

The actually existing 'state of Palestine'

Hashem Abushama

There exists a 'state of Palestine'. It has an anthem and a flag. It has several prisons, some of which are notorious for torture. It has a president, who was last elected in 2005 and illegitimately remains in power until today. It has a Legislative Council, though that has been dismantled through executive decree. Its National Security Forces, which include the Palestinian Border Police, the Military Intelligence, the Military Force and the Presidential Security elite unit, number around 65,000 members. It is a state that spends the largest portion of its budget on security forces¹ – in a colonial context of active military occupation precisely designed to deprive Palestinians of their safety, land and livelihood. It employs 28% of the waged labour force within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.² It oversees the daily operations of schools and hospitals and pays their employees. In 2024, it had a public debt of four billion dollars. It has diplomatic missions at the United Nations and across the globe. It has a non-member observer status at the United Nations and is recognised by 157 of its 193 member states. It is a state that will be recognised, perhaps in September 2025, or next year, or in five years, maybe in twenty years, *if* it meets certain conditions and implements certain reforms. It is a state that the White House had defined in 2020 as 'a future state, not currently in existence that could be recognized by the United States only if the criteria described in this [Trump's 2020 Peace to Prosperity] vision are met.'³ It is the actually existing 'state of Palestine': repressed and repressive; *becoming*, in its very state of perpetual waiting; and *becoming*, in increasing harmony with the demands of the imperialist and colonial order. It is a state that exists in its awaited recognition.

Given the return of a discourse of recognition of the Palestinian state – not least from the UK, France and Australia – as a solution to colonial genocide, it is important to assess the position of the actually exist-

ing 'state of Palestine' as it *concretely* exists today. By the 'state of Palestine', I refer to the actually existing institutions, ideas and personnel that have concretely proliferated around a demand for Palestinian statehood. This is neither to deny the lack of sovereignty and territorial contiguity – crucial elements of statehood – nor to neglect the constitutive and apparent dependencies of such a 'state' on Israeli settler colonialism. Rather, it is precisely to examine the dominant forms of Palestinian state-building that have emerged in such extreme conditions of colonial dispossession and expansion. The political stakes of such an analysis are significant: 1) to distinguish the actually existing 'state of Palestine' as a dominant iteration amongst multiple Palestinian state-building and liberation imaginaries, many of which are much more progressive in orientation; 2) to concretely assess how these state institutions have managed to persist, despite both a range of coercive and consent-building mechanisms, and also, their own structural dependencies and deficiencies; and, 3) to identify how anticolonial forces in Palestine continue to resist and show the limits of this actually existing 'state of Palestine.'

The Oslo Accords, which were signed between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli colonial government in 1993 and 1995, function as the governing framework for this state. The accords crystalised a set of economic, political and social relations that would limit and condition the terrain of political struggle for Palestinians across historic Palestine and in the diaspora. They are largely based on the principles laid out in the 1967 Security Council Resolution 242 and Resolution 338. The accords only discussed the territories Israel had occupied in 1967 (East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, which constitute 22% of historic Palestine) as the potential geography of a Palestinian state. In doing so, they absented the two million Palestinians who live

within the territories Israel had occupied in 1948 (i.e., the remaining 78% of historic Palestine) and relegated them to a minoritarian status (i.e., an ‘Arab Israeli’ minority) within the Israeli state. This has worked to normalise Israel’s occupation of Palestine in 1948 as legitimate (hence the misleading designation of ‘Israel proper’) and its occupation of 1967 as ‘exceptional’. 1967 was a significant moment that enabled Israel to draw a geographic discourse that redefined its 1948 occupation of historic Palestine as legitimate as opposed to its ‘exceptional’ settlements in the ‘Occupied Territories’ of 1967. In this equilibrium of legality and illegality, the settlement in the West Bank normalises the city-settlement of Tel Aviv. The accords enshrine this discourse, which has concretely fragmented the Palestinian national polity and deepened the divide amongst the different Palestinian geographies. This is the racial and segregationist character of the two-state solution, which has disintegrated the Palestinian national polity and advanced colonial expansion.

The Oslo Accords elaborated a *conjuncture* animated by an organic contradiction: to advance a Palestinian neoliberal nation-state building project within the limits of an unfolding colonial conquest of Palestine. The organic contradiction refers to Zionism’s continuous inability – indeed failure – to decisively complete its conquest of Palestine, a contradiction that is vulnerable to the political, social and economic vicissitudes of each historical conjuncture.⁴ The accords, alongside the so-called 2005 ‘Gaza disengagement plan’, have become condensed sites of articulation for the intensified rise of far-right forces within Zionism as well as the re-elaboration of Palestinian anticolonial forces. From this view, the recent promise from some European and Anglo-American countries, including Spain, France, Canada and the UK to recognise the actually existing ‘state of Palestine’ is surely a desperate attempt to maintain the colonial status quo.⁵ By nurturing these institutions without addressing the colonial question, the Accords offered an unprecedented framework for intervening culturally, socially and politically in Palestinian society in ways that aim at obstructing Palestinian anticolonial forces and ‘remolding Palestinian consciousness.’⁶ Recognition, in this sense, does not only maintain the colonial status quo but serves to further readjust Palestinian statehood aspirations to conform to the demands of US imperialism and Israeli colonialism. It also aims to absorb the

genuinely anticolonial energies and passions that have emerged around the globe to demand the end of Israel’s colonial rule and the delegitimisation and dismantling of Zionism as a genocidal ideology.



A Palestinian artist writing on a street wall in Ramallah⁷

Conversations between the sword and the neck

The Palestinian artist Al Aziz ‘Aatef visually describes the horrors of genocide as an abnormal scene (see Figure 2). Threads of bandage weave together a sea only to highlight its many wounds. An entire land engulfed in finely stitched bandages. ‘Colonial lines’ between historic Palestine and the Gaza Strip’s geography are demarcated by differentiated intensities of bandages, of wounds. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation was never an ‘invasion’ but a prison break, a return. It is an abnormal scene but one that is deeply historical, with layers upon layers of dispossession. The aim of genocide is to dispossess, transfer and discipline. In the face of the resistance and steadfastness of Palestinians in Gaza and the tightening of the blockade with the complicity of neighbouring Arab regimes such as Egypt, that project of complete dispossession has failed. Notwithstanding the relentless genocidal insistence of Zionism, the alternative now, suggested in one ceasefire proposal after another, is to discipline Gaza into a territory that submits to a re-elaborated version of neoliberal peace that leaves the colonial question intact and organically reproduces its geographic segregation from the West Bank.

Indeed, the twenty-point Trump Plan unveiled on 29th September 2025, suggests that ‘Gaza will be governed under the temporary transitional governance of a technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee, respons-

ible for delivering the day-to-day running of public services and municipalities for the people in Gaza.’⁸ The plan then clarifies that this committee is to report to a ‘Board of Peace’, a transnational body of political and business interests from around the world, headed by US president Donald Trump. This transitional stage, we are told in point nine, will handle the ‘redevelopment of Gaza’ until the Palestinian Authority has completed ‘its reform programme.’ While the plan is designed to coercively bring Gaza into the direct orbit of US imperialist control, it may *not* in reality lead to the Gaza Strip being eventually managed by the Palestinian Authority in the aftermath of the transitional stage. As the Oslo Accords demonstrate, transitional plans drafted under conditions of colonial domination constitute effective tools of evasion and trickery; the Accords were meant to last for five years and here we are thirty-two years later. The outright US and Israeli rejection of a Palestinian state on any land within historic Palestine and the current geopolitical relations where both remain unchallenged in their terror has consequences. One possible outcome of this *transitional* plan is the complete administrative separation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the elaboration of a new architecture of internationally financed control over Gaza that further entrenches the separation of the two territories.

The plan does stipulate that Gaza will be rejoined under the Palestinian Authority’s control *once* the latter completes its ‘reform programme.’ In doing so, it brings into sharp relief the ways through which ‘colonial politics of recognition’ work in tandem with genocidal violence to entrench colonial structures of dispossession and fragmentation. Writing on settler colonial Canada, Glen Coulthard reminds us that Indigenous anticolonial nationalism forced the colonial power to modify its modus operandi from one that was ‘primarily reinforced by policies, techniques and ideologies explicitly oriented around the genocidal exclusion/assimilation double, to one that is now reproduced through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our *recognition* and *accommodation*.’⁹ This recognition does not eradicate colonial domination but works to entrench it. It is the conversation between the sword and the neck, as Ghasan Kanafani had once put it. For Israel, as a colony that has failed to reach a demographic majority of settlers,

unlike in Canada or Australia, Palestine provokes too much existential anxiety for the liberal recognition of all Palestinians across historic Palestine. The ‘colonial politics of recognition’ works in tandem with an unfolding structure of violent, military occupation and genocide in order to further enable colonial frontiering.



Figure 2: ‘From an abnormal scene’. Oil and bandage on fabric. By Palestinian artist, Al Aziz ‘Aatef.¹⁰

In this sense, we should view the actually existing state of Palestine, which is referenced as the Palestinian Authority in Trump’s 20 Point plan, not as a fixed entity but as a set of institutions, practices and personnel that are dynamically reproduced in the vicissitudes of Palestinian anticolonial struggle against Israeli settler colonialism. The genesis of this actually existing state of Palestine lies in the contradictions faced by the then Fatah-dominated Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the late 1980s. Having been coercively chased out of Jordan, then Lebanon and Tunisia, the PLO leadership deemed it necessary to establish a territorial nucleus within Palestine in the form of a state. This demand was

emboldened by – and instrumentalised – the genuine national-popular energies of the first Intifada (uprising) of 1987. The Intifada delivered a blow to Israel's architectures of colonial rule across Palestine. This anticolonial dissent was in sharp contradiction with the intensified neoliberalisation of Israel's economy and its associated needs to open up to global markets, enter into free trade agreements and smoothen out the pathways of capital circulation.¹¹ As noted by Shir Hever, in the early days of Oslo negotiations, Shimon Peres had filled the negotiating team with representatives of Israeli business interests,¹² who had hoped to use the accords to quell the 'disruptive capacities' of Palestinian anticolonial resistance. Israel was not alone in this foundational wave of neoliberal capitalism as the latter has been global in orientation. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, neoliberal capitalism offered the ruling blocs in the imperialist and colonial centres both the material and ideological tools needed to roll back the wins of anticolonial and progressive socialist movements around the world.

Many anticolonial movements were gradually pacified through 'colonial politics of recognition.'¹³ Such politics devises a whole range of juridical and diplomatic channels to absorb, liquidate, domesticate or annul indigenous demands for self-determination. The materialist groundings of this politics have been free market ideology and structural adjustment programmes enhanced and secured by US imperialist domination through both war and 'financial terror' (through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund).¹⁴ In South Africa, this meant the formal end of political apartheid in 1994 without the implementation of any genuine land redistribution programmes that would dismantle the entrenched inequalities precipitated by decades of colonial-racial accumulation.¹⁵ In the North of Ireland/Northern Ireland, it meant the Good Friday Agreement, which also stipulated demilitarisation and deferred issues of land redistribution and a United Ireland to a future date.¹⁶ In Palestine, it meant the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the Israeli settler state. The Accords were followed by the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations, which gives Israel total control on tax revenues and entry and exit ports. In their own ways, these agreements offered neoliberal frameworks for the joining of capitalist and co-

lonial forces for the benefit of dominant settler groups. They also offered a juridical opening for the dominant parties from the revolutionary conjuncture of the 1960s to the 1980s to lead distinct state-building projects. Thus, contrary to the prevailing belief that contemporary South Africa or Northern Ireland are what await a free Palestine, all three geographies offer differentiated articulations of the same neoliberal solution to deeply entrenched colonial structures.

The Oslo Peace Accords offered a framework for the continuities of neoliberal and colonial forces, which in turn became the conditioning limits of the actually existing state of Palestine. The Palestinian formal leadership was not merely duped at the time. Given the context of suffocating global conditions for continuous anticolonial dissent, the Gulf War and the detrimental effects of Yasser Arafat's support for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the end of the Cold War, the PLO opportunistically sought a way out through the Accords. It had aspirations to kickstart its nation-state building project. By then, the PLO was already dominated by less progressive political forces that had abandoned a more comprehensive program of social, economic and political liberation. Fatah – the dominant party within the PLO – gradually came to represent the interests of diasporic Palestinian capital and the reactionary elements of the Palestinian petite bourgeoisie. It is telling that the Accords allowed a limited number of Palestinians to return (estimated between 40,000-100,000), many of whom were equipped with the skills and capital necessary for kickstarting the 'nascent' Palestinian economy.¹⁷ Oslo loyalists still argue today that this was the first actual 'return' of displaced Palestinians to Palestine. Dominated by one-party, the PLO – already equipped with a legitimating discourse of sacrifice and revolutionary armed resistance – deemed itself the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The vision was for a strong one-party rule of a nation-state building project energised by a charismatic and populist leader, an ironic fate that Palestine shares with many other postcolonial contexts with the significant difference of facing an active settler colonial project.¹⁸

The Accords were not the beginning but a critical node of a gradual process of *harmonisation* between, on the one hand, the dominant leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the Palestinian bourgeoisie

scattered around the world and its aspirations for national capitalist development, and the reactionary regional ruling bloc in the neighbouring Arab countries (where some of the strongest currents of Palestinian capital were organically elaborated), and US imperialism and Israeli settler colonialism, on the other. But the gradual dominance of this reformist tendency did not come without resistances. As early as the 1970s, many Palestinian intellectuals and artists were acutely aware of the looming danger of negotiations in the midst of constant colonial expansion and refusal of Palestinian self-determination. Naji al-'Ali produced political cartoons in the 1980s that highlighted the defeatist and opportunistic approach of the Palestinian formal leadership, which eventually cost him his life.¹⁹ Ghaleb Helsa wrote in the late 1980s of the systemic expulsion of the organic Palestinian intellectuals from the ranks of the PLO and its metamorphosis into one-party (Fatah) rule.²⁰ Emerging in the mid-1980s in the midst of dwindling pan-Arab nationalism and a post-Iranian revolutionary conjuncture and alongside the rise of a particularly disintegrative phase of capitalism, Hamas, as we will see, has had a contradictory trajectory with negotiations, but one that has mainly rejected this reformist logic of unequal negotiations with the colonial regime.

Conjunctural contradictions and financialised terror

By conjuncture, I mean the 'condensation of contradictions', as Stuart Hall would put it, emanating from the signing of the Oslo Accords. A 'conjuncture', Hall reminds us, is not a 'slice of time but can only be defined by the accumulation/condensation of contradictions, the fusion or merger – to use Lenin's terms – of "different currents and circumstances".'²¹ Importantly, this 'accumulation of contradictions' does not merely connote a 'stacking' of forces present in a certain historical moment, merely pointing to their 'complexity.' Rather, it names the hierarchies produced *by* and *amongst* the social, economic, cultural and political relations and forces present in a certain moment. Political stakes, then, are front and centre in any conjunctural analysis as it examines the unequal relations that govern interactions between the different social groups and the political tensions that emerge from such hierarchies, with attention to the cracks and fissures

that we can exploit to transform the social system.

The Oslo Accords crystallised a set of economic, political and social relations that would limit and condition the terrain of political struggle for Palestinians across historic Palestine and in the diaspora. This does not mean that Palestinians everywhere automatically follow the historical dictates of the Accords; it simply means that the Accords articulated a set of material forces to be reckoned with (i.e., negotiated, subverted, upended, resisted, etc.) across the different scales of Palestinian livelihood. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, they have enabled the Palestinian Authority – i.e., the governing body of the actually existing 'state of Palestine' – to recruit a *limited* social base for its operations. Such a base includes elements of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, who were enthused by the financial prospects of a 'free market.' Additionally, 28% of the Palestinian workforce in the West Bank (681,000 in total) are employed by the Palestinian Authority's public sector.²² This does not automatically make them part of its social base, but it does mean that they are tied to it through the wage and its associated mechanisms of discipline and management. The wage is a constant site of speculation in Palestine, given its fluctuations. For example, since the beginning of the genocide, the Israeli government has withheld the tax revenues it is supposed to transfer to the PA as stipulated by the Paris Protocol. In the first half of 2024, Israel held hostage ILS 1.8 billion in clearance revenue.²³ This means that everyday Palestinians who are public employees have been variably receiving 30% to 70% of their actual wages. It also means that Israel can 'negotiate' over the revenues it holds, pressuring the Palestinian Authority into more compromises – not least in security coordination and in withholding wages from the Palestinian families of martyrs and prisoners as a form of punishment.

This is the actual content of the Palestinian Authority's structural dependency on Israeli settler colonialism, which makes the former extremely vulnerable to the conditioning capacities of the latter. It is predicated on what Cavallero and Gago (2021, 13) term 'financial terror', which 'holds hostage the desire for transformation: it produces a psychological terror that consists of forcing us to only want things to stop getting worse.' Financial terror explains the relationships between, on the one hand, public debt and military dictatorships and occupations,

apartheid and colonisation on the other. It reminds us that colonisers often weave together financial tools and mechanisms that displace the costs of colonisation onto the colonised themselves.

In the Oslo conjuncture, the wage – already a historical *sign* of dispossessing people from their land and making them reliant on an extractive relationship – is an integral part of the colonial process of impoverishment and discipline. Owing to the ‘neoliberal restructuring’²⁴ of the Israeli and Palestinian economies and the deeply violent ways through which its costs are devolved onto the Palestinians, the devaluation of the wage has proliferated indebtedness across Palestine as a chronic condition.²⁵ In this, Palestinians share the fate of many around the world whose lives have been ravaged by the ‘financial terror’ unleashed by neoliberal arrangements that are kept intact through wars and financial packages dictated by the US-led international financial institutions.²⁶ The Oslo Accords institutionalised a ‘neoliberal restructuring’ that has meant the structural dependency of Palestinian state-building on international aid, an intensifying fiscal austerity and the growth of a limited, new class of predatory elites with strong ties to the Palestinian Authority and Israeli business interests. Debt is the cost of these fundamental changes being filtered down onto the shoulders of dispossessed Palestinians. And, debt is about discipline – to be chased by the Palestinian Authority’s courts and security forces for not paying back or not having enough credit to pay a cheque. Debt is what Palestinians in Gaza incur to live after the systemic destruction of their homes, lands and sources of livelihood and employment, ranging from bakeries to hospitals. It is what they have had to endure in the midst of engineered starvation and commodity scarcity. It is what they will incur to finance the ‘reconstruction.’ Debt is a social form of a colonial system that steals from the colonised only then to punish us for mere living. Debt is, indeed, a defining feature of the actually existing state of Palestine.

Tied to loans from Palestinian banks, many of the now-unemployed West Bank workers have been pursued by the Palestinian Authority’s courts and forces to ‘pay’ their ‘debt.’ Prior to the genocide, the number of Palestinian workers within Israel increased from 78,000 in 2010 to 173,000 in 2022.²⁷ Palestinian labourers inside the colonial Green Line and the settlements are systematically excluded from any legal protections, let alone

labour unions. They are routinely subjected to wage theft, work permit fees and middlemen fees. They are chased at checkpoints and entry points, attacked with tear gas and sometimes rubber and live bullets, humiliated in the workplace and held captive by the Israeli bureaucratic and legal processes from obtaining the permit to return home at the end of their day, week or month. Since the beginning of the genocide, most Palestinian workers have been barred from entering their workplaces, which effectively means leaving most of them unemployed or their lives endangered as they find alternative ways (such as climbing the apartheid wall) to get to their work. Many Palestinian labourers from Gaza were abducted, arrested or went missing since the beginning of the genocide. Over its decades of existence, the settler state has simultaneously worked to minimise its dependency on Palestinian labour while ensuring the reverse – the dependency of Palestinians on Israeli employment, for which you would need ‘security clearance.’

Additionally, the Palestinian Authority has also more than 65,000 workers in the security sector in the West Bank, who are trained directly and indirectly by US military forces.²⁸ While the authority has had no direct governance role in the Gaza Strip since 2007, it still pays the salaries of many of its own ‘absentee’ public employees there.²⁹ While some of the security workers acquire a middle-class status by virtue of their military education and employment, many are recruited from the impoverished that fall at the margins of the class system in the cities, villages and refugee camps. They constitute an important force that has become much more coercive and confrontational in its targeting of Palestinian anticolonial resistance. As the Palestinian Authority remains both unable to deliver on its aspirations for statehood and structurally dependent on Israeli settler colonialism, it increasingly becomes dependent on the coercive capabilities of its security forces. Indeed, much ideological craft has gone into turning Palestinians impoverished by colonialism into a *de facto* arm of Israeli settler colonialism. Such craft includes security aid and funding from the European Union and the United States; management of the ‘professionalization and modernization’ of the Palestine security forces by US Army Generals;³⁰ the transfer of expertise from neighbouring Arab security apparatuses, including Jordan and Egypt, two places with extreme levels of surveillance, censorship and repres-

sion; and, a whole series of paternalistic and clientelist tactics that nurture loyalty amongst the security workers. In this current moment, it is a variation of this 'security arrangement' that is being proposed for the Gaza Strip by the US, Arab regimes and the Palestinian Authority.

Imaginarities of Liberation

As a conjuncture sees the waning of certain relations and forces and the emergence of other ones, it is worth outlining – even if in a rudimentary fashion – the conjunctural realignment of political forces within the Palestinian and Israeli political scenes and their implications for the actually existing 'state of Palestine.' The Oslo Accords have become a condensed site of articulation for Palestinian anticolonial energies and passions. In this sense, it is important to distinguish between the actually existing state of Palestine described above and a rich lineage of Palestinian struggle for more emancipatory forms of state building that committed to anti-colonial, anticapitalist and socially progressive imaginaries. The ideological collapse of the long Palestinian liberation struggle across its different geographies into a well-defined, neoliberal nation-state building project is one of the most detrimental consequences of the Oslo Accords. As a project led by the Palestinian national bourgeoisie and aimed at nurturing their interests, it aims to capture and flatten Palestinian anticolonial politics. In other words, the actually existing state of Palestine is a contingent formation that may – and indeed must be – rearticulated to more emancipatory ends.

There is a spectrum of Palestinian imaginaries for liberation. Even within the Palestine Liberation Organisation, there had existed state imaginaries that radically differ from the one precipitated by the Oslo Accords. This includes the 1971 vision,³¹ declared in the eighth National Palestinian National Council (PNC) convention, which adopted a unanimous resolution that declared:

the armed struggle of the Palestinian people is not a racial or religious struggle directed against the Jews. This is why the future state that will be set up in Palestine liberated from Zionist imperialism will be a democratic Palestinian state. All who wish to will be able to live in peace there with the same rights and the same duties.³²

Crucially, the resolution discusses the alliance between 'world imperialism', 'Zionist imperialism' and

the 'anti-revolutionary forces in the Arab homeland' as impediments to the Palestinian revolution. It also argued for an internationalist struggle that clearly positions the Palestinian revolution alongside 'all forces struggling against imperialism, colonialism, oppression, racism and exploitation and mobilize on our side all forces of justice, liberation and peace in the world.' We can also revisit Ghassan Kanafani's writings from that conjuncture, in which he argued that the Palestinian state could not exist without defeating the coordinates of US imperialism in the region, the dictatorial Arab regimes and the socially regressive forces within Palestine itself.³³ Zionism is a checkpoint for the region's popular and genuine democracies. Palestinian liberation is a critical node within a wider anti-imperialist struggle in the region and globally.

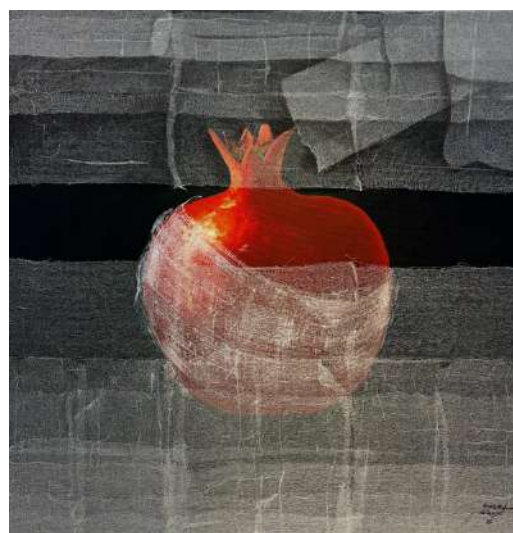


Figure 3. Untitled. Oil and bandage on fabric. By Palestinian artist, Al Aziz Aatef.

Such liberation imaginaries do not merely constitute an archive of a bygone past that may help us analytically and politically in moving beyond the deadlock of the Oslo arrangement. Rather, they are a concrete subterranean force that still makes itself felt across different fronts within Palestinian society in student unions, youth movements, cultural organisations and importantly, the political prisoners' movement. They are subterranean because they are systematically coerced, imprisoned, maimed and assassinated by both the Israeli settler colonial regime and the Palestinian Authority's (PA) security forces. They are also subterranean because of the left's failures to reorganise itself in the aftermath of the 1980s not only in Palestine but globally.

Hamas, as a political movement and party, emerged on the Palestinian political scene in constitutive contestation with the Accords and gradually captured the administrative institutions in the Gaza Strip. Initially, the Oslo Accords became the Islamic movement's condensed site of contestation and, by extension, of elaboration of its political programme. With its roots in the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas was established in 1987 with the rising tides of the first Intifada. Incubated in constitutive contradiction with the failures of Arab secular nationalisms and assisted by the regional rise of political Islam in a conjuncture partially defined by the Iranian revolution, the movement presented a nationalist and political programme with an Islamist orientation committed to the fight against Israeli colonialism. Following the horrific massacre of 29 Palestinians at the hands of Israeli settlers in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron in 1994, Hamas carried out a series of armed attacks against the Israeli army and settlers.

The question of whether or not to join presidential and legislative elections enabled by the Oslo Accords was repeatedly a site of debate for Hamas. While the movement had decided not to participate in the first Palestinian elections in 1996, it did join and win the Palestine Legislative Council elections in 2006. The decade separating these two elections was marked by the intensification of armed resistance in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the rise of the second Intifada and the elaboration of a strained relationship between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The Bush US administration also further enshrined the idea of a 'future Palestinian state' contingent on 'reforming the Palestinian Authority.'³⁴ Twinning the imperialist 'democratisation' in Iraq with that in Palestine, the Bush administration imposed a major restructuring on the Palestinian Authority that saw Mahmoud Abbas – the current president of the Palestinian Authority, who was favoured by the US and Israel to Yassir Arafat – rise as the prime minister. In his willingness to accommodate US and Israeli demands, Abbas became instrumental in transforming the Palestinian Authority into a disciplinary arm of Israel's colonial project. In other words, we already start seeing how notions of 'reform' and 'restructuring' are euphemisms for constant institutional bricolage to guard US and Israeli interests and disintegrate the Palestinian national question.

Hamas had gained much of its popularity from its rejection of such reform. It is important to remember, though, as Tareq Baconi makes clear in his detailed study of Hamas as a political formation, that the movement has undergone many different transformations since its inception. Its participation in the elections in 2006 is a clear example of its shifting positions and strategies. Hamas' success in the elections stretched the institutional limits of the Palestinian Authority and brought its contradictions to the surface; the movement attempted to 'repoliticize the Palestinian Authority away from its administrative focus and dedication to endless peace talks.'³⁵ Mahmoud Abbas had won the 2005 presidential elections following the death/assassination of Yasser Arafat in 2004. In the same year, Israel devised what it had misleadingly called a unilateral 'disengagement plan' from the Gaza Strip. While often presented as a sign of Israeli good will for peace, the plan was the first in a series of steps to besiege the Gaza Strip, and most settlers removed from the strip were relocated to the West Bank. Hamas' surprising move to join the 2006 Palestine Legislative Elections, saw it win the majority of its seats. Fatah won around 41% of the vote, while the leftist Palestinian party, the PFLP, won around 4%. While independent observers confirmed the elections' transparency, Israel, the United States and the European Union imposed sanctions on the Palestinian Authority, demanding that the Hamas-led government recognise the governing agreements between Israel and the PLO, that it recognise the colonial state of Israel and that it renounces armed resistance. Such demands were made without any genuine push for Israel to dismantle its colonial project across Palestine. Additionally, Israel systematically arrested and assassinated Hamas leaders and activists.

After a series of lethal armed clashes between Fatah and Hamas loyalists that killed around 300 Palestinians, a geographic split solidified by 2007 between a Hamas-led Gaza Strip and a Fatah-led West Bank. Hamas's al-Qassam brigades were mobilised to violently overwhelm Fatah's forces, which had blamed the former for kidnapping and shooting its members. Hamas, in turn, blamed Fatah for carrying out cold-blooded executions of its members. Gaza came under a brutal Israeli siege, and the West Bank became the testing ground for the Palestinian Authority's neoliberal state project. It was then that the PA forces became colloquially known in Palestine as

the 'Dayton forces', in reference to Keith Dayton, the US Lieutenant General sent to lead the PA military establishment's 'professionalisation and modernisation process'.³⁶ The armed dispute with Hamas hardened the Palestinian Authority's alliance with US imperialism and Israeli colonialism and the discourse of a 'modernised' and 'reformed' Palestinian Authority has worked to aggressively re-adjust its institutions to colonial and imperial demands. Struggling to finance the administrative costs of Gaza in the midst of a blockade, Hamas became increasingly reliant on the financial and military backing of Iran.

Yet, both the Oslo Accords and the so-called 'disengagement' plan became condensed sites of articulation for the Israeli far-right and its unquenched thirst for colonial violence and expansion. Honaida Ghanim, in an exquisite and detailed study of the hegemonic rise of the new Israeli right, points to the failures of liberal Zionism to decisively 'complete' its conquest of Palestine as a key factor.³⁷ As early as 1995, Israeli far right forces marked their constitutive presence (already underway since the Likud Party's win in 1977) by assassinating one of the architects of the Accords, then Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. It was then that the current fascist Israeli Minister of Interior, Ben Gvir, made his first appearance on the Israeli political scene. Indeed, three weeks prior to Rabin's assassination, Gvir appeared on Israeli television holding a Cadillac emblem that had been stolen from Rabin's car. He said: 'just like we got to this emblem, we can get to Rabin.'³⁸ Through a series of contestations and contradictions with Israel's liberal institutions, these forces, alongside the personal dramas and anxieties of Netanyahu's corruption, have effectively pushed the Likud party into a ruling bloc with the most extreme elements of the far-right. Coupled with the emboldened rise of far-right forces around the world, not least the rise of Donald Trump to the helm of US imperialism, these factors have enabled the Zionist far-right forces to seize the Israeli state apparatus. And, to get rid of every Palestinian on the land of historic Palestine has *always* been integral to their overall objective: to complete a 'God-mandated' conquest of Palestine.

It is worth noting that liberal Zionism (Labour), conservative Zionism (Likud) and the more far-right, emerging religious Zionism bloc agree on the colonisation of Palestine but only differ in their means. After all, Ra-

bin was not only the signatory of the Oslo Accords but also the architect of the brutal Iron Fist policies designed to violently quell the first Intifada.³⁹ It is no surprise, then, that many in Palestine and beyond find such distinctions to be merely superficial, deeming them all faces of the same coin. However, there is a political necessity in understanding the distinctions, differences and contingencies of Zionism and its colonial violence. A reckoning with the historical movement of Zionism unveils its dependencies and vulnerabilities to geopolitical conditions and Palestinian resistance, disrupting its ideological claims to permanence. It is from the cracks, fissures and contestations underpinning such distinct concrete historical movements that the resistance can be more exact in its targeting of the Zionist colonial project.

Genocide as historically contingent

Genocide is a contingent, conjunctural manifestation of an organic contradiction at the heart of Zionism: to complete the project of conquest it had violently inaugurated in 1948 with the dispossession of 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of more than 500 Palestinian villages. However, this conquest is imbricated with a generalised policy of 'scorching the earth', making it impossible to heal or repair the land. Zionism has not decisively settled its conquest of Palestine; it remains in constant existential anxiety. No wonder that Zionists start by asking for an assertion of their state's right to exist; as Fred Moten once put it, 'states have no rights and ought not to have rights.'⁴⁰ The question names a constitutive anxiety. It is this anxiety that was brought into sharp relief on October 7th. And, it is this same anxiety that the Netanyahu-led far right bloc is capitalising on to generate consent within Israel and beyond for their genocidal project. Such an ideological edifice makes its appearance across different fronts and subjects: as self-victimising allegations of antisemitism against any protest, however small; as unverified and untruthful reports of beheaded babies; and as historically inaccurate affirmations of the continuities between the Holocaust and October 7th. This is how Zionism has managed for decades to proliferate ideological subjectivities, ideas and infrastructures that disguise its active settler colonisation of Palestine into a seeming suppression of 'incomprehensible', 'blood-thirsty' and ahistorical 'Palestinian terrorism.' Helpful to Zionism

is the intensified racism and Islamophobia in the West, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, which have made it increasingly easy for Zionism to articulate itself to locally embedded anxieties across different Western societies.

Zionism is not merely an 'ideology.' We cannot presume that Zionism's modes of entrenched colonial violence are merely ideational, though they are partially that. Zionism is an ideological formation that is differentially articulated to varied economic interests globally. Most important here is Zionism's indispensability to US-led imperialism as a disciplinary force with military might instrumentalised to coerce the entire region into subservience to imperialist interests.⁴¹ It is also a critical node for what the Biden administration had termed 'economic integration' through an 'economic corridor' that connects the Asian continent to Europe through the Arab Gulf countries, Jordan and Israel – aspirations that continue into the Trump administration. In a world with dwindling US hegemony, Zionism remains a central launching pad for imperialist interests. Indeed, it is an organising principle for the coercive smoothening of capitalist pathways in the region. It is in this sense that one can speak of an 'integral Zionism',⁴² which refers to the complexities, contradictions and mediations that link Zionist ideology to a whole series of material economic interests and positions across different national polities, not least the United States. The question is not whether it is AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) or economic interests that are behind Zionism's dominance within US politics. It is how AIPAC, Christian Zionism, economic interests and imperialist aspirations are *all* linked, through a series of political process and subjects, to Zionism as an ideology.

From an objective review of the Palestinian resistance's statements and speeches preceding the genocide, the October 7th attacks aimed at '*tabyeed al sujoon*' (i.e., 'whitening Israel's prisons' by kidnapping enough Israeli soldiers to release the six-thousand Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails),⁴³ sharpening the internal crisis of the Israeli state and obstructing the increased regional normalisation with it. In particular, the aim of clearing Israeli prisons of Palestinian prisoners became much more imaginable after the October 7th attacks and the arrest of around 250 Israeli soldiers and officers. The aim was to disrupt plans for economic integration that bypass the colonial question and override Palestinian demands for

self-determination. At the risk of seeming too obvious, October 7th is *historically produced by its very own context of colonial Manicheism – of extreme colonial inequalities that govern the most intimate and minute details of the lives of the colonial settlers and the colonised Palestinians.*⁴⁴ It is also the result of decades of US-led institutional engineering that created a wedge into the heart of the Palestinian national question. One could read October 7th as the implosion of the Oslo framework and its manipulation of Palestine, its suffocation of its political forces and its hierarchisation of Palestinian pain, which has for too long placed Gaza under Israel's sharpest teeth.

Despite the conjunctural contingencies of who carried out the attacks, which would require a much more extended study of Hamas' governance in Gaza and its armed resistance capabilities, it is no surprise that the anticolonial armed struggle of October 7th – in all its contradictions and ambiguities – came from the Gaza Strip. The lethal besiegement of Gaza sharpened a popular anticolonial consciousness across Palestine but especially in Gaza. Owing to the geographic division and the increased military capacities of resistance groups in Gaza, especially Hamas, and the relative decline of armed resistance in the US-funded and PA-led West Bank, Gaza was for too long endowed by other Palestinians with a historical responsibility to lead the armed struggle. Among many Palestinians, the question of why similar eruptions have not emerged from the other Palestinian geographies (the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the territories occupied in 1948, and the diaspora) is intensely debated. This, of course, points to another important question: how Israeli settler colonialism has managed to create differentiated Palestinian territorial archipelagos, each governed by its own contradictions and dwelling in its own relative deprivation.⁴⁵ The violence of genocide is also incremental, and Israel has been most brutal in its exercise of that violence on Gaza for decades. Genocide is the logical conclusion of the four wars preceding it, which indiscriminately killed thousands of Palestinians. Urbicide is the logical conclusion of the colonial metaphors of 'mowing the grass',⁴⁶ which had repeatedly flattened neighbourhoods and residential blocs in Gaza. Famine is the logical conclusion of Israel's pre-genocide campaigns of counting the calories entering into Gaza according to 'mathematical formulas.'⁴⁷ It is the long colonial war on Palestine and genocide is its latest manifestation.

Conclusion

How to repair in the midst of genocide? By breaking the neck of the genocidal ideology. This is precisely what the colonial recognition politics seeks to mask. The promise to recognise a Palestinian state works to disguise the historical urgency of confronting the genocidal nature of Zionism. Israeli prisons have not been 'emptied' yet, as more than ten thousand Palestinian prisoners still languish in their darkness. According to the BBC, Israeli jailers have killed 94 Palestinian prisoners since October 7th. Israel's neighbouring dictatorial (Egypt and Jordan) and precarious (Lebanon and Syria) Arab regimes remain disciplined by its colonial violence. They continue to justify their stillness and silence, reiterating their insignificance in the face of Israeli colonialism and US imperialism. The normalisation deals with the Arab Gulf countries are still in full force. There are many cracks and fissures in the consent that Zionism has spent decades establishing. Despite Zionism's consensus on genocide, its internal crisis has indeed been intensified, with constant disputes between the political leadership, the far-right bloc, the military leadership and the Israeli prisoners' families. The cracks and fissures are widening in Western liberal democracies and the calls for an arms embargo and genuine sanctions ring louder on the streets. Most importantly, Palestine has emerged as a clear site of articulation for antiracist and anticolonial popular forces around the world. In the face of these conjunctural shifts, the responses of Western imperial forces and the regional Arab regimes have been a call for recognition of the actually existing State of Palestine.

The purpose behind such calls is to once again use the aspirations for Palestinian statehood to discipline Palestinian anticolonial energies and passions. As early as November 2023, the Biden administration had waved its flag of support for what it called a 'revitalised Palestinian Authority'.⁴⁸ The aim is to re-adjust the already existing state of Palestine's institutions to the demands of Western imperialism. It is to use the already existing state of Palestine as a disciplinary tool for Palestinians in Gaza, who have remained outside its direct orbit of operations since 2007. The Palestinian Authority has made clear its willingness to enter the Gaza Strip on the backs of Israeli tanks. Indeed, it has been

in 'rehearsal mode' in the northern West Bank, where its security forces have launched a campaign titled 'Protecting the Nation' on Jenin refugee camp since December 2024. The campaign parallels continuous Israeli invasions of the northern camps that have destroyed much of their infrastructure and fabric. Refugee camps in the northern West Bank, including in Jenin, have produced the most direct forms of anticolonial resistance against the Israeli army and settlers since the second uprising. The Palestinian president has also appointed Hussein al-Sheikh⁴⁹ – a staunch loyalist to 'Security Coordination' with Israel and one of the least popular faces of Fatah – as his vice president. This campaign is the 'reform' that has been demanded of the actually existing state of Palestine: to prove its ability to discipline any anticolonial forces present within the West Bank, only then to be qualified to rule the Gaza Strip.

Yet even this form of Palestinian statehood is deemed unacceptable by hegemonic forces within contemporary Zionism. The Israeli government has been clear in its rejection of proposals for the Palestinian Authority to rule the Gaza Strip. It has imposed paralyzing financial restrictions on the Palestinian Authority's operations. It has also supported and sanctioned the rampant settler violence across the West Bank. Furthermore, on July 23rd 2025, the Israeli Knesset passed a resolution supporting Israel's annexation of the West Bank. While the Israeli ruling bloc moves in the direction of intensified dispossession and colonial violence, Western liberal responses move in the outdated direction of formal recognition within a two-state solution framework without any guarantees for an end to Israel's colonial project. Not only does the recognition of the actually existing state of Palestine go against the aspirations of the Palestinian people but it also fails to address the extreme situation of colonial and genocidal violence we face in Palestine today. The recognition is not 'too little, too late' – it dangerously works to entrench Israeli colonialism and suffocate anticolonial praxis.

It is not only that proposals for recognition bypass demands for genuine sanctions and an arms embargo on the colonial state. They also insist on framing the colonial question in Palestine through a racial and segregationist two-state solution, which has been designed to normalise the theft of most of historic Palestine. They also neglect the situation of the two million Palestinian citizens of

Israel, who endure horrific forms of censorship and institutional abandonment and violence. They refuse to see historic Palestine. They are predicated on notions of disarmament that want to capitulate the Palestinian resistance. They entrench the power of the reactionary forces that uphold the actually existing state of Palestine. They distract us from the historical necessity to support progressive forces in Palestine and globally and the urgent emergence of an internationalist impulse that sees Palestine as intimately connected to systems of oppression and resistance movements globally. They hide with a fig leaf the cracks and fissures that Palestine has made palpable in the cemented walls of imperialism. They foreclose the question of resistance, negating its legitimacy and suppressing its possibilities for articulation. They want to disarm the colonised while leaving the military arsenals of the genocidaires unscathed. They bypass the historically urgent need of working towards dismantling Israel's colonial project and delegitimising and disarming Zionism as a colonial and genocidal ideology. De-zionification is an urgent demand: to dislodge Zionism from its subject positions, its institutional articulations, its material base, its international alliances. To break its neck.

Until that happens, history tells us, anticolonial forces will continue to make themselves felt across all fronts.

Hashem Abushama is a writer and associate professor at the School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford. His writings have appeared in Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Annals of the American Association of Geographers, Soundings and the Jerusalem Quarterly.

Notes

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3. 'Peace to Prosperity', *Trump Whitehouse*, accessed 30 Jan 2026, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov-/peacetoprosperity/>.

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4. Nasser Abourahme makes this argument forcefully. Although I agree with Abourahme's observation that Zionism is yet to 'decisively' conquer Palestine and genocide is its belated solution, I find his declaration of Israel as defeated to be less convincing and somewhat triumphalist, given the concrete historical circumstances we are facing in the post October 7th conjuncture. See Nasser Abourahme, 'In tune with their time', *Radical Philosophy* 216 (Summer 2024), 13–20.
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10. Al 'Azeef 'Aatef is a Palestinian visual artist and calligrapher based in Palestine. His works play with multiple visual mediums, including Arabic calligraphy, to address issues of carcerality, protest and solidarity. This artwork is part of a wider, developing collection that uses 'bandages' to address contemporary issues in Palestine and beyond. You can find his work on Instagram @alaziz underscore atef.
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14. For more on 'financial terror', see Luci Cavallero and Verónica Gago, 'Introduction and A Feminist Reading of Debt' in *A Feminist Reading of Debt* (London: Pluto Press, 2021) 1–29.
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