, and a discussion on the necessity of further research and future possibilities.

2. Literature Review

2.1.   Epistemology

First and foremost, it is necessary to take a closer look at how the Palestine Question is being reproduced today. "The way the 'story' of the Arab-Israeli conflict is told depends on the perspective of the storyteller" (Isacoff, 2005, p.71). This quotation is central to any discussion related to the Palestine Question, and as such also central in this dissertation. It is not the goal of this dissertation to present the reader with a right or wrong. Rather, the goal is to present a critical analysis of one specific storyteller, being the Trump Administration, keeping in mind that certain understandings can be represented more truthfully than others.

This dissertation starts from a settler colonial paradigm, which necessitates the replacement of the indigenous population by the settler population, as happened in the United States. Settler colonialism requires the expulsion or extermination of the majority of the indigenous population, after which the settlers swamp the native territories. This is different from colonialism, in that in colonial formations the aim is to dominate and control indigenous populations and rule them from a metropolitan center (Veracini, 2013). Such as, for example, Belgium did in Congo. The settler colonial paradigm starts from a political angle, taking into account the political history of Palestine and Israel.

Within Palestinian development studies, this paradigm has been replaced by what is considered as a more depoliticized analysis, that could deliver textbook solutions. Popular topics included the improvement of institutions and laws, improvement of Palestinian's quality of life, and their personal development. However, this analysis does not question or challenge the ongoing occupation and continuously expanding settler colonialism, and extracts human compassion from the analysis. Humanitarian practice starts from this point of view, from the idea in international humanitarian and development practice, that humanitarian actors have to remain politically impartial and neutral. The mainstream neoliberal idea of development entails that if a country follows the specific steps laid out for them by institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, they will reach economic growth, and ultimately development. This, however, completely disintegrates the Palestine Question from the political situation and conflict (Khalidi, 2016). This is why Khalidi (2016) argues for the integration of Palestinian development studies in the wider perspective of settler colonial studies, reinstituting Palestinian agency, and links it to the influence neoliberalism has had on Palestinian resistance. The majority of the authors referred to in this literature review start from this particular point of view.

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

2.2.   The Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Crisis

Before going deeper into the main topic of this dissertation, namely UNRWA, it is necessary to take a closer look at what exactly has prompted its creation. The literature on UNRWA cannot be separated from the history of the Palestine Question and the refugee problem it has created.

In *The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel, and the Occupation* (2013), Lorenzo Veracini argues that instead of a border dispute, the conflict has to be understood as primarily driven by colonial forms, more specifically settler colonial ones. Whereas many situate the start of the conflict simultaneously with the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the history of the Zionist project goes further back to the end of the 19th Century.

The Palestinian territory has been inhabited by numerous peoples throughout the centuries. Towards the end of the second millennium, it was predominantly inhabited by Hebrews or Jews, up until the Romans invaded in 63 BCE and exiled the majority of the Jewish Population around 130 BCE. Many years later, and after sequential invasions of Persians, Arabs, Turks, etc, at the beginning of the 19th C. the population consisted of approximately 175.000 to 300.000 people. The majority of the population, around 90%, were Muslim Arabs, around 20.000 to 30.000 were Christian Arabs, and around 7.000 to 10.000 were Jews. In 1881, right before the start of the Zionist influx into Palestine, the population had increased to 457.000, with about 400.000 Muslims, 42.000 Christians, and only 13.000 to 20.000 Jews. Back then, the Jewish population was largely poor and submissive to the authorities. The increasing antisemitism in Europe also had its repercussions in the Middle East (Morris, 1999).

In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte, in an attempt to find allies to defeat the Ottomans and establish a French presence in the Middle East, offered Palestine to the Jews as a homeland. Yet, he was ultimately defeated and the plans could not go through. However, this did not mean the Jews were about to forget about it. The plan was revived by the British, and with the help of some wealthy benefactors, Jewish migration to Palestine started to increase. In the early 1880s one of these wealthy benefactors, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, became one of the biggest sponsors and helped to establish 30 settlements, the most important one being Rishon Le Zion. This has been called the First Aliyah, which means 'ascension' or the first wave of immigration to Palestine. In 1885, Nathan Birnaum coined the term Zionism, which is derived from the Jewish name for Jerusalem: 'Zion'. In 1896, Theodor Herzl, seen as the father of modern Zionism, published a book called *The Jewish State*, in which he envisioned an independent Jewish State in the future. From the beginning on, Herzl's wish was to gently expropriate the Palestinian population across the border by providing employment opportunities in neighboring countries. However, he kept these

ideas for himself and did not talk about them publicly (Morris, 1999; "Timeline of Palestine's History," n.d.).

The flourishing of Zionism, the Jewish wish to return to, and have sovereignty in, Eretz Yisrael, was enhanced by the increasing antisemitic sentiment and flourishing nationalist ideologies in 19th Century Europe (Moshe, 2002). In an attempt to subsidize his project, Herzl turned to many Western leaders, who initially did not budge. However, in 1907, then British Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman, proposed to establish a buffer-state in Palestine. For Britain, this was more an attempt to divide the region to assure its imperial dominance. The Jewish National Fund bought up Palestinian land in the Marj Bin Amer region and expelled approximately 60.000 Palestinians. World War I created new opportunities for Europe to reform the Middle East. The British favored the Zionist Organization as a partner and attempted to obtain the territory of Palestine. The secret British-French Sykes-Picot Agreement accelerated the establishment of a Jewish State on Palestinian territory. In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Balfour wrote a letter to Lord Walter Rothschild, who lobbied for the Jews in Britain, with a pledge to establish the Jewish homeland in Palestine. This pledge, also called the 'Balfour Declaration', is still considered to be both immoral and illegal, as Britain had no moral, political, nor legal rights to pledge other peoples' lands to the Jews. In 1920, Herbert Samuel, a fervent Zionist was appointed as the first British High Commissioner for Palestine and in 1922 the League of Nations ratified British rule over Palestine ("The Legal Status of the West Bank and Gaza," 1982; "Timeline of Palestine's History," n.d.). The British Mandate document stated that "the British Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under political, administrative and economic conditions that will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home" (Mandate for Palestine, 1922).

More and more Jews immigrated to what was now called Mandatory Palestine, and more and more settlements were being built. From 4.000 migrating Jews in 1931, the number jumped to 62.000 in 1935. This, logically, led to increasing resistance from the Arab side. Which, in its turn, led to brutal repression by the British and the expulsion of Palestinians from their land. In 1936, Palestinians went on strike for six months, to protest continued Jewish immigration. Tensions between the British authorities and Palestinians continued to lead to revolts and in turn violent suppression. The Palestinian revolt lasted until 1939 when the British held a conference to debate the partition of Palestine. However, this conference failed to bring peace to Palestine and in 1940 the world was again at war. Britain decided to put limitations on Jewish migration to Palestine, which was met with resistance of the Jews, who now turned to the U.S. for future support, a relationship which is

GHENT UNIVERSITY

still strong today, as I will discuss later on. After much turmoil, in 1947, Britain decided to turn over its Mandate in Palestine to the United Nations ("Timeline of Palestine's History," n.d.).

In 1947, the UN devised a plan for the division of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state. In which the Jewish state would acquire 56% of the land (see figure 1). Not only the Palestinians objected to this plan, but the Arab League was also preparing a pan-Arab Liberation Army to support the Palestinians in nullifying the UN Partition Plan, as well as to eliminate Zionism. At the same time, Palestinian militia attacked Jewish towns and villages, which led to the outbreak of a civil war. When the State of Israel was proclaimed, on May 14, 1948, the civil war turned into a full-blown Arab-Israeli war. Eventually, the Arab armies and Palestinian militias were defeated and Israel occupied more land than it would have had received under the UN Partition Plan. This led to what the Palestinians call the Nakba, or great disaster, as half of the Palestinian community was exiled from or fled Palestine and became refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (Moshe, 2002; "Timeline of Palestine's History," n.d.).

Figure 1. UN Partition Plan 1947, United Nations.

This historical analysis from before 1948 shows that the Palestine Question started much earlier than the 1948 war. From a settler colonial point of view, you can see how Zionist ideas and actions have attempted to expropriate Palestinians from their land for decades and replace them with Jewish settlers. Carried out with the help of Western powers such as Great Britain and the United States of America. This strategy has led to the creation of millions of Palestinian refugees who now have to be protected by UNRWA.

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

2.3. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency

This chapter will give a concise overview of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It will touch upon how it came into existence, its main characteristics, and some difficulties it has encountered in its seventy years of operation.

2.3.1. Historical & Political Context

First, we need to go back to the time before UNRWA was created. After the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 194 (III) established the UN Conciliation Commission on Palestine (UNCCP). This body existed out of the U.S., France, and Turkey and aimed to find a durable solution to the Palestine Question, together with the local governments and authorities. In the meantime, the Commission also had to protect the Palestinian refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019; Rempel, 2000). The UNCCP, together with the government of the U.S., tried to put pressure on Israel to take back approximately 250.000 refugees. This would be in return for the Arab nations, to which many Palestinians had fled, to take in the rest of the refugees. However, Israel only showed a willingness to take in 100.000, which the UNCCP found too little. Rallying support from the international community to advocate for the Palestinian cause seemed to be harder than expected, and many nations almost immediately lost interest. This is why the UNCCP founded the UN Economic Survey Mission (ESM), which was mandated to investigate the economic condition of the countries which were affected by the crisis of Palestinian refugees. Rather than focusing on the right of return to Palestine, the ESM focused on the reintegration of Palestinian refugees in the social and economic life of the Arab host countries. While the commitment to the right of return was not gone, this clearly showcased a shift in the international community's approach towards Palestinian refugees. Together with a focus on reintegration, the UNCCP adopted a developmental approach to the Palestine Question. In this light, UNRWA was created (Rosenfeld, 2010).

UNRWA came into existence on December 9th, 1949, following United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 302(IV), and started its operations in May 1950 (Bocco, 2010). The UN pushed for its creation with UNGA Resolution 302 (IV), because of the failure of the international community in implementing UNGA Resolution 194 (III) Paragraph 11. Paragraph 11 emphasizes the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes or the right of compensation in cases in which it is not possible to return or if their property was damaged. ("194 (III). Palestine -- Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator," 1948; Rosenfeld, 2010).

UNGA Resolution 194 (III):

Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible

UNGA Resolution 302(IV) describes UNRWA's mandate as "(a) To carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission; (b) To consult with the interested Near Eastern Governments concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available" ("302 (IV). Assistance to Palestine Refugees," 1949). In May 1950, UNRWA had to take over the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of the Red Cross Societies, and the American Friends Service Committee their mandate to carry out emergency relief for the Palestinian refugees. Next to this, UNRWA was also instructed to carry out works programs supporting the economic reintegration of the refugees (Bocco, 2010; Suleiman, 2018). Both of these mandates are clearly present in its name. It was envisioned that UNRWA would evolve quickly from a relief organization into a rehabilitation and (economic and social) reintegration organization. However, UNRWA reports largely focused on the refugee reality, dire living conditions of Palestinian refugees, and the lack of employment opportunities. They concluded that these conditions would make economic reintegration hard to achieve. This is why they requested to continue their relief assistance. The grand public works and development programs did not seem to work in reality, as they were too costly and were opposed by many refugees themselves (which will be touched upon later on). However, in the 1950s UNRWA officials did hold on to the constructivist developmental approach and tried to increase funds supporting these projects. But from the start on, UNRWA has continuously faced budgetary difficulties because of inadequate funding and high costs, which eventually led to a recentered focus on basic relief (Al Husseini, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2010)

Working with this refugee population, over the years, UNRWA had become increasingly critical of the failure of the international community in delivering a solution to the refugee problem (Rosenfeld, 2010). As stated in their Annual Report of 1955: "The unrequited demand for repatriation will continue to be an obstacle to the accomplishment of the objective of reintegration and self-support"

(Labouisse, 1955, p.5). At the end of the 1950s, UNRWA decided to change directions and decided to focus on the development and improvement of its education services. They presented this decision to the UN as being beneficial for the younger refugee generation. However, the UN did not provide them with extra funding, so UNRWA had to reallocate its own, already restricted, resources. Slowly, education started to replace basic relief as the largest share of its budget, and over time less and less money was allocated to their relief activities (Rosenfeld, 2010). As stated by Rosenfeld (2010), UNRWA shifted from a relief-centered organization towards a welfare-centered organization.

But what about Israel? In 1949, Israel voted for the creation of UNRWA and in 1967, after the Six-Day War, it invited the Agency to continue administering schools, offer food assistance, medical assistance, and other social services in the occupied territories and refugee districts. Tolerating UNRWA's assistance was a logical move made out of convenience. In this way, Israel could continue to control the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), but without having to provide welfare services, such as health care and education (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020).

2.3.2. Characteristics and Difficulties

What sets UNRWA apart from other UN organizations, is that it is the only one set up with a mandate focused on a specific geographic location (operating in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria) and a specific refugee population (Palestinians) (Al-Husseini, 2000).

UNRWA's definition of a refugee slightly differs from the definition formulated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, when someone has crossed an international border, they may qualify as refugees, whereas those who have been displaced within their country of origin are called Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) (Feldman, 2012a). UNRWA's definition, which has been developed to define who qualifies for UNRWA services, states that a Palestine refugee is a person "whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the outbreak of the conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, has lost both his home and means of livelihood". Next to this, descendants of male Palestinian refugees also qualify for UNRWA services (Feldman, 2012a; "Palestine Refugees," n.d.). This is why its beneficiary population keeps expanding year by year. Right now, in 2020, the Agency's target population consists out of approximately 5.6 million Palestinian refugees ("United Nations Reli. Work. Agency Palest. Refug. Near East," 2020).

Figure 2 illustrates the different regions UNRWA is operational and its different refugee camps. Because of the importance of the right of return to Palestinian refugees, the Arab host nations

(apart from a couple of exceptions) have not granted them official citizenship. Jordan, for example, has developed a separate category, called 'refugee-citizens', who officially are endowed with citizens' rights and duties until the day they can choose whether to go back to Palestine or stay in Jordan (Al Husseini & Bocco, 2010).

Figure 2. UNRWA Fields of Operations Map 2020, unrwa.org.

Initially, UNRWA's mandate was supposed to last only three years, but because of the insolvability of the Palestine Question, it has been extended multiple times over the last seventy years (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019). At the start, UNRWA was in essence a non-political agency. Today, while officially still maintaining this character, it has attained a political dimension as well. As it operates in a highly politicized environment, UNRWA has become increasingly embedded in the Palestinian nation-building process and has become a quasi-state institution (Al-Husseini, 2000; Bocco, 2010). Here are four examples of this political quasi-state character: first, the Agency has responsibilities such as education, health care, and social services, that are in normal circumstances carried out by governments; second, the political environment in which it operates is one characterized by the emergence of the Palestinian national movement and the creation of a Palestinian national identity among the refugees; third, it has become Palestinian refugee's political representative on the international stage (Al-Husseini, 2000); fourth, and last, UNRWA's registration cards are often interpreted as the official identity documents of the stateless refugees. There have been cases in which refugees have tried to produce their own cards in order to find work or travel (Irfan, 2019). In essence, the Agency serves as an analogous public service provider and a non-territorial administration, but without the coercive power a state would possess (Bocco, 2010).

As was already mentioned a couple of times throughout this chapter, UNRWA has continuously been facing financial difficulties from the start of its operations. Annual donations fluctuate enormously, are unpredictable, and cannot keep up with the ever-growing refugee population. In 2010 the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA came to life and has been working on strengthening UNRWA's financial capacities, reallocating its funds to where they are most needed, and strengthening its ability to continue to provide essential services (*Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, 2010). Mid-2016, the funding gap was as large as $96,5 million. The Working Group has been able to bring this gap down to $49 million by December 2017. But this little 'win' was followed by the announcement, in January 2018, that the U.S. would only contribute $60 million in the upcoming year. This while the U.S. had pledged a total amount of $364.265.585 by the end of 2017. This thus created a gap in funding of approximately $300 million in 2018 (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019). Before going into this specific case study, the following chapter will give an overview of the wider debate on humanitarianism and UNRWA.

2.4.   Humanitarianism: a Necessity?

The research question of this dissertation is situated within a wider debate on humanitarianism, as well as UNRWA's specific role in this debate. There exists a specialized field of Palestinian Development Studies, with old versus new, Western versus Arabic, and institutional versus grassroot voices. As such it is necessary to give a concise outline of this debate, to better understand and situate the specific case of the decisions of the Trump Administration.

2.4.1. The Humanitarian Condition

First, it is necessary to give an explanation of what humanitarianism exactly is. There are many different definitions, ranging from: "The word 'humanitarianism' describes the worldview, aspirations, professional vocabularies and actions affirming the common dignity of humankind regardless of differences in race, gender, religion, national belonging, political creed, or any other accident of birth or contextual circumstance" (Belloni, 2007, p.451), to the more practical one given by Feldman (2012b, p.156): "It is an arena of legal regulation meant to protect civilians and refugees, including the body of international humanitarian law (the laws of war); refugee conventions such as the 1951 and 1967 conventions on the status of refugees; and institutions such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which are meant to enact these legal protections". Feldman (2012b) elaborates this definition even more, adding two other dimensions. Next to being an arena of legal regulation, it is also a form of practice, of delivering relief and emergency aid such as food aid, shelter, medical aid, but also the provision of social services as done by UNRWA. Lastly, it is also a discursive field. For example, to generate donations humanitarian actors create and circulate images of suffering to generate a feeling of compassion.

Important to note is that Palestinian refugees have been living within this humanitarian space for about seventy years, their lives have been profoundly shaped by their conditions of displacement and humanitarian action. Within such a long time frame, there has been a clear shift from basic relief and crisis response towards a more developmental approach with a focus on social services, as discussed in the previous chapter (Feldman, 2012b). In *The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living,* Feldman (2012b) discusses the impact protracted humanitarianism has on these Palestinian refugees. She points out the importance of power relations, illustrating how humanitarianism turns people into victims, receiving help and compassion from the 'helpers'. Tabar (2016) supports this statement, declaring that humanitarianism does not create self-reliant individuals, but rather reiterates relationships of dependency. This image of the dependent subject of the Global South is rooted in paternalistic colonial understandings and dates back to the beginning of global humanitarianism when Christian Europeans traveled to the Global

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

South in an attempt to ameliorate the lives of the 'poor natives' living in the colonies. Instead of approaching the indigenous population from an active point of view, perceiving them as actors with agency and dignity who struggle for freedom, humanitarianism reduces them to passive victims inferior to the Westerner.

2.4.2. Understanding Humanitarianism in a Settler Colonial Reality

Second, it is necessary to paint an image of the context in which this protracted humanitarianism exists. Israel has pursued a settler colonial strategy ever since the 19th Century. as has been discussed earlier in this paper. As a brief repetition, settler colonialism entails the taking over of indigenous territory and the erasure of the original population in an attempt to replace them with another socio-political body (Veracini, 2013). In *Disrupting Development, Reclaiming Solidarity: The Anti-Politics of Humanitarianism,* Linda Tabar (2016) analyzes humanitarianism from this settler colonial angle and points out its specific depoliticizing character in the oPt, calling it the anti-political paradigm which only focuses on basic needs. Tabar's analysis starts from the Second Intifada (2000-2005).

As a reaction to the Second Intifada, Israel stepped up its efforts to strangle the life out of the Palestinian society. They started with the building of the apartheid wall and attempted to break up and fragment Palestinian land as much as possible (Tabar, 2016). In the name of security, they installed checkpoints, roadblocks, gates, ditches, and called into life a curfew (Shearer, 2004). The effects of these moves on Palestinian self-sufficiency were tremendous, it shattered their economy, especially manufacturing and agricultural production. Take for example food production, before the new Israeli policies after the Second Intifada, approximately 70% of the food consumed in the oPt was domestically produced. In 2016, on the other hand, 96% of food and staple items were imported into the oPt, predominantly from Israel. In 1997, around 200.000 Palestinians were registered to receive assistance, such as food aid, this number made up 8,5% of the Palestinian population. In 2001, only four years later, this number rose to 1.7 million Palestinians, which was 51% of the population (Tabar, 2016). This shows how Israel on purpose shifted Palestinian self-sufficiency into an Israel-dependent relationship. This trend shows that hunger and malnutrition are not just temporary problems, such as in wars, but symptoms of years and years of settler colonial policies attempting to tear apart and dissolve the native population, clear political objectives (Tabar, 2016).

Because of the situation Israel created, on the international stage, Palestinian refugees are predominantly defined as in need of aid and being in a constant humanitarian crisis of hunger and malnutrition. This became increasingly clear after the Second Intifada when the international

response focused on humanitarian aid instead of condemning Israel's continued settler colonization and abuses of international conventions and human rights. "After Israel's reinvasion of the West Bank in 2002, international organizations framed the problem as a "horrifying humanitarian disaster worsened" and not as a disaster caused "by the occupation."" (Tabar, 2016, p.20). In 2008, Palestinians were the number one recipients of humanitarian aid throughout the world (Tabar, 2016). In humanitarian aid, agencies and organizations are obliged to stay neutral and impartial according to the principles of humanitarian aid (Labbé & Daudin, 2015), this contributes to the depoliticization of the original conflict they stepped into. Humanitarian aid actors do not question the reasons that created these circumstances. As has been briefly touched upon in the chapter on epistemology, the Palestinian Development Paradigm prefers to offer neutral solutions, using terms such as malnutrition, unemployment, and poverty which ignore the violent reality in which all of this occurs. By only focusing on basic needs, international humanitarian organizations promote, what Tabar calls an anti-political paradigm. The Palestinian struggle for their land and political recognition in the face of Israeli settler colonialism thus gets reframed into a struggle for food and life. This framing also influences how the world looks at this crisis situation, it messes with our understanding of the problem and detaches it from its origins and the historical context of settler colonialism. Representing it as a struggle for food and economic access creates a hegemonic discourse that is spread throughout the world as the 'truth' (Tabar, 2016). To summarize with the words of Tabar (2016, p.21): "humanitarian aid becomes a means to transform colonial violence into a bureaucratic problem that needs to be managed and the colonized into objects that need to be administered".

The Palestinian refugee problem has been created by Zionists' settler colonial strategies, which is a very politicized reality in itself. Palestinians themselves, living this decade-long struggle for recognition also express their resistance in their everyday life (Feldman, 2012b). They practice *Sumud*, steadfastness, meaning "staying put in the face of Israeli occupation" (Feldman, 2012b, p.158). It is impossible to take the political out of this conflict, however, it is possible to contribute to depoliticizing the conflict itself, as humanitarianism does. Let us look at the example of UNRWA. On the one hand, they have been criticized for not speaking out against rights abuses and providing insufficient protection to Palestinian refugees. While UNRWA has already been assisting for 70 years, a resolution is still far away. On the other hand, they have been criticized by certain actors for sustaining a strong sense of national identity among Palestinian refugees. As, in certain ways, UNRWA has served as the representative of Palestinian refugees on the world stage, and has become their site of articulation to vocalize national and political demands (Feldman, 2012b).

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

Lately, this developmental discourse is being challenged by Palestinians who believe that this will not bring them justice, and believe that Palestinian anti-colonial agency cannot be left out of the discussion (Tabar, 2016).

2.4.3. Humanitarian Aid as an Accomplice

According to Tabar (2016), two conceptions make humanitarianism an accomplice in maintaining power structures and violence, that contribute to the depoliticization of the Palestine Question. The first conception is the notion of charity. Because humanitarian organizations need to remain impartial and neutral, its support to certain communities predominantly comes in the form of material aid, such as food aid, sponsored by individuals or states voluntarily. She also problematizes the concept of charity in itself, paraphrasing Marx and Engels and Pupavac, who stated that in fear of radical political change, the bourgeois class created charities to ease social grievances, while in the meantime keeping alive existing power structures and relations. This critique can also be converted to the international stage, in which the rich Western countries are being generous, while in the meantime working hard to maintain their superior position.

This links to the second conception, which is the notion that the humanitarian concept rests on a racialized hierarchy, kept in place by the ones on top. As stated above, global humanitarianism can be traced back to the early days of colonialism, thus operating from a Eurocentric point of view. Notions of the white European benevolent helping the oppressed non-Western 'other' out of the goodness of its heart are still very much alive today and characterize the humanitarian sphere. This way of thinking thus continues to reproduce racialized hierarchies that deny any sort of agency to the non-Western other and places them outside of the category 'human' (Tabar, 2016). But who says these people want to be helped, rescued, or even developed? "Humanitarian interventions produce commodified images of "needy victims" that appeal to Western sympathy rather than portray them as "oppressed right-bearers demanding a duty" from people around the world" (Tabar, 2016, p.19). This also describes how some feel about organizations such as UNRWA. They have the feeling that UNRWA sees them as one of their millions of charity cases. This view is very much in conflict with the movement which existed before the First Intifada (1987-1991). Palestinians organized based on nationalist principles of self-reliance, aiming to create an alternative to the colonial administration. Public work programs were set up to improve infrastructure and living conditions. There is a sentiment among Palestinian refugees that large scale humanitarian aid since the Second Intifada has undermined nationalist concepts of self-sufficiency and resistance (Tabar, 2016).

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

According to Feldman (2009), by creating and recreating these power relations, and defining images of powerless, needy victims, humanitarian organizations have also created actual victims. Humanitarian aid is given to the ones who suffer most, and the category of victim is a rather narrow one (UNRWA narrows it down even more because of its financial difficulties). This creates a specific condition in which victimhood is being performed in order to qualify as a victim and receive different forms of aid. The more innocent they appear, the more compassion they generate. On the other side of the coin, the more they resist and the more independent they appear, the less they will receive (Feldman, 2009). "Humanitarian compassion seems increasingly reserved for those who only suffer but do not act." (Feldman, 2009, p.31). Tabar (2016) extends this critique by Feldman (2009) and states that the humanitarian ideal thus bolsters settler colonial power relations which demand submissive 'good natives' who do not resist or talk back to the settler colonial state.

2.4.4. UNRWA: Considerations & Critiques

In this part, UNRWA will be situated within the wider debate on humanitarianism, and its positive and negative characteristics will be touched upon. Important to mention is how one characteristic can have positive elements for one party while having negative elements for another.

UNRWA has been the exclusive service of Palestinian refugees for a very long time. The Agency has a very close proximity to the refugee population they are working with. One example of this is the fact that the majority of its local staff exists out of Palestinian refugees themselves (Al Husseini, 2010; Al Husseini & Bocco, 2010). This proximity does have a couple of advantages, but it has also led to several critiques. An advantage to the close proximity of UNRWA to the Palestinian refugee society is the fact that UNRWA can more easily adapt to the rising wants and needs of its target population. This has already led to great operational achievements such as spreading literacy, a great ability in handling epidemics, training for refugees, and quick emergency responses. This has greatly reduced conditions of distress and starvation among refugees and helped advance peace and stability in the Middle East (Al Husseini, 2010).

Critiques are mainly coming from Israel and the United States, who claim that UNRWA is being used by the refugees to express their political claims, and thus perpetuate the problem in itself, which will be touched upon in the next chapter (Al Husseini, 2010). The refugees themselves were also critical of UNRWA from the start. The absence of a real resolution to the Palestine Question, together with the strong attachment to return to their homes made the refugees skeptical towards UNRWA's initial work programs during the 1950s. Any program that could lead to refugee's resettlement was opposed, as they believed these were constructed by Western powers to eliminate their political rights. This led to various forms of resistance, ranging from demonstrations

to attacks on UNRWA's local staff (Al-Husseini, 2000, 2010). This can be linked to the depoliticizing character of humanitarianism, reflected upon in chapter 2.4.2.

What is also important to mention is that the international community is in fact obliged to provide legal, humanitarian, and physical protection to refugees, as long as the state which is responsible for their displacement, in this case, Israel, is unwilling to provide them with sanctioned rights. However, according to BADIL Resource Center's 2018 Report titled *Confronting the Campaign Targetting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency*, an ineffective protection framework causes a gap in the protection of Palestinian refugees. As mentioned in the first chapter, after the 1948 war both the UNCCP and UNRWA were set up to protect Palestinian refugees. The UNCCP mandate was linked to providing legal rights (right of return, compensation, ...). Because the UNCCP faced difficulties, related to Israel's rejection, UNRWA was established with a mandate to provide humanitarian aid, relief, and work. Both bodies thus had different characteristics and goals. Next to this, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was mandated to intervene and bridge the protection gap in case UNCCP or UNRWA ceased existing. However, the UNCCP was flawed from the beginning and ceased its operations already during the 1950s and was absorbed into the UN Secretary-General, transforming into a functionally ineffective body. According to plans, the UNHCR should have taken over the UNCCP's role, but failed to fulfill its obligations. This only leaves UNRWA with its limited mandate, to stand up for the Palestinian refugees. Right now, only one of the pillars of international protection still stands, because UNRWA is not permitted to guarantee respect for refugees' rights in other states, to protect their properties, nor to provide lasting solutions (*Confronting the Campaign Targeting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): Parameters, Principles and Recommendations for A Palestinian Strategic Plan*, 2018).

Then again, there is an existing awareness among the refugees that they need UNRWA. UNGA Resolution 194 (III), which can be found on page 15, supported Palestinians' strong attachment to their homes and described the absolute right to return for all Palestinian refugees. UNRWA functioned as their official recognition as refugees, more specifically the 'right of return' served as a real lifeline, as they saw it as a right they were entitled to and a debt owed to them by the United Nations. Because the Palestinian refugee problem was seen as the outcome of the 1947 Partition Plan issued by the UN, the UN is thus seen as responsible for providing Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Peoples with international protection until a lasting solution is realized (Al-Husseini, 2000; Al Husseini, 2010; *Confronting the Campaign Targeting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): Parameters, Principles and Recommendations for A Palestinian*

Strategic Plan, 2018; Irfan, 2019). Al-Husseini (2010) claims that because of this specific characteristic, UNRWA created a sense of political combativeness among the refugees. He directly opposes Feldman's (2009) theory on the creation of victimhood, discussed on page 23, among receivers of humanitarian aid, stating that UNRWA's assistance was not regarded as temporary relief, but as insurance to their refugee status and their political rights (Al Husseini, 2000). In *UNRWA and the Refugees: a difficult but lasting marriage,* Al-Husseini (2010) states that: "The Palestine refugees' interpretation of UNRWA's services as a right to which they were entitled pending their repatriation contributed to the fact that they never developed the mass psychological dependence on aid observed in other refugee cases in Asia and Africa" (p.9).

Next to this, and as touched upon in the chapter on UNRWA's emergence, over the years UNRWA has attained a specific political dimension and became entrenched in the Palestinian nation-building process. This is only logical, as it operates in a highly politicized environment, despite its non-political character on paper. UNRWA became a representative of the refugees both on the Palestinian as on the international stage. First, administrative infrastructure was set up in the camps, which was managed by Palestinian staff. Second, because UNRWA is not a state institution, but a UN agency, it is protected to a certain extent from host governments' interference. This made it an excellent forum for grassroots Palestinian activism. Its different institutions, such as schools and Youth Activity Centers, became places where a collective Palestinian refugee identity was formed and articulated. Third, UNRWA serves as the quasi-political representative of Palestinian refugees on the international stage. As a witness to the refugee situations and to remind international institutions and actors of the right of return (Al-Husseini, 2000). When looking at UNRWA from the side of Western donor countries, the Agency is largely perceived as a stabilizing factor in the Near East. This can explain the recurrent support from different stakeholders since its early years (Al Husseini & Bocco, 2010).

However, since the late 1990s - early 2000s trust in UNRWA as a political representative has been waning. This can partly be blamed on the donor's pressure to phase out UNRWA, while no real solutions have been reached yet (Al-Husseini, 2000). As UNRWA was originally set up as a temporary relief agency, it operated on voluntary contribution, which made sense at the time. But as its mandate has been renewed over and over again, this model proved to be unsustainable. Its three to five-year mandates also make it impossible for the staff to engage in long-term planning. UNRWA now has to work with ever-smaller funds, especially since the cuts by the Trump Administration. This while at the same time, the refugee population and its needs keep increasing year by year. UNRWA thus had to reduce its services, adopting austerity measures especially in

the educational and medical field, which violates refugee rights (Al Husseini & Bocco, 2010; *Confronting the Campaign Targeting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): Parameters, Principles and Recommendations for A Palestinian Strategic Plan*, 2018). This can also be linked to Tabar's (2016) first conception of humanitarianism as an accomplice, namely charity. Has UNRWA been set up as a 'charity case' for richer Western nations to keep their conscience clear, while at the same time not changing much about the situation on the ground? Besides this, hanging above UNRWA's head and leaving a very negative imprint are the allegations of misconduct and mismanagement among top UNRWA officials. These allegations have been researched by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which has led to the resigning of multiple officials, among which Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl ("Palestine refugee agency chief resigns amidst mismanagement probe," 2019; Williams, 2019). Because of this, Belgian, Dutch, and Swiss governments have decided to suspend their funding to the Agency (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020).

2.5.   The Trump Turn

What changed in the United States and Israel's relationship in the last years? Why did the Trump Administration ultimately decide to cut UNRWA's funding entirely? What did Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu think of this move? These and a couple of other questions will be the main focus of this chapter, as it is important to give some background information before heading on to my research.

2.5.1. The U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian relationship

The U.S. and Israel have always had a special and close relationship. From the 1960s until today, American leaders and the public across party lines, have clearly supported a solid bilateral relationship between the two countries. The U.S. leadership has shown economic, diplomatic, and even military support over the years. While its citizens have largely positive attitudes towards Israel, are interested in Israeli news, and stand behind Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians and other Arab countries. Next to this, in the UN, Israel can always count on the U.S. to defend them or block sanctions lifted against Israeli violations of international law. Since the 21st century, this trend started to shift. Republicans have continued to provide unchanging support for Israel and have remained largely positive. While when Democrats exert their support for Israel, they tend to combine it with attention to the Palestine Question as well (Cavari, 2020; Espín Ocampo et al., 2020).

Let us compare former President Barack Obama with current president Donald J. Trump. Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu entered the office around the same time. Netanyahu has been Israel's Prime Minister before, from 1996 until 1999, and has been part of the government for many years ("Benjamin Netanyahu," 2019). According to Cavari (2020), they have very different world views and were not fond of each other from the start. This expressed itself in many conflicts on policies related to the Palestine Question but also related to the Arab Spring and the Iran Nuclear Deal. Obama overturned a decision made by his predecessor G.W. Bush, who allowed Israel to build in the settlements and tried to prevent it. However, except for this move, the Obama Administration did not really do anything to support the Palestinians, rather they continued to back Israel on almost every level (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020). Continuously shifting priorities in the peace negotiations with Israel and the Palestinian leadership also led to their failure. When Obama left office, a peace agreement was further away than when he entered office (Freedman, 2017). In the end, 83% of Republicans disapproved of Obama's way of dealing with Israel, and Trump used this in his bid for the presidency (Cavari, 2020).

The January 2017 inauguration of U.S. President Donald J. Trump ushered a new era of U.S.-Israeli relations. Trump promised to strengthen the U.S.'s relationship with Israel again and Israeli leadership was very enthusiastic with the new president. The Israeli and U.S. government are closer than ever before. According to Espin Ocampo et al. (2020), this move has to be studied within a wider framework of the U.S. protecting its interests in the ever-changing Middle East. Especially with Iran rising as the new power and main threat to U.S. interests. The Trump Administration has taken moves that no other administration ever dared to take. One of Trump his first moves was to recognize Jerusalem, commonly perceived as occupied territory by the international community, as the capital of Israel and moving the U.S. embassy there. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) perceived this move as the U.S. abandoning its role as a peace negotiator. Other pro-Israel moves were the recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, also occupied territory, withdrawing from the Iran Nuclear Deal, and defending Israel in the UN. In November 2019, the Trump Administration reversed Obama's decision (mentioned before) to prevent Israel from building in the settlements, claiming that these settlements do not violate international law. It is important to note that the majority of UN member countries did not agree with the decisions made by the Trump Administration and maintained their critical stance towards Israel's role in the Palestine Question (Cavari, 2020). To top this all of, at the beginning of this year, Trump together with Jared Kushner, Trump's senior advisor and son-in-law and close family friend of Netanyahu, revealed what they called the 'Deal of the Century', which was their plan to 'solve' the 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict'. This will be touched upon further on in this chapter, as it is important to first discuss what preceded this announcement.

2.5.2. UNRWA Funding Cuts

Since Trump entered office, his Administration has taken several measures to reduce assistance to Palestinian refugees (Zanotti, 2018). In January 2018, Trump first announced his administration would only contribute $60 million to UNRWA, instead of the pledged $364.265.585, if the Agency would not undertake specific reforms proposed by the U.S. (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019). For example, the Trump Administration asked UNRWA to limit its Palestinian refugee classification. More specifically Congressional Bill H.R. 6451 from July 2018 stated that "(1) the derivative refugee status may only be extended to the spouse or minor child of such a refugee; and (2) an alien who was firmly resettled in any country is not eligible to retain the refugee status." ("H.R.6451 - UNRWA Reform and Refugee Support Act of 2018," 2018). UNRWA and the Palestinians did not agree with the proposed reforms, which in its turn angered Trump (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020). By the end of 2018, the administration announced the complete defunding of the Agency (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh,

2019). Up until then, the U.S. was the largest contributor to the Agency (Irfan, 2019). Next to this, donations to the PA have also been cut off. The only U.S. assistance left to the Palestinians comes from the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), which helps train and equip PA justice officials and PA security forces (Zanotti, 2018).

Does Israel agree with the Trump Administration's decision? As mentioned in the first chapter, Israel voted for the creation of UNRWA and finds the Agency's existence rather convenient, because it means Israel does not have to provide for the refugees themselves. As they also do not want to extend their services to the refugees, leadership after leadership has supported UNRWA's continued existence. Considering the Agency is so enmeshed in both Israeli and Palestinian society, abruptly quitting UNRWA aid could be catastrophic, as the refugees have no other framework to depend on for these services. However, Israel does exploit UNRWA's permanent existence, by continuing to support the Agency's existence, while on the other hand not promising the right of return, the conception UNRWA's existence is based upon (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020). The Netanyahu government, conversely, seems to be shifting its priorities on this matter and declared it would prefer to see the Agency go. Netanyahu stated that UNRWA perpetuated the refugee problem and the right of return narrative. He proposed that UNRWA funds should be gradually transferred towards the UNHCR. This, however, can have an ironically opposite effect, as the UNHCR has a specific mandate to exercise the right of return of refugees to their home countries (Abunimah, 2018).

One can only imagine which repercussions these decisions have had on an Agency that provides to more than five million Palestinian refugees and is the closest thing they have to a government (Irfan, 2019). As the U.S. has been the largest donor up until January 2018, cutting off funding has left a big deficit in funding. This, at a moment UNRWA was already suffering financially (Irfan, 2019). Krähenbühl (2018), UNRWA's then Commissioner-General, called it "the most critical financial situation in the history of the Agency". To fill this budget deficit, UNRWA launched the #DignityIsPriceless campaign on January 22, 2018. Encouraging donors, states, and civil society actors, to increase their funding so UNRWA can keep open 700 schools for approximately 525.000 children. As well as to continue providing emergency food aid, essential medical services, and emergency cash assistance (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019). Thanks to this campaign, funding has indeed increased, with extra contributions from East Asia, the Gulf States, and Europe (Irfan, 2019). However, the deficit remains and the humanitarian impact is immense. Cuts were mainly made in health care provision and education, which has serious impacts on Palestinian refugees and UNRWA employees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019).

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

According to Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2019), the #DignityIsPriceless Campaign and its success hide the effects of UNRWA's budget deficit. Because there are very real, but mostly invisible consequences. First, let us take a closer look at health care by touching on a couple of examples. UNRWA's health care services have had to make several decisions in order to be able to continue to provide for the most vulnerable. For example, they suspended the coverage for normal pregnancy deliveries in March 2018. They also stopped covering 10% of the 'Secondary Hospitalization bill' for those registered in the Social Safety Net Program and Palestinian refugees registered in Lebanon but who come from Syria. As 65% of Palestinians in Lebanon live under the poverty line, these cuts will be serious dealbreakers, especially for women, who ironically are the face of the Campaign. Second, in the field of education, UNRWA's top priority, several cuts have also been made. For example, Palestinian children now have to purchase their textbooks themselves, while previously these were provided free of charge. This can have serious effects on families with little resources or/and multiple children. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2019) refers to these cuts as a process of privatization. Refugees are more and more expected to turn to the private sphere and rely on themselves or their families to fill the gaps created by funding deficits. The last example is workers' rights. UNRWA's staff and service delivery make up the largest part of their cost. In January 2018, they announced they would not extend services beyond the retirement age of 60 and posts opened because of retirement were no longer to be filled. Also, job security came under pressure, as conversions of fixed-term to indefinite appointments were suspended (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019). The decisions mentioned above are just a couple of examples of the ways UNRWA has been dealing with budget deficits and the Trump cuts.

2.5.3. The Deal of the Century

Next to the monetary and humanitarian impact, the political significance of this move cannot be underestimated. Multiple academics (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020; Irfan, 2019; Yahaya, 2020) agree that this decision is part of a much larger plan developed by the Trump Administration to bring 'peace' to the Middle East. To persuade Palestinian leadership to take part in U.S.-led diplomacy on the peace process, which Trump called 'the deal of the century', but is formally called the 'Peace and Prosperity Plan'.

The Trump Administration's detachment of UNRWA is not only a financial decision, as it has also made clear it does not agree with UNRWA's very premise. In leaked emails, Jared Kushner described the Agency as perpetuating the status quo, being corrupt and inefficient, and constituting a barrier to peace. These emails also uncovered plans to disrupt the Agency's work, including plans to strip the five million Palestinian refugees registered with the Agency of their refugee status.

Internationally, UNRWA serves as the acknowledgment of the Palestinian refugees' existence and their unresolved rights, including the right to return. We can thus see how UNRWA constitutes a problem to those who would like to see Israel succeed and refugees' rights dissolved (Irfan, 2019). In cutting off funding for UNRWA, the Trump Administration has brought millions of Palestinians in danger. Denying refugees their rights (especially the right of return) is seen as one of the steps, in an attempt to put pressure on, weaken and isolate the PA. The ultimate goal is to remove every form of leverage the PA has to push through a final peace agreement (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020). A peace agreement, which does not take into account the Palestinian wishes. Even though Nicky Haley, U.S. ambassador to the UN, claimed that neither side would be completely happy with the plan, we haven't seen real Israeli resistance against it. The plan without a doubt seems to be a dream come true for Israel (Yahaya, 2020). It is also

Figure 3. Vision for Peace Conceptual Map, Peace to Prosperity (2020).

clear that both Netanyahu and the Trump Administration are no longer pushing for a peaceful two-state solution. (Bazian, 2018)

The following paragraph highlights a couple of requests from the Peace to Prosperity Plan. Figure 3 visually showcases the ultimate goal of the plan. The latest version of the Peace Plan, released in January 2020, provides the Palestinians with a state with borders on the Gaza Strip and half of the West Bank, but most importantly, without Jerusalem. A 'new Jerusalem' can be built on the outskirts of East Jerusalem. Holy Sites are to be safeguarded by Israel, which should guarantee the freedom of worship. Palestinian territory would only amount to 11,5% percent of historic

Palestine. Palestine should be completely demilitarized and Palestinian security and borders would remain controlled by Israel, as well as Palestinian airspace (*Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*, 2020; Yahaya, 2020).

Hamas, which is regarded as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and Israel, has to adopt the Quartet principles. These principles "include unambiguously and explicitly recognizing the State of Israel, committing to nonviolence, and accepting previous agreements and obligations between the parties, including the disarming of all terrorist groups" (Yahaya, 2020, p.28). The Plan proposes that what Palestine gets in return for these concessions is $50 billion in investments for infrastructure and business projects, mainly provided by private investors and Arab states. Palestine would also get 'extra' territory in the Negev Desert, which is completely disconnected from the larger Palestinian state (*Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*, 2020; Yahaya, 2020). Concerning UNRWA, the Peace Plan plainly states that "Upon the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement, Palestinian refugee status will cease to exist, and UNRWA will be terminated and its responsibilities transitioned to the relevant governments" (*Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*, 2020, p.33).

But will the Trump Administration succeed in their plans to disrupt UNRWA as part of its deal of the century? Because of the #DignityIsPriceless Campaign and other efforts, UNRWA has managed to raise fundraising considerably. While still maintaining a budget deficit, it has largely been able to continue providing its necessary services. Next to this, and maybe even more important, Trump's announcements have put UNRWA back in the picture and on the international agenda. This clearly shows the limits of the U.S.' power (Irfan, 2019). On the Palestinian side, there is little chance that Palestinian leadership will silently accept a peace agreement imposed on them. Not recognizing the right of return, together with moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem has left a large spot on U.S. legitimacy in Palestinian eyes. If UNRWA has to cut down its services even more, public demonstrations are not out of the question. Mainly, because UNRWA does not only serve as a social welfare provider but also as a symbol of the international commitment to their right of return (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020). As stated by Espin Ocampo et al. (2020, p.37): "Driving Palestinians into a corner may not be the best political strategy. It will bring more distress, but not surrender.".

Still, UNRWA is not completely out of the woods. The Agency and its target population remain extremely vulnerable. If the U.S. continues along this path, they may create disastrous humanitarian and political consequences that might lead to a new regional crisis (Irfan, 2019). Even though the U.S. has lost legitimacy in the Palestinian's eyes, on the international stage no country

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

will challenge the U.S. profoundly, nor replace its role as conflict mediator (Espín Ocampo et al., 2020). Currently, the European Union does not have a lot of influence in the Middle East, mainly because of losing the U.S. as a partner (Yahaya, 2020). This, however, might change in the future.

2.6.   Conclusion Literature Review

This literature review aimed to outline both the debate on UNRWA and humanitarianism as the U.S.' stance towards Israel-Palestine and UNRWA following the Trump Turn. Both of these debates are equally important as they inform the empirical analysis which is about to follow. First, however, it was important to give a historical overview from a settler colonial angle to construct as broad a context as possible. This analysis follows the assumption that the Palestine Question is not just a dispute over borders, but a conflict driven by settler colonial forms.

Originally, UNRWA was thus created from a developmental point of view, to integrate Palestinian refugees socially and economically. But as has been discussed, because of several aspirations and problems, it quickly turned into a relief and welfare organization, with a centered focus on education. This has both its pros and cons, which have been reviewed in the broader framework of humanitarianism.

Under the continuous occupation, Palestinians have been living in a protracted humanitarian space for decades. In which UNRWA, on the one hand, serves as a humanitarian agency that reiterates a relation of dependency, offering basic relief and welfare services (Feldman, 2012b; Tabar, 2016). While, on the other hand, serving as a political representative, sustaining a strong sense of national identity and hope for a better future (Al-Husseini, 2010). This tense relationship is the crux of the debate on the necessity or unnecessity of UNRWA. This is related to one of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from the literature review which has been formulated by Tabar (2016) and Feldman (2012b). They argue that humanitarian aid in general reiterates relationships of dependency of the colonized subject. To top this off, in the Palestinian case, this dependency relationship when removed from its context of Zionist settler colonialism gets redefined as a humanitarian struggle for food and life. Framing political struggles such as the Palestine Question into a humanitarian disaster, on an equal footing with the consequences of a flood or an earthquake, has disastrous consequences on the political self-determination and agency of Palestinians. Something they continue to try to win back. Because of its present political dimension, UNRWA keeps alive a sense of national identity and belonging, creating a sense of political combativeness against the Israeli occupation, as described by Al-Husseini (2010). In the literature review, we have already seen that both the U.S. and Israel are rather critical about this. It seems like the Trump Administration may benefit from this situation.

The Trump Administration's decision to quit funding created a very critical situation with different repercussions on the Agency and its beneficiaries. The decision was in line with what Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu envisioned for the future. As I have touched upon, different academics have

emphasized the idea that this decision has been made in an attempt to push through the Peace and Prosperity Plan, which seems to be more beneficial towards Israel than towards the Palestinians. Both Israel and the U.S. seem to be eager to push through this plan, pulling out all the stops, such as putting pressure on UNRWA and the PA. The literature has confirmed that the U.S. favors Israel above the Palestinians, will the empirical research validate this?

The existing literature on the humanitarian debate has provided us with a clear overview of its shortcomings. While the literature on UNRWA has also shown us in which way humanitarianism and the Agency are a necessary factor in the Palestine Question. In my opinion, the decision of the Trump Administration to cut funding has to be analyzed within this broader framework, as it has both been influenced by it and influenced it in return. This is something that has not been widely studied yet, probably because it is a very current topic. Through the empirical analysis, I aim to look for linkages between humanitarianism, UNRWA, and the Trump Administration's decision.

Based on the literature review I have formulated two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that because of the U.S.'s known bias towards Israel, its reasoning will mainly consist of criticism on the Palestinian strategy, rather than focusing on legitimizations and solutions both the Palestinians and Israelis can agree on. Next to this, it is also important to keep in mind the idea that humanitarianism creates a situation of depoliticized victimhood, as formulated by Tabar (2016) and Feldman (2009 & 2012b). The second hypothesis is thus the assumption that this situation of passive victimhood might be favored by the Trump Administration.

3. Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis

As has been rigorously discussed throughout the literature review, critique on humanitarianism and UNRWA's workings does not only come from the American and Israeli sides. However, academic literature clearly demonstrates the bias of the current U.S. Administration concerning the Palestine Question, and towards UNRWA's humanitarian aid in particular. In order to draw conclusions, this dissertation will take a look at the Trump Administration's discourse on UNRWA and will ask the broader question: 'how does the Trump Administration defend its decisions to quit funding UNRWA?'. Next to this, I will also analyze which tensions this discourse brings to the front in the broader debate on humanitarianism and UNRWA's role in the Palestinian humanitarian sphere. To do this, I will use a Critical Discourse Analysis, which will be introduced throughout this chapter.

3.1.   Critical Discourse Analysis: Characteristics

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), also referred to as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), belongs to the field of discourse analytical research (Datondji & Amousou, 2019). Multiple researchers within the field of CDA formulate slightly different definitions, which I will first give a concise overview of. Throughout this overview, I will also relate these definitions and characteristics to the research in this dissertation, to explain why exactly I chose this method.

3.1.1. Language as Social practice

According to Fairclough (1995), one of the most well-known names within the field, CDA aims to distance itself from Discourse Analysis' (DA) noncritical and descriptive stance. DA in general has too little interest in looking further than analyzations, and into explanations, something that I aim to do with this research. Within the field of CDA, language is perceived as a form of social practice that is imbued with implicit ideological propositions and assumptions (Fairclough, 1995). It recognizes that texts are not written nor read in a neutral or isolated situation, but a real-world context. This real-world context makes it extremely context-sensitive, which is why CDA aims to take into account relevant textual and contextual factors that can influence the production, as well as the perception of the text, such as certain historical factors (Huchkin, 1997).

These propositions and assumptions are often generalized and hard to dissect by the general public. CDA aims to break these down and analyze them from a critical point of view, while also paying attention to opposing views (Fairclough, 1995). According to Wodak (2015), denaturalizing the role of these implicit discourses in the (re)production of structures of inequality and non-inclusivity, and challenging "the social conditions in which they are embedded" (Wodak, 2015, p.2) are the main aims of CDA. This is also confirmed by Pennycook (2001, cited in Samir El-Falaky &

M.M. Ahmed, 2015) who describes CDA's aim as to make transparent the 'social ideological systems and representations', while also illustrating how these relate to the wider social order.

3.1.2. Power Relations

Another important name is Van Dijk. He describes CDA as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power dominance abuse, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context." (Van Dijk, 2001, p.352). As stated by Wodak (2015), language is not powerful by itself, but it is a means to acquire and preserve power by the hegemonic groups. The goal of CDA is to understand and expose these abuses and inequalities within language, in order to be better able to resist social inequality. Because of this characteristic, CDA is conducted in solidarity and together with the subjugated groups (Van Dijk, 2001), taking an ethical position on social issues as a way to improve society. It aims to draw attention to these power imbalances, non-democratic actions, social inequalities, and inequities or other injustices (Huchkin, 1997). After reading the literature, it is clear that there exist very asymmetrical power relations between the U.S., Israel, and the oPt. According to Espin Ocampo et al. (2020), withdrawing funding from UNRWA was a clear aim of the Trump Administration to exacerbate these power inequalities even more, to impose an agreement upon the Palestinian leadership which they would not be able to oppose. Power asymmetries are thus very present within the literature, and with my research, I aim to uncover these in the Trump Administration's discourse as well. Ultimately, trying to bring the discourse and literature together to formulate a possible analysis and explanation. My alliance thus lies with the group with the least 'power' in this conflict, which are the Palestinians. This, however, can also be understood as biased.

3.1.3. Social Constructionism

CDA starts from a social constructionist point of view. Theorized by poststructuralist researchers such as Foucault and Bakhtin, social constructionism assumes reality is changeable. The way people perceive reality is constructed through interaction with other people, through the use of language or other systems of semiotics. CDA aims to analyze the version of reality that is currently dominant in society and uncover who interests this dominant discourse favors. As reality is changeable, CDA practitioners aim to change it for the better and support the ones oppressed by the dominant discourse to resist it (Huchkin, 1997).

Because social constructivism and thus CDA deny the existence of one objective and unchangeable reality it also does not believe in the existence of value-free, objective science, which entails that it isn't value-free of its own either. Science and scholarly discourse, just like any other

form of discourse, are (re)produced through social interaction and influenced by social structures (Van Dijk, 2001). Instead of perceiving this as a weakness, Van Dijk (2001) claims that it is necessary to study it in its own right and be accounted for in any type of research.

3.2. Discourse-Historical Approach

This research will be guided by the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The DHA to Critical Discourse Analysis has been extensively theorized and described by Ruth Wodak. The first research in which it has been utilized aimed to analyze former UN General Secretary Kurt Waldheim's Austrian presidential campaign (1986) and the apparent constitutions of antisemitic stereotypes emerging in public discourse back then. Throughout this research, four characteristics of DHA emerged: "interdisciplinary and particularly problem-oriented interests; teamwork; triangulation as a fundamental and constitutive methodological principle; and orientation toward application" (Wodak, 2015, p.1). Other studies using the DHA, for example, focused on nation and nationalism in Austria and how discrimination is discursively constructed against migrants in Romania, and right-wing politics (Wodak, 2015).

3.2.1. Characteristics

In *Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach* (2015), Wodak formulates the ten most important characteristics of DHA. First of all, DHA is interdisciplinary, "involving theory, methods, methodology, research practice, and practical application" (Wodak, 2015, p.2). Second, it is a problem-oriented approach. Third, in DHA it is possible to combine various methods and theories whenever it can lead to a suitable comprehension and explanation of the research object. Fourth, it is possible to incorporate fieldwork or ethnography, if this is required for a better analysis and theorization of the research object. However, under the current circumstances (covid-19 pandemic) this is not possible. Fifth, the research constantly shifts between theory and empirical data, which is also the intent behind my research. Sixth, the aim is to study numerous different genres, public spaces, intertextual (links between different texts), and interdiscursive (links between discourses) relationships. Seventh, and very important, DHA takes into account the historical context when interpreting texts and discourses, to link them interdiscursively and intertextually over time. The approach aims to integrate as much available knowledge as possible, specifically about historical sources and social and political background information of the research object. In order to make a holistic analysis, one should integrate past experiences, present events, and predictions of the future (Datondji & Amousou, 2019). In my research, I cannot analyze the Palestine Question and UNRWA's existence, without taking into account the historical context. This is an important part of my decision to use DHA. Eight, tools and categories are not fixed, they differ in each research and thus have to be developed related to the specific problem. Ninth, Grand theories can serve as an overall foundation, but in specific analyses, middle-range theories are

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

more useful and supply a better theoretical basis for the research. Tenth, and last, results should be made public and should be able to be applied by experts (Wodak, 2015).

As DHA is situated within the wider field of CDA, it shares the same assumptions about ideology and power. Following the Weberian definition of power "as the possibility of establishing one's own will within a social relationship and against the will of others." (Wodak, 2015, p.4), DHA aims to 'demystify' the hegemonic discourses by analyzing and deconstructing its underlying ideologies (Wodak, 2015).

3.2.2. Four Levels of Analysis

Because of DHA's interdisciplinary character, it takes into account more research objects than language alone. To analyze, understand, and explain the objects under investigation, it is necessary to include diverging sources of data and analyze them from different angles. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, triangulation, understood as taking into consideration different empirical observations, theories, methods, and background information is thus a very important characteristic (Wodak, 2015). Whereas CDA combines three levels of analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Huchkin, 1997) the DHA approach adds another level to the analysis.

The first three levels of analysis are: one, the text and language; two, the discursive practices, which are "intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses" (Wodak, 2015, p.5); and three, social practices, which include the larger social context with institutional frames and social variables (Fairclough, 1992; Huchkin, 1997; Wodak, 2015). The fourth level, which DHA adds, is the overarching sociopolitical and historical context, in which discursive practices are embedded and related to (Wodak, 2015). Historical context is included in two different manners. The first one is the integration of all available historical background knowledge, as this dissertation has done throughout the literature review. The second one is detecting how types and genres of discourse used are subject to historical change (Alemi, Tajeddin, & Rajabi Kondlaji, 2017). To understand the

Figure 4. Three Dimensional conception of discourse, Discourse and Social Change. (Fairclough, 1992)

difference between the first two levels, it is necessary to clarify the difference between text and discourse. Briefly, a discourse is "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are
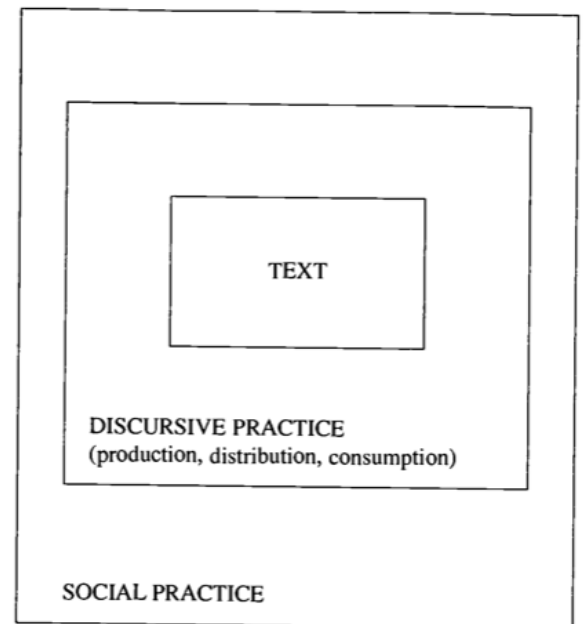
situated within specific fields of social action; socially constituted and socially constitutive: related to a macro topic: and linked to the argumentation about validity claims" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p.88). Text, on the other hand, is part of the discourse. In essence, the text is a bridge between the production and the reception of speech, it is a means to carry over speech. Text can be visualized, written, and even oral (Wodak, 2015).

To summarize, DHA focuses on interdiscursive and intertextual relationships between texts, utterances, genres, and discourses, as well as on social practices and variables, institutional frameworks, and, exclusively to DHA, on the historical context in which these discursive and social practices and frameworks are embedded. While paying attention to all these levels and layers, researchers also focus on how sociopolitical change influences texts, discourses, and genres (Wodak, 2015).

3.2.3. Topoi

Topos or topic, topoi in plural, is a key concept in DHA. According to Alemi, et al. (2017) in DHA, researchers use the theory of topoi, also called argumentation theory, to execute the principle of triangulation. These topoi can be explicit or implicit and are connected to each other through the content, argument, conclusion, or claims. Next to this, there also exists a difference between intrinsic topoi, which are related to lexicons or lexical groups, and extrinsic topoi or dynamic topoi, which encompass themes that can come to the fore in an argument. In political speeches, for example, speakers use different topoi to identify themselves with or distance themselves from other political parties or political orientations, using both intrinsic and extrinsic topoi.

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

3.3.   Research Object

To be able to formulate an answer to the main research question: "How does the Trump administration legitimize its decision to quit funding UNRWA, and which tensions in humanitarianism does this decision bring to the front?" It is necessary to take a closer look at the topics/topoi they utilize related to UNRWA, Palestine, Israel, and themselves in their official communications and speeches, which are the research objects of my Critical Discourse Analysis.

I aimed to find as many texts as I could find from the U.S. government on the topic of UNRWA since the Trump Presidency started. This was not as easy as I thought it would be. Finding transcripts from Trump's speeches on the U.S. Government website is more or less impossible. Eventually, I found 11 different sources on the topic. These texts are relevant to the research as they are all representative of the Trump Administration's policy towards Israel-Palestine and UNRWA.

Three of the texts consist out of Department Press Briefings dating from January and July 2018, the year Trump announced the complete defunding of UNRWA. These Press Briefings were carried out by Heather Nauert, former Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State. Another one is the Press Statement on U.S. Assistance to UNRWA from August 31, 2018, in which Nauert announced the U.S. would completely cut their funding. Five sources were Congress Bills introduced in the House of Representatives by different state representatives. The titles of these bills are: Promoting Equality and Accountability at the UN Act of 2017; UNRWA Accountability Act of 2018; UNRWA Reform and Refugee Support Act of 2018; Palestinian Assistance Reform Act of 2018; and Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act. Next to these eight sources, I also included a Congressional Record from the House of Representatives in September 2017. Lastly, the "Further Consolidated Appropriation Act 2020", a Public Law "which authorizes appropriations to fund the operation of certain agencies in the Federal Government through September 30, 2020" (Trump, 2019) was included in the analysis.

I am well aware of the limited number of texts that have been used in this analysis. The goal was definitely to find more, but the U.S. government seems to be very careful with what they release to the public. For example, no official transcripts of speeches or interviews given by the President himself exist, or at least I could not find any. These would have been even more interesting for the analysis. This thus constitutes a limitation to this research.

3.4. Data Analysis Framework

As described above, to do a thorough Critical Discourse Analysis, it is necessary to make use of topoi. This framework is based on the one used by Alemi et al. (2017) in their *Discourse-Historical Analysis of Two Iranian Presidents' Speeches at the UN General Assembly.* "Topoi helped clarify the speakers' stance regarding the global and local issues and illustrate and describe the type of relations the speakers were aiming to make with world powers and agents." (Alemi et al., 2017, p.6). The documents used in this research, however, are not speeches but predominantly Bills and Press Briefings, which are not directly from President Trump but do represent his administration's stance.

3.4.1. Coding

The framework is divided into four steps, to make it as clear and logical as possible. The first step is coding the different texts, which entails attaching codes or labels to sentences or small parts of texts to identify them. Different parts of the text that talk about the same topic are given the same code, these are called intrinsic topoi. By doing this, the topics the text is talking about come to the front.

3.4.2. Focused Coding

The second step is to first make a list of the frequent intrinsic topoi and then combine the codes attached to these topoi from different texts together, this is also called focused coding. The same codes can be used in different texts, and by combining them we get an overview of the topics which are touched upon the most. This also brings intertextual trends to the front, which is important when analyzing the discourse of the Trump Administration.

3.4.3. Intrinsic Topoi

As a third step, I divided the different intrinsic topoi into groups based on the actor they talk about. By doing this, it is easy to distinguish the types of discourse and topics the Trump Administration uses when referring to different actors. The actors mentioned in the texts that were analyzed for this research are UNRWA, Palestine, the U.S., and Israel. See table 1.

Table 1:

On UNRWA	3. UNRWA reform
	4. Importance schools & healthcare
	5. Monetary reform

11. Necessity UNRWA

13. Condemn violence against UNRWA

14. Accountability UN

15. Reform UN

16. Anti-Semitism & Anti-Israel bias

17. Terrorism

18. Inefficiency UNRWA

19. UNRWA affiliations with Hamas

20. Dissemination political rhetoric

23. Redefine UNRWA definition refugee

27. Critique UNRWA strategy

30. Critique right of return

32. UNRWA as an obstacle to progress?

33. Economic inefficiency

35. Transparency

37. Dismantle UNRWA

39. Neutrality

40. No violence

41. Not opposing USA law

42. Biased education

43. Encouraging violence

44. Education reform

45. Neutral education

49. Human rights

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

	51. Inspect UNRWA

- 45 -

On Palestine	10. Peace talks
	31. Creation Palestinian State
	34. Security
	36. Economic enhancement
	38. Local integration
	48. Hamas
	50. Middle East Peace Deal
	52. Local PA government

On the USA	1. Voluntary Contributions
	2. Future Contributions
	6. Burden Sharing
	8. USA largest donor
	9. Critique on the USA
	12. USA taxpayers
	21. Reallocate funds
	22. Ending all contributions
	24. Withholding funds as strategy
	25. Opposing recognition of Palestine
	26. National security
	28. Humanitarianism
	46. Losing influence

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

	47. interests USA
On Israel	29. USA bias to Israel

Table 1: Intrinsic topoi grouped by actors

Important to mention is that I have not included code 7 'avoiding question' as it does not fit the categories created. However, it is an important code to keep in mind when analyzing which questions or topics the Administration likes to avoid, as this can say a lot about their intentions, without them actually saying anything.

3.4.4. Extrinsic Topoi

The last step was to formulate extrinsic topoi based on the intrinsic topoi. These are themes that come back in different intrinsic topoi. The goal is to identify the bigger themes that are being mentioned throughout all of the texts to see a clear overview. See table 2.

Table 2:

On UNRWA	3. UNRWA reform	Reform
	14. Accountability UN	
	15. Reform UN	
	18. Inefficiency UNRWA	
	37. Dismantle UNRWA	
	51. Inspect UNRWA	
	5. Monetary reform	Monetary reform
	33. Economic inefficiency	
	35. Transparency	
	4. Importance schools & healthcare	Necessity UNRWA
	11. Necessity UNRWA	

	13. Condemn violence against UNRWA	
	49. Human rights	
	23. Redefine UNRWA definition refugee	Critique UNRWA strategy
	27. Critique UNRWA strategy	
	30. Critique right of return	
	32. UNRWA as an obstacle to progress?	
	16. Anti-Semitism & Anti-Israel bias	UNRWA anti-Israel
	20. Dissemination political rhetoric	
	19. UNRWA affiliations with Hamas	Violence
	17. Terrorism	
	43. Encouraging violence	
	39. Neutrality	UNRWA needs to be neutral
	40. No violence	
	41. Not opposing USA law	
	44. Education reform	Education reform
	45. Neutral education	
	42. Biased education	
On Palestine Question	10. Peace talks	Peace deal
	34. Security	
	50. Middle East Peace Deal	

	31. Creation Palestinian State	Palestinian state
	52. Local PA government	
	36. Economic enhancement	Economy
	38. Local integration	Local integration
	48. Hamas	Hamas/terrorism
On the USA	1. Voluntary Contributions	Funding pressure
	2. Future Contributions	
	21. Reallocate funds	
	24. Withholding funds as strategy	
	22. Ending all contributions	
	12. USA taxpayers	Interests the USA
	26. National security	
	46. Losing influence	
	47. interests USA	
	6. Burden Sharing	Unfair towards the USA
	8. USA largest donor	
	28. Humanitarianism	Importance humanitarianism
	9. Critique on the USA	Critique on the USA
	25. Opposing recognition of Palestine	Opposing recognition Palestine
On Israel	29. USA bias to Israel	USA bias to Israel

Table 2: Extrinsic topoi

The abovementioned steps fulfill the first two levels of analysis (see chapter 3.2.2), being text and discourse (intertextual and interdiscursive). In a Critical Discourse Analysis, it is not only important to identify these intrinsic and extrinsic topoi, but it is also necessary to critically analyze them in the larger social context, which is the third level of analysis. As we used the Discourse-Historical Approach, we cannot forget the fourth level of analysis, being the overarching sociopolitical and historical context. This third and fourth level of analysis will be critically analyzed in the next chapter, starting from the existing literature, reviewed in chapter 2.

4. Discussion Empirical Findings

When taking a closer look at the codes derived from the research objects and comparing these to the existing literature, there are a couple of interesting observations that can be made. As this is a Critical Discourse Analysis, my goal is also to critically examine these observations within the larger social and political context of settler colonialism.

First, however, it is important to reflect on the influence the Trump Administration's discourse might have on the receiving side. As stated before, text is a social practice that can shape the world view of the reader, listener, etc. The way the Trump Administration, and the American Government in general, talks about or refers to UNRWA and the Palestine Question has an influence on its audience. On the one hand, Its critical stance towards the Palestinian side might be part of the reason why the American citizen continue to show strong support for Israel and is critical of Palestine in general. Take for example the use of 'Israeli-Palestinian or Arab-Israeli conflict'. From a settler colonial point of view the use of these terms is not neutral but biased in favor of Israel and completely disintegrates the 'conflict' from its historical and political context which has been explained in chapter 2.2. On the other hand, and as we have already discussed, the Palestinian side clearly has lost their belief in the role of the U.S. as a peace negotiator, based on the U.S.'s discourse and actions.

4.1.   Pro-Israel

It is clear that the relationship between the U.S. and Israel has been very friendly, particularly under the Trump Administration. This is an important factor when analyzing the position of the U.S. towards UNRWA. This relationship really came forward from the reviewed literature and was also very noticeable in the texts that were analyzed.

According to Cavari (2020) and Espín Ocampo et al. (2020), Israel can always count on the U.S. to protect its interests in the UN and over the years, the U.S. has provided Israel with economic, diplomatic and military support. In multiple texts, the UN and UNRWA have been called out for supposedly antisemitic and anti-Israeli bias. Text 5 stated that "the US should continue to oppose anti-Israel bias at the UN and in UN agencies". Whereas text 8 mentioned that "textbooks used by the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the West Bank and Gaza demonize Israel".

The question that is important to ask is: from which point of view does the U.S. judge Palestine and Israel and which power relationships does this bring to the fore? As is already known that the relationship between the U.S. and Israel is rather friendly, it is straightforward to assume that they

are going to protect and defend Israel more. Text 4, a Congress Bill on promoting Equality and Accountability at the UN, equals the *Boycott, Disinvestment, and Sanctions* (BDS) movement with antisemitism. On his visit to an Israeli settlement on November 19th, 2020, Mike Pompeo, U.S. Secretary of State, expressed abovementioned opinion in public (Halbfinger & Kershner, 2020). Pompeo declared "that the United States would deny government support to groups that participated in the movement" (Halbfinger & Kershner, 2020) and called the movement a 'cancer'. But as the Trump Presidency is coming to an end, it is not clear which real repercussions this declaration would have (Halbfinger & Kershner, 2020). In short, the BDS movement is a peaceful Palestinian-led movement which "works to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law" ("What is BDS?," n.d.). They call on the world to boycott, disinvest and sanction Israel to pressure it to comply with international law. The fact that the U.S. calls this organization antisemitic, clearly shows which side they are taking. This leads me to assume that everything and everyone which or who is critical of Israel and Israel's practices are defined as antisemitic in the eyes of the U.S.

Next to criticizing the Palestinian side for antisemitism, it is also very clear when reading the texts that the U.S. does not take part in criticizing Israel. Not one of the eleven texts analyzed mentioned any form of criticism towards Israel or any form of recognition of the settler colonial context in which Palestinians live and in which UNRWA operates. The U.S. can easily do this from the powerful position they occupy on the world stage. Whereas the Palestinians have not very much power to exert on this level. We can thus state that the empirical research supports the unequal power relations between the U.S.-Israeli alliance and Palestinian leadership which has been described in the literature review.

4.2.   Financial Considerations

In multiple texts that were analyzed, but mainly in the press statements, the financial interests of the U.S. were cited as one of the main reasons for defunding UNRWA. "The US Government and the Trump Administration believe that there should be more so-called burden-sharing to go around" (text 1). They claim that it is not in the U.S. interest, and especially not in the U.S. taxpayers' interest, to spend such a big amount on an organization such as UNRWA, while the rest of the world does not provide a proportionate amount. "The United States was no longer willing to shoulder the very disproportionate share of the burden of UNRWA's costs that we had assumed for many years" (text 11). They also continuously emphasize how the U.S. has for long been the largest donor, in an attempt to show how generous they have been up until now. With sentences such as: "We're very generous, in fact, I would argue we're the most generous nation on the globe"

(text 1) and "The United States has been UNRWA's biggest donor since its inception, and contributes a disproportionate amount on Palestinian refugees in comparison to other refugees around the world" (text 6).

This could be a legitimate reason, if not for the fact that the U.S. continues to be one of the biggest donors to many other UN organizations and agencies. Therefore, the rest of the chapter will go deeper into what may be the real arguments and underlying reasons for the Trump Administration's decision.

4.3.   UNRWA as an Obstacle to Progress

One of the main problems the Trump Administration seems to have with UNRWA is its overall working strategy. Overall, they see UNRWA as an obstacle to progress. Which is a criticism that has been discussed thoroughly in the literature review. However, the Trump Administration starts from a different point of view than authors such as Elena Feldman (2009; 2012a; 2012b) and Linda Tabar (2016).

As different authors discussed in the literature review point out, the U.S.-Palestinian relationship and U.S. discourse have to be analyzed in light of the Peace to Prosperity Plan, commonly referred to as the Deal of the Century and is the U.S. and Israel's ideal form of progress. As we can read in chapter 2.5.3, the Peace to Prosperity Plan is not what Palestinians want because it is very advantageous to Israel. Multiple topics touched upon in the different texts have a clear link to the plan, which will be touched upon in the following paragraphs.

In text 7, the Congress Bill called 'Palestinian Assistance Reform Act of 2018', U.S. officials emphasized the necessity of local integration for Palestinian refugees. "The United Nations should prioritize the dismantlement of UNRWA refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza to allow Palestinians currently residing in such camps to integrate into their local communities and labor force." (text 7). Pushing for local integration into the current host governments can be interpreted as an attempt to end their refugee status. This is, however, not what Palestinian refugees want. While UNRWA was created with the attempt to integrate refugees economically and socially through their works programs, this was opposed by the refugees themselves. This is why UNRWA officials decided to refocus on basic relief and welfare services until the international community (and predominantly Israel and the U.S.) could come up with a real solution. But as it is clearly not the goal of neither Israel and the U.S. to push for an equal two-state solution, we can see why they push for the dismantlement of refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza and for their local integration, whatever this may mean.

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

The same text emphasized the impossibility of the right of return of Palestinian refugees in the eyes of the U.S. The right of return is one of the reasons why social and economic local integration is not ideal for Palestinian refugees and has not and will not work. As thoroughly discussed, UNRWA partly serves as the recognition of UNGA resolution 194 (III), which describes the right of return or compensation in the case that is not possible. The U.S. does not agree with this premise stating that the "United States financial support for UNRWA should not be construed to imply United States support for all Palestinians' right of return to Israel" (text 7). In this text, they also refer to President Bill Clinton's Peace Proposal in 2000 (the Clinton Parameters) which pointed out the "need for a policy that makes 'clear that there is no specific right of return to Israel' for the Palestinian People" (text 7). For the U.S., being able to remove the right of return would be an extraordinary step in the direction of the Peace and Prosperity Plan.

Another flawed UNRWA strategy in the eyes of the U.S. is their definition of a Palestinian refugee. In text 11, the August 31 press briefing, in which Nauert announced the complete defunding of UNRWA, she called the Agency an 'irredeemably flawed operation'. Calling the organization unsustainable, she referred to the negative effects of its expanding community of beneficiaries on its business model and fiscal practices. As pointed out, UNRWA's definition of a Palestinian refugee slightly differs from the one used by the UNHCR: "citizens of recognized states should be removed from UNRWA's jurisdiction; UNRWA's definition of a ''Palestine refugee'' should be changed to that used for a refugee by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees" (text 4). The main difference is that UNRWA also recognizes the descendants of male Palestinian refugees as beneficiaries, which thus leads to an ever-expanding target population. In the eyes of the U.S. Peace and Prosperity Plan, this is not beneficial: "Instead of resettling Palestinian refugees displaced as a result of the Arab-Israeli Conflict of 1948, UNRWA provides aid to those they define as Palestinian refugees until there is a solution they deem acceptable to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This policy does not help resettle the refugees from 1948 but instead maintains a refugee population in perpetuity." (text 6). In the eyes of UNRWA, on the other hand, this is necessary as these people currently live in refugee camps under the Israeli occupation and thus suffer more or less the same consequences. Four of the eleven texts analyzed mentioned the fact that UNRWA should adapt its definition and adopt the one of the UNHCR. This is also what Netanyahu wants, as discussed in chapter 2.5.2, again showing the bias of the U.S. towards Israel. This is also clear in text 7: "UNRWA's current mandate provides for an increase in the population of Arab persons who are assured, through their status as ''Palestine refugees'', that they will be entitled to return to Israel. UNRWA has identified more than 5,000,000 UNRWA refugees in its records. If 5,000,000

UNRWA refugees were to move to Israel, the Jewish people would become a minority population in Israel, and Israel would no longer be a Jewish State.". Most of the time, however, they claim that it is financially unsustainable instead: "UNRWA's policy of expanding the Palestinian refugee population, generation after generation, in contrast to every other refugee population in history, is not a financially sustainable model for United States taxpayers to continue to support without significant reform" (text 7).

For Feldman (2009: 2012b) and Tabar (2016), UNRWA is an obstacle to progress because it turns Palestinian refugees into passive victims instead of active agents resisting Israeli occupation. But for the Trump Administration, UNRWA is an obstacle to progress because it does the exact opposite in their eyes. It continues to offer them a world in which Palestinians can return to their homeland and at least stand on an equal footing with Israel.

4.4. Terrorism

Something that has not been discussed in the literature review, but has been mentioned in multiple texts which have been analyzed is the link between UNRWA, Hamas, and terrorism. The U.S. has designated Hamas as a terrorist organization in 1997 and the EU has done the same in 2001 ("EU court rejects Hamas appeal to delist terrorist status," 2019; "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," n.d.). In an attempt to disqualify UNRWA and legitimize the decision to cut funding, U.S. officials in different texts equalize UNRWA with Hamas and/or terrorism. Text 7 states that "UNRWA facilities have been used to support terrorist activities", while text 9 states that "UNRWA has employed individuals affiliated with Hamas, a designated terrorist organization". Whereas there have been instances in which UNRWA employees are affiliated with Hamas, these seem to be individual cases, rather than organizational linkages. It also seems like UNRWA does everything in its power to prevent this. Text 7 even states that "UNRWA announced that it had suspended Suhail al-Hindi, the chairman of the UNRWA Palestinian workers' union in Gaza and the principal of an UNRWA elementary school after receiving substantial information that al-Hindi was elected to Hamas' politburo in a vote in early February 2017." (text 7). This is also described in text 4.

They even linked UNRWA's most accredited service, being education, with terrorism: "Mr. Chairman, it does not advance the interests of the United States to fund schools that incite terror and hate throughout the world. Thirty-four of those such schools exist in Judea and Samaria, the area currently controlled by the Palestinian Authority, and this amendment would defund 34 schools that are named after terrorists, killers, and Nazi collaborators." (text 9). For one side these people are terrorists, whereas for the other they are martyrs. It is not the aim of this research to formulate

an opinion on this matter. However, when looking from a critical stance, we can see that the U.S. only refers to history or violence when it is to their advantage, thus committed by the Palestinians, while casually forgetting the atrocities committed by the Zionist settlers and Israeli government and military. Another element of this quote that stands out is the use of the terms 'Judea' and 'Samaria'. Judea and Samaria are the biblical names used for the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) by the Israeli Government (Galnoor & Blander, 2018). Even though the internationally used and recognized term remains 'West Bank'. This, again, shows the bias of the U.S. towards Israel.

4.5. Depoliticizing UNRWA

What is very pertinent when reading and analyzing all of these texts, is the complete dehistorization and depoliticization of the Palestine Question by the Trump Administration. As we know by now, when the U.S. announced the contribution of $60 million in September 2017, they used this as leverage to pressure UNRWA towards reform on several levels: "Next, the bill prohibits funds for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency until the Secretary can certify to the Congress that this organization is conducting regular inspections of its installations to ensure they are only used for humanitarian purposes and that the content of educational materials does not induce excitement. These conditions provide Secretary Tillerson with leverage to demand accountability and reform." (text 9) and "The United States success over a period of decades demonstrated that withholding contributions and placing conditions of its payment can result in real reforms, stop counterproductive developments, and advance U.S. interests at the United Nations." (text 4). When analyzing the texts, it clearly stands out that one of their main aims is to neutralize the Agency. One example is already mentioned above, which is their wish to adapt the definition of a Palestine refugee and adopt the one of the UNHCR instead. This completely disconnects the definition from the specific history and context of settler colonialism and the Palestine Question. But adapting this definition is not their only attempt in doing this, this part will go deeper into the topics of neutrality and humanitarianism.

As pointed out by Al-Husseini (2000) and Bocco (2010), UNRWA operates in a highly politicized context which has repercussions on the Agency itself, attaining a quasi-state character. This is clearly not appreciated by the U.S. In different texts, you can see how the U.S. state officials emphasize different aspects of UNRWA which they define as biased. One example is the field of education. In their January 2020 report, UNRWA states that they use the curriculum and the textbooks of the host country, and claim that "The Agency provides students with a quality education, the centerpiece of which is the commitment of UNRWA to the delivery of an education in its schools that is consistent with the values and principles of the United Nations (UN) and

promotes human rights, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination of race, gender, language and religion in line with the broader UN development goals." ("demystifying the unrwa approach to curriculum jan 2020," 2020, p.1). While UNRWA claims that it continuously reviews the textbooks based on the UN values and principles ("demystifying the unrwa approach to curriculum jan 2020," 2020), text 8 states that "The new Palestinian curriculums fail to meet the international standards of peace and tolerance in educational materials established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.". Next to these claims, text 8 also refers multiple times to the fact that UNRWA's educational materials encourage antisemitism, and violence and hatred towards Israel: "Textbooks used by the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the West Bank and Gaza demonize Israel, encourage war, and teach children that Palestinian statehood can be achieved through violence.". The U.S. asks for educational reform, which does not encourage "violence or intolerance towards other nations or ethnic groups" (text 8), and conforms "with standards of peace and tolerance in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization" (text 8).

Apart from criticizing UNRWA's educational facilities, five of the texts acknowledge the importance of the Agency's educational facilities, which is also UNRWA's main priority. In text 11, Nauert states: "We are very mindful of and deeply concerned regarding the impact upon innocent Palestinians, especially school children, of the failure of UNRWA and key members of the regional and international donor community to reform and reset the UNRWA way of doing business. These children are part of the future of the Middle East. Palestinians, wherever they live, deserve better than an endlessly crisis-driven service provision model. They deserve to be able to plan for the future.". It is somewhat contradictory that the Trump Administration recognizes the importance of UNRWA's educational services, while in the meantime cutting its funding which has a serious impact on this specific service. Combining this with the heavy criticism and emphasis on violence and terrorism, one can only wonder whether the Trump Administration does really care about Palestinian children and their education.

Up until now, I have described what the texts talk about, but what is equally important is what the texts do not talk about or avoid talking about. I have already identified the U.S. and Trump Administration's pro-Israel bias and have shortly touched upon the inconsistencies in referring to history and violence on both sides. This last factor is in my opinion very prominent throughout the different texts. Although, the texts' main topic is UNRWA and its 'inefficiencies' and 'problematic working strategy', it conveniently seems to (deliberately) ignore everything which surrounds and

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

maybe even can explain these 'inconsistencies'. From a settler colonial point of view, the U.S. ignores the history of Zionist settlers expelling Palestinians from their land decade after decade. Because they do not acknowledge this historical fact, the U.S. also do not acknowledge the right of return, which they have openly expressed in text 7 of the research objects. Next to this, the U.S. deny Palestinians their right to peaceful resistance. Evidently, this list could go on forever. However, what is striking is how this strategy seems to overlap with what Tabar (2016) described as the 'depoliticizing character of humanitarianism'.

Analyzing humanitarianism from a settler colonial point of view, Tabar pointed out how humanitarianism, by only focusing on basic needs depoliticizes the situation or conflict it intervened in. This is especially true when we think about the Palestine Question. It seems that what I have described in the literature review as the biggest flaw of humanitarianism, is exactly the situation the Trump Administration wants to create. In different texts that were analyzed, the U.S. officials emphasized the continued support for and need for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people: "The US should continue to assist other needy populations around the world through international aid and development assistance, including Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria." (text 6). However, this assistance should not happen through an organization as 'politicized and biased' as UNRWA. The different texts describe UNRWA as standing in the way of real progress because it continues to offer Palestinians the idea of a return to their homeland. As Al-Husseini (2010) pointed out, UNRWA gives the refugees a sense of solidarity and combativeness. If UNRWA would be reduced to a humanitarian organization only, not representing Palestinian refugees on the world stage, nor standing up for human rights abuses etc., the U.S. and Israel easily could work out more their plan for 'peace' in the region, namely disenfranchising the Palestinians. In this context, it is necessary to repeat a quotation which has been used in chapter 2.4.3 on humanitarianism as an accomplice: "Humanitarian compassion seems increasingly reserved for those who only suffer but do not act (Feldman, 2009, p.31). The title of this chapter also forms a great conclusion: humanitarianism acts as an accomplice in depoliticizing the Palestine Question and gives both the U.S. and Israel what they desire.

This can also be linked to what Tabar (2016) refers to as charity and the racialized hierarchy. Does the U.S. imitate the white Western 'bourgeois class', which out of the goodness of their hearts, aims to alleviate suffering in the world, while continuing to pursue their hidden agenda of delegitimizing Palestinians and furthering the goals of Israel based on their superior position on the world stage?

4.6.   Deal of the Century?

Another topic that has not been touched upon in the different texts from the Trump Administration is the Peace and Prosperity Plan which has been released shortly after the UNRWA funding cuts. Multiple authors that have been discussed point out the relation between the cutting of funding of UNRWA and this Peace and Prosperity Plan. It is important not to forget the underlying intentions, as we know that the U.S. predominantly acts out of their self-interest, as every country on the world stage does. Especially with the rising threat of Iran and the changing dynamics in the Middle East. Despite all of this, the texts do not mention this plan specifically. Except for one, in which a U.S. House Representative criticizes the idea of cutting funding to UNRWA. Stating: "Also, we should be mindful that the President is reengaging with Israel and the Palestinians on a Middle East peace deal, which we all know is difficult and a very complicated task. Prohibiting funds to UNRWA at this time may have an adverse impact on those delicate processes the President and his team have before them." (text 9). In the Press Briefing of January 16, 2018 (text 1), when a journalist attempted to bring up a question about a Tweet President Trump made on the peace talks, Nauert avoided the question by stating: "I'm not certain if this is what the President was referring to or not. I'd just have to refer you to the White House. I've not spoken to the President about this issue, so I'm sorry, I'm just not – I don't have the information to be able to answer that question. Okay, perhaps the White House can." and "Those are his words. I have not seen that myself. I've not seen that word that you just mentioned, so I'm not going to characterize or comment on that".

The mysteriousness and avoidance when mentioning or asking about the Peace Deal makes me assume that more is going on than they are willing to let go. This suspicion is also supported by the quotation from text 9, as seen in the paragraph before. Cutting funding of UNRWA does seem to be an attempt to delegitimize and depoliticize the Agency in order to push through the Deal of the Century.

5. Conclusion: "Turning active Palestinian agents resisting against settler colonialism into passive victims of a humanitarian disaster"

The goal of this dissertation was to take a closer look at publicized texts and released press statements of the Trump Administration related to its decision to cut UNRWA's funding, to deduct their discourses and arguments. More specifically, the research question it tried to answer: 'how does the Trump administration legitimize its decision to quit funding UNRWA, and which tensions in humanitarianism does this decision bring to the front?'. In the first half of the dissertation, the literature review outlined the debate in which the research question is located, namely humanitarianism. In the second half of the dissertation, I aimed to answer the research question by doing a Discourse Historical Analysis of official U.S. documents and press releases related to the cutting of funding for UNRWA. Here I will shortly give an overview of the answer to the research question and present my main conclusion, followed by a recommendation for the future. Important to note that because of the small sample of the research object, no hard conclusions can be drawn and further research is necessary to lay the foundations of a real conclusion.

First, I will shortly summarize the main arguments which the Trump Administration gave as a reason to defund UNRWA. This is an answer to the first part of the research question: "how does the Trump Administration legitimize its decision to quit funding". The first reason is the idea that other countries contribute too little to the Agency compared to the U.S., which they find unsustainable to maintain. This, however, seems to be used as a hypocritical excuse when we know the Trump Administration remains the biggest donor in other UN Agencies. Secondly, the Trump Administration seems to have a big problem with UNRWA's working strategy. They claim the Agency is inefficient and forms an obstacle to progress. The main problems it has with its working strategy are the fact that it counters local integration because of a promise of the right of return and has an 'overstretched' definition of a Palestinian refugee. These characteristics seem to stand in the way of the Peace to Prosperity Plan, introduced by the Trump Administration. Thirdly, multiple of the texts refer to the link between UNRWA and terrorism/Hamas. This can be interpreted as an attempt to delegitimize UNRWA and its staff members who have been working relentlessly to provide services to over 5 million refugees. Lastly, the Trump Administration claims that the Agency is not neutral enough, and accuse their services and staff members of antisemitism and inciting violence and hatred. This last argument is also the main tension that has been brought to the front when analyzing the different research objects and is the answer to the second part of our research question, which will be touched upon in the next paragraph. First, however, it is important to point out the obvious pro-

Israeli bias of the Trump Administration throughout the different texts that have been analyzed, which thus confirms the first hypothesis.

The main conclusions I have drawn from the literature review seems to be the premise of the Trump Administration going forward. We have seen that one of the main problems with humanitarianism and UNRWA is that it redefines a struggle against settler colonialism into a struggle for food and life. This premise was always in the back of my mind while analyzing the research objects and after analyzing the texts, it became clear that humanitarian aid depoliticizing the Palestine Question comes very handy to the Trump Administration, which is thus a confirmation of the second hypothesis. The Trump Administration wants to deny the highly politicized environment in which Palestinians struggle against the Israeli occupation of their homeland. Every aspect of UNRWA which is related to or has an impact on the right of return and Palestinian self-determination has to be removed. While they continue to emphasize the focus on humanitarianism in the field of health care and education. Thus, by turning the Palestinian struggle for their land and political recognition in the face of Israeli settler colonialism into a struggle for food and life, humanitarianism in essence contributes to what both the U.S. and Israel want, namely denying the existence and self-determination of Palestinians. While authors such as Al-Husseini (2010) hold on to UNRWA specifically because it creates a sense of national identity. The U.S. and Israel want UNRWA to cease its operations because it creates an atmosphere of political hope for Palestinian refugees. In the meantime, they do want to continue humanitarian aid outside of the UNRWA framework and we know, based on Tabar's (2016) argument, that humanitarian aid depoliticizes the underlying conflict and removes the agency and self-determination of the refugees. It seems that the U.S., by taking these specific actions, is exactly aiming for this scenario, namely turning active Palestinian agents resisting against settler colonialism into passive victims of a humanitarian disaster.

According to Tabar (2016), the category of victimhood is also performative, meaning that victimhood will be performed to receive benefits or aid. Even though the U.S. claims that without UNRWA, a real path towards progress is possible, the very premise of humanitarian aid, and the U.S. knows this, keeps victims powerless. Al-Husseini (2010) pointed out that the specific case of UNRWA creates a sense of political combativeness. Thus in the eyes of the U.S., keeping humanitarianism alive would be beneficial as it creates victims. But it would have to be removed from the framework of UNRWA, to do away with the feelings of national identity and political agency that the Agency creates and reiterates.

How relevant is this research? In an ideal situation, this research would have been conducted on a bigger scale, preferably including Trump's speeches. However, these were not easy to find, and

with the limited time and resources available I have decided upon these eleven texts. The covid-19 virus has made doing fieldwork difficult. But if it would have been possible, it would have been a real contribution to the research to be able to go to Palestine and talk with UNRWA employees and beneficiaries to get to know their point of view and opinion on what I have deducted from the Trump Administration's discourse. This may be an idea for future research. Next to this, with the Trump Presidency normally coming to an end, it would also be interesting to see what the Biden Administration has in store for the future. We already know Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu looks forward to working with Biden in the future, as he congratulated the President-elect on his victory and stated that they have a longstanding personal relationship for more than 40 years (Ahren, n.d.). Will the Biden Administration adopt another discourse when talking about Palestine and UNRWA? Will something change for the better for Palestinians? Will there be a change in the relationship between Israel and the U.S. or will they continue their strong relationship of today? These are questions I cannot answer just yet but research has to be mindful of in the future. Next to the changes happening in the U.S. it will also be necessary to keep an eye on the changing dynamics in the Middle East itself, especially with the rising importance of Iran on the international stage and Israel forming alliances with other Arab countries to prevent this (Lubold & Schwartz, 2020). These all have an impact on the future of Palestine and in this ever-changing world, research continuous to be of utmost importance.

6. Bibliography

194 (III). Palestine -- Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator. (1948). Retrieved
September 24, 2020, from
https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A

302 (IV). Assistance to Palestine Refugees. (1949). Retrieved September 22, 2020, from
https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/AF5F909791DE7FB0852560E500687282

Abunimah, A. (2018). How Israel hopes to make Palestinian refugees disappear. *The Electronic
Intifada*. Retrieved from https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/how-israel-hopes-
make-palestinian-refugees-disappear

Ahren, R. (n.d.). After hours of silence, Netanyahu congratulates Biden, but doesn't say what for.
The Times of Israel. Retrieved from https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-hours-of-silence-
netanyahu-and-rivlin-congratulate-biden-on-election-win/

Al-Husseini, J. (2000). UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process. *Journal of Palestine
Studies*, *29*(2), 51–64.

Al Husseini, J. (2010). UNRWA and the Refugees: a difficult but lasting marriage. *Journal of
Palestine Studies*, *11*(1), 6–26.

Al Husseini, J., & Bocco, R. (2010). The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East: The
right of return and UNRWA in perspective. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *28*(2–3), 260–285.
https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdp036

Alemi, M., Tajeddin, Z., & Rajabi Kondlaji, A. (2017). A Discourse-Historical Analysis of Two
Iranian Presidents' Speeches at the UN General Assembly. *International Journal of Society,
Culture & Language*, *6*(1), 1–17.

Bazian, H. (2018). US's Defunding UNRWA & Starving the Palestinians into Surrender. Retrieved
October 15, 2020, from http://www.hatembazian.com/content/uss-defunding-unrwa-starving-
the-palestinians-into-surrender/

Belloni, R. (2007). The trouble with humanitarianism. *Review of International Studies*, *33*(3), 451–
474. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210507007607

Benjamin Netanyahu. (2019). Retrieved November 4, 2020, from

https://www.gov.il/en/departments/people/benjamin_netanyahu

Bocco, R. (2010). UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees: A history within history. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *28*(2–3), 229–252. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdq001

Cavari, A. (2020). Trump, Israel, and the Shifting Pattern of Support for a Traditional Ally - The Trump Doctrine and the Emerging International System. In S. A. Renshon & P. Suedfeld (Eds.) (pp. 281–315). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45050-2_12

Confronting the Campaign Targeting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): Parameters, Principles and Recommendations for A Palestinian Strategic Plan. (2018). Bethlehem.

Datondji, A. C., & Amousou, F. (2019). Discourse-Historical Approach To Critical Discourse Studies: Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis, Basic Characteristics and Analytical Tools. *Revue Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée, de Litteérature et d'Education*, *2*(1).

demystifying the unrwa approach to curriculum jan 2020. (2020). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/demsytifying_unrwa_approach_to_curriculum2020. pdf

Espín Ocampo, J., Moreno Melgarejo, A., & Navarro Zapata, E. (2020). Supporting israel by withholding support to international organizations: UNRWA and UNESCO in Trump's foreign policy. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterraneos*, *28*(28), 25–42. https://doi.org/10.15366/REIM2020.28.002

EU court rejects Hamas appeal to delist terrorist status. (2019, March 6). *DW*. Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/eu-court-rejects-hamas-appeal-to-delist-terrorist-status/a-47790588

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling* (Vol. 110). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: the critical study of language*. New York: Longman.

Feldman, I. (2009). Gaza's Humanitarianism Problem. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *38*(3), 22–37.

https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2009.xxxviii.3.22

Feldman, I. (2012a). The challenge of categories: UNRWA and the definition of a "Palestine refugee." *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *25*(3), 387–406. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fes004

Feldman, I. (2012b). The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, *3*(2), 155–172. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2012.0017

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2019). The Changing Faces of UNRWA: From the Global to the Local. *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, *1*(1), 28–41. https://doi.org/10.7227/jha.004

Foreign Terrorist Organizations. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/

Freedman, R. O. (2017). The Obama Legacy in the Middle East and the Trump Challenge. *India Quarterly*, *73*(2), 241–250. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928417699917

Galnoor, I., & Blander, D. (2018). *The Handbook of Israel's Political System*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316160978

H.R.6451 - UNRWA Reform and Refugee Support Act of 2018. (2018). Retrieved October 15, 2020, from https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6451

Halbfinger, D. M., & Kershner, I. (2020, November 19). Pompeo Visits West Bank Settlement and Calls B.D.S. Anti-Semitic. *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/19/world/middleeast/pompeo-bds-golan-heights-west-bank.html

Huchkin, T. N. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. Miller (Ed.), *Functional Approaches to Written Text: Classroom Applications* (pp. 78–92). Washington D.C.: English Language Programs.

Irfan, A. (2019). Understanding UNRWA: what the Trump cuts tell us. *The Middle East in London*, *15*(3), 7–8.

Isacoff, J. B. (2005). Writing the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Historical Bias and the Use of History in Political Science. *Perspectives on Politics*, *3*(1), 71–88.

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

Khalidi, R. (2016). Twenty-First Century Palestinian Development Studies Bringing It All Back
Home. *Journal of Palestine Studies, 45*(4), 7–15.
https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2016.45.4.7.Summer

Krähenbühl, P. [PKhraehenbuehl]. (2018, January 17). After decades of generous support,
dramatic reduction of US funding to @UNRWA results in most critical financial situation in
history of Agency. I call on member states of the United Nations to take a stand &
demonstrate to Palestine Refugees that their rights & future matter. [Tweet]. Retrieved from
https://twitter.com/pkraehenbuehl/status/953562941370093568?lang=en

Labbé, J., & Daudin, P. (2015). Applying the humanitarian principles: Reflecting on the
experience of the International Committee of the Red Cross. *International Review of the Red
Cross, 97*(897–898), 183–210. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383115000715

Labouisse, H. (1955). *Annual Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Work
Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East covering the period 1 July 1954 to 30 June
1955*. New York. Retrieved from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/712884#record-files-
collapse-header

Lubold, G., & Schwartz, F. (2020, September 15). U.S., Israel, U.A.E., Bahrain Sign Peace
Accord. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-israel-u-a-
e-bahrain-sign-peace-accord-11600191303?mod=article_inline

Mandate for Palestine (1922). League of Nations.

Morris, B. (1999). *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1998*. New York:
Knopf.

Moshe, M. (2002). The UN Partition Resolution of 1947: Why Was it Not Implemented? *Palestine-
Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture, 9*(4), 15. Retrieved from
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=buh&AN=9200236
&site=eds-live&authtype=shib&custid=s3011414

Nauert, H. (2018). State Department Press Statement. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from
https://www.un.org/unispal/document/on-us-assistance-to-unrwa-us-state-department-press-
statement/

Palestine refugee agency chief resigns amidst mismanagement probe. (2019, November 6). *UN

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

News. Retrieved from https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1050801

Palestine Refugees. (n.d.). Retrieved November 4, 2020, from https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees

Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People. (2020). Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/peacetoprosperity/

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In M. Reisigl & R. Wodak (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 87–121). London: Sage.

Rempel, T. M. (2000). *The United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine , Protection , and a Durable Solution for Palestinian Refugees*. Retrieved from http://badil.org/phocadownload/Badil_docs/bulletins-and-briefs/Brief-No.5.pdf

Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2010). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185954/

Rosenfeld, M. (2010). From emergency relief assistance to human development and back: UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees, 1950-2009. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *28*(2–3), 286–317. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdp038

S. El-Falaky, M., & M.M. Ahmed, A.-S. (2015). Coquetting Females versus Males of Manners: Critical Discourse Analysis of Egyptian Street Songs. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *6*(5). https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.6n.5p.190

Shearer, D. (2004). The humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory: an overview. *Humanitarian Exchange*, *November*(28), 2–4. https://doi.org/http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-44

Skinner, R., & Lester, A. (2012). Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, *40*(5), 729–747. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2012.730828

Suleiman, J. (2018). *The Ongoing UNRWA Crisis: Context, Dimensions, Prospects and Responses*. Beirut.

Tabar, L. (2016). Disrupting development, reclaiming solidarity: The anti-politics of

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

humanitarianism. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *45*(4), 16–31.
https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2016.45.4.16

The Legal Status of the West Bank and Gaza. (1982). Retrieved December 3, 2020, from
https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-203742/

Timeline of Palestine's History. (n.d.). Retrieved November 3, 2020, from
https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/palestineremix/timeline_main.html

Trump, D. J. (2019). Statement by the President. Retrieved November 18, 2020, from
https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-by-the-president-
32/#:~:text=1865%2C the "Further Consolidated Appropriations,Government through
September 30%2C 2020.

United Nations Partition Plan of 1947 - Map. (n.d.). Retrieved December 7, 2020, from
https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208958/

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2020).
Retrieved September 30, 2020, from https://www.unrwa.org/

UNRWA Fields of Operations Map 2020. (2020). Retrieved December 7, 2020, from
https://www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/unrwa-fields-operations-map-2020

Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical Discourse Analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton
(Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 352–371). Oxford: Blackwell.
https://doi.org/10.1111/b.9780631205968.2003.00033.x

Veracini, L. (2013). The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel, and the Occupation. *Journal of
Palestine Studies*, *42*(2), 26–42. https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/31.6.177

What is BDS? (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2020, from https://bdsmovement.net/

Williams, I. (2019). Ethics report accuses UNRWA leadership of abuse of power. *Al Jazeera*.
Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/29/ethics-report-accuses-unrwa-
leadership-of-abuse-of-power/

Wodak, R. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach. In K. Tracy, C. Ilie,
& T. Sandel (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction, First
Edition* (pp. 1–14). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463/wbielsi116

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

Yahaya, J. U. (2020). President Trump Peace Strategy: Emerging Conflict Between Israel and Palestine. *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, *82*. https://doi.org/10.7176/iags/82-04

Zanotti, J. (2018). US Foreign Aid to the Palestinians. *Current Politics and Economics in the Middle East*, *9*(4).

7. Annex

1. Coded texts
2. Methodological Analysis