

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE PALESTINE: PERSPECTIVES ON DECOLONISATION

Professor Salim Vally

Faculty of Education
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg
South Africa

and

Professor Haidar Eid

Research Associate
The Centre for Asian Studies in Africa
University Pretoria
Practitioner at Nelson Mandela University
South Africa
And Associate Professor
Al-Aqsa University Gaza
Palestine

After 20 months of calculated and unrelenting horror aimed at the starving and terrorized population of Gaza, the Israeli/US/UK/EU genocide is being ratcheted-up. As we go to press the official casualty count — 60,000 deaths from traumatic injury — is an immense undercount. It excludes the thousands buried under the rubble and deaths resulting from preventable disease, manufactured famine, malnutrition, the lack of water, inadequate sanitation and the availability of chronic medication. Sadistically, the Israeli Occupation Force and the US have orchestrated ‘death traps’ using food as bait to lure hungry people to areas where scores are routinely and casually murdered, as if the hideous massacres over the past 650 days have not been enough — each new atrocity vying with the previous one in a macabre pattern of inhumanity and brutality. Gaza has the greatest number of children per capita whose limbs have been amputated in the world, often without anesthesia and close to 40 000 children have lost one or both parents.

In this grim context, there has been a radical shift in Palestinian consciousness that aims at reframing Israeli–Palestinian relations in terms of settler colonialism and a renewal of liberation that invokes the conceptual framework of decolonisation — this is what the authors in this collection grapple with. There is a new sense of urgency not seen since the signing of the disastrous Oslo Accords, about how to understand the nature of the Zionist regime and, more importantly, how to achieve a post-Zionist future that will bring liberation for all. True liberation within this context means achieving true equality in historic Palestine after the return of all Palestinian refugees to the towns and villages from which they were ethnically cleansed in 1948.

Sonia Boulos analyses how the ICJ ruling on the Advisory Opinion on the illegality of Israeli occupation can be put in service of a ‘broader decolonising agenda’. The article is an excellent overview of the relevant international legal frameworks and the arguments around their interpretation in relation to Palestine, particularly the discussion amongst decolonial legal scholars. In her estimation, the Advisory Opinion allows for engagement with broader structural issues, the duties of third parties and reparations. On 18 September 2024 the UN General Assembly adopted by a two-thirds majority a historic resolution based on the Advisory Opinion which for Boulos, opened the way for possible sanctions. Boulos also discusses the UNHRC Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, chaired by South African Judge Navi Pillay which provided further ballast to the Advisory Opinion on the issue of sanctions and detailed concrete measures that States should pursue.

Francesca Albanese’s September 2022 report to the UN General Assembly¹ speaks to some limitations of the framework used by many organisations that sees Israeli apartheid as primarily ‘territorial’ and excludes the experience of Palestinian refugees. Albanese insists that the recognition of Israeli apartheid must address the experience of the Palestinian people in its entirety and in their unity as a people, including those who were displaced, denationalised and dispossessed in 1947–1949 (many of whom live in the occupied Palestinian territory) and in 1967. The Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq in its report *Israeli Apartheid: Tool of Zionist settler colonialism*² echoes Francesca Albanese and expands the current international discourse on apartheid, and importantly, examines apartheid as a structural element of furthering Zionist settler colonialism on both sides of the Green Line and against

1 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese, Distr.: General 21 September 2022 Seventy-seventh session Item 68 (c) of the provisional agenda). n2427968.pdf

2 <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/20931.html>

the Palestinian people as a whole. The report adds clear Palestinian voices and analysis to the wider international calls demanding an end to Israel's apartheid regime. To quote: 'Palestinian civil society demand decolonisation and dismantling of Israel's settler colonialism and apartheid regime, the fulfilment of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, systematically denied since the British mandate, and the right of refugees and exiles in the diaspora to return'.

Boulos shares these views and provides a compelling argument for the right to return of refugees. She writes: 'Confining the right to self-determination to the 5.3 million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation would therefore amount to the denial of self-determination for the majority of the Palestinian people' since 'there are 14.3 million Palestinians living in Mandatory Palestine and the diaspora. Relatedly, Boulos examines the importance of self-determination as opposed to 'statehood'.

Jeff Halper starts from the premise that 'Israel is a settler colonial state which must be decolonised' and that a two-state dénouement cannot decolonise the Zionist project nor fulfill the national aspirations of Palestinians. He argues firmly for a one democratic state though he graphically illustrates the complexity by addressing a number of questions. These include 'how to decolonise a powerful settler project that has enjoyed almost eight decades of sovereignty, one that leaves in its wake massive and irreversible demographic, geographic, economic and social 'legacies'; how to construct a post-colonial polity that meets Palestinian demands for national self-determination but also addresses the claims of Israeli Jews to national status and how to construct a polity that enables the emergence of an integrated civil society?' Halper provides an examination of differences within the one democratic state initiative around 'One Democratic Palestinian State' and 'One Democratic Civil State'.

Toine van Teeffelen and Fuad Giacaman article is a thoughtful and thorough reflection, based on longitudinal research of the multi-dimensional and multifaced concept '*sumud*' as a critical-pedagogical concept in Palestinian citizenship education in the occupied West Bank. The praxis of *sumud* drawing on the Freirean concepts of hope, agency, and 'the confrontation with oppressive circumstances' has served Palestinians well to counter the Israeli attempt to divide and fragment the Palestinian population. For the authors, the concept, 'bridges moral thought and educational practice, linking resilience with national belonging. Despite the devastating Israeli war on Gaza, *sumud* persists through stories, symbols, and teaching methods, serving as both cultural expression and educational strategy. It aims to cultivate rooted, inclusive citizenship values amid ongoing occupation and adversity'. The authors show how *sumud* is vital for decolonising education and for 'Palestinian identity, experiences and

resistance to the Israeli occupation and settler-colonialism' and how it has also served as a grassroots development strategy to promote self-reliance and oppose corruption.

Haim Bresheeth-Žabner historicises how 'the precepts of Judaism were replaced by the IDF and Israel as the new identity of most Jews' and argues that the 'future decolonisation of Palestine will require decolonising Jewish minds, freeing Jews from Zionism'. Following Nur Masalha, Bresheeth-Žabner describes how the religious nationalist right has dramatically transformed Zionism — from secularism to racist messianism. The article also discusses the differences with Christian Zionism and its anti-semitism but also the short-term opportunistic alliances. Bresheeth-Žabner concludes, 'Israeli society is now experiencing a deep cognitive dissonance, or even a social psychosis — it has lost contact with the world and its hard realities. One is taxed to name another society which achieved such miraculous unity through mass delusion and genocide, and this will be the likely cause for its fast decline and eventual fall. Zionism, in its long century of colonisation, has occupying more than just Palestine...'

Two of Refaat Alareer's first students at the Islamic University of Gaza, between 2007 and 2011, Mohammed Sulaiman and Yousef M. Aljamal, now scholars in Australia and Malaysia, respectively, write a heart wrenching and gripping paean to their martyred teacher and conclude: '... we witnessed the killing of our teacher and big brother Refaat from afar and are writing this tale — the tale of his life and martyrdom — to uphold the truth about Dr Refaat Alareer, Gaza's global intellectual, grand narrator and digital resistance fighter.'

The collection in this Special Issue provides vital perspectives toward 'Decolonising Palestine' and should be read together with a previous issue of *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* (2024) which had as its theme, 'Racial Capitalism and Palestine'. It provides a dimension of political economy absent in the present collection. The guest editors of that issue explain that 'For us racial capitalism illuminates the nature of the monster and provides the theoretical and methodological tools to wage the struggle as is now required in the face of the unrelenting barbarism of Zionist colonialism and Western Imperialism'. Palestine is the central location of the struggle within the broader context of global resistance to imperialism, racial and fossil capitalism and white supremacy.

Our collective aspirations for freedom and liberation for all, rests on a decolonised Palestine.