

I Don't Want a State, and I Never Did

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It was the early spring of 2017, and I stood in line for the daily school routine. We did the usual routine of standing up for the Palestinian anthem and the obligatory start-of-the-week fingernail check. The inspector will hit your hands with a wooden stick if you do not cut your fingernails every week. After the morning routine, we saw our sports teacher make an announcement:

“On behalf of the school administration, we would like to present our condolences to Kareem and his entire family for the martyrdom of Kareem’s cousin, Ahmad, by the Israeli Occupation Forces. We will take this moment of silence to grieve and recite Fatiha upon Ahmad’s soul.”

I was confused and shook. I looked around for Kareem to no avail; he didn’t attend school that day. Nevertheless, I recited the Fatiha upon Ahmad’s soul. The sports teacher continued:

“Despite this great loss and sadness, we are rooted in the land. Despite everything, we will have a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and Abu Mazen as its president.”

I heard the students chuckling in the concoction of confusion and sadness. A teacher suddenly laughed. Amidst his laughter, he said, “Abu Mazen and his state are going to outlive us all!” The grieving atmosphere of martyrdom was suddenly uprooted and supplanted by the chuckles of the students and the low-whisper comments by the teacher — all because of one sentence relating to a Palestinian state headed by Mahmoud Abbas.

“A Palestinian state with [East] Jerusalem as its capital” is a statement we’ve heard so many times: from corrupt Arab comprador regimes directly complicit in Gaza’s genocide, from the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, from European countries, and even from the United States. Variations exist, with some saying “a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders,” and some replacing East Jerusalem with Jerusalem to imbue ambiguity on the political processes of the Oslo period that strip the Palestinians of their right to the entirety of Palestine.

Ever since Arafat’s proclamation of statehood on November 15th, 1988 — considered an official holiday by the Palestinian Authority and an annual laughing stock for Palestinians in the West Bank — the “symbolic” has replaced the decolonial. Statehood has replaced national liberation. We have a “quest” for statehood, a passport, ministries, embassies, a police force — overlook the fact it arrests and kills fighters for the sake of optimism — and even our very own seat in the United Nations as an observer state, just like the Vatican! We also have settlements cleaving the West Bank, checkpoints whose purpose is to lessen Palestinian productivity via arrests and long-waiting times, daily raids emptying Palestinian towns of their most politically active people,

martyrs every day, and a genocidal campaign being waged on Gaza. Statehood here comes crashing down with reality. What we're left with, essentially, is a proxy lessening Israel's obligations vis-a-vis directly ruling the population of the West Bank. It gets money from donor countries and (sometimes belatedly) gets VAT taxes ostensibly collected on its behalf by Israel. It could build a school or two with some of that money! It may even renovate a road! The majority of this money, however, will go towards purchasing bullets, tear gas, and new fancy anti-riot gear from Israel. What happened to settlement building, refugees, and the land? They're pending future status negotiations.

The symbolic replacing the material is vital to emphasize; Spain has finally recognized us as a state! Colombia is going to build an embassy in Ramallah! It only took an ambitious military operation on October 7th, and an entire genocide of Gaza thereafter, for those two countries to do their symbolic moves. Does recognition of a Palestinian state — wrested from the majority of its rightful territory, with its refugees disregarded, under the PLO's "historic compromise" — imply a stop to settlement-building? Do they affect the material reality on the ground? What benefits do Palestinians get from these moves? In essence, we're closer than ever to being an official state, but also paradoxically so far away from being so.

Do we need so many offices? So many businessmen with BMC permits (permits issued by the Zionist entity to extremely wealthy assholes, allowing them to travel to the territories colonized in 1948 with their Palestinian car) and so many politicians? Do we need that non-member observer status in the United Nations? What has all of the above brought us on the ground? Ghassan Kanafani's early warnings about the bureaucratization of the Palestinian Revolution in assessing the PLO's conduct in Jordan after the events in Black September are important mental notes to take into account when articulating why speeches replaced the gun. This discourse of statehood has morphed the fighter into an official, and the munadel (Arabic for the person who struggles, literally a struggler, usually reserved for fighters and prisoners) into an "activist." The significance of October 7th lies in the fact that it broke this taboo, which reclaimed the Palestinian lexicon from an imperialist world order that seeks to confine the Palestinians into the discourse of "state-building."

I do not want a state. I want liberation from the settlers across the entirety of Palestine, and the least of my worries is having a ministry or symbolic representation at the United Nations. Do I care if I have a passport or a ministry if my town is slowly becoming an urban enclave surrounded by bloodthirsty settlers? I want land, not a Palestinian state dictated by what our genocidaires deem appropriate.

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