

Geographies of Dis/Topia in the Nation-State: Israel, Palestine, and the Geographies Of Liberation

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Since the dawn of the twenty-first century there have been numerous calls to break with the tradition of nationalism. Even so, the state remains vital for those seeking liberation. Denied a representative form of government, safety, or autonomy, the colonized may embrace a vision of liberation in the form of an independent state. This article interrogates the dual image of the nation-state as both a space of utopian liberation and dystopic violence and repression. It focuses on the pernicious nature of the nation-state vision for peoples on both sides of the Palestinian/Israeli divide.

A utopia is necessarily, through its very definition, a placeless place: it cannot exist beyond the imaginaries of its proponents. The utopia embodies ideals — social, political, and otherwise — but can never be attained. Michel Foucault famously referred to a notion of heterotopia, a place that exists in space, but whose fantastic nature cannot be realized in any real location.¹ And Benedict Anderson has noted that nationalism requires such an idyllic vision of the unattainable in order to mobilize its adherents.²

The Zionist project for the creation of a Jewish state, culminating in 1948, relied both upon a utopian reordering of territory based on unrealistic claims about the nature of the land itself as savage and uninhabited and on the promise of movements for ethnic purity in the state and in labor.³ The Israeli occupation of Palestine thus resulted in the creation of an ethnically Jewish state on territory inhabited by a largely non-Jewish, indigenous Palestinian population. Today this occupation has, however, created conditions that approach the original ideal's inverted dystopia as a result of spatial practices enacted through systems and organs of disempowerment, displacement and killing.

Globally, the colonial project created horrors for the colonized, engendering militant responses, both violent and nonviolent. This is no less the case today in Palestine. This contradiction was evident in Hannah Arendt's writings on the Eichmann trial in 1961, for

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even at that early date it was clear the Israeli state was predicated on the destruction of Palestinian aspirations.⁴ Palestinians by and large seek a state to represent them, to protect them from harm and guarantee their safety. Like the Zionists, in envisioning this state, they, too, mobilize a utopian vision, seeing the state as an answer to the depredations of the Israeli occupation. So far, this state has been deferred; it is clear that no party can, or will, guarantee the aspirations of the Palestinians. At the same time, current conditions are not sustainable, and state-based solutions remain the only viable proposals for an end to the interminable hell that is the occupation.

This article seeks to understand the changing role of the state through the lens of subaltern geopolitics, an approach that represents a novel way of tackling questions of state-making in the contemporary era.⁵ In this respect, the problems of Israel-Palestine offer a telling case study and a challenge to the political work carried out by the variously utopian and dystopian visions associated with the nation-state.

Starting from the Israeli perspective, the article critically reevaluates notions of the state in popular discourse by examining the nationalist narrative as represented by popular authors writing in the Israeli press. Because the official, popular, Israeli narrative relies on assumptions about the attitudes of individual Palestinians, it then puts this narrative in conversation with quotidian Palestinian narratives, gathered through 56 personal interviews throughout the West Bank and Gaza between 2006 and 2011.

It is precisely the problem of being a nation without a state that makes it necessary to look for Palestinian narratives through ethnography. In other words, there is no state-sanctioned voice of Palestine as such, and certainly none of the accouterments of the state such as news media, museums, and other publicly funded institutions of nation-building — let alone a national press corps. What exists in their stead is the Palestinian Authority, which, since its establishment — and particularly since the U.S.-sanctioned coup d'état of 2007 — has been the organ of the Fatah movement. Political parties may have their organs of propaganda and representation, but without a cohesive central state, these voices are drowned out by Israeli and Western representations of who Palestinians are, what they believe, and what they stand for. This is not to say there is no master Palestinian narrative — for there most certainly is. Rather, to understand the contemporary experience, it is vital to seek the voice of individuals to understand how the condition of occupation promotes a utopian vision of the state among the stateless.

APPROACHING NATIONALISM AS UTOPIAN VISION

An important chronology of events has led to the current dynamic of Israel and Palestine. The Levant, the lands of the eastern Mediterranean, were historically inhabited by a diverse population, and the territory of Palestine provided

a central location for the migration and settlement of these peoples. For hundreds of years Palestine was ruled by the Ottoman Turks, until their empire fell at the end of World War I and control of the area passed to a British Mandate. By this time the Zionist movement had already begun a series of waves of immigration, known as *aliyah*. The first, begun in the 1880s, brought Eastern European Jews to Palestine in hopes of creating a Jewish state. But by the 1920s a series of major conflicts had broken out between the indigenous Arab majority and these newcomers. These incidents represented a clash of nationalisms, but they also had an anti-colonial character. Thus, both Zionists and Palestinians struggled against the British, while rank-and-file Palestinians struggled against what they saw as a Zionist nationalist invasion. The year 1947 marked the beginning of the establishment of the Israeli state, which included the withdrawal of British forces in 1948 and culminated in the signing of the Rhodes Armistice in 1949. Then, in 1956, Israel embarked on a war of expansion, temporarily occupying Gaza and parts of the Sinai Desert before withdrawing to the 1948 borders. And in the years that followed Israel continued to expand as a result of a series of armed conflicts with its neighbors.

While Palestinian resistance has been present in some form since the beginning of the occupation, it culminated in the largely nonviolent outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987. This event ignited the popular imagination of the West and represented a significant step in the internationalization of the conflict. The Intifada ended with the signing of the Oslo Interim Accords in 1993, a series of temporary agreements which established the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza. While Oslo was hailed as a major step toward peace, it was also followed by an increase in the construction of Israeli settlements on occupied lands, and it was marked by continued Israeli military occupation and control of Palestinian resources and territory. In short, it did not bring any real sovereignty for Palestinians. Then, in 2000, the Oslo period came to an end with the beginning of the second Intifada and the Israeli “reoccupation” of the West Bank and Gaza.

Popular liberation struggles take a number of forms, but as James Blaut has adeptly demonstrated, their goal is intrinsically imbricated and conflated with nationalism. The situation is complex and riddled with contradictions: the current world system of nation-states is, in itself, a construction of Western European colonialism. In recent years many authors have foretold the end of nationalism, either through neoliberal globalization or internationalism, and they have focused on the contradictions in the very notion of national liberation. A number have already heralded the end of the nation-state through a process of “flattening” — the removal of restrictions to trade, ostensibly creating a liberal vision of economic equivalence punctuated by competitive advantage.⁶ Others, in response, have described the collapse of the nation-state system as inevitable in the face of international grass-roots mobilization.⁷

These various analyses, while intended to be optimistic, may be a bit premature, and they ignore the revitalization of imperial militarism powered by American nationalism, for example.⁸ Likewise, they cannot explain the pervasive call for state sovereignty within many social movements for liberation. Blaut is helpful in this regard, as he has explained the continuing importance of the state in the context of popular struggle.⁹ Such analyses are significant because they emphasize how claims about the irrelevance of the state have been deeply exaggerated in academic discourse. Indeed, the events of 2011 in the Middle East, while serving as examples of international popular struggle, were also deeply rooted in attempts to seize control of individual nation-states — in Tunisia and Egypt, Yemen and Syria, Bahrain and beyond.

The notion of freedom can best be addressed through the experiences of those for whom it is so completely denied. Palestinians are such a population — denied citizenship and statehood, part of the Arab World, but distinct in identity. As one resident of the town of Bir Zeit explained to me: “There were three losers of the First World War — Armenians, Kurds, and Palestinians. None of us got a state.”

Clearly, the state is the fundamental concern of geopolitics. Thus, the end goal of many nationalist movements is the creation of a state, a space and an apparatus that represents the struggling nation, a peer in a world of nation-states. Yet my research rejects the notion of states as monolithic entities, seeking instead to interrogate the notions of geopolitics through the lived experience of the subaltern. I thus return to the question of the state, but examine its conflation with freedom through the voices of those who have been denied both. Partha Chatterjee has described nationalism as a “derivative discourse,” which may be problematized as a colonial notion and a distraction for those seeking true popular liberation.¹⁰ However, this article considers the ways in which the state may be hybridized through what Vicente Rafael has called a process of “translation.”¹¹ In this process, Frantz Fanon has argued, the foreign notion of the state may become something new in the hands of the colonized, representing an end to the violence of colonization.¹²

In the case of the occupied Palestinian territories, the Israeli presence has created a particular political, carceral, geography, which varies dramatically from place to place. One might think of this as creating “microgeographies of occupation.” It is important to examine the practices of resistance to occupation. But rather than include an exhaustive analysis of all violent and nonviolent (or, more precisely, popular vs. armed¹³) practices, this article will examine the processes by which nationalism is *translated* into a local phenomenon. Nationalism thus becomes imbricated with notions of liberation and an overall strategy of *sumoud*, or “steadfastness.” Seen this way, nationalism is the unifying feature of *sumoud*. Thus, while the occupation functions through separation and isolation of Palestinian enclaves, Palestinian resistance remains national in character, insisting on the identity, culture

and space represented by the phrase *min al nahr ila al bahr*, “from the river to the sea.”

Nationalism as a social movement must mobilize a vision of a utopian ideal. The binary of utopia/dystopia is thus far from unique to Zionism, and it is present in most discourse about colonies.¹⁴ This is particularly true of Western colonialism, in which a utopian order is supposed to be established on the dystopian disorder of the native population.¹⁵ In Zionism, the ideal is of a culturally homogeneous state, one that protects the Jewish people from the depredations of anti-Semitism. Israel, then, was created in the model of Western liberal democracies; but, like all colonies, it suffers from an intractable contradiction. In the case of Israel, this fundamental contradiction lies in this notion of a democratic, Jewish state. In a territory with an indigenous non-Jewish majority, the possibility of a democracy that only recognizes Jews as full citizens is an oxymoron.

In contemporary Zionism, the specter of the Holocaust is consistently mobilized both to justify and promote the nationalist cause. The ideal of Israel is thus as a safe haven for Jews, and Jews alone. But Zionist nationalism has traditionally also meant Ashkenazi nationalism, as the major parties have always been dominated by the Ashkenazi elite. Paradoxically, the Israeli definition of a Jew is racialized from a European notion of ethnicity.¹⁶ This racialization papers over historical differences between communities, and it creates a white vision of the Jew, even though Ashkenazi Jews represent a minority of the Jewish population in Israel.¹⁷ Israeli writers have acknowledged these racial and cultural cleavages in Israeli society.¹⁸ And some have even suggested that the only force stronger than the fracturing forces of Israeli stratification is the existential threat that Israeli governments evoke in their portrayal of Palestinians.¹⁹ This definition is empowered by the right of return for Jews, allowing anyone of Jewish descent to immigrate to Israel and attain citizenship through a process called *aliyah*, or “ascension.”

Indeed, Israeli nationalism is rife with contradictions, as the Israeli state deploys a language of Western modernity to promote itself as the sole democracy in the Middle East — language that does much to support Israeli military and political actions. The deepest contradiction here is the paradox of liberal modernity in the face of the modern atrocities that mobilized international support for the Jewish state: those of the Holocaust in Europe.

The Israeli author Yitzhak Laor has examined in painstaking detail the problem of Israel defining itself through the Western lens and detaching itself from its neighbors, while attempting to mobilize fears of Western anti-Semitism to promote itself among Western powers. Laor has thus pointed out in his reading of numerous Israeli writers, notably Amos Oz, that the defining characteristic of the Israeli state is a yearning for ethnic purity. Clearly, this ethnic notion of statehood has its roots in the very origins of Zionism, a movement that maintained as its sole concern the establishment of

a Jewish state in Palestine. This ideal is complicated by the demographic problem — the realization that if true democracy is realized in Israel, eventually Jews will be outnumbered by non-Jews, destroying the possibility of a pure Jewish state.

In many ways Palestinian and Israeli visions of the state talk past one another, and there are significant differences in the portrayal of the future for each nation. As Ghazi Falah has pointed out, there is a refusal on the part of the Israeli leadership to create solid borders. The state is an ephemeral institution, harking back to Ratzel's vision of an organic being, needing to expand to survive. And so the territory of Israel has continued to expand, from its initial existence as a series of outposts in the first *aliyah* to a state-space encompassing the 1948 and 1967 territories.²⁰ In this sense, it is the ethnic makeup of the state which defines it.²¹

This expansive and organic vision may be contrasted with the prevalent Palestinian nationalist narrative.

Palestine to me is my life and everything. Everything related to me is Palestine. Its boundary is every speck of dirt from the Mediterranean sea until the [Jordan] river.

— H, Ras al-Tira

H, quoted above, lives in a small village surrounded by the Israeli wall in Area C of the West Bank. He speaks quite clearly to the primary vision of a Palestinian state: from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. The Palestinians with whom I spoke in the course of my research had a vision of a nationalism that demanded a Palestinian state as an entity rooted in geographic, not ethnic, boundaries. When I asked, “Where is Palestine?” the answer often was “*Min al nahr illa al bahr*” (“from the river to the ocean”). This phrase refers to the historical boundaries of Mandate-era Palestine. By comparison, in normal conversation, the 1967 boundaries are represented as a more immediate future.

Israelis interpret this geography as the embodiment of Gamal Abd Al-Nasser's alleged threat to “push them into the sea,” a dystopic, millenarian recall of past genocides. However, what separates the Palestinian nationalist vision from that of the Israeli utopic state is that there is no attempt to define its ethnic makeup. It is merely a state where Palestinians can live in relative peace and freedom. This lack of ethnic demands on a future state is present in proclamations from Palestinian leaders that in the event of a Palestinian state coming into being on the 1967 borders, Jewish settlers who choose to remain will be granted Palestinian citizenship. This discrepancy is not merely a diplomatic flourish; not one of my respondents, regardless of political affiliation, expressed a vision of an ethnically pure Palestinian state.

Freedom to me is the disappearance of every Israeli in the world — Israelis, not Jews. Israelis are nationalists; nationalism is what they are doing, not religion, and

they are using Judaism as a shield. Freedom can only be reached if every Israeli disappears. Our religion respects other religions, and we respect them too, and Jews are People of the Book. But what we have here are not Jews that take things from a religious perspective; they take them from a nationalist perspective, and they want to remove Arab nationalism and replace it with Israeli nationalism hidden by religion.

— M

Here M, a council member from a small village in the Qalqilyah district, explicitly describes the problem as one of nationalism, not ethnic conflict. She takes pains to make clear that her anger is not directed toward Jews, but toward people who self-identify as Zionists and who take part in the Zionist project. This does not mean that the Palestinian vision of a collective state is of a perfect peace between Israeli Jews and locals — although some of my interviewees espoused this ideal in response to further questions. Rather, the demographic makeup of a future Palestine was just not a central concern to my participants. There is no vision of an Islamic republic — or even an exclusively Arab republic. Partly, it is derived from the fact that the Palestinian population, itself, is far from homogenous. There are deep political and religious divisions within it, and Palestinian Arabs include Muslims, Christians, Jews, and members of other religions.

Certainly, there are deep divisions within Israeli society, too, but the national myth of Zionism primarily concerns the securing of a Jewish, Ashkenazi nation — even when non-European Jews make up the majority of the population. For many Palestinians, by contrast, the nation means freedom and safety, not homogeneity and ethnocracy. For them, the state represents freedom of movement, freedom from the biopower of a hostile state, and the safety to exist, to maintain lands, to live in peace.

The territories of the Zionist dream were originally imagined as the Wild West, a frontier, a settling of the East. This pioneering spirit was mirrored in the early architecture of Wall and Tower.²² And this process of controlling space, attempting to tame territory to make way for immigration and the national ideal, continues to this day in the vertical domination of space through settler architecture.²³ Likewise, the early programs of claiming territory embraced a project of “making the desert bloom” through agricultural projects that were the forebears of modern Israeli agricultural industry. Much of this settlement practice was founded on ostensibly socialist ideals; yet, at their core, the majority of these settlements adhered to a notion of Hebrew labor, an attempt to promote the Jewish state through the exclusion of native workers.²⁴

These early images of nation-building within Zionism clashed with the simultaneous destruction of Palestinian homes and communities, which reached a fever pitch coincident to the creation of the Israeli state. Perhaps the most

intricate documentation of this process is Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, a photographic tally of the villages and homes depopulated first by Zionist forces and then by Israelis. This wanton destruction of Palestinian society can explain how Palestinian liberation movements came to envision themselves through the anti-colonial rhetoric of the second half of the twentieth century. Images from Khalidi's book create the feeling of a place haunted. But the inhabitants and their descendants were not all killed; they live on in squalid refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and beyond. Meanwhile, their former settlements have been reinhabited or abandoned: mosques have become kosher fish and falafel restaurants for more recent immigrants; entire villages have been grown over by national parks or transformed into artist colonies (FIG. 1).²⁵ These refugees live in their own limbo, in vertical cinder-block shacks, the structure of their densely populated camps a commemoration of the homes from which they were driven, and to which they hope to someday return.²⁶

Clearly, the notion that Palestine was an unpopulated territory was ludicrous during the last part of the nineteenth century. It is for this reason that many authors have attempted to parse the meaning of the quintessential phrase of the Zionist movement abroad: "A land without a people for a people without a land." While the exact origins of this phrase are debated, there can be no question that it helped define the actions of the new immigrants to Palestine. However, the main idea in the phrase is not that the land was completely unpopulated; rather, it concerns the definition of a valid "people."²⁷ This rhetoric is deeply ingrained in Zionist ideology, and it is imbricated with a similar notion, that Palestinians "were not using the land properly." This secondary notion has appeared in the discourse of my own extended family, who equate backwardness and a lack of respect for the land with the indigenous. Thus, the utopian vision of Palestine as the site of the future Jewish state set a stage for the development and resettlement projects of the Zionists, working hard to make the desert bloom.

However, this attitude also meant that from the time the Israeli state was established (and was subsequently recognized by the U.N. in 1949), the Palestinian population was governed under a state of emergency. Immediately recognized as a demographic threat and a potential fifth column, Palestinians in the 1948 territories lived under a regime of limited citizenship in the aftermath of a concerted campaign of ethnic cleansing.²⁸ My own mother, living in Haifa, described the process by which her family moved from one house to another — in her memory, at the behest of the British. These homes were built by Palestinians, lived in by Palestinians, but then used to provide shelter to Eastern European immigrants, who in turn gave quarter to paramilitary soldiers from the proto-Israeli Hagana whose goal was the creation of a Jewish state. In her own narrative, there was no consideration of the previous occupants of these homes. She said the Palestinians "just left," and her family replaced them.

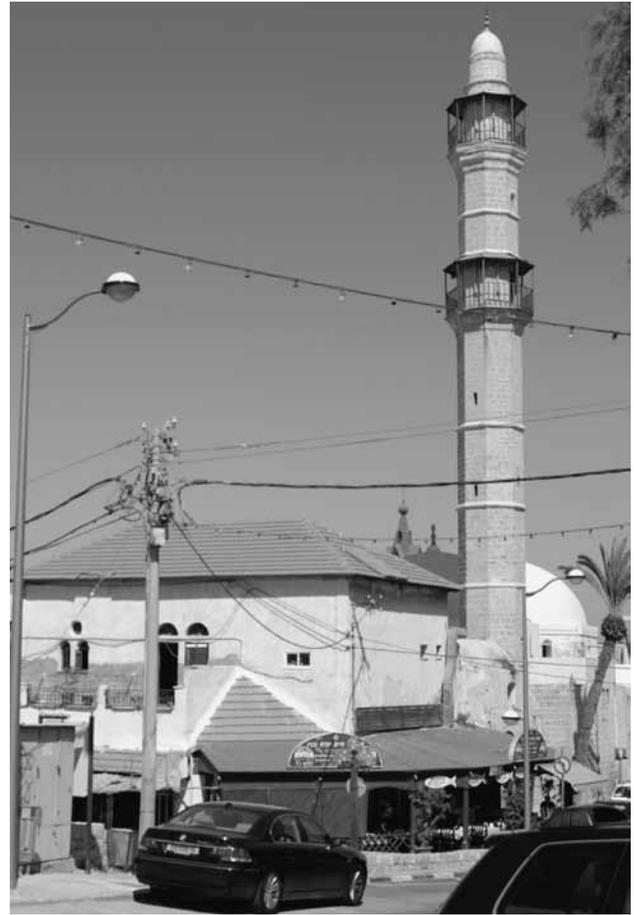


FIGURE 1. Mosque in Jaffa, 1948 territories, converted to a kosher fish and falafel restaurant. Note the stars of David on the signs and in the graffiti, signs of a neighborhood undergoing gentrification/Judaization.

Certainly, her idealized memory was a result of her youth (she was eight years old when the state was established), but it was fortified by an Israeli master narrative that has never been contested except by the most radical historians.²⁹

A CHRONOLOGY OF PLACE AND PLACELESSNESS

The defining voice of Zionism was that of Theodore Herzl, whose *Der Judenstadt* outlined plans for the creation of a Jewish state. A defining characteristic of Herzl's treatise was the absence of the native. A close reading of Herzl also belies the socialist presumption of early Zionism. Herzl was not proposing a classless utopia; his vision was the transplantation of European Jewish society as a whole to a new territory. This transplantation assumed the maintenance of class divisions, with working-class Jews expected to build their own homes and then homes for the elite. It was this wholesale transfer that made the final destination of Jewish migration less

important. By the time he wrote *Der Judenstadt*, Herzl was proposing either Argentina or Palestine as possible sites for this transplantation.

By attempting to ignore and discount the impact that environment has on society, Herzl, however, created an impossible utopia. Gershon Shafir has documented the results of this contradiction as it played out in the first waves of Jewish immigrants from Europe to Palestine, known respectively as the first and second *aliyah*.³⁰ The land of Palestine was no garden of Eden; life there was harsh, complicated for the early settlers by a lack of Western development. Under Ottoman rule it had been a backwater, and it remained so as the twentieth century began. This underdevelopment was not, however, a result of Palestinian barbarism; it was an effect of neglect by imperial powers who sought to control the region but not allow it to become equal to the core. Yet, after the initial wave of Zionists settled the territory, it became clear that Palestine was an inhabited country, and that the existing society would have deeply formative impacts on the society to come. It was from this reality that the construction of the Jewish state began, and with it, policies that resembled apartheid and other racially preferential colonial regimes.

What separates Israel and Palestine from other conflicts, however, is, in part, the seeming permanence of the occupation. For Palestinians, this began not in 1967 in the current occupied Palestinian territories, but in 1917 with the start of the British Mandate.³¹ In this conceptualization, the occupying force simply changed hands to Israel in 1947/1948. It is significant that this timeline reflects the political disempowerment of the local Palestinian elite. Thus, the first Zionist settlers came in the 1880s, but the date at which the occupation began is set decades later.

Clearly, Palestinians indigenous to the region were unwilling to be removed in the interest of protecting Israeli notions of demographic perfection. And settler violence began right away, initiating the transformation of the Ottoman backwater into the maelstrom of violence that it is today. As part of this process, the displacement of Palestinians was unintentionally facilitated by the Ottomans. This was particularly the case in the aftermath of the Tanzimat reforms, wherein a new tally of Palestinian lands eroded traditional usufruct claims.³²

As many Israeli historians have acknowledged, before 1948 there was great reluctance among orthodox Jewish rabbis and communities to promote the settlement of Palestine.³³ However, this reticence was eventually overcome, not by a reinterpretation of Jewish religious texts but through the insistence of the largely secular Zionist elite. And in the years since, various religious authorities have come to embrace the notion of settlement. Indeed, such authorities are now both its greatest proponents and the public face of the settler movement, often challenging any restriction placed on it (even though there is no serious desire to challenge the settlers from within the Israeli government). It is important to rec-

ognize, however, that Israeli settlers are not simply religious zealots. They include a large number of people motivated by secular, economic interest, who are seeking to take advantage of subsidies and lowered real estate costs in newly established towns and neighborhoods.

NATIVE AND SETTLER: 1948 AND 1967 AS IDENTITIES

Israel/Palestine is a land divided. Under the political and military control of the Israeli government and military, its major divisions can be distinguished both temporally and geographically. Temporally, the territory can be thought of as divided between lands incorporated into the state of Israel when it was established in 1948 and other areas. The former lands include the Naqab/Negev Desert in the south; the central coastal plain, including Tel Aviv, Haifa, and areas up to the Lebanese border at Rosh Haniqra/Ras an Naqoura; western Jerusalem and its environs; and al-Jalil/the Galilee in the inland north. In 1967, as a result of conquests in the Six Day War, Israel took control of the remainder of historical Palestine as well as the Sinai Desert and the Jilaan/Golan Heights. The Sinai Peninsula was subsequently returned to Egypt following the 1979 peace treaty, but the remaining territories continue to be under Israeli occupation. Of these, the Jilaan/Golan is not historically part of Palestine; it is Syrian territory under Israeli occupation. Thus, the area known as the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) refers to Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem (even though the latter has been officially annexed by Israel, it is still considered under occupation).

This process of dispossession is not limited by chronology and geography. However, with regard to the 1948 territories, most Israeli critics consider it part of the guilt-ridden past. Thus, among liberal Israelis, the entirety of dispossession has been transposed to the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinian population remaining within the 1948 borders is thought of as living in comfort as a civilian minority. The lie of this transposition is betrayed by policies euphemistically referred to as gentrification (more accurately termed Judaization). This has meant the harassment and eviction of Palestinians from traditional Arab neighborhoods slowly converted to upscale Jewish ones in Akka, Jaffa and Haifa, and the ongoing struggles in the Naqab/Negev.³⁴

While Palestinians living within the 1948 borders have been assimilated into Israeli society, their citizenship status is tenuous at best. The Israeli public still looks upon these Palestinians as a potential fifth column, and recent legislation has clarified their continuing outsider status. The recent documentary film *Slingshot HipHop* does much to detail the double standards and hardships that the 1948 community endures, even as citizens of the Jewish state.

In Palestine, place contributes in a very essential way to identity. For Palestinians, placed identities have direct, concrete effects. Whether one is a resident of the 1948 territories



FIGURE 2. Part of a queue of Palestinian cars at Zaatara checkpoint. The poster on the road sign reads “The war is with the Arabs.”

or the 1967 territories has a dramatic impact on daily life. 1948 Palestinians are ostensibly citizens (while certainly not given equal treatment in practice to Jewish Israelis): they can vote in Knesset elections; they are governed by civil courts; and they have a greater freedom of movement. By contrast, 1967 Palestinians are denied entry to Jerusalem, live under direct military and civil occupation, are subject to harsh military law, and are actively prevented from political and economic life. This divide is further complicated by Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem. Palestinians here are not full citizens of Israel, but they are by necessity allowed more freedom of movement. And further complicating these identities is the new “security” barrier, which creates a matrix of citizenship as a direct result of its route — cutting communities off from the rest of the West Bank, often marooning 1967 Palestinians on “the wrong side,” with profound impacts on their freedoms (FIG. 2).³⁵

There is an equivalent geographical component to the notion of the Israeli settler. Clearly, all of what is now Israel was settled through the Zionist project, but the 1948 borders represent the division between “Israeli” and “settler.” While settlers and their settlements are associated with religious fundamentalism, the historical record challenges this notion. Officially, it is residence in some of the territories that were overrun by the Israeli military in 1967 that is recognized as the rubric for whether one is or is not a settler. This is an important distinction, because although the first settlements appeared in al-Khalil, deep within the West Bank, in late 1967, they very soon began to appear around East Jerusalem. East Jerusalem, although it was captured like the rest of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war, was annexed and officially “unified” by Israeli forces. This has allowed Israelis living in settlements there to avoid the label of settler, and to think of their developments as neighborhoods detached from the drama of the settler movement. Even so, these Jerusalem

settlers are most certainly engaged in the settlement project. They receive subsidies, and they benefit from more affordable real estate, compared to Israelis living within the 1948 borders. Moreover, the construction of their homes has come as a direct result of the displacement of Palestinians from their homes and ancestral lands (FIG. 3).

These Jerusalem-area settlements are heavily marketed throughout the country, and even abroad. There have been a number of cases of developers marketing homes here directly to American Jewish communities. Likewise, the English-language Israeli media is filled with advertisements for these new neighborhoods, often expounding their ethnically ho-



FIGURE 3. A billboard outside a settlement advertising real estate. The Arabic writing has been plastered over on the road sign. The company promoting the homes is Amanah, one of the largest settler real estate corporations.

FIGURE 4. *Encampment of family members evicted from their home by settlers in Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem.*



mogenous makeup. Again, the appeal in this case mobilizes the cloak of utopia, expounding the freedom of living in luxury, for a very good price, while it ignores the deepening conflict to which each of these new homes contributes.

Official settlements have also not been placed haphazardly around the West Bank; they serve political and military purposes. Thus, settlements in the Jerusalem district act as a ring around the city, attempting to separate it from the rest of the West Bank, with the intention of preventing any possible return of the city to Palestinians in a future peace deal. Over the past two years a battle has been fought over two of the last Palestinian neighborhoods, Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, preventing the completion of this ring. As tensions increase between settlers and Palestinians in these neighborhoods, Palestinians are being driven out.³⁶

While I was interviewing Palestinians living in Sheikh Jarrah, settlers came to a house from which a family had just been evicted. This was clearly a provocation, and the family, which now lives on the street in front of their home, was eating a traditional evening breakfast for Ramadan (FIG. 4). As the settlers left the house, one of the members of the evicted family shouted: “You can’t treat us like this. This is Jerusalem; this is not Hebron!” The implication was that Jerusalem is a shared city, and that settlers should not expect to get away with behavior that characterizes their efforts deeper in the West Bank. Yet, as recent events make clear, Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah will continue to be Hebronized. House by house, the neighborhoods are being annexed to build new settlements and a religious theme park.

In Palestine the power to name is also of immediate and practical importance. Naming is a clear demonstration of the power to define, commonly an integral part of the colonial project.³⁷ The father of Jerusalem deputy mayor Meron Benvenisti was directly involved in the renaming of originally Arab sites.³⁸ In Hebrew designations, biblical names are prevalent, seeking to create a connection to the ancient past — whether that past exists in the archeological record or only in the imagination of planners.

On roads throughout the West Bank, signs are maintained in Hebrew, English and Arabic. But what may be unclear to the Westerner is that the Arabic is almost always a transliteration of the Hebraized name, and that the traditional Arabic names have been ignored. Moreover, the very names of Arab villages may be omitted, with signs providing only the names of nearby settlements. Yet, for even this minimal placement of Arabic, the reaction of settlers and their governors is harsh. Many Arabic names are stickered over, often with settler slogans. And recently the Israeli minister of transportation advocated the removal of the last vestiges of Arabic names from all signs in Jerusalem.³⁹

OCCUPATION IS A PLACE: LIMBO AS DYSTOPIA

It is important to define occupation as a condition, a state of existence. Occupation is the destruction of sovereignty in a territory and its administration by a foreign power. As such, it is commonly considered a military condition. Under such a condition, certain freedoms and operations of the local government are suspended; the government may even be dissolved and replaced by a military government established by the occupying power. Occupation is foreseen in international law as the result of military conquest, and is governed by international treaties and the Geneva Convention. However, the central underpinning of occupation is its temporary nature: occupation is a state of limbo, between annexation and withdrawal. It is not intended to last indefinitely. It is a middle-state designed to act as a placeholder until a final outcome is determined.

While acknowledged as a geopolitical condition, occupation has profound impacts on its subjects. This was clear in comments by one Balata resident:

Of course there’s nothing harder than occupation. Anything you face, basic issues you face, could be solved, but occupation and these mental and emotional constraints can’t disappear; they stay with you.

— I, Nablus

In 1975 the U.N. General Assembly voted in favor of a resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism. Many in Israel and elsewhere have challenged this declaration — and indeed, it is more precise to relate Zionism to colonialism, especially colonialism in the European mold. There are some particularities, however, that make Zionism and the actions of the Israeli state somewhat different from earlier colonialisms. The historian Ilan Pappé has maintained that Zionism is different from European colonialism because the latter was usually supported politically, financially and militarily by an already established state.⁴⁰ His analysis does not, however, eliminate the notion that Zionism is indeed a type of colonialism.

It is in the 1967 territories that it is most common to see utopia and dystopia in the same physical space. The city of al-Khalil (Hebron) in the south of the West Bank most exemplifies this condition.⁴¹ It is characterized by multiple layers of dwelling, living, occupation and expulsion.⁴² In this dystopic milieu, Palestinians live amidst military and settler violence and dispossession. Here, settlers on the frontier snatch homes and harass farmers, while the military looks on, intervening only to arrest Palestinians in the resulting fracas (FIG. 5). Once settlements have been initiated by these forays, little by little they are incorporated into the infrastructural fabric of established Israeli cities. Eventually, in the larger settlements,

there is little indication that one is crossing a border. And in Jerusalem there is an intentional integration of settlements as “neighborhoods,” with no indication a visitor is crossing the hallowed “green line.”

All Israeli governments since 1967 have supported the settlement project. While internal divisions have been present, the policy has always been unilateral expansion.⁴³ The 1967 occupied Palestinian territories, then, represent a living hell, not just for Palestinians, but also for liberal Israelis, who rarely venture into the Palestinian villages and towns there. My conversations with Israelis on the left revealed that the vast majority had never been to Nablus for a *kanafé*, or eaten *mussakhan* in Ein Arik, or seen *dabke*, the Palestinian dance, at the national theater in Ramallah. In effect, the loudest Israeli voices for a negotiated settlement have never seen the beauty of Palestinian culture; the OPT is simply a place of horror, guilt and violence. Yet it is vital to understand that dystopia, like hegemony, is never absolute; there is resistance in the maintenance of culture.⁴⁴

The Palestinian territories are thus a crazy-making space, much like the areas of Vietnam represented in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, or in Lebanon as portrayed in Ari Folman’s *Waltz with Bashir*, a 2008 animated feature film about the experience of an Israeli brigade in Lebanon. In

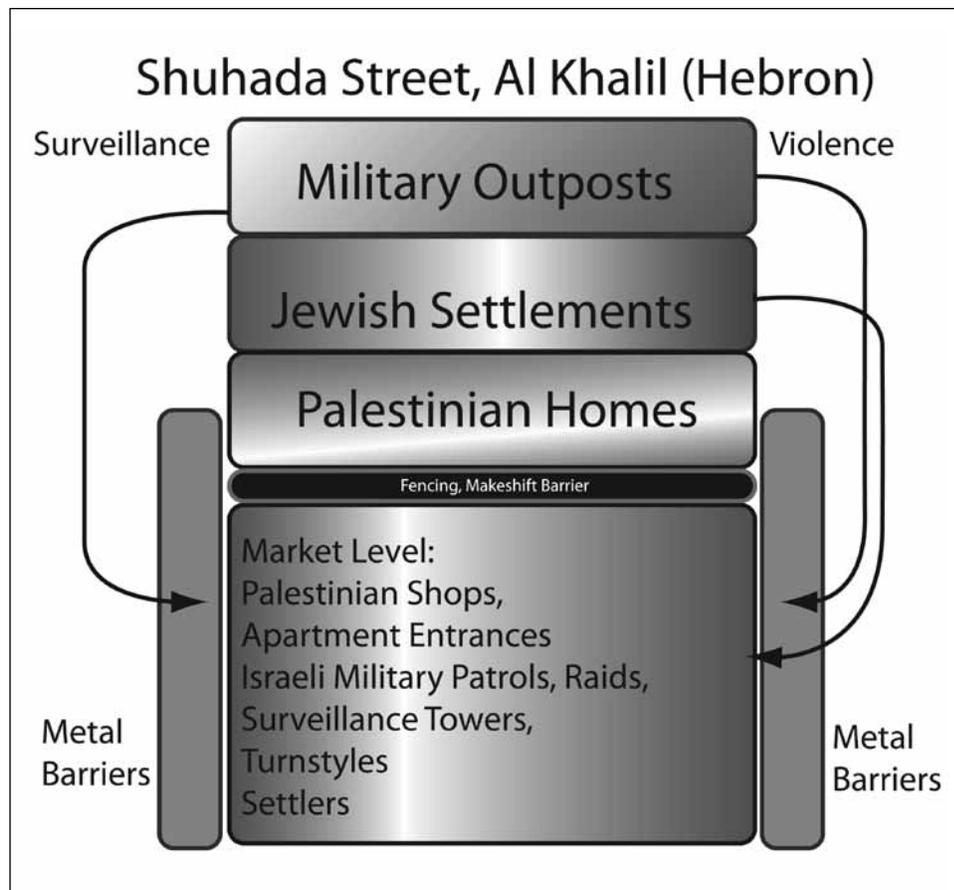


FIGURE 5. Diagram of physical verticality in al-Khalil. Metal cargo containers are lifted in place over Palestinian homes. These containers become extensions of the settlements, and many homes below are taken over and occupied by settlers. From R.J. Smith, “Graduated Incarceration: The Israeli Occupation in Subaltern Geopolitical Perspective,” *Geoforum*, Vol.42 (2011).

Gershon Goremburg's recent popular analysis of the aftermath of the 1967 war, Israeli expansion into the territories is seen as accidental, a response to the realities of the territory itself. However, here is how one respondent in my research explained the lived definition of occupation, a condition of life without the protection of a state.

Occupation is the enemy of human beings and human kind; every occupied person doesn't feel their human value. The ugliest picture of torture and miserable lives happens within an occupation, especially the Israeli occupation, one of the ugliest occupations in the world.

— K, Qalqiliyah district

For settlers, the 1967 OPT represent the Wild West. But much like the missing counterview in most Hollywood Westerns, they are a living hell for the indigenous inhabitants. The dystopic nature of the OPT results in part from the condition of occupation itself, a state of limbo between annexation and withdrawal. Here Palestinians live under a draconian and byzantine system of military laws, while rampaging settlers and soldiers are accountable to no one but military governors (and, rarely, the Israeli High Courts). All aspects of life for Palestinians are controlled, monitored and determined by the occupation. Meanwhile, Jewish Israelis in the same spaces benefit from subsidies and military protection and have recourse to the Israeli civilian court system.

SAFETY IN THE UTOPIAN STATE

No place in the world gives a person safety like his home or his country.

— H, Ras al-Tira

James Blaut has posited that nationalism takes a number of different forms, and that when a nationalist movement comes into being it is often in the context of a number of competing nationalisms.⁴⁵ Certainly, the current conflict involves a number of competing Palestinian configurations of nationalism — namely, Fatahwi secular nationalism, Islamism as expressed by groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and socialist nationalism as expressed by the numerous Communist parties. But a number of external nationalisms also have a stake in the game, including various Israeli Zionisms, U.S. and British nationalism, and (as became evident in May and June of 2010) Turkish nationalism. In that case, the Turkish government opposed Operation Cast Lead, and the Turkish state was vocal in its opposition to the killing of Turkish nationals (and one American) during the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla.

Palestinian nationalist visions are tempered by the current condition of occupation, a condition that is present in all aspects of Palestinian life. There is no aspect of daily life which is not deeply affected by the Israeli occupation — be it

public participation, family, work, or freedom from harm. In this context, as was revealed to me in interviews in 2009, the notion of the state is seen as a utopia, a vision within a particular space, that of historical Palestine.

Of course, I don't feel safe at all. I feel that at any point they'll displace us; I expect them to do anything they want to us. No safety at all, no stability. I can't even build a future for my children or even think of a future because, 24 hours a day, you're thinking of safety.

— K, Qalqiliyah district

K is the patriarch of a Bedouin clan that settled in the 1967 territories, caught between a Palestinian village and the ever-expanding settlement of Alfe Menashe. He has been threatened with eviction numerous times, and Israeli forces have even attempted to bribe him to leave his land. His response is one of steadfastness, or *sumoud*: he will not leave. Palestinians often refer to *sumoud*, a determination to remain regardless of the violence and pain inflicted upon them by the occupation. This notion is central to Palestinian resistance, and in this case it is concurrent with hope for a new state where personal safety will be guaranteed.

There is not one safe place in Palestine. In all of Palestine, from the river to the ocean, not just Qalqiliyah or Nablus, or Jaffa or Haifa, no place is safe. And when I'm in my home, or at my work, a civilian can shoot me. At the crossings maybe a soldier can say this guy had a knife and shoot me. There isn't a place that's safe at all.

— M, Qalqiliyah district

The state holds a particular importance for Palestinians living under occupation, which is related in part to the deprivation that occupation produces. Occupation deprives Palestinians of basic notions inherent to well-being, including a sense of safety, a sense of sovereignty, a sense of permanence, etc. The state, then, embodies these denied emotions and represents a potential sea change in the lives of ordinary Palestinians. At the same time, this utopian vision must be considered in the context of the current, colonial reality. In this regard, it is the very impossibility of the state that makes it so important in the lives of Palestinians practicing *sumoud* against the occupation and policies designed to promote transfer.

My goals for the future? To literally wake up and not find the name Israel or something called occupation. To find all the oppression against the Palestinian people gone, to have our rights the same as normal human beings around the world.

— I, refugee from Nablus district

The vast majority of sketch maps produced by my respondents revealed a notion of the state as the entirety of his-

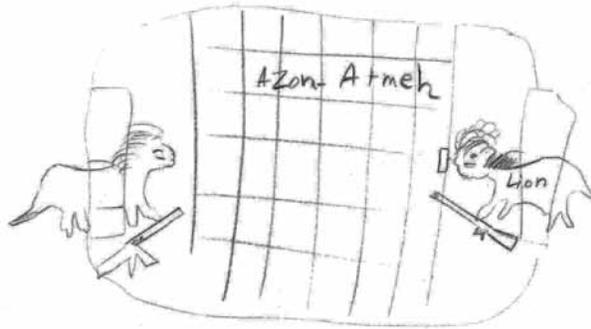


FIGURE 6. Participant's sketch map of Azzun Atme village, surrounded by gates guarded by lions (Israeli soldiers).

torical Palestine. The exception were maps made by those living in isolated enclaves created by the Israeli security wall. In these cases, the sketch maps were on a far smaller scale, and indicated the extent of personal mobility in practical terms, illustrating the direct impacts of occupation (FIGS. 6, 7).

When I asked why the state held such importance for Palestinians, several respondents expounded on its importance as the only guarantor of safety. The state represents freedom from arbitrary harm, as is exacted upon them by occupation forces.

I don't feel safe, not one moment, not even in this moment with you here. You saw the lack of safety when you were with me when we were passing through the gate with the camera and their [the Israeli soldiers'] questioning of what you're taking pictures of, and their taunting manner. Even if I'm sitting here drinking coffee or tea, or going to sleep, I'm expecting at any moment the door of my home will be broken down by an Israeli soldier for searches, or because someone touched the fence, or someone entered, or anything.

— H, Ras al-Tira

In essence, while avoiding any attempt to place Palestinian nationalism chronologically, there is no doubt about its relevance and importance to Palestinians currently living under Israeli occupation.

Freedom is to be free in your country. Doing what you want, going to where you want without restrictions.

— K

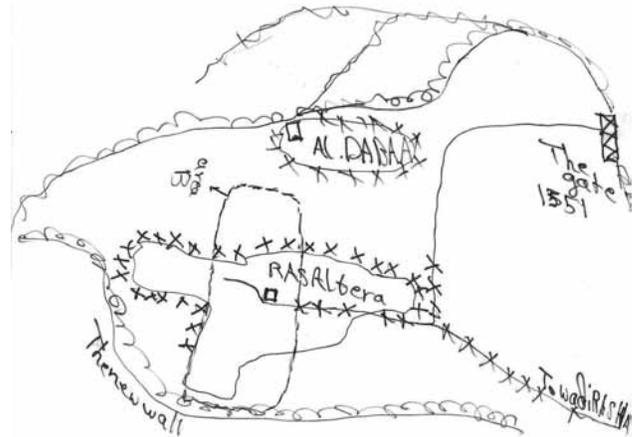


FIGURE 7. Participant's sketch map of Ras al-Tira village, surrounded by walls, gates and fences.

K used the term *baladak*, “your country.” More precisely, it signifies the land of your country, as opposed to *watanak*, which would refer to one’s country as a political unit or state. As I mentioned, K is on the front lines of resistance to settlement expansion in the West Bank, squeezed by the planned expansion of the settlement of Alfe Menashe and on the wrong side of the wall. Subject to harsh limitations of movement, for him it is freedom of movement itself that is the embodiment of freedom. But K is explicit in his explanation of where freedom takes place: it is the freedom to move in your own country.

Another respondent had a slightly different view of freedom.

It has two meanings. One is personal and one is general. Personally, to be able to roam freely, to visit and walk around without being asked anything. Being able to come and go where and when I please and at any time I please without permits or gates or walls — access to water, access to roads. Generally speaking, freedom is independence, love for the country, love for the land, valuing the state, and liberty to roam.

— A

A, the council head of Azzun Atme village, thus differentiates between what he calls a personal and a general definition of freedom. On a personal level, it is freedom of movement — one of the most basic freedoms denied to Palestinians throughout the West Bank (and in the wall-produced enclaves, in particular). In some sense, his general definition mirrors this aspect, but it also includes independence. What he means is collective sovereignty and patriotism, or *wataniyye*.

The Arabic used here presents an interesting take on nationalism. There are two words used to describe a love for the nation: *wataniyye* and *baladiyye*. While *'ard* is a common term for land, *balad* can also be used to describe a particular village or area. But it has a second meaning, referring to the territory of the nation. A made a point in the interview of referring to both notions, that of *baladiyye* and *wataniyye*, separately. He also made reference to national independence and valuing the state: *al-astiqal wa qiyam dawle*. These notions are intertwined, but they are not identical. The state is an important goal, but the land holds a significance beyond the state itself.

Interviewer: What does Palestine mean to you?

Palestine is my country; it is the land that I love; it is the word I love. It is my very presence; it is the prettiest country; it is the prettiest home. However, with all that we bear and our sumoud in Azzun Atmeh, I feel there is a smaller Palestine and a bigger Palestine. The smaller Palestine is my home, my land behind this wall; the bigger Palestine is the village of Azzun Atmeh. And the even bigger Palestine to me is from the sea to the river.

— A, Council Head, Azzun Atmeh

Here, A develops concentric geographies of the state, from the immediate to the ideal. His notion of the state is defined by the various spatial practices of occupation. The smallest is his home, which is divided from the village of Azzun Atmeh by the wall and a settler road. The next in scale is Azzun Atmeh, separated from the rest of the West Bank by two walls and two checkpoints. And finally the largest entity is the entirety of the Palestinian state.

Freedom to me is that I can go to Yaffa, Haifa and Akka in leisure, without seeing a single Israeli soldier.

— M

In M's analysis, freedom is denied by the Israelis by their prevention of West Bank Palestinians traveling to the entirety of the 1948 territories. The deprivations imposed by the occupation define freedom for its subjects. While M specifically named the major cities in the 1948 territories, she herself is hemmed in by two Israeli walls and checkpoints, making entrance to or exit from her enclave exceedingly difficult. This architecture of dispossession encloses the space of her village, and allows settlement expansion to continue unabated on all four sides.

A Palestinian state to me is a dream, with the full borders of '67, with Jerusalem, not missing one centimeter. The settlements are Israel's problem, not Palestine. I ask of the people, the world, to follow through with the borders of '67. . . .

— K

THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AS ANTI-NATIONAL DYSTOPIA

Much of the international media coverage of Palestine and Israel revolves around notions of conflicting states — the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel — in negotiations for an eventual peace. This portrayal is deeply problematic given the deeply uneven power balance between the Israeli government and Palestinians. But it is also problematic because the PA by no means represents a state; rather, it is a constructed apparition, a reflection of these uneven relations. In an interview I conducted in the Qalqiliyah district with M, a local farmer and construction worker, I asked if the state was important to him. His immediate response was, in English, "Not really. . . ." M then began to describe life under Israeli occupation within the pseudo-state of the PA.

His response was not an indication that a potential state was of no importance; it was, rather, a pragmatic description of his life as it currently stands. The PA does nothing to protect him from the depredations of Israeli forces; therefore, the state is meaningless. His lackadaisical response reflected his anger and his disappointment with the state in its current form. And his interpretation of my question as a reference to the contemporary condition, rather than to a future possibility, can be interpreted as emerging from a worldview dominated by the immediate, disillusioned repeatedly by claims of liberation under the ruling parties.

As one of a lucky few with permission to work in 1948 Israel, he is also in constant contact with Israelis and Palestinian-Israelis on the other side of the 1948 borders. Yet his constant passage from the 1967 OPT to the 1948 territories exposes him to constant surveillance, and to exploitation with impunity by his employers. Much as the West has learned of the dystopic nature of sweatshop labor from offshoring, a similar dystopia has emerged in the struggles of everyday Palestinians to earn money to buy food and other necessities. No matter how committed to the struggle, the economic realities of occupation force workers to labor for their oppressors.

The occupation used to be better than this. I used to be here in Qalqiliyah able to drive my car straight to Tel Aviv. This is gone. Before 1986 we used to drive our cars to Tel Aviv, to Haifa, to Gaza. But then came the Intifada, and this authority; they closed [the roads with checkpoints], and I can't go anywhere. So then the [direct] occupation, to us, was better. The authority [PA] here isn't for freedom; they're here to protect Israel's security.

— M, Qalqiliyah district

Theses comments reveal the intersections of identity, geography and nationalism on the individual relationship to the nation.

In regards to work inside Israel, every morning I need to be at work at 7 AM. Everyday I leave at 3:30 AM, meaning about three hours before my work. Why? Because the military checkpoints delay us. I should leave to work at 6:30 so I can get there at 7. But I have to throw away three hours — gone. And when I come back, they delay us again an hour, so I have four hours just lost.

— M

The Palestinian Authority was recognized by Israel as a representative body for Palestinians as a result of the Oslo peace accords in 1993. Many saw its creation as a step toward the eventual recognition of a Palestinian state. In practice, however, the establishment of the PA represented a step backward from statehood. The PA represents a safety valve, a token, much in keeping with Fanon's analysis of the strategies of cooptation that colonial powers use to avert real independence. The PA has no real power in the 1967 territories; it essentially manages the internal affairs of Palestinians, under the command and control of the Israeli occupation forces. This impotent authority is seen by many as the betrayal of a decades-long struggle for liberation, and it is the subject of popular derision.

So what is this state? What are the components? It doesn't have borders, sky; it doesn't have anything. . . . This isn't the state that we were hoping for — after all our losses in the first Intifada, after all the lives that were lost, to get an authority like this, a useless one. We didn't dream of this kind of state, so a state like this we don't want.

— M

In informal conversation, many Palestinians refer to the PA as *Salata Filistiniyya*, a play on the Arabic name for the PA, *Al Sulta Filistiniyya*. “*Salata*” here indicates the mixed-up state of affairs — tossed, like a salad. And in recent years, the PA has acted ever more overtly to undermine Palestinian national aspirations, as evident in its vote against international condemnation of the recent Israeli attacks on Gaza.

As a result of this condition, a small but persistent call has risen among Palestinian organizers and academics for the PA to be dissolved. They believe this would force Israel to accept responsibility for Palestinians and admit its illegal occupation of the 1967 territories.⁴⁶ In essence, the call for dissolution is an attempt to expose the contradictory condition of the PA. In its absence, critics argue, a return to direct military governance would force a final decision on the state of the territories. This would bring an end to limbo: either official complete annexation, with the accompanying citizenship rights in Israel, or complete withdrawal from the territories, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

THE “PEACE PROCESS”: A ROAD TO NOWHERE

Ever since the British arrival in Palestine and the creation of the Mandate in 1917 there has been a seemingly endless series of peace proposals. An end to conflict is seemingly sought by all sides — the intention being to end hostilities and achieve a lasting peace. The early proposals were made by independent commissions, such as the Peel commission, which issued statements and sought approval from both sides. Deeply problematic from the inception, these proposals invariably divided the territory between the conflicting parties. Yet all these proposals created disproportionately sized territories for the immigrating Jewish population in comparison to the existing demographic makeup of the territory. In response, the Zionist leadership finally approved the division of the territory, but explained that this was simply an interim step until Israel could enlarge itself to more respectable dimensions.⁴⁷

From 1967 until now everyday their [the Israelis'] aggression adds up. With every attempt of peace that's proposed [they bring] more aggression in order to prevent it.

— H, Ras al-Tira

Since 1993 much international aid and attention has been focused on the peace process, a series of negotiations and documents intended to end hostility between Israel and the Palestinians. The difficulty here, as initially identified by Edward Said, among others, is that negotiation is a process that happens between equals, and the power differential between the two sides in Israel/Palestine is so great there is little hope of attaining a just, permanent peace. Furthermore, Israel has consistently violated international law in its maintenance of the occupation and the expansion of settlements. What has resulted is the perpetuation of a state in which each side accuses the other of violating the already skewed terms of the Oslo agreements, while Israel maintains the terms it finds useful in the administration of the territories. Of note, the Oslo agreements were originally intended to be interim agreements only; they were never intended to be a final resolution, and were contingent on continuing progress toward disengagement and peace.

Perhaps the most visible application of the Oslo agreements has been the territorial division of the West Bank into sectors A, B and C. These divisions denote areas under PA administration, joint PA/Israeli administration, and Israeli administration, respectively. While Area A essentially contains only segments of the largest Palestinian cities on the West Bank, the rest of the territory is divided into B and C, areas that ostensibly are under joint control of Israel and the PA. Of course, all of the West Bank, even Area A, is under the control of the Israeli military authority. These administrative divisions therefore do little to create local sovereignty. Instead, Israel uses them to justify settlement expansion and to strangle the Palestinian villages that lie in the way.

THE PROMISE OF A NEW UTOPIA

In imagining an end to conflict and the creation of a future Palestinian state, there are two competing proposals: a one-state and a two-state solution. Both offer visions for moving away from the current impasse in terms of concrete realities. Yet any attempt to implement either proposal currently suffers from a lack of will on the part of both the Israeli and interim Palestinian governments. Neither body seems able to move toward any solution, with the default condition being continued Israeli territorial expansion, continued settlement, and renewed attacks on Palestinian citizens of Israel.

I would argue that from the Palestinian perspective both the one-state and the two-state solutions are equally dysto-

pian. The two-state solution seems to condone apartheid separation and discrimination against Palestinians within the eventual Jewish-only state. Meanwhile, a single-state solution would depend heavily on the will of the Israeli state to follow through with full citizenship, equality, and reparations for victims of Israeli expansion.

Both solutions thus seem equally fruitless. But as the Palestinian organizer Omar Barghouti explained to me in the summer of 2009, no one expected the apartheid regime in South Africa to fall when it did. While Barghouti claims the fall of that regime was a direct result of boycott, divestment, and eventually sanctions, the point is that the utopian is necessary for progress. Such dreams represent the only hope for an escape from the dystopia of the colonial present.⁴⁸

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