



## Palestine and the Ends of Theory

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## Palestine and the Ends of Theory

Max Ajl 

Merian Center for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb, Tunisia and University of Ghent, Belgium and Tunis, Tunisia

### ABSTRACT

This article argues that over the past decade-and-a-half, amidst the resurgence of US/EU solidarity with Palestine, several anti-Zionist analyses have emerged that sidestep national liberation, regional politics, or imperialism. It connects that terrain to the rise of a new, and partially anti-systemic, political Islam that gained strength with the fall of the USSR and the contradictions arising within US-led imperialism. The article links this phenomenon to post-Cold War imperialist counterinsurgency and accumulation strategies, and the chasm separating EU-US anti-Zionism from the Palestinian national movement. It discusses political repression and the professionalization of Arab regional studies and ‘the Left,’ with pressures to create a Palestinian narrative speaking to an alleged mainstream and thus making Palestinian rights fit within a world-system and its geoculture that have no place for them. It analyzes those theories that helped forge an anti-Zionism hostile to Israel that ignores, mischaracterizes, or rejects the concrete forces resisting Israel and the US. The article calls for a more catholic theoretical practice that is open to the liberation agenda and its historical agents.

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The October 7, 2023, Hamas-led operations against Israel, by their nature, posed universal questions. What options exist for anti-colonial movements in the twenty first century? What is the place of violence in contemporary political struggle? The dominant reaction to the attacks painted them in varied hues of irrationality and murderousness, completely outside knowability, or reducible to ineffable and eternal hatred. One seemingly dissenting reaction emphasizes the abstract understandability or justifiability of armed resistance—a colonized people will fight, the United Nations defends the right to anti-colonial violence. Another goes yet further, discussing the first phase of the October 7 attacks as a ‘legitimate [instance of] guerrilla warfare against an occupying power’ (Shatz 2023)—but accepts the ‘primordial vengefulness’ of October 7, rather than examining ‘the military logic of the attack’ (Abdeljawad Omar 2023). According to such a sketch, Palestinians must be politically irrational

**CONTACT** Max Ajl  [max.ajl@gmail.com](mailto:max.ajl@gmail.com)

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and ethically vacuous actors. The wide-scale reproduction of the Israeli version of October 7, which paints them as atavistic mass killing, is part-and-parcel of vilifying Palestinian military actors and erasing Palestinians as political subjects, as these two moves interweave in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> Casting Hamas as simply agents of massacre relies on and reinforces a lack of engagement with military strategy, the extension of politics to the sphere of violence. This demonology then makes it easier to depoliticize the Palestinian cause, leaving discussion in the sphere of abstract rights linked to a maudlin narrative of suffering.

Yet, such distancing from Hamas—dominant analyses do not generally mention non-Hamas factions—often occurs, within intellectual sectors more critical of the Zionist project, not only through overt demonization, but also more covert expressions of disagreement with Hamas’s ideology or strategy, or through other modes of thought constructed around a present-absent: in the widest possible meaning, national liberation within an imperialist world-order (Palestinian Freedom, Antisemitism Accusations, and Civil Rights Law 2023). Indeed, some fora—i.e. the recent World Academic Forum for Palestine—go so far as to discuss Arab world resistance while barely mentioning Hamas. This dissonance is striking given that post-October 7 Gaza Strip is not simply a wash of Palestinian blood, helplessness, or ineptitude. There is an ongoing asymmetric armed struggle alongside genocidal counter-insurgency meant to ensure ‘a system collapse’ (Influential Israeli National Security Leader Makes the Case for Genocide in Gaza 2023). The catalyst for Israeli counterinsurgency was a carefully engineered operation that killed hundreds of Israeli soldiers. Subsequent genocidal Israeli escalations have produced military failure: widespread destruction of mechanized infantry in the Gaza Strip, the elimination of billions of electronic infrastructures and evaporation of Israeli deterrence in the North, and the spread of armed operations to Yemen, including its activities in the Red Sea. In twelve months, there has been no significant destruction of Palestinian command-and-control capacities, and despite successful Israeli targeting of guerrillas, Hamas retains the capacity to replenish its fighters after Israeli degradation. Yet only Palestinian deaths are broadly discussed, and usually in terms of a second Nakba rather than an operation meant to cut apart the webbing of civilian support for an armed movement nested within its people, or to simply target the civilian population because of an inability to target the armed political movement responsible for the October 7 events. Politics is therefore effectively excised as an historical category, leaving the humanitarian case: genocide.

One common explanation for such hesitance with engaging with Palestinian national and factional politics is Islamophobia. While this goes some distance towards explaining wide-scale revulsion against the operation’s authors, it fails to account for the broader unease with the Islamist forces, violence in the concrete, and various registers of depoliticization or idealism. Indeed, this unease with existing Palestinian politics and regional dynamics is a particular expression of a broader phenomenon:

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<sup>1</sup>The simple and uncontroversial fact that the number of Israeli dead, civilian and armed, has descended according to Haaretz’s count from 1400 to under 1200 since October 7 is one example, with one third of them publicly admitted as to be combatants, and many publicly documented instances of IDF killing of Israelis (see Kubovich 2024).

discomfort with the national question—that is, the achievement and defense of the political sovereignty regime (Ajl 2021a; Moyo, Jha, and Yeros 2013) and its advance towards national liberation, or the rupture of foreign monopoly control over the national productive forces (Cabral 1979). The national question (Moyo and Yeros 2011) is central to Palestinian politics, and is an inseparable component of Arab politics as the container wherein gender (Prasad 2021), class, and ecological contradictions (Ajl 2023a) may be resolved in favor of popular development and working-class emancipation. Therefore, removal of the national question, including in its regional components—for the achievement of national sovereignty and the struggle for national liberation have always been nationally-bound frames around moments in world-wide processes—conduces towards purely moral rather than political appeals.

Based on these biases, various theorizations of Palestine have appeared that go beyond strategic focus on the discourses necessary for maneuver within international civil society, towards a more pointed erasure or condemnation of the national movement, its chosen strategies, and its strategic partners—leading to the dominance of ‘a discourse of human rights and victimhood [which] can only evoke pity... a fragile and feeble foundation for building movements’ (Omar n.d.). There is a widening separation of primarily Western, but also increasingly non-Western, theory from the practices within the ‘zone of storms’ (Amin 2017), and a fusion of theory with resistance in the imperial core. Thought is constituted as an asset for a war of position, moving within and through the institutions, moats, bulwarks, and networks of Western civil society. Such thought shows a certain uneasiness to engage with, or a distaste for, those socio-political actors pursuing liberation for Palestine amidst withdrawal or sectoral defeat of US military power in the Arab region. Implicitly, this is the price of shifting opinion on Palestine, yet it comes at the cost of shrugging at the political, legal, and economic sanctions around Palestinian and broader Arab-Iranian political forces.

This article is structured as follows. It first shows how over the past 15 years, amidst the post-Second Intifada rise of global solidarity with Palestine, a variety of anti-Zionist analyses have emerged that do not engage with national liberation or imperialism. It links that political terrain to the rise of a partially anti-systemic political Islam post-1979, which gained traction with the fall of the USSR and the loss of a material and ideological anchor for Arab region Marxist politics. The article ties this phenomenon to post-Cold War imperialist counterinsurgency and accumulation strategies, and the separation of EU-US anti-Zionism from the national movement, a long-standing strategy adopted by Israel, as well as the US ruling class. It then discusses political repression and the professionalization of Arab region studies and ‘the Left,’ with ongoing pressures to present a narrative of Palestine that can speak to an alleged ‘mainstream’ and thus make Palestinian rights fit within a world-system and its geo-culture that have no place for them. It analyzes how those theories—apartheid, most versions of settler-colonial theory, certain interpretations of Hamas as either a conservative or reactionary force—have been used to forge an anti-Zionism hostile to Israeli ideology and practice. An anti-Zionism that yet ignores, mischaracterizes, or rejects the concrete forces resisting that ideology and practice, while de-regionalizing the Palestinian struggle, long a maneuver of the Palestinian right, and often

demonizing Iran. They also remain blind to or mischaracterize US accumulation in the Arab region. The article finally calls for a more catholic theoretical practice that re-considers theories explicitly aligned with the liberation agenda and its historical agents, arguing that failure to center resistance and national liberation makes theory unable to respond effectively to the diabolization of October 7, which is also the inevitable outcome of any successful military operation against Israel.

## The New Imperialism

The post-1990 moment of US imperialism emerged with the fall of the USSR, as the US began a new phase of global accumulation based on systemic financialization and uncontested military dominance. Central to this moment were the effective loss of the USSR as an alternative way of organizing society, holding open developmental and political space at the material and ideological level, and the ‘opening up’ and the very partial, very contested, and indeterminate re-incorporation of China. Peter Gowan called this shift ‘the global gamble’ (Gowan 1999): weaponized dollarization, widespread high-technology investment, research, and development, the ability to move funds in and out of nation-states to force their adherence to the new ‘Washington Consensus’ for neoliberal globalization, the destruction of any obstacles to such capital movements and the capacity to maximize investment returns, and widespread income deflation in the former Second and Third Worlds (Patnaik 2007; Banerjee 2020). These operations relied on eliminating remaining state strategic obstacles through eradication where possible (the former Yugoslavia); sanctions where necessary (Iraq, Libya, Iran, North Korea); ‘terror listing’ to impose political and economic quarantine and strangulation of Arab and other Third World resistance forces in the context of post-Soviet mop-up operations, and abrupt shattering of state planning and assurance of social reproduction, opening up states like India and Egypt to wide-scale investment (Kates 2023), and repeated assaults on popular democracy in Haiti and Venezuela. During this period, Israel’s role was to become a burgeoning center in hi-tech investment (Nitzan and Bichler 2002, 296–331) with a unique linkage to the counterinsurgency sector; and to serve as a testing ground for a bestiary of legal procedures to criminalize political forces opposed to the US and Israel (Li et al 2024), and associated global neo-colonial interests.

Post 9/11, the US moved from its ‘wide’ technology and greenfield investment regime based on destruction of some strategic obstacles, such as the former Yugoslavia, and the containment of others, such as Iran and Iraq, to a *fuite en avance*, most marked in the evaporation of the state in Iraq, extending to Libya and Syria in 2011, Yemen in 2015, and maximum pressure sanctions on Iran. Finance, oil, weapons, and associated subsidiaries such as those linked to energy and oil contracting—Enron, Halliburton, Bechtel—alongside global finance, became central channels of accumulation. Such huge valuations rested on future claims to surplus value. The waste of the Arab region and Third World income deflation *via* sanctions became central inputs into global accumulation, with the accelerated shattering of regional resistance ideology part-and-parcel of the post-Soviet breaking of the working class on a world scale. As part of the regime of *accumulation by waste*, the US

sought to evaporate ‘any social platform from which the working class’ might, even potentially, ‘challenge the hold of U.S.-led imperialism’ (Kadri 2023; Kadri 2014, 7). Throughout this period, world-wide resistance manifested through a ‘new’ agrarian question; and bifurcated between a horizontalism hostile to the state and new national questions, where acquisition of political sovereignty or its radicalization became potent drivers of mobilization in a world wherein communism could no longer set the anti-systemic agenda.

## The Rise of the New Resistances

These new coordinates oriented the rise of new resistances, which this article reads through the question of Palestine, the most prominent of the modern anti-colonial national liberation struggles and one of the few where it has taken an armed form.<sup>2</sup> The larger and older factions of the Palestinian national movement, from Fatah to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), emerged during the high noon of secular or revolutionary nationalism and were underpinned by the Arab nationalist republics and Soviet influence. The contemporary armed Palestinian factions emerged in their modern guise in the dusk of Soviet power and Communist influence and in the dawn of a new regional configuration, a ‘new era’: the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Orinoco Tribune 2023). The Republic crystallized a *mélange* of dependency theory, anti-imperialism, and affinity with the republican anti-colonialism of the Arab popular states, inflected through an Islamic populism, in state institutions.<sup>3</sup> The Revolution’s victory built a material basis for the state that would take up the baton of the USSR in supporting anti-colonial or pro-sovereign struggle in the Arab region, animated by ‘a ‘divine’ goal to disseminate the truth, resist the unjust, and claim a global religious role’ (Divsallar and Azizi 2023).

Amidst these dusks and dawns, Communism slowly dissipated as an organizing force. Consequently, Arab region resistance to colonialism and imperialism changed radically. While the ‘social’ or national-democratic question remained relevant—it was an element of unease during the ‘Arab Spring’ and has been an element of radicalization in some of the new regional forces, it has also been partially separated from the national question. Furthermore, secular Arab nationalism was essentially spent as an anti-systemic force with state power (Syrian sponsorship of Palestinian nationalism aside). The largest bloc of ‘rejectionist’ forces against US-Israeli imperialism has been (1) the Islamic Republic of Iran; (2) Hezbollah; (3) Hamas and Islamic Jihad; (4) to a lesser extent, the secular Marxist nationalist PFLP and DFLP; (5) Ansar Allah; and (6) Syria. These forces intertwine logistically, strategically, and materially: Iran had already begun to support Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah in the 1980s, a flow which accelerated and widened in the 1990s. The post-colonial political sovereignty regime

<sup>2</sup>I follow Cabral’s conceptualization of national liberation as freeing the development of the productive forces from monopoly capital, as distinguished from nationalist struggles for political sovereignty. This is an analytical rather than normative judgment (see Cabral 1979).

<sup>3</sup>By populism the article refers to occasionally unmediated relationships between the people and the masses, and even more significantly, a model of anti-elite mobilization not using a clear class analysis – which may yet have a class content. The term has no negative connotations as used here (Sohrabi 2018; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2019).

and associated minimal protection for social reproduction became the field of battle. That is, those were the battlefields chosen by and the targets of the US and its proxies, which were, furthermore, able to turn a neoliberal social compact they had deliberately engineered into fuel for political unrest and then intervention (Matar 2016; Matar and Kadri 2018; Capasso 2023).

Those forces advancing an agenda in any way hostile to the US, Israel, and normalization became subject to US war-making, including through proxies. Such war-making aims for the de-development of the former strongholds of Arab republicanism, i.e. Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, where it has not been able to effectively subvert and destroy the political and state-planning planks of Arab nationalism, as it had been able to do in Egypt. The overall goal is to ensure the safety of petrodollar recycling, arms purchases, and associated capitalist investments, including in Israel itself; to strengthen US-integrated accumulation circuits and the states with which they are linked; and to effectively de-statize through ballooning NGOization, where possible (Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia), and through destruction where necessary, including the possibility of creating semi-colonial conditions. This, in turn, is linked to the overall goal of creating massive labor reservoirs, undermining the costs of reproducing the laboring classes within those reservoirs through shortening life, and in turn instilling physical and ideological defeat on global working classes writ large through wars of annihilation in the Arab region (Ossome and Naidu 2021; Kadri 2023; Yeros and Jha 2020).

Central to this effort has been encircling Iran which, although increasingly neoliberal, is still a semi-industrialized semi-periphery and has offered technological support for the regional asymmetric militia (Baconi 2018, 105, 110–111). Accordingly, from the 2006 victory of Hezbollah over Israel, and even more from 2011, with the onset of the US war of aggression against Syria, the Axis of Resistance became a strategic obstacle to the US (National Defense Strategy 2023; Carl 2023). On the economic development front, Iran circumvented sanctions, forging a form of ‘industrial resilience’ (Batmanghelidj 2021). This has been the basis of an industrial-military plant interlinked with the modernized Russian and Chinese defense-industrial systems. Iran has succeeded in light weaponry production and re-tooling existing, imported, and cannibalized technology in the face of ‘severe international sanctions, international isolation, and significant financial constraints’ (Czulda 2020). These interwoven industrial systems with their partially autonomous capacities, as well as research and development capacities, underpin Iranian ‘strategic depth,’ justified not merely with respect to deterrence, but also ‘messianic religious beliefs, anti-imperialist slogans, and populist concepts’ (Divsallar and Azizi 2023, 8,9).

This effort has ranged from arms and financial transfers and military counsel to Syria, technology sharing, organization of regional arms shipments, assisted development of unmanned aerial vehicle technology, dispatch and coordination of special forces, training, for example, of the Radwan Forces in Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas training in Syria, and finally a ballistic missile system that underpins elements of Hezbollah’s own deterrence strategy (Skare 2021). In Palestine, although the acquisition of technology and the incubation of know-how through regional resource sharing started at least in the early 2000s, it took decades for quantity to turn into



quality. By 2014, the performance of the armed elements in the Gaza Strip was ‘skillful, adaptive, and conducted coherently’ (Porter 2014). It surprised Israeli military leadership and sowed wider belief amongst Palestinians of the possibility of the armed option. Furthermore, the guerrilla groups were the primary vector for Arab-Iranian strategic depth. Throughout this period the Al-Qassam Brigades maintained warm relationships with regional opponents of the US and Israel, including Syria. Overall, these resistances have ambivalent relationships with questions beyond national sovereignty, a fact now weaponized against them (Farnia 2023). In some cases, they are best understood as attempts to ‘deform’ the colonial condition (Abdaljawad Omar 2024); in others, they are beginning to fill the carapace of state sovereignty with social substance and planning, as with Ansar Allah. In yet others, as with Syria, they are still resisting US semi-colonial occupation. To varying degrees, they all face the challenges of addressing social and democratic questions amidst imperiled or unachieved national sovereignty (Doutaghi 2024; Doutaghi and Mullin 2022) and amidst a dimming, partially induced by imperialism itself, of the light of liberation theology in Iran and elsewhere, as a guiding star for a reconstitution of national and social questions in a post-Soviet moment.

At the same time, they represent huge obstacles to US power and the stability of its regional satraps. The development of military strength through defensive and import-substitution industrialization has created a buffer for state capacity, including its role in regional social reproduction (however flawed) and the possibility of planning (however limited). They, furthermore, represent an alternative to US-incorporated accumulation and dependent capitalism. In their opposition to Israel, they do not merely challenge that state as a political container for fixed capital assets and land itself, worth hundreds of billions of dollars, as well as its role as a catalyst for world-wide arms sales. Furthermore, the Axis’s actions challenge the stability of regional states that must move to repression of their populations, and even crack-downs within their armed forces, to quash and control anti-Zionist sentiment and action.

## Western Theory and Western Practice

Since 2005, the US and European public spheres have nurtured a ‘new’ solidarity movement with Palestine, centered around the call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) (Mullin 2021). This movement was the harvest of the Second Intifada, and the subsequent radicalization around the Palestinian cause—as Al-Awda called for widespread boycotts of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Such a solidarity was originally born out of a partial fusion between the Palestinian national movement’s activities during the Second Intifada and a re-awakening of diaspora/solidarity activism after the opiate of Oslo, to the point that the Israeli government explicitly fretted about convergences between BDS-using ‘delegitimizers’ and the armed ‘Resistance Network.’ However, divergences now widen in unproductive ways between world-wide theoretical production and the NGO-linked movement discursive practice on Palestine—focused on

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<sup>4</sup>These pre-2005 calls are not present in BNC literature: (Barghouti 2021).



apartheid, an anti-racist settler colonialism, and the struggle for rights—and an increasing shift to armed resistance in the Gaza Strip and, more recently, the West Bank, which has produced a primarily Arabophone cadre of organic intellectuals.

Indeed, most literature of all stripes within Western civil society and its associated publications and institutes, in their rainbow of colorations, has scarcely engaged with the physical, strategic, or technical aspects of Palestinian asymmetric operations (For a rare exception: Mansour 2022). Knowledge production has essentially ignored, if not undermined, the geopolitics of Palestinian mobilization, and specifically Palestinian orientation to Syria, the most contentious stone in the arch of resistance (Al-Hardan 2016). From 2012-2016, much of the pro-Palestine movement, including many now engaged in intellectual work, supported the US destruction of Syria, although now silence reigns. This has been a problem insofar as it has gone well beyond the bounds of theoretical ecumenicism, and has meant actively supporting the leveling of the regional support structures of resistance.<sup>5</sup>

These phenomena should be understood in the context of the post-2008 renaissance of academic and intellectual interests in Palestine, amidst the broader rise of solidarity and support for Palestine—a popular cradle for knowledge production. Methodologically, it sometimes becomes necessary to adopt a functionalist approach to the sociology of knowledge. We may nevertheless note clear patterns in the production of knowledge and gaps that are striking, given the unmissable dissonance between research topics and theoretical frameworks within the academy and criminalized asymmetric armed groups and their operations. Furthermore, the production of knowledge is always tied to broader repressive apparatuses and liberatory movements. Radical intellectual work, scholarly or otherwise, crescendos and decrescendos with the prospects for liberation. Imperial flashpoints produce particularly explosive conflicts around the politics of knowledge production, precisely because of the need to erect intellectual, ideological, and political cordon sanitaires around major anti-systemic efforts to deprive them of normative legitimization within civil society (Farnia 2023; Jha, Yeros, and Chambati 2020; Ajl 2021b). Such quarantines have historically proliferated in the Arab-Iranian region due to its centrality to global capitalism, the radicalness of its post-colonial states, their proximity to Israel, and the consequent ease of demonization of pro-sovereign regional movements. Criminal sanctions on material support for the actual national liberation movement produce, as they are meant to, ideological, cultural, and intellectual over-compliance.<sup>6</sup> The sanctions regimes, the terror listing, and the more recent ‘Prevent’ in the UK have effectively criminalized the Palestinian national liberation movement itself, including its iconography.

Over-compliance does not translate into an abnegation of national liberation but relies on framings that ablate political and theoretical discourse from the concrete forces carrying the burden of liberation. That separation has been effectively

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<sup>5</sup>See these two petitions, ‘Solidarity with the Syrian Struggle for Dignity and Freedom,’ and ‘On the Allies We’re not Proud Of,’ represent a “who’s who” of critical Middle Eastern studies and chunks of the contemporary Palestinian-American intelligentsia: <https://www.change.org/p/solidarity-with-the-syrian-struggle-for-dignity-and-freedom> and <https://hummusforthought.com/2016/10/12/on-the-allies-were-not-proud-of-a-palestinian-response-to-troubling-discourse-on-syria/>.

<sup>6</sup>Thanks to Paris Yeros for suggesting this interpretation of scholarly practice.

internalized within most scholarship on Palestine, which is often alleged to be radical ‘in its very nature’ due to previous sanctions on scholarship on Palestine outside of pro-Zionist or pro-counterinsurgency perspectives. As a result, studies on Palestine, often excellent, proliferate. At the same time, studies on Al-Qassam Brigades, the PFLP, the role Israel plays in US empire, the logic of armed struggle, or the relationship between armed resistance and the Arab-Iranian state system and associated sub-state militias are rare (at time of writing there are two serious studies on Islamic Jihad, see Alhaj, Dot-Pouillard, and Rebillard 2014; Skare one semi-serious on the PFLP, see Leopardi 2020; see the critique: Mari 2022; one on Ansar Allah, see Brandt 2017). Comparatively, the radical *Middle East Report* used to interview forces that explicitly espoused armed resistance, like the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine. Even in the Second Intifada, it countenanced discussions of the armed strategy overall and the ethics and strategy of the armed option (Rabbani 2001). Circa the second decade of the third millennium, the Axis is scarcely mentioned, and only to disparage it, demote its relationship with anti-colonial Palestinian resistance, and evacuate its birth as a resistance to the US wars on encroachment on the region (Ryan 2015).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, *MERIP* more recently has refused to publish commissioned articles that highlight the central role of the Axis in opening space for broader liberatory transitions in the region.

Furthermore, Arab nationalism and ideological support for Palestinian resistance, although part of exile organizing frameworks, were essentially excised from the Palestine movement through a two-pronged operation, which left lasting wounds. On the one hand, the Palestinian Boycott National Committee, which lists Hamas, the PFLP, and Islamic Jihad as amongst its endorsers through the Council of National and Islamic Forces, rejects association with any group that defends armed resistance. It has also attempted to purge Samidoun, the support network for Palestinian political prisoners, and other organizations from BDS work because of their positions on armed resistance. The BNC recently released a statement urging international formations to refrain from defending armed resistance.<sup>8</sup> On the other, such questions are not separable from extensive Western foundation financial support for the Western Palestine movement and associated media enterprises, including the BNC itself, which have forged a pro-systemic anti-Zionist public sphere that does not mention imperialism or resistance. Indeed, the surge in apartheid and rights discussion went alongside decreased attention to the Palestinian factions, the near-severing of ties between non-Palestinian solidarity work and the political parties, as the US brandished the noose of material support prosecutions, and the overall distaste for the national question and nations that dominates Western liberal and left political thought (Amin 1980).

Finally, there is a rising convergence between the various flavors of Western Marxist thought and the Palestinian right and center. Within these arenas, accusations of Hamas’s ‘criminality’ dominate (Intercepted 2023; but see Alqaisiya 2024).

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<sup>7</sup>The absence of the Democratic Republic of North Korea-Palestine linkages in the historiography is a similar blind spot that can only be explained by imperialist knowledge production protocols. Thanks to Patrick Higgins for this insight.

<sup>8</sup>After extensive pushback from Palestinians, including a direct criticism from the PFLP, the BNC deleted the portions concerning armed resistance, yet the documents on the website contain no trace of this process.

Where the armed operations are defended, this often occurs in moral form rather than embedded in their geopolitics or value-relations. Indeed, these institutions systematically and incoherently refer to the defense of the sovereignty of Iran, the major geopolitical and material supporter of the Palestinian armed groups, as ‘campism’ (Hardt and Mezzadra 2024). While the rhetoric lubricates regime change in Iran and the historical allusions lack seriousness, in a situation of open warfare, it is logical, due to its very nature, that one would join one of two warring camps. Thus, the position of the Western ideological ‘camp’ contrasts with the positions of all the major armed Palestinian factions and ends up in a de facto alliance with the NATO-Israeli camp prosecuting the war (Mojtahedi 2024). Such positions are not merely moral failures. They are systemic, a form of petty bourgeoisie alignment with US imperialism of which Cabral warned. Institutionally, Anderson manages to understand that this phenomenon is linked to ‘the widespread migration of intellectuals of the Left into institutions of higher learning’ (Anderson 2000). Characteristically, however, his complaint does not concern political content, but rather that he feels academics do not write so well and that they supply receipts for their arguments. What he cannot see, for it is the beam in his eye, IS that it has led to the severance of theory from practice (Temin 2024) and the creation of an entire sphere of Western left intelligentsia that, in a post-Soviet moment, has aligned with Western imperialism. Such allegiances and alignments are class positions, pushed by the ‘compradors of defeatist thought,’ in the words of Nizar Banat.

This article has advanced certain hypotheses that deserve more exploration. Nevertheless, this is a secondary aim, as a comprehensive sociology of knowledge of Palestine studies in the US-EU is outside the scope of this article. The primary aim is to immanently critique modes of thought that foreclose serious engagement with Palestinian politics. As such, it moves to consider certain dominant forms of thought that create Palestine as an object of study and a subject of politics. It shows how these distort or sidestep the national liberation struggles’ political history, and even more so the network of regional alliances that have, respectively, cradled that movement and thrived off its destruction.

### **Settler-Colonialism: Description or Liberation?**

The section begins with an account of the political uses and mis-uses of settler-colonial analysis, a fundamental category of the national liberation struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in Africa (Inter alia: Ntalaja 1979; Rodney 1972; Ben-Gurirab 1982; Good 1976). In fact, partisans of the Palestinian struggle frequently described Israel as a settler-colonial state, whether from bourgeois-nationalist (Sayegh 2012), Western Marxist (Rodinson 1973), or Marxist national liberation orientations, which, accordingly, offered analytical threads to sew together national fronts. Nevertheless, they often could conceal substantive ideological and strategic difference (Samed 1976; Hilal 1976). Partisans of centrist or right-wing nationalist perspectives often deployed a frame where racism was the operative category—‘Rightist thought in the Palestinian and Arab field tries to eliminate or dilute the class view of things’ (PFLP 1969). Meanwhile, Marxist work often analyzed the imbrication of racism,

colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism. Analysis organically related to practice. Extirpation of the racializing logic of difference accompanied Fateh-PLO bourgeois nationalism. An emphasis on semi-proletarianization, social reproduction under colonial conditions, and imperialism led to a focus on classes and their oppressions within a national front, and the need to demarcate the liberation agenda with more care (On this, see: Mari 2020). At the same time, although these theories implied strategic practice, they did not mechanically dictate it. In practice the PLO, while deploying settler-colonialism as a central category, had accepted the statehood agenda by 1974 and even the PFLP was part of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising, which focused on resistance to the occupation. Meanwhile, while the PFLP maintained an analysis of the need for Arab revolution to upend the regional architecture in which Israel was a major strut, it engaged pragmatically with Arab states that put resources at its disposal, including the protective carapace of state sovereignty—awareness of the limits of Syrian Ba’athism did not mean the PFLP was unaware of the difference between harbors like Syria and hammers like Jordan (PFLP 1969; Garfield, Hillal, and Quba 1985; Kanafani 2024).

The new settler colonial analysis emerged in the global midnight of Third World Marxism, the ascendancy of economistic Marxism, and intellectual, political, and legal quarantines around remaining national liberation movements in Zimbabwe and the Philippines. Meanwhile, Indigenous emerged as a potent category of analysis, resisted and declawed by the settler-colonies, while becoming a component of a new multi-national liberation discourse in Latin America. While the new settler-colonial work was born out of a critique of post-colonial theory’s supposed relative inattention to settler-colonial contexts<sup>9</sup> and was moored to materialist analysis, the field under the aegis of Patrick Wolfe metastasized with universalistic ambitions, seeking to make settler-colonization anterior and prior to the internal logic of social formations—capitalist or communist—and linked to the universalizing category of Indigenous (see Ajl 2023b for a more engaged analysis). While originally linked to imperialism on the one hand and land-based struggles in Australia on the other, the framework often lost such tethers, becoming a portable and increasingly reified regime sheared from imperialism, accumulation, and analysis of the relationship between metropolitan social contradiction and settler-class formation, and its impact on different colonized social classes. As materialist analysis became subordinate to the formal structure of the regime, it lost the capacity to theorize the operation of the settler-colony as a historical and social form. Furthermore, the ‘regime’ as a reified mental construct, although abstracted from a stylized version of the Australian dispossession, grew ever-more methodologically nationalist, bracketing imperialism and broader regional dynamics, as the frontier expansion of its original cases reached blue water. It evolved, frequently but not always, into a theory of political defeat, marked by a ‘logic of elimination.’ Settler-colonial theory has been criticized for its teleological bent when it comes to the Palestinian cause, and for defining by conceptual fiat successful cases of decolonization—Algeria and Zimbabwe—as outside of its scope as ‘colonies’ with settlers rather than settler colonies (Barakat 2018; Ajl 2023b). These strictures pushed the theory away from social and political dynamics outside the national box, which meant the removal of

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<sup>9</sup>This relied on stipulating a priori that Algeria, the major national focus of Fanon, and Tunisia, were colonies with settlers rather than settler colonies. Such concept-mongering plainly has little to do with thought (Wolfe 1999).

the Arab-Iranian strategic depth that had been central to historical Palestinian and Arab nationalist revolutionary thought and to anti-colonial asymmetric armed dynamics in the Gaza Strip (Hafiz 2005; Kanafani 2024; PFLP 1969).

A superficially more Marxist critique of Weberian settler-colonial theory discusses the absence of class, exploitation, or any notion of primitive accumulation from dominant theorizations. Such thinking, however, follows Wolfe's method in sidestepping imperialism as a structure that creates, reproduces, and widens core-periphery developmental disparities through uneven development. Instead, it collapses such antagonisms into 'a broader framework of capitalist accumulation' (Englert 2020, 1658), in effect erasing imperialism as the primary contradiction, and sidesteps the inseparability of the history of Israeli settler-colonialism and the role of Israel as a world-wide Sparta for US power—reifying settler-colonialism as one of several 'processes' to which it is 'connect[ed]' such as a capitalism (Englert 2020; Englert 2022).

This 'alternative' framework then focuses on the wavering between 'exploitation' and 'elimination' within historical settler-colonialism but focuses on drivers internal to a reified settler-colonial social formation. However, it ignores the larger context: the slide towards elimination is not merely what occurs within the territorial box, but also stems from the relative surplus core population available for colonization (as it did in Australia and the US). More importantly, in the special Israeli case, it sidesteps Zionism's unique role in instilling defeat and sowing chaos within the Arab region and the Third World more broadly (Kadri 2023; Ajl 2024a). Elimination was not possible amidst the height of Soviet power and with the backstopping of Iraq, 1967-1990; and it became an 'option' in lockstep with broader US policies of Arab region de-development (Capasso and Kadri 2023), and finally incited by the rise of an armed movement that ideologically and concretely threatened US-Israeli dominance (Ajl 2024b).

These variants of settler-colonial theory, whether in their Weberian or Marxist subtypes, although intended to provide guidelines for decolonization, have furthermore avoided any serious engagement with strategy: the connection between agents and their goals, including assessment of the mechanisms at hand to achieve their goals. In the case of Palestine, the canonical works have erased resistance as constitutive of the historical trajectory of settler-colonialism, rather than a road bump that the settler juggernaut has moved over with speed. Such blindness is linked to the broader shortsightedness of contemporary settler-colonial literature to national liberation—the breaking of foreign monopoly control over the productive forces—as an organizing concept. Thus only rare studies using this framework have analyzed the operational logic of Hamas resistance operations in the Gaza Strip, let alone how they have shaped Israeli military occupation (for exceptions, see Sen 2016; Awad 2023).

Settler-colonial theory has provided an important bridge between work within Indigenous studies of all stripes, and the Palestine movement, helping political activists walk between the two struggles. Furthermore, there is no reason that emphasizing indigeneity should militate against acceptance of the differences between the Arab and US contexts (i.e. Alqaisiya 2023). Nevertheless, the great bulk of contemporary work on settler-colonialism has largely failed to take up the broader call for alignment with what Salamanca and others (2012) identify as the 'Arab struggle for self-determination,' even though the military logic of the Palestinian armed resistance and

Israeli counter-insurgency and regional dominance is inseparable from that logic. Indeed, sometimes there is open hostility to the armed regional infrastructure behind Palestinian resistance. Englert, the author of a monograph on comparative settler-colonialisms, condemns Iranian support for the Palestinian and Lebanese asymmetric militia (in the case of Hezbollah, a standing sub-state army), alongside Iranian support for Yemen, while focusing on the potential for economic disruption through general strikes amongst Palestinians (Collective 2019; see the chapter on Liberation and Return in Englert 2022). While this is a lever of mobilization, it is far from the most important. Furthermore, such studies, in ignoring class-national struggle internal to Palestine, have sidestepped the proto-neo-colonial role of the Palestinian right and the Palestinian Authority's security coordination in the present, as argued by Banat, a conclusion for which he was murdered. In this way, settler-colonial analysis has become so plastic as to allow for the condemnation of or disinterest in the central forces resisting settler-colonialism and has clearly too often 'remain[ed] a descriptive category that does not move beyond sentiment and into strategy' (Salamanca et al. 2012). Such a lapse into sentiment often presents a defeatist or defeated attitude, an orientation that exists in Wolfe's work itself as he retreated from Australia's calls for Indigenous community control to a struggle waged at the level of ideology and against assimilation—or similar attitudes vis-à-vis Palestine where the relative balance of force is considered irrelevant. Let us now examine the next category, which has similarly tended to ignore the international system: apartheid.

## Apartheid

While the apartheid discourse has multiple strands and origin stories, these are not the focus of the article, which instead treats how the analytic has come to organize thinking and practice. Apartheid is institutionalized juridical separation alongside unequal by law access to rights and privileges. It is also recognized as a crime under international law. The term, finally, refers to a concrete historical experience: South Africa, and its allocation of rights and privileges. Although South Africa and Palestine analogies and even the terminology of apartheid have long studded the communiqués and analyses of the Palestinian Marxist left—which openly supported the armed option, the modern renaissance of apartheid was part of the reconstitution of Palestinian national resistance sparked by the Second Intifada. The international practice was BDS, alongside peaceful direct action and solidarity delegations as the 'international' entered historic Palestine. The theory and rhetoric were resets from dominant focus on two states and anti-occupation. By then, these positions had become an institutionalized trap, a well-funded intellectual, legal, and diplomatic exercise wherein the statehood project—a historic concession of the Palestinian national movement under Gulf/US pressure and financial and diplomatic counterinsurgency—remained the normative horizon. Apartheid reframed the Palestine question, re-opening it to historical Palestine, and meshing with a BDS discourse focused on the repression, occupation, or exclusion of the three elements of the Palestinian population, two-thirds of whom, refugees and Palestinians living in 1948, had been excluded from the Palestinian project through Oslo I and II (Massad 2006).



The deployment of apartheid analysis re-opened political frontiers the imperial-sponsored Oslo process had closed, especially re-opening the question of Zionism and scaffolding anti-racist alliances, including with nation-states like South Africa.

Yet apartheid had three fundamental limits as crime or as analogy. As crime, we should first revisit the broader discussion around international law within the Palestinian national liberation struggle (Erakat 2014; Qato and Rabie 2013). The Israeli war upon the Gaza Strip, for example, precipitated a global debate concerning genocide and whether the Israeli acts have been sufficiently murderous to qualify as genocidal acts. This debate took center-stage amidst the South African brief to charge Israel with genocide, and amidst the International Court of Justice's May decision to (ambiguously) order the Israeli government to cease operations in the southern Palestinian city of Rafah. The point of this interlude is not to diminish maneuvering on the battlefield of international law. In fact, precisely because international law simply crystallizes the existing power relations on a world scale, it has been recurrently deployed by Hamas as a 'weapon of the weak': the goal is not, necessarily, to force Israel to comply with international law but rather to show that Israel and the US, as the political bodyguards and viceroys of global capitalism, cannot comply with international law and its stipulations for equality before the law. In that sense, Hamas understands its own war of movement on the battlefield, and likewise requires a war of position within and through Western liberal society to show that institutional routes towards ending colonial violence lead, by themselves, to dead ends.

Yet, or similarly, as with genocide, apartheid as crime retained the limits of justiciability under international law: which entity was going to force Israel to account for its crimes and therefore undo apartheid? While international law is a dominant rhetoric to appeal to a wide array of constituencies within and outside Palestine and within the international system, such laws lack enforcement mechanisms.

As historical analogy, apartheid summoned up South Africa. Yet, the history of South African, and even more so the sanitized version of its liberation struggle, do not cleanly map over Palestine. In South Africa, domestic class struggles, and the withholding of labor could help shatter apartheid because of the integration of Black labor into capitalism. Labor struggles could thereby affect the profitability of domestic and international capital. Such levers do not exist within Palestine, posing the question of alternative levers. Mass non-violent mobilization was the main internal Palestinian strategy from 2005-2014 (arguably, 2021 including the Great March of Return), yet achieved few results primarily because its disruptive effect rested on international spectacle and an overestimation of the effects of such forms of international solidarity (for discussion of similar dynamics in the Zimbabwe situation, see Moyo and Yeros 2007). Furthermore, because of the reduced need for Palestinian labor with a globalized crisis of 'surplus' populations, Israel retains an option for destruction and elimination, clear in the scale and scope of its 2023-24 counter-insurgency, which the South African government did not.

A second and less-noted problem with the contemporary operationalization of the analogy is inattention to the regional dynamics of South Africa. The Black Consciousness movement broadly and the Soweto uprising was, some suggest, catalyzed by the specter of 'Black troops—Cubans and Angolans—hav[ing] defeated White troops in military exchanges' in Angola (Gleijeses 2013, 346). The frontline states' role was not merely



ideological. Liberation struggles in Namibia and Angola drained the apartheid state's treasury (Luiz 1998). Underlying these dynamics were the overall Third World legitimization of the armed struggle against apartheid, through the Non-Aligned Movement, the AAPSO, and other organs (Makamure and Loewenson 1987). Analogization is linked to the way the historical object of analogy is sketched: Two apartheid in two territorial boxes. For Palestine, it widened the analytical box beyond the Occupied Territories, but de-Arabized the liberation struggle at the level of thought. While such thinking is not immanent to the metaphor, long-standing in Arab liberation thought, nearly the entirety of the post-Oslo apartheid literature either focuses on de-racialization (Bakan and Abu-Laban 2010) or the nationally bound allocation of material privileges (Clarno 2017); syntheses focus on transnational comparison (Petet 2016). The role of the front-line states is minimal.

The apartheid analogy need not have been beholden to methodological nationalism and the erasure of the regional pan-Arab (and pan-African) components of armed resistance, yet this is indeed what has generally happened. There are several reasons. First, dominant intellectual communication and theorization channels for the analysis were those suffering under the situation most akin to apartheid, the Israeli-Palestinian population. As Majdalawi argues, 'Gazans practically have no actual place within these frameworks and take no part in their circulation' (Ajl 2023c). And Gaza is the heartland of Palestinian armed resistance. Indeed, apartheid may, by the very nature of the comparison, block from view military occupation (or counterinsurgency), rising to the level of Phoenix Program-level bombardment, forced population movements, and genocide, as in the Gaza Strip in 2023-24, and in Jenin and Nablus, 2021-2024. As Majdalawi explains, this discourse was one amongst many which 'revolved around the human rights approach—apartheid and settler colonialism'; indeed, he added, 'apartheid is the new political agenda of the main liberal Jewish institutions in the US and Tel Aviv until the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023' (Ajl 2023c). The question of rights in the apartheid analogy displaced the most salient oppression encountered within the Gaza Strip: that of military occupation, and the resistance discourse, that of national liberation. The apartheid discourse also incubated in Israeli Jewish critical literature and its institutions, such as the Van Leer Institute. Yet, Israeli Jewish anti-Zionism and non- or left Zionism is almost uniformly hostile in principle and practice to the concrete armed liberation movements and Arab nationalism, even if a marginal component will admit in principle the legitimacy of armed resistance. In this way, the discourse by dint of the institutions who controlled its circulation and the organizations that deployed it, alongside their funding structures, have tended to an analogy that blocks from view central current elements of the Palestinian national struggles and its obstacles.

We now turn to a final partial accommodation of Hamas and its associated framework of resistance, which again de-regionalizes the Palestinian question, embraces imperialist perspectives on the frontline states, and contorts itself to delegitimize the Palestinian factions.

### **Hamas and Iran: Contained, or Condemned?**

A third prominent approach to Palestine and the Arab-Iranian region overall has dealt with Hamas specifically through various modalities of delegitimization or

distance-taking and open hostility to Iran. In essence, these approaches argue that Hamas is trapped in the logic of state management in lieu of its social and ideological commitment to resistance, that this logic has in fact been a mechanism of incorporation by Netanyahu, while taking a broader position of opposition towards Hamas's regional alliance system. This approach departs from an unease with Hamas that is in fact a sub-species of a broader dislike of Palestinian nationalism, as in the work of Perry Anderson. Other work has emerged concerning the 'domestication' of Hamas—including Tareq Baconi: *Hamas Contained*, a plethora of post-October 7 theories concerning how Netanyahu colluded with Hamas (2018), and contemporary anarchist cousins of Anderson's polemics.

Theoretically, these accounts sit easily with a broader unease with taking state power, with nationalism, and accordingly the national question, insofar as the state is a necessary but insufficient mechanism to address that question within a world-system structured along territorial nation-states. The overall thrust of these accounts is to claim that Hamas lacks nationalist legitimacy, because administering a proto-state structure on behalf of Israel is inherently compromising. In fact, these critiques are common in Western thought whenever a radical movement takes state power, finding in victory only ashes, while forgetting that any revolutionary group or social movement which takes the state can only transform the system through an international effort. Thus, Hamas is simply a broader instance of the dilemmas of taking power.

Consider, first, Perry Anderson's comment that Hamas could best be characterized as a clique of 'bigots in Gaza,' one amongst many examples of Palestinians' 'ruinous leadership' (Anderson 2015, 36–37). Anderson provides no evidence of the first claim, and little of his second: in fact, already by 2014 Hamas had built up what was rapidly becoming a professional army capable of directly confronting IDF brigades, something his acid disdain for Palestinian nationalism prevented him from perceiving. Nor could he see that the arms build-up was the child of the Palestinian alliance with Hezbollah and Iran. Instead, Anderson glosses the regional panorama as a sectarian 'conflict raging between Shi'a and Sunni forces, which allows America to play off one against the other as with the Sino-Soviet split during the Cold War, divides and distracts the faithful' (Anderson 2015, 21). On the one hand, this sectarianizes a conflict that is geopolitical and rooted in the Iranian state's ideological commitment to Palestine, which furthermore concerns forward deterrence against the US-Israeli threat. On the other, it denies the Sunni component of the Axis of Resistance (the Syrian Arab Army is primarily Sunni, while Palestinian Muslims are overwhelmingly Sunni). Indeed, Anderson's position is indistinguishable from that of the US-based defense intelligentsia and mainstream Middle East scholarship in attributing regional conflict to entrenched sectarian rancor and sidestepping that one Axis is anti-systemic and the other is pro-systemic.

The article now turns to Baconi's thesis. He argues, first, that Hamas's modulation of resistance activity was somewhere between 'policing' and 'pacification' that verged c. 2017 to become permanent (247). Second, armed resistance had been a strategic failure. And third, it went beyond strategic failure to the destruction of Palestinian society. The third claim, that armed resistance was damaging the social fabric of Palestine, is a claim whose political salience can only relate to the effectiveness of

armed resistance. The second claim, that armed resistance had been a strategic failure, would require serious engagement with the medium- and long-range strategic possibilities inherent in armed versus unarmed resistance in the Palestine context and vis-à-vis confronting Israel. As Baconi avoids this, he hides a normative preference behind a strategic assessment. A strategy of violent resistance to military occupation or settler-colonialism can be regarded as a failure until it begins to succeed, but such an evaluation provides little serious analysis, a fortiori in the context of an advanced experiment in ghettoization like the Gaza Strip, as opposed to popular wars of national liberation that did not start from a militarized high-tech concentration camp, and where friendly states offered territorial sanctuary—Vietnam, Algeria, Guinea-Bissau. Regional comparative analysis shows military force compelled the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon; repelled the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006; and forced the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. The claim concerning permanent pacification was belied by the October 7, 2023, attacks, which have achieved strategic aims of prisoner exchanges and paralyzing Israeli-Saudi Arabian normalization protocols, vastly increasing the legitimacy of Hamas in the West Bank and for armed resistance (Wartime Poll: Results of an Opinion Poll Among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip 2023).

Baconi's text, furthermore, is bedecked in heavy silences. It barely touches on the broader regional military, logistical, and materiel infrastructure, the only relevant frame to assess strategic prospects for the military option, and indeed has been the regional cradle within which resistance has emerged. Although he briefly reference the region, he does so only to dismiss it, discussing Hamas's historical alliance with 'Assad's regime [which] was seen as part of the so-called radical Axis given, among other things, its support of Palestinian resistance.' (173). Notably, Qatar and the US are not identified as 'regimes.' Baconi then discusses Hamas's defection from Qatar as 'President Assad's regime brutally militarized against Syrian protestors,' a claim (186) which, as the historian Patrick Higgins has shown, is a distortionary simplification of militarization coming from within the chimerical 'peaceful' protests themselves in the context of US regime change operations (Donovan Higgins 2023). Indeed, Iran only enters as a factor in the loss of funding that made Hamas's situation and financial isolation more acute. These questions of geopolitical alliance and class alliances implied are not holistically integrated in a study that presents itself as synthesizing the recent political history and strategies of Hamas and criticizing them. Instead, the framework presents an abbreviated and geopolitically neutered account of Hamas. Meanwhile, presumably because of the difficulties of accessing the relevant material, Baconi offers almost no information on Hamas or Islamic Jihad military capacity. The reader is justified to wonder how the author arrived at a critique of the military option and describes it as a strategic failure without an assessment of its operational logic. The upshot of the study is that it offers the reader a chronicle of Hamas over the past decades but leaves the reader with a muddy understanding of Israel, imperialism, national liberation, or regional resistance—the relevant categories to interpret Hamas's actions historically and especially October 7 and afterwards.

A more diffuse and parallel narrative has been the post-October 7 narrative that Netanyahu has essentially colluded with Hamas, through allowing in financial flows

from Qatar, to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state (Scahill 2024). The argument that Netanyahu allowed Qatar to send money to Hamas is correct. But the premise that the PA is the agent to achieve a Palestinian state is not. The underlying assumption is that liberation can be vacated from Palestinian politics, or that Palestinian nationalist forces lack, to use an Arab Spring-rhetoric, ‘agency.’

A third argument from an ‘anarchist’ perspective (Çubukçu 2024b)—which yet aligns with the logic of monopoly capital in delegitimizing Hamas—claims ‘many speak for Palestine’ in place of a false narrative that ‘Hamas is the singular leader of the Palestine liberation movement,’ an example of antiquated thinking around the need for a ‘vanguard party.’ Such evasions fail to engage with the basic reality that Hamas’s armed brigades have tremendous popular support amongst Palestinians and are carrying the largest share of the armed struggle (Public Opinion Poll No (91) | PCPSR 2024), and use the alibi of ‘many’ in order to sidestep the elemental fact that Al-Qassam (rendered as Hamas, since few make the distinction between Hamas’s political and military wings) is the leader of the armed resistance and has great nationalist legitimacy. Therefore, they are a masked way of expressing discomfort with the political texture of the current leadership of the Palestinian national movement, or indeed of leadership, period. Such an argument is paired with the assertion—absent theory, argumentation, or data—that ‘Iran’ is an ‘imperial power...’ (Çubukçu 2024a). Her assertion does not engage with Iran’s role in underpinning regional asymmetric resistance to Israel –as Banat asked, ‘From where did you get the rockets that protected Gaza?’<sup>10</sup> Nor does her argument seriously engage with the lights and shadows of the armed option. Finally, none of these arguments engage in self-reflexivity, and question the bourgeois nature of their platforms and circulation, or how their arguments buttress more straightforwardly pro-imperial interpretations of Hamas and Iran.

## Conclusion

The October 7, 2023, operation, like a lightning bolt, brought the relief and contours of the political terrain into view. As Israeli counterinsurgency deepened and widened in the face of anti-colonial resistance, ever-more of the political topography of the Arab-Iranian region, Palestine, Europe, the US, and global solidarity and exile politics has been illuminated. EU-US political support for Israel was never shadowed. However, fissures and fault lines within global anti-Zionist sentiment have emerged from darkness into light. In the face of the sharp knife of global counterinsurgency, sanctioning, and political repression, and the dull compulsion of the professionalization of critical Middle East studies, support for Palestine and anti-Zionism appears increasingly to have two wings. The first one, primarily located in the Arab-Iranian region, encompasses the asymmetric resistance movements and standing armies, from Palestine to Iran to Yemen, as well as their popular cradle: enveloping popular support that nurtures resistance to Israel. While this cradle also extends to popular, youth, and exile movements in the US-EU (Dasha et al. 2024; Nabulsi 2024), it also

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHqSH7Gwc7g>

meets the immolating force of domestic counterinsurgency passed through the prism of a set of intellectual and organizational forces—primarily linked to NGOs, but also journalists and much of academia—that either condemns Hamas or denies its legitimacy as a political actor.

This article has explored some scaffoldings that support intellectual, moral, emotional, and political distance or apprehension to be too close to the anti-colonial elements of the Palestinian national movement. It has furthermore explored how many of those frameworks, even when engaging with Hamas as a political force, fall into moralizing when it comes to the regional cradle within which the armed resistance capacity of the Gaza Strip has matured, indeed delegitimizing them groundlessly, and sometimes doing so to Hamas itself. First, it offered a background for the forging of an anti-Zionism bereft of anti-imperialism, in the context of repression of academics working on Palestine and the professionalization of work on Palestine and leftist-activist scholarship on the Arab region. It focused on how contemporary work on apartheid or settler-colonialism,<sup>11</sup> while accurately diagnosing Israeli repression and neo-colonial accomplices to that repression, has not offered analytical space to the forms of anti-colonial friction and mass politics at the center of Arab-Iranian region politics. Second, it dealt with the question of genocide and apartheid. Third, it has showed how popular-academic conceptualizations of Hamas policies in Gaza, over the last decade or more, analytically neuter the movement's clear anti-colonial agenda and paint the operational logic of anti-colonial resistance in colors that obscure its details. Instead, this article suggests intellectual work should openly engage with the political and social forces confronting Israel. It should treat and study them as rational political actors whose agenda merits scrutiny, rejecting a priori the moral and political firewalls erected by US-Israeli demonization and criminalization campaigns. Such a call is for greater understanding, and indeed more light.

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## ORCID

Max Ajl  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1422-1010>

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<sup>11</sup>See, as an example, the recent special issue on these topics published in 2024 by Middle East Critique, 33.2.

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