

# Conclusion

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The Palestinian quest for an independent state has been unsuccessful but it was not in vain. It undoubtedly affirmed Palestinians' right to self-determination and thereby their political presence, which UN Resolution 242 denied. The struggle for independent statehood, however, was not able to bring about liberation, let alone justice, because it was confined within an international consensus based on territorial partition as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The partition paradigm, or the two-state solution, does not question the settler-colonial structure of Zionism nor address the injustices that Israel has inflicted on the Palestinians since 1948. Partition was bound not only to compromise Palestinian political aspirations but also to deepen Israel's settler-colonialism, as best manifested by Israel's 2018 nationality law. That law, which upholds the right to self-determination only for Jewish people in the land that Israel controls, has effectively wrapped the dispossession of the Palestinian people with another veneer that voids the Palestinian state project of any emancipatory promise. It demonstrates the dangers, and embedded racial-exclusionary connotations, of linking self-determination to territorial statehood and ethnic nationhood.

As this volume has stressed, the right to self-determination cannot be protected within the confines of a strict territorial understanding of sovereignty nor within the boundaries of an ethno-nation-state. A central question that will continue to dominate Palestinian politics and Palestine studies moving forward is whether it is possible to transcend the state in the attempt to exercise the right of self-determination. As Adam Hanieh discusses in this volume, the state is not a neutral or technical entity, but rather a social relation situated within a dynamic global capitalist reality. Analyzing the evolving nature of this political economy, including the impact of Covid-19 on regional economies, the direction of capital flows, and the process of class formation, is critical to understanding the kind of state and system of government being built and their ability to enhance, or further compromise, the Palestinian struggle for justice and equality. De-exceptionalizing Palestine and situating it in its regional context is also key, given the genealogy of capital accu-

mulation and investment in Palestine and the Middle East more generally. This contextualization is all the more important given that the Palestinian history of displacement, inequality, and oppression is no longer distinctive, as the experiences of Syrian, Iraqi, and Lebanese refugees attest. The demand for the right to self-determination and equality has never been unique to the Palestinians; it is a demand shared by Arab citizens in the entire region, as the Arab uprising of 2011 clearly demonstrated.

One of the conclusions drawn from the various chapters in this volume is that the state cannot be transcended but needs to be rethought. Because the state is not simply about security and order, its power needs to be tamed. The state remains, in its essence, a constitutive political community that must be accountable to, and representative of, its citizens, who are the source of sovereignty and are entitled to full equality. Articulating how the state is to be held accountable in a regional and international context that is increasingly integrated economically and is deeply unequal is not evident, however, and warrants further research. The signing of the Abraham Accords by Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain at the White House on September 14, 2020 shows that the economic interests of Arab regimes effectively converge with those of colonial states. These accords formalized long-standing informal economic and security relations between these states and signaled the official end of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which conditioned Israel's regional normalization on it ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and establishing a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capitol. Together with the Trump Administration's 2020 peace plan, these accords entrench an authoritarian understanding of statehood as well as mark the end of an era in Arab politics in which the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was considered central—if only rhetorically—to attaining peace in the region.

Some would argue that these recent developments confirm the demise of the liberatory promise of statehood, and of the Palestine question. A more careful analysis, however, would suggest that the changes precipitated by the 2011 Arab uprisings and their aftermath are indicative of the symbiotic relationship that exists between Palestine and the larger Arab region. Moreover, the "Ferguson to Palestine" rallies, the Black Life Matters demonstrations, and the international outcry against Israel's latest war on the Palestinians in 2021 show again both the resonance that the Palestinian cause has worldwide and the intersectionality of people's struggle for freedom. The deep connections between race, class, and decolonization in the struggle against authoritarian oppression are increasingly evident and warrant further research, especially since they are redefining the meanings of political liberation and citizenship in the twenty-first century.

As Masen Masri reminds us in this volume, statehood is inherently intertwined with the law. The law delineates the power of the state, its relationship to its citizens, and the rights of citizens. In any democratic society, the law is produced by the people and for the people, for they are the only sovereign. Putting the law,

especially international law, at the service of the Palestinian cause has remained a central feature of Palestinian resistance and research. The law continues to affirm Palestinians' individual right of return, their collective right to fight colonialism, and the legal validity of the notion of a Palestinian nationality, as Susan Akram demonstrates in this volume. How to translate these legal tools into a political program of decolonization needs further study since, as Noura Erekat has shown, the law, whether domestic or international, can be a weapon of oppression just as much as an instrument for liberation.

The trajectory of the Palestinian struggle so far has shown that political liberation cannot be achieved by accepting Israel's colonial structure in the hope of containing it. The meaning of decolonization in the twenty-first century and how to achieve it, however, remains unclear, both from an academic and from a political point of view, given that Palestinians do not all face the same material realities or embrace the same forms of resistance, even if they share a common history, an ongoing Nakba, and a recognized set of rights. While for the Palestinian diaspora, decolonization is associated with return, for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, it continues to be tied to independent statehood. For Palestinian citizens of Israel, decolonization demands transforming Israel into a state that ensures equality for all of its citizens. Attempting to harmonize these different visions into a single political project is daunting, especially in view of the absence of institutional platforms that would enable different constituencies to dialogue and articulate a clear political project moving forward.

Moreover, it is far from clear which Palestinian constituency can best articulate the political shape of liberation in the twenty-first century. Some argue that Palestinian citizens of Israel are best poised to articulate the elements of decolonization, given the historical juncture at which the Palestinian question finds itself today. Others see the primary agents of decolonization as the refugees and people in the diaspora, given the centrality of their right of return to the question of Palestine. Whether Palestinian citizens of Israel should, or would, become the center of gravity of the Palestinian nationalism, as refugees did in the 1970s and 1980s, and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have over the past three decades, remains an open question. Only further research can shed light on this question and help untangle what at times appears as the dialectical relationship between Palestine and the Palestinians.

As has been argued, settler-colonialism is not an event but an ongoing process. Its dismantlement entails not only decolonizing the land but, above all, decolonizing Israeli-Palestinian relations. It requires that Israelis give up their colonial privileges and address questions of historical injustices and reconciliation with the Palestinians. Palestinians, in turn, will need to address the issue of Israelis' collective and individual rights once their colonial privileges are revoked. The question of Israeli rights, however, remains among the thorniest issues for Palestinian activists and researchers. The success of any constitutional design for a

democratic decolonized polity, be it binational, federal or confederal, will hinge on the willingness of those involved to work and live together as equals. As Nadim Khoury explains in this volume, decolonization entails a process of reconciliation. It requires engaging with the enemy and confronting the issue of historical responsibility by developing mechanisms for reconciliation, both between Israel and the Palestinians and also within Israeli and Palestinian societies. Further research can help identify the inherent challenges and the means by which such mechanisms of reconciling with the “other” can be developed and implemented, not only in Palestine but also in the whole Arab world, where the scars of the past ten years of war would need to be healed to ensure stability moving forward.

On both the epistemological and political levels, the issue that will continue to face Palestinian and Arab liberation struggles is how to move beyond the grand narrative of national liberation without falling into the neoliberal discourse of rights, which privileges individuality and inequality. Some academics, such as Ilan Pappé among others, argue that the discourse of indigeneity offers a more productive approach for decolonizing the land. It still remains to be seen, however, how far indigeneity can become an effective tool to understand the political shape of self-determination moving forward. Further research can shed light on how far the Palestinians can relinquish the dream of unifying their fragmented nation within the boundary of a state, as opposed to accepting the diversity of Palestinians’ political experiences and modes of resistance. The political manifestation of this dilemma can be heard in the contrast between those who call for reviving the PLO, on the one hand, and those who accept its demise and advocate for a new reliance on grassroots forms of resistance. These forms of popular resistance can be seen in the yearly commemoration of the Nakba by Palestinian citizens of Israel inside the Green Line, in the 2017–18 Great March of Return in Gaza, and in the Palestinians’ uprising in Spring 2021 against Israel’s war on Gaza, house evictions of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, and Jewish mob attacks against Palestinian citizens in Israel. They express new ways of unifying the Palestinian body politic without ossifying it in rigid institutions.

At the heart of the question of Palestine is the desire for freedom and justice. This desire is also at the center of the struggles of Arab citizens against their oppressive regimes and the struggles of all those fighting injustice globally, be they indigenous peoples in the Americas and Australia, people of color in the United States, refugees waiting at the doors of Europe, or Iranians waging the Green Revolution, among so many others. If this book has shown that Palestinians are rethinking statehood beyond partition and continue to resist their ongoing colonial reality, further research can illuminate what kind of political and legal actions are needed to create a decolonized polity that ensures liberation and equality for all.