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## From the Editors

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## From the Editors

ON 18 MAY 2021, Palestinians again revealed a solid geography of peoplehood across and despite the partitions and separations imposed by Israeli settler colonialism. In the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, as well as inside the Green Line and in the diaspora, Palestinians united in a general strike that marked a watershed moment. The last time every corner of historic Palestine joined in such unified action was 1936, when a national boycott produced the longest general strike in colonial history, launching a three-year uprising against both British colonialism and European Jewish settlement.

Where we begin the story of the ongoing struggle for Palestinian liberation is a political decision. The Palestinian struggle certainly did not begin in 1993, when the Oslo Accords ushered in an ostensible peace process that partitioned the West Bank into Bantustans, intensified Israeli settlement in Jerusalem, now at well over 250,000 colonists with close to half a million others in the West Bank,<sup>1</sup> and facilitated de facto Israeli annexation.

It did not begin in 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights; another quarter of a million Palestinians became refugees; and Palestinians under military occupation were confined to being colonized subjects denied basic inalienable rights—as they remain today. Nor did it begin in 1950, when the 150,000 Palestinians who stayed in what had become Israel became internally dispossessed strangers in their homeland and were subjected to sixteen years of Israeli military rule. It also did not begin in 1948, with the troubled twin birth of the Israeli state and the Palestinian refugee condition, when some 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled or fled under fire in what we know as the Nakba, or catastrophe.

It did not even begin in 1936, when the Great Revolt became the most sustained anti-colonial struggle across the entire span of the interwar Arab world. The revolt was not simply an armed insurrection: it was based on a network of national and popular committees that built rebel institutions including intelligence, taxation, and juridical operations.<sup>2</sup> The revolt was also more than a call for political independence—it encompassed a class struggle for social justice and against elite politics. In response, the British colonial government employed techniques of deportation, torture, targeted assassination, and collective punishment perfected in Ireland, Egypt, India, and other colonies—techniques that were bequeathed to the Israeli system of control and continue to mark Palestinian experience.

So where do we begin this story? One place would be in the late nineteenth century, when the first wave of European Jewish immigrants settled in Palestine. Another crucial point of origin is the denial of Palestinian peoplehood and political rights marked by the Balfour Declaration issued in November 1917. The declaration articulated Britain's commitment to "a national home for the Jewish people" without supposedly prejudicing "the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities." This short document rendered "Jewish" an ethno-national category in Palestine. It defined the land and its inhabitants in terms of their nonbelonging to this category despite the fact that Jews

constituted only around 5 percent of the people who lived there at the turn of the twentieth century. The Balfour Declaration designated the 95 percent majority of the people who lived on that land as “non-Jewish,” a nameless categorization that would juridically undergird British rule until 1948.

To begin the story in 1917 is to name the struggle for what it is: settler colonialism. We know that Zionism was a response to centuries of Judeophobia in Europe and, more immediately, to the consolidation of state-led anti-Semitism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, Zionism was not the most popular response to the oppression of Jewish people in Europe, nor was it the only one. Others included socialism, communism, and emigration to the United States and other lands. Zionism did not become the preferred option for Jews fleeing vicious persecution until the 1933 rise to power of the Nazis in Germany. By that point, countries like the United States and the United Kingdom had closed their doors to Jewish refugees, and Palestine consequently witnessed an upsurge in Jewish immigration. Zionism emerged in response to racist European hierarchies of humanity, becoming the preeminent solution to Europe’s “Jewish question.” But instead of dismantling it, Zionism recreated that hierarchy. From its inception, Zionism’s imperative was to conquer the maximum amount of land with as few Palestinians on it as possible.

\* \* \*

The uprising of 2021 that began in Shaykh Jarrah is part of the ongoing struggle of Palestinians to remain on their land. This specific case concerns twenty-seven families of Palestinian refugees who had already been displaced from Haifa and Acre in 1948 and had settled in this East Jerusalem neighborhood in 1957, when it was under Jordanian rule. The ultranationalist Lahav Shomron settler group claims that it acquired the land on which the Palestinian homes were built from Jewish trusts that had originally bought it during the Ottoman era. The residents of Shaykh Jarrah reject such claims, arguing that the Israeli courts upholding them have no jurisdiction over occupied territory under international law. After making its way through Israeli courts for years, the case was due to be adjudicated by Israel’s Supreme Court on 10 May. As Tareq Baconi has suggested,

It is true that many of the Palestinians facing forcible transfer from [Shaykh] Jarrah settled in the neighbourhood after being expelled from their homes elsewhere in 1948. But many Israeli Jewish families now live in houses or on land that belonged to Palestinians before the Nakba. Should the Israeli court set a precedent for the reclaiming of property based on Ottoman-era ownership deeds, you might think that Jewish families across West Jerusalem and beyond would have as much to fear as Palestinians in [Shaykh] Jarrah. They don’t, though: Israel’s legal system protects the land claims of Jewish Israelis but not [of] Palestinians.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Israel’s Supreme Court is an arm of the state’s expansionist project. In early 2021, and mirroring the analysis put forth by Palestinians since 2005,<sup>4</sup> the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem argued that there is no separation between the Israeli state and its military occupation,<sup>5</sup> with the two constituting one single apartheid regime.<sup>6</sup> In April, Human Rights Watch followed with its own report charging Israel with “the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.”<sup>7</sup>

As the court date approached, Shaykh Jarrah families mobilized broadly to resist their expulsion and were joined by thousands of Palestinians who had congregated in Jerusalem

on 7 May to pray at al-Aqsa Mosque. Protesters were met by Israeli occupation forces with rubber bullets, jets of putrid “skunk water,” tear gas, and stun grenades. That weekend, Israeli police injured over 250 people in Shaykh Jarrah alone. This was followed by the storming of the Haram al-Sharif, during which Israeli occupation forces fired tear gas and stun grenades into the mosque itself, wounding worshippers praying there on one of the last days of Ramadan. As the protests unfolded, people from Lydda, Haifa, Umm al-Fahm, and the Naqab, which are Israeli by the logic of partition, rose up in support of Shaykh Jarrah, as did people in localities throughout the West Bank and the diaspora.

In Gaza, severed from other Palestinian territories by a fourteen-year Israeli-Egyptian blockade, Hamas issued Israeli forces an ultimatum to evacuate al-Aqsa and Shaykh Jarrah. The warning was ignored, and a series of rocket barrages into Israel ensued, starting on the evening of 10 May. There followed the tragically familiar unbridled campaign of Israeli air and artillery strikes against the besieged territory, which killed at least 253 Palestinians, including 67 children, over the course of eleven days. In the period from 13 April to 21 May, Israeli forces killed 31 Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem, 10 of them on a single day (an unprecedented one-day toll since the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, OCHA, started keeping records in 2005).<sup>8</sup> From 10–18 May, Palestinian rocket and mortar fire killed 13 people in Israel.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that when we say the Nakba is ongoing, what we mean is this: on top of the disproportionate casualties, 77,000 more Palestinians in Gaza were displaced from their homes between 10 and 26 May; and Israeli security forces arrested some 2,650 Palestinians, including over 1,700 Palestinian citizens of Israel, in the two-month period from April to the end of May.

\* \* \*

As we learn from Rana Barakat, we ought not ask to whom the land belongs but insist that we belong to her.<sup>10</sup> Today, the people rising up from the far north to the far south of historic Palestine all belong to that land. And thanks to Black feminist theory, we know that the eviction from the category of the human is a key technology in subjugating and keeping people captive.<sup>11</sup> We must resist this extraction.

While Palestine is ground zero for this struggle, the international arena is also a crucial battleground. In response to the unremitting resistance of Palestinians to their dispossession, we have witnessed massive solidarity marches worldwide, a social media storm, more open mainstream media coverage, and an unprecedented wave of support for Palestinian rights. This is reflected in the work of the Palestine and Praxis collective, which released a petition in mid-May signed by over five thousand academics.<sup>12</sup> The petition calls on people of conscience to join in affirming the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people and to uphold the foundational principles of academic integrity. It asks for pressure on academic institutions and organizations to respect the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions to end complicity and partnership with military, academic, and legal institutions entrenching Israel’s colonial policies. The Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC), a multigenerational group, has also issued a pledge to which over 127 university gender and sexuality departments have committed. The PFC’s “love letter” to the people struggling in Palestine reminds us that “Palestine is a feminist issue. Love guides our methodology for liberation. We affirm life and implore feminists everywhere to speak up, organize, and join the struggle for Palestinian liberation.”<sup>13</sup>

## Endnotes

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