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Palestine beyond National Frames: Emerging Politics, Cultures, and Claims

“Forty years ago we fought not only for our lives. We fought for life in dignity and freedom” (Edelman quoted in Krall 1977: 122). These were the words of Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising, in his recollection of the events around the revolt. It was the first and most prominent action of armed urban resistance to the Germans during the Second World War. Edelman was a member of the Bund, a secular Jewish labor socialist movement, and an anti-Zionist who also later fought in the general Warsaw uprising of 1944 to liberate the city from the Nazis.

Edelman’s (1990) memoir *The Ghetto Fights: Warsaw 1941–43*, first published in 1945, was banned for decades in Israel, where he was considered persona non grata. Not only did Edelman disrupt official Zionist historiography that claimed that the Warsaw ghetto resistance was led by Zionists—and the linear trajectory that poses these events as the natural prelude to the Zionist national movement in Palestine—but Edelman also opposed Zionism as a conquering project that would have left unchallenged the plight of Jews in their homes in Europe.¹ Edelman’s reflections open a breach in the Israeli orthodox narrative by claiming that the protection of Jews and Judaism in

their homes in Europe was at stake, and this divergent view was for Jews more radical and universalizing than an aggressive nationalism and occupation of another land.

Edelman's disrupting narrative offers inspiring material for an opening to this special issue on "Palestine beyond National Frames." Mainstream representations of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians tend to portray it as a struggle between two opposing national aspirations on the same land. Yet Zionism is not only an ethnoreligious form of nationalism but also an expansionist settler-colonial project based on the ethnic cleansing of the native population. The Palestinian struggle for self-determination, by contrast, is inscribed in an anticolonial type of nationalism and liberation, closer to the "fight for dignity and freedom" that Edelman recalls as the core call of the Warsaw ghetto resistance.

Unsurprisingly, colonization, dispossession, and statelessness have meant that the "national" has featured as the prime lexicon for speaking of Palestine. The "national" has functioned as the affective and symbolic frame for the political project of liberation for Palestinians and has also been the underlying grid of most of the scholarly work on Palestine.

However, in this issue we explore how going beyond national frames can disclose a different dimension of the Palestinian politics of liberation. We shed light on an indigenous population engaged in ongoing and everyday collective resistance to protect their "home" and defend their "land"—as these are constantly reconfigured and imagined across place and time—rather than a memorialized homeland or national territory. Furthermore, over time, Palestine, as a "site"—or laboratory—of encroached forms of control, surveillance, dispossession, and separation, has become a paradigm for universal claims to justice across the world, shifting its scope from a national to an international public (see, among others, Collins 2012; Salih, Welchman, and Zambelli 2017).

Thinking beyond National Frames

Writing at the time of the first Intifada, Ted Swedenburg (1989) reflected on the ineluctability of the national: studying the Great Revolt of 1936–39, he showed how national frames functioned to couch or even silence subaltern class memories of the revolt (see also Swedenburg 1995); they seemed inescapable as political, affective, and ideological lenses carving the oral histories of his Palestinian interlocutors. Not surprisingly, the elderly he interviewed prioritized Palestinian unity and hesitated to reveal the scissions and cleav-

ages in their memories and narratives of the revolt. Swedenburg (1989: 268) concluded that “because Israeli policies concentrate so ferociously on disintegrating all cultural forms that evoke the national reality, Palestinians carefully protect the memory of those same symbols.”

When the research community is subject to systematic repression as a national group, what moral and political positions are available to the researcher? Swedenburg felt “compelled to participate in those veilings and to resist a full revelation before the holders of power,” assigning himself the duty to produce a “socially acceptable” narrative within which the Palestinian case might be argued in the West, which, like all narratives, “will necessarily be based on partial truths and strategic exclusions” (270).²

Swedenburg wrote his reflections at a moment when Palestinian nationalism and the national project itself were going through significant moves toward a clear nation-statist form. From the early 1980s onward, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Yasir Arafat started to signal his readiness to participate in negotiations with Israel and work, in line with UN resolution 242, on a territorial solution to the conflict (Ghanem 2013: 22–23). With the 1988 Declaration of Independence at the nineteenth session of the Palestinian National Council in Algiers, the slogan “Two states for two people” gained prominence, and a distinctly nation-statist project became the hegemonic articulation of Palestinian nationalism, marginalizing other imaginaries and imaginings, whether anchored to trans- or subnational frames. National liberation took predominantly the shape of territorial liberation in a two-state solution.

Three decades since the beginning of the nation-state project, which took concrete form after the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993, we feel compelled in this issue to interrogate the “national” from its margins and borders. This probing exercise feels particularly relevant at a time when the fallacies of the Palestinian nation-state-building project—with its unique positioning, simultaneously across colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial temporalities, economies, and sovereignties—are emerging in all their dramatic dimensions. Neoliberal discourse and technologies shaped by donors’ notion of a “liberal peace,” coupled with a politically sieged, and limited, sovereignty based on security, and the persistence of colonial violence dramatically shoved off the democratic promise from the state-building process (Haddad 2016).

Awareness of the pitfalls of the concrete manifestation of the national project in Palestine today leads us to recognize that such a project may carry fissures also at an ideational level. In this introduction, we therefore ask how

“national frames,” as an analytical category and a lens of investigation, have shaped the literature on Palestine, its scope, questions, and foci of inquiry, and how these have been challenged.

Going beyond national frames is a political as well as an epistemic project. Hamid Dabashi (2016) has convincingly shown (with reference to Iran, but also more widely to the Arab and postcolonial world) that the nation-state formation can never be entirely freed from its linkages to colonialism or, to say it with Partha Chatterjee (1993: 14), the “modern regime of power” (see also Abu Lughod 1998; Mbembe 2001). To liberate the nation “from the false epistemic and political foregrounding of ethnic nationalism, sectarian provincialism, and thus to restore the cosmopolitan worldliness out of which these nations were formed in the first place” (Dabashi 2016: Kindle location 383–86) would require a process of “remapping . . . the world beyond its colonial contortions” (Kindle locations 3275, 3287; see also Dabashi 2012). For Dabashi, stateless nations could be one of the epistemic starting points for thinking outside nation-statist frames:

It is today imperative to retrieve and rearticulate the regional, and in fact global, consequences of a creative defiance of all the current frontier fictions that hold the fate of peoples imprisoned within frames of reference that confine and control their liberation movements. From Palestinians to Kurds, Baluchis, Azaris, and so on, people who have been historically denied their national formations can in fact overcome and dismantle the frontier fictions that have foreclosed their future, and offer alternative modalities of postnational solidarity and alliance. (2016: Kindle location 464–72)

Here we propose Palestine as a paradigm to think of liberation beyond the not yet fully realized and yet already mutilated project of the nation-state. Inspired by Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh’s (2013) intimate and provocative collection of essays around Palestine as beginning rather than as origin, the fruit of the political work of imagination of what could be, beyond the static memory of what never was, we explore what liberation and political subjectivity look like for those currently excluded or marginalized from the emotive project of a semi-sovereign nation-state as a “truncated and transitory” authority (Johnson 2013: ix).

We wish to give space in this special issue to hazardous and yet radical and wider-embracing scenarios stemming from Palestine’s political work as it unfolds through class, indigeneity, intersectionality, diaspora, borders, and exile. More specifically, how might refugees, exiled and displaced, that is, those centrally imbricated in but benefiting little from the

current hegemonic national project, challenge its central logics or break free of its fallacies?

A critical engagement with methodological nationalism has been pioneered, in particular, in diaspora and transnationalism studies. This literature stressed the multiple networks, flows, mobilities, and interactions that link people, institutions, goods, and ideas across the borders of nation-states (see, among others, Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Sassen 1998; Appadurai 1991; Malkki 1992). Arguing that “decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return,” James Clifford (1994: 306) called for a shift in focus from exclusivist and sedentarist notions of roots in national territories to “a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance,” which, he contended, “may be as important as the projection of a specific origin.”

Along similar lines, Liisa Malkki (1992: 24) argued that “there has emerged a new awareness of the global social fact that, now more than perhaps ever before, people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases—not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit.” Malkki’s work is particularly inspirational in that it questions the sedentarist and “arborescent root metaphors” (27) not for culturally hybrid diasporic or hyphenated peoples but for refugee populations who were forced by violent events to leave their original homes.

Unsurprisingly, the methodological and epistemological provocations emerging from rethinking the dynamics between “roots and routes” (Clifford 1997) have only sporadically and hesitantly been taken up in the academic work on Palestine. Dan Rabinowitz’s (2000, 2001) studies of Palestinians in Israel as a “trapped minority” might be an exception. For him “[a] nonseparative imagination of the territory of Palestine/Israel will have to move away from the state and the nation as the only unit of analysis and the only idiom of affiliation” (Rabinowitz 2000: 768). Rabinowitz’s call for rethinking the relationships between place and identity beyond national frames opens up creative ways to think about Palestine and Israel by challenging “the self-congratulatory territorializing narration of the nation” (770). Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg (2005: 5) endorsed further the scrutiny of methodological nationalism in the introduction to their volume on the politics of popular culture, where they were critical of Palestine studies for remaining caught within “the national paradigm, [that is] a scholarly narrative that installs the national or nation-state as the inherent logic guiding the critical analysis.”

Yet for most Palestinians, the nation-state project, built on the nexus of territory, nation, and state, is hard to overcome as an emotive project of liberation. This is even more so, as the colonization of Palestinians' land takes on more violent and pervasive qualities, where not only space and place but, as Julie Peteet compellingly shows in her contribution to this special issue, also time is occupied. As Peteet (2007: 637) has elaborated elsewhere, even if the orientation to Palestine has over the years become a complex field of inchoate concrete and imagined relations, and taken the shape of "mediated and unmediated" metaphorical and affective—along with territorial—connections, the "territory of origin, particularly when it has been claimed and occupied by another, remains critical to nationalist imaginings and a sense of justice." From this angle, Clifford's (1994) emphasis on "lateral connections" not only risks diverting or even undermining the Palestinians' rights to land but might even serve as a tool of normalization of Palestinian dispossession.

While acknowledging that the endeavor to think beyond the national is not without its risks, we contend that the question of whether and how the right to land, to self-determination, and to exist might feature in a more radical vision for justice than that embodied by the neocolonial and neoliberal consensus of the Palestinian "nation-state" is central and critical. In this sense, we feel the urge to go beyond understandably defensive nationalist stances by making visible the multiple ways Palestinians think, become subjects, act, or mobilize through visions and political practices outside of—but not necessarily oppositional to—national frames. Yet rather than uncritically celebrating a notion of painless and free-floating notion of diasporic identities, we acknowledge the fragmentation and deterritorialization of Palestinian nationhood, stimulated by Edward Said's (2002) early elaboration on Palestine as "exile" (see also Johnson and Shehadeh 2013). We therefore proceed by probing the applicability of borders, exilic and diasporic subjectivities—and their specific politics—as fertile grounds for political subject-formation and liberation beyond the nation-state.

Although historically situated across a multiplicity of references, regional, pan-Arab, local, and religious, among others (see, e.g., Khalidi 1997; Doumani 1995; Tamari 2008; also Allen, this issue), contemporary Palestinian identity remains trapped in the grammar of the "national." Yet, given that Palestinian political subjectivities are formed in a context of statelessness (or failed state building), it remains important to ask whether, and in which specific ways, Palestinian political subjecthoods, visions, struggles, and vocabularies are linked, but not limited, to this national grammar.

Our inquiries are strongly stimulated by the work of postcolonial, subaltern, and feminist theorists. Judith Butler cogently draws attention to how liberal notions of possessive individualism often translate into possessive nationalism (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 9). Land confiscation, annexation, and fragmentation are foundational not only to the formation of Israeli settler nationalism but also to the definition of its citizens as political and human subjects. In this line, we consider it urgent not only to ask, How can claims to land simultaneously work to decolonize “the apparatus of propertied human subjectivity?” (27), but also to inquire, Which categories of the human are formed against the background of the abject and the dispossessed? “How has the human been formed and maintained on the condition of a set of dispossessions?” (36; see also Peteet and Salih, both in this issue).

Anticolonial nationalism, however, as Chatterjee (1993) claimed in his critique to Benedict Anderson (1983), should not simply be read through and subsumed under the normative history of nationalism and nation-state-building processes of the West. Chatterjee made the important distinction between the “material” and “spiritual” domain of nationalism, arguing that in the material domain—that of state, economy, technology, and so forth—“the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed.” Yet, in the spiritual domain, that is, that of cultural identity, postcolonial subjects retained a certain “freedom of imagination” (Chatterjee 1993: 6–7). He coined the notion “political society” to denote those new aspirations and claims that in many postcolonial contexts emerged outside, and somehow in opposition to, the earlier liberal consensus of state–civil society relations. He argued that “the historical task that has been set by these movements is to work out new forms of democratic institutions and practices in the mediating field of political society that lies between civil society and the nation-state” (Chatterjee 1998: 68). “Political societies,” as Chatterjee analyzes them, are invested in a project of democracy rather than one of nationalism and modernization, from which they were excluded or only partially included. While their idioms are still national, these movements may encompass, express, and long for different types of allegiances, aspirations, claims, and solidarities beyond the nation-state, which comes to be scrutinized, contested, and even challenged.

We draw from Chatterjee’s insights to revert the peripheral space given to exile, displacement, and refugeehood within national frames, particularly in the current configuration of sovereignty in Palestine and in the postcolonial Arab nation-states at large, where refugees and/as stateless are often seen as superfluous humanities, suspended in a nonpolitical space, merely

awaiting return to a memorialized past and roots. If analyzed outside the teleological box of national frames, refugees and displaced—with their aspirations to return but also to social justice and full rights in their places of exile—could be seen as “political societies” pushing forward a claim for radical democracy rather than merely a nationalist project (Salih 2013; Salih and Richter-Devroe, forthcoming).

Early Palestinian Nationalism: Relational Histories

Given the scope of this introduction, we provide here only a cursory sketch of the literature on Palestinian nationalism and nation-state building. Our focus remains on how the “national” has functioned as a lens, but also as a blinker, in studying and forming Palestinian identities and political struggles.

The project of nation-state building, and thus the nation-state and nationalism, has featured centrally in Arab historiography and modernist thinking (see, among others, Choueiri 2000; Khalidi 1991). Palestine, in this regard, is no exception, although it has its own specificities.

Rashid Khalidi’s (1997: 63–88) seminal work has countered Zionist historiography’s claims that Palestinian national identity emerged only in response to Israeli nationalism by showing how Palestinian identity, characterized by multiple affiliations and loyalties, preexisted the establishment of Israel (see also Kimmerling and Migdal 1993: 68–69). Beshara Doumani (1995: 245) follows a similar line of argument, stressing that the “economic, social, and cultural relations between the inhabitants of the various regions of Palestine during the Ottoman period [are crucial in explaining] why Palestine became a nation in the minds of the people who call themselves Palestinians today” (see also Nassar 2001–2: 29–30). Swedenburg’s (1995) study, furthermore, stressed the important role that peasant resistance played in the Arab revolt and thus also in the formation of modern Palestinian identity.³ Moving from local to regional identities, Salim Tamari (2008) cogently showed in his brilliant study that Palestine was and continues to be part of a much larger social formation, adding that Palestine’s cultural and political environment is crucially defined by its belonging to the wider environment of the Arab East, from which it was forcibly detached in 1917. Yet these wider dimensions of Palestinian political cultures and identities have been sidelined in what Doumani (1999: 17) aptly termed the “nationalist rewriting of history.”

Despite these convincing claims that, one, Palestinian communal identity emerged before the Zionist colonization of Palestine and, two, continues until today to be made up of multiple identities below and beyond the national,

there is little disagreement that the 1948 Nakba and the Palestinian exodus functioned as a watershed in the formation of Palestinian national consciousness, providing the “context for the transformation of the old Palestinian local and communal affiliations into nationalist ones” (Nassar 2001–2: 34). But rather than emerging from the encounter with the Zionist national movement per se, as often claimed in Israeli historiography, the Nakba left its mark on Palestinian national identity formation in various and multiple ways. Most importantly, as Issam Nassar argues, “The notion of a Palestinian collective identity, which started among the refugees and dominated modern Palestinian national discourse, was essentially based on the experience of the refugee camp” (35). This meant that exile and refugee status—rather than the neat and classic overlapping between nation, state, and territory—came to be and still is core to the specificity of modern Palestinian national identity.

Moreover, the events of 1948 also show that the Palestinian national project and identity were shaped in close relation and interaction with other national formations, both Arab and Zionist. First, given the large exodus, Palestinian national identity was formed in exile in interaction with host-country politics and their own national identity formation processes. The branding of Palestinians as “other” in surrounding Arab nation-states in the making (see, e.g., Massad 2001) was crucial not only in the formation of Arab host countries’ own national imaginings but also in the shaping of the Palestinian national identity (Nassar 2001–2: 27).

For some, inter-Arab politics, in particular Arab states’ policies toward Palestine and the failure of the Arab nationalist movement, proved foundational in the creation of Palestinian national identity, more so than Zionism (e.g., Muslih 1988: 87). Yet, although Palestinian national identity was formed vis-à-vis other nationalisms (and vice versa), this did not mean that, in specific historical moments, other supranational identifications also (re)surfaced. For example, pan-Arab political discourse of the 1950s and 1960s negotiated and maneuvered between Palestinians’ belonging to a broader Arab identity and political entity, on the one hand, and a specific Palestinian particularity and national quest, on the other—a dynamic that Lori Allen sheds more light on in her contribution to this issue. The Arab Nationalist Movement under George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh, for example, called for the liberation of Palestine through the pan-Arabist language of Arab nationalism (see, e.g., Pearlman 2011: 62–93).

For Yezid Sayigh (1997: 21), there remained a tension between the Palestinian national movement and its pan-Arab allegiances: “It was the Arab states that set the Palestinian agenda, invariably according to their own interests,

perceptions, and priorities. Yet Arab support for the establishment of the PLO in 1964 and recognition of its status as sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians in 1974 effectively implied abdication of practical responsibility for the attainment of its national objectives.” Palestinian national goals thus were always linked to, and, in Sayigh’s evaluation, held back by, the policies of surrounding Arab states. This highlights that Palestinian and other Arab nationalisms always shaped each other, rather than existing as separate entities.

Zachary Lockman has found such a dialectical relationship also between Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. He stressed the need to trace the relations, influences, and co-constitutions between what gets to be represented as bounded, cohesive national communities, and he was critical of both Zionist and nationalist separatist approaches for bringing about what he called the “dual society” model. Such an approach, he argued, rendered the “mutually constitutive impact [of the two societies] virtually invisible” and curtailed the vision of how “boundaries between (and within) communities were drawn and reproduced, and practices of separation, exclusion, and conflict articulated” (Lockman 1993: 606). Proposing a “relational history,” Lockman (1996: 8) highlighted that we need to trace the “mutually formative interactions” (9) *between* Palestinian and Israeli communities and identities, as well as *between* Zionism and Palestinian nationalism before and after 1948.

Highlighting these interdependencies between Palestinian nationalism and the surrounding Arab states, on the one hand, and Zionism, on the other, however, should not lead to an uncritical denial of power asymmetries. Daniel Monterescu (2007: 174), in his study on Jaffa, argued that urban spaces in “mixed towns” like Jaffa are in fact intertwined and, when “analyzed relationally, these spaces produce peculiar forms of quotidian social relations between Palestinians and Israelis, producing counter-hegemonic local identities that challenge both Palestinian and Jewish nationalisms.” Yet Monterescu stressed that “the two groups and their identities were constituted in a series of dialectic oppositions and homologies which not only opposed each other, but at the same time dialectically created each other, in dynamic *but constantly asymmetrical* relations of power” (175; emphasis added).

In sum, while post-1967 scholarly work on Palestine has moved toward acknowledging interdependencies between national formations, the challenge remains how to recognize relational forces at work, while keeping wary of the risks of normalizing dispossession or subsuming the history of Palestinians within the colonizers’ or the Arab states’ history and framework.

The Oslo Accords and the Crisis of the “National”

The 1993 Oslo accords and the subsequent period of “state and peace building” provoked a deep crisis for the Palestinian national project, both in its material and spiritual dimensions. Oslo was born with a paradoxical agenda of state building under settler-colonial occupation. It established the Palestine National Authority (PNA) as a state in the making without sovereignty, which, nevertheless, got tasked with negotiating peace with the “other” side, building a foreign-funded and aid-dependent state machinery on the reduced and dismembered territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and representing only a fragment of the Palestinian nation.

Delineating the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the territorial base for a future nation-state, Oslo excluded all those Palestinians who do not reside in these areas. As such, the accords effectively established a new legal marker to define who is and who is not Palestinian (under Palestinian Authority [PA] sovereignty) with drastic consequences for many: “Those who lived the catastrophe are now facing a new catastrophe: the legal disappearance of their Palestinian identity, an identity that evolved from their personal diasporic experience in the years between the creation of Israel in 1948 and today” (Nassar 2001–2: 35–36). With the Oslo accords, the PNA thus not only sidelined the PLO, the refugees (as well as Palestinians in Israel), and their demands but also further fragmented the Palestinian community, leaving those not under their mandate in limbo as to who could represent and claim their rights.

Studies on pre-Oslo Palestine had already drawn attention to some of the tensions between gender and nationalist agendas, which preexisted the phase of failed state and peace building. Gendered analyses of the first Intifada, for example, with their sensitivities to the loci and qualities of power and resistance also made manifest some of the homogenizing and repressive elements within Palestinian nationalism. Many of these studies were stimulated by feminist and postcolonial theories highlighting the gendered ambiguities and fallacies of colonial and postcolonial formations and tracing how women became major pawns, but also agents, in the internal power plays of the national movement (Kuttab 1993; Abdo 1994; Jad 1995; Sabbagh 1998).

Rema Hammami’s (1990) study on the “hijab campaign” during the first Intifada, in this regard, showed not only how gendered politics of control were used by secular and religious political actors but also how discourses on women’s dress and modesty were deployed to measure national commitment. It is not incidental that these tendencies were more poignantly unveiled during the uprising. The first Intifada, although commonly represented as a

national uprising, also incorporated, articulated, and enacted its struggle for social justice beyond national frames and along the lines of class (Hiltermann 1993; Pearlman 2011) and gender (Kuttab 1993; Hasso 2001, 2005).

The wider turn to the paradigm of the everyday and everyday resistance (de Certeau 1984; Scott 1985) within anthropology and sociology also prompted a new gaze on the national (e.g., Jean-Klein 2001; van Teeffelen 2007; Kelly 2008; Allen 2008; Hammami 2010). Rather than viewing the everyday as opposed to the national, these studies called for the need to trace the shapes that the national takes in the context of daily life and how everyday acts are part and parcel of constructing national subjects. The question thus turns from whether to *how* the everyday is nationalized and what meanings the “national” takes in these transformations (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; Richter-Devroe 2011).

Within the field of history and oral history, a turning point was represented by Ilan Pappé’s (2007) collection *The Israel/Palestine Question*, which produced a social history from below. Not incidentally, this focus had gained wider currency after the Oslo accords, with oral historians, in both academic and community circles, striving to “decolonize methodology” (Gluck 2008) but also to scrutinize more broadly issues of memory, memorialization, and the question of who gets to speak, write, and produce history on “Palestine.”⁴ Some oral history studies focused especially on Palestinian women’s narratives, capturing women’s subjective, experience-based and local knowledges of history, place, and identity (Richter-Devroe 2017), as well as their different patterns of narrative style and forms of self-representation (R. Sayigh 1998, 2007a, 2007b).⁵ This work was interested in uncovering other lines of belonging, affiliations, and solidarities and, as such, provided a basis for a historical analysis that went, whether implicitly or more explicitly, beyond classic national lines (see also Salih 2017).

Yet a close focus on how people remember, narrate, and frame their pasts also highlighted once more that the “national” remains a crucial foregrounding language in Palestine, even when memory and imagination merge, producing Palestine as beginning rather than as origin (Johnson and Shehadeh 2013). Rochelle Davis’s (2010) study of Palestinian village books, for example, traces how refugees used the histories of their local villages as a platform to counter and problematize their progressive abandonment by, first, the PLO from the mid-1980s onward and, later decisively, the PA with the Oslo accords. As the fissures between refugees and the national leadership deepened, refugees’ village histories became more institutionalized, but also nationalized. In this process, they functioned as an alternative to

national frames, rather than in opposition to them, with the national becoming a space of competing narratives and visions. In a similar vein, Diana Allan (2007) has noted that memories and narratives of the Nakba have become increasingly institutionalized and integrated into the Palestinian nationalist discourse. The fact that the PA certainly has lost its credibility as the national representative of the Palestinian people, particularly among refugees, therefore does not mean that the national as a horizon for liberation has lost its grip on people's political identities, projects, and imaginaries. Rather, as a contested semantic and political field, it might take different forms and shapes.

Settler Colonialism, the National, and “Border Thinking”

The failure of the Oslo “peace process” to provide national liberation propelled a further conceptual paradigm within Palestine studies. Perhaps the most important shift is the emergence of the settler-colonial paradigm and, relatedly, of indigeneity.⁶ Unlike other forms of colonial rule that tend to control the indigenous population through racialized labor exploitation, settler colonialism is based on a “logic of elimination of the native” (Wolfe 2006: 387).

How does adopting a settler-colonial paradigm to studying Palestinian struggles for liberation push us to think beyond national frames?⁷ Lorenzo Veracini (2013) suggests that colonialism and settler colonialism are decidedly different: while the former operates control over land and natives from a center of authority and needs for its success to maintain the rule of colonial difference between colonizers and colonized, the latter's success is measured against its ability to normalize the settlers as indigenous to the land. If national emancipation, in the form of an emancipated sovereignty, is the historical foreseen outcome of anticolonial struggles seeking to end colonial domination, liberation from settler colonialism requires frameworks other than the national one.

Importantly, indigeneity, as a political subjectivity, claim, and project that resists settler colonialism, is not about a mere, unmediated “return” to fixed roots. Clifford (2013: 7) has argued that indigeneity is “a process of becoming” in which people “reach back selectively to deeply rooted, adaptive traditions: creating new pathways in a complex postmodernity.” Indigeneity in the Palestinian context is historically, socially, and politically constructed in response to settler colonialism, which must be understood as a structure, not an event (Wolfe 2006). The ongoing struggles by the native population to denormalize and undo this settler-colonial structure, which aims to realize

the settlers' claims to the land, thus cannot be read through the lens of identity politics. As elsewhere, Palestinian indigeneity does not endorse fixed and essentialized notions of identity, memory, and belonging, but rather is born out of the sites and processes of struggles that Palestinians in different locations and times are and have been inhabiting.⁸ Although constantly shifting, these positionalities never were comfortably situated in a fully fledged and established nation-state, nor was the nation-statist agenda the only frame that Palestinians followed when struggling for liberation from settler colonialism.

In this issue, we approach the “national” through and from the lens of its multiple and constantly remade borders and margins that penetrate deep in and extend far beyond the national territory, the latter also contingently defined and imagined. For Palestinians, not only are borders constantly shifting due to an ever-expanding territorial colonization pushing farther and deeper into their land, but the boundaries of their state in the making are being erased and redrawn.

We start from the positionalities of those marginalized by, or on the margins of, national formations—those who, in Walter D. Mignolo's (2000: xv) terms, dwell in the border, not the territory: How might national and nation-statist hegemonic frames, both in their material and ideational manifestations, be challenged by those not firmly established within the “national order of things” (Malkki 1992)? What does “border thinking” (Mignolo 2000) add to the understanding of contemporary manifestations of power, forms of dispossession, and struggles in Palestine? Does it shed light on new hierarchies and claims cutting through and across the national?

All the contributions in this special issue engage with dimensions of Palestinian existence and struggle beyond classic national frames. They study refugees' collective catharsis from national frames (Salih), international solidarity campaigns (Allen), indigenous and class struggles (Pappe and Allan), as well as the affective (Gabiam), spatial (Parizot), and temporal (Peteet) dimensions of dwelling in or moving across borders or separation walls. While displaying different outlooks on what going beyond national frames might lead to, they all share the vision that Palestine can be a particularly potent paradigm to imagine liberation and justice within and without the “national territory.”

If, as Mignolo auspicates, “border thinking” constitutes a first and essential step toward decolonization, what Dabashi (2016) calls a “liberation geography” (see also Lubin 2014; Pagès–El Karoui 2012), we hope that by tracing and bringing to light the largely hidden nonnational formations and

articulations that Palestinians imagine and live on a daily basis, the articles in this issue not only reveal something about the national but also contribute to the epistemic and political project of decolonizing Palestine.

Notes

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- 1 For a full understanding of the figure of Edelman and his refusal to endorse Zionism as the solution for the Jewish plight in Europe, see, for example, Luden 2015 and Krall 1977. In 2002, Edelman also wrote an open letter, which was published in Poland's leading newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and in which he addressed Palestinian leaders as "commanders of the Palestinian military, paramilitary and partisan operations" and "soldiers of the Palestinian fighting organisations" establishing a link between the resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto, which he helped lead, and the Palestinian resistance. In the letter, he is reported as stating: "We fought for the life of Jewish society in Warsaw. We fought solely for life, not for territory and not for national identity. . . ." (JTA Staff 2002). The letter was reported in the *Guardian* (Foot 2002) and *Haaretz* (Sheleg and Ha'aretz Correspondent 2002).
- 2 See also the exchange between Swedenburg (1992) and Moshe Shokeid (1992) that followed the publication of Swedenburg's (1989) original article on the topic.
- 3 Interestingly, the focus on urban identities (Khalidi 1997; Doumani 1995) marginalizes nonurban Palestinian communities in the formation of Palestinian national identity. While Swedenburg's (1995) study highlighted the role of peasants in Arab revolt, the Bedouin communities of the South remain the most ignored in Palestinian historiography.
- 4 For studies focused especially on the Nakba, see, among others, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007, Kabha 2006, and Masalha 2005. On other aspects of, and events in, Palestinian history, see Swedenburg 1995 and Slyomovics 1998.
- 5 Oral history studies with a focus on Palestinian women include Gluck 2008; Khalili and Humphries 2007; Fleischmann 2003; Kassem 2011; and R. Sayigh 1998, 2007a, 2007b. Of course, anthropologists also use similar methods to document history (e.g., Peteet 1991).
- 6 For studies on indigeneity more broadly, see Povinelli 2002 and contributions in Iverson, Patton, and Sanders 2000 and Simpson and Smith 2014.
- 7 Among the scholars who have adopted the settler-colonial paradigm for Palestine are Ghazi-Walid Falah (2005), Ilan Pappé (2012), Gabriel Piterberg (2008), Gershon Shafir (1996), Oren Yiftachel (2006), Lorenzo Veracini (2010, 2013), Patrick Wolfe (1999, 2006), and Omar Jabary Salamanca et al. (2012).

- 8 See the edited volume by Johnson and Shehadeh (2013), in which contributors reflect on how Palestinians live and imagine home and exile. The contributions demonstrate vividly and creatively how Palestine and Palestinianness is always perceived through and lived as a dynamic process of becoming, rather than through fixed static identity politics.

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