

6. Historical Timeframes for Stateless Nations

Analysing the Colonised Periodisation Paradox of Palestinian History

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Introduction

Paths of historical progression and the ordering of historiography with the perceived absence of progression are the subjects of this chapter. Specifically, I will explore periodisation and temporalities of history in the context of histories with arguably non-linear progressions—some would say a history without progression—historiographies of stateless nations.¹ Every student of history is familiar with the adage that those who

* This essay is dedicated to my father, who witnessed its genesis and discussed with me its development but lives to see its fruition only in blessed, blessed memory; and to my mother, a woman of incredible fortitude. Acknowledgements are also gratefully given to the American National Endowment of the Humanities and the Palestinian-American Research Center, for a postdoctoral research fellowship during which the idea for this paper was conceived and initial research undertaken; to the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, where, during a postdoctoral fellowship residency an initial draft of the ideas presented here was written as a presentation for the Chronologies conference; to the organisers and participants of the Chronologies conference and especially Thomas Maissen, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Barbara Mittler, for thought-provoking discussion and insightful feedback on my presentation that has helped strengthen this version of it; to the volume editors for their patient understanding as my family has dealt with tragedy; and to Nadia Villafuerte, who welcomed me into her warm and sunny NYC apartment, where the present version of this paper took its final form.

1 A distinction is made between ‘the stateless’ and ‘stateless nation.’ The stateless refers to individuals as defined in Article 1, Chapter 1 of the UNGA Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons of 28 September 1954: a person “who is not considered as a national by any State under operation of its law.” UNHCR, “Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons,” https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/wp-content/uploads/1954-Convention-relating-to-the-Status-of-Stateless-Persons_ENG.pdf. A member of a stateless nation may or may not have citizenship in a state. However, the national group to which this individual feels their belonging actively seeks to form its own state-based polity.

do not study and learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. At the heart of this statement is an idea that time is cyclical. More commonly, historians view time as linear. We may think of the past as a place. The metaphor is powerful. Once localised, we can ‘visit,’ and ‘revisit’ the past. We can ‘map’ it, two-dimensionally, along a line of time that stretches from the past through the present and into the future. Doing so, we can ‘locate’ past events at a measurable ‘distance’ from our lived present. Distance and detachment facilitate perspective, and perspective allows for the construction of insightful, analytical, rational explanatory narratives of the past, namely histories. Temporal distance allows us to measure and chart progression, endowing time with the quality of space.

However, as researchers in the interdisciplinary fields of postcolonial and memory studies attest anew, there is a disparity of distance between some pasts and the present where human experience is concerned. From above, and over the past century more vociferously from below, the importance of the past in the present has broadened. The retrospective demands upon the heirs of dominant histories for morality, culpability, and redress, which followed logically from the introduction of the banners of equality of all peoples and the principle of humanitarianism into international political discourse, prompted by the dissolution of empires and the rise of a world of nations, have irrevocably intertwined unsettled pasts consciously with the present, at least for now. The European Parliament acknowledged this entanglement in 2009, in its resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, stating that “misinterpretations of history can fuel exclusivist policies and thereby incite hatred and racism [...] the memories of Europe’s tragic past must be kept alive in order to honour the victims, condemn the perpetrators and lay the foundations for reconciliation based on truth and remembrance.”²

Arguably, periodising history facilitates the entanglement of the past with the present. In essence, it is an act of folding time back on itself. Periodisation highlights stretches of cohesion and points of rupture in narratives of the past that we mould by grouping selections of past historical events, and modes of thought and action, into a time-bound framework that reveals a logic of development we perceive retrospectively. In this way, periodisation conflates the then and the now by organising the past in a way which, ultimately, makes sense best in the present.

2 European Parliament, “European Conscience and Totalitarianism,” resolution P6_TA(2009)0213, April 2, 2009, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0213+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>, accessed July 31, 2022. Political uses of history should also be considered, of course. For an overview of historical politics in the eastern European context, see Alexei Miller, “Historical Politics: Eastern European Convolutions in the 21st century,” in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 1–20.

Moreover, periodisation is temporal and temporary and in function is impermanent. All periodisations will be subjected to re-evaluation and likely reorganisation in the future, as a result of, or sometimes in order to engender, a paradigmatic turn in our interpretation of the significances of the pasts they have ordered. We may ask, for instance, but not yet answer, whether the Cold War will be a period, a chapter, or merely a subheading in a larger chapter of world history, one hundred, two hundred, or three hundred years from now. The future restructuring of periodisations may be catalysed by uncovered aspects of the past that had remained hidden, future pasts that will have occurred in the interim, or the development of an innovative mode of thought that shifts perceptions about existent interpretations of the past.

Neither of these observations is an argument against periodisation. As a tool of historiography, periodisation is as useful to the historian as is a chapter to a novelist and their readers. By demarcating subjects or themes and following them from a beginning to an end, periodisation orders the past into a cohesive narrative of progression—and thus creates a specific *chronologies* of progress. The alternative, stagnation—what we define historically as such—would most logically be a singular period, typically demarcated by periods of descent and ascent, in either order. The question I wish to consider in this chapter is how to periodise unresolved histories which, I would argue, although not stagnant, are often viewed as lacking progression.

Alongside the Palestinians, on whom this chapter will focus, many stateless nations today—Tibetan, Tatar, Taiwanese, Tamil, Kashmiri, Kurd, Catalanian, and Uyghur, to name a few—live outside their homeland and/or in it under non-indigenous rule and have histories, varying in length, of aspiring to but not achieving and sustaining their sought autonomy or statehood. Many stateless nations lack broad political recognition and frequently face vigorous contestation of their legitimacy. This has less to do with the past than with the present and perceived future practical and political implications for other, established states and nations upon granting legitimation to stateless nations and witnessing their realisation as states.

Histories of many stateless nations share a common fate of censure and erasure. I examine the periodisation of Palestinian history as an exploration of how stateless nations periodise the history of their struggle for a still-unrealised state, and the significance of chosen schemes of periodisation. Before critically examining the periodisation of Palestinian history, a curiously neglected topic, and exploring possibilities for future alternatives to it, I begin with three observations on critical temporal aspects of Palestinian history that complicate the nation's historical time.³

3 On the concept of historical time/s, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Originally published as *Vergangene Zukunft, Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

Snags in the Fabric of Palestinian Historical Time

Firstly, Palestinian national history is transnational. The 1947–48 war that broke out upon announcement of British withdrawal from its League of Nations’ Mandate over Palestine, resulted in the geographical fragmentation of the Palestinian population and the unravelling of the unilinear thread of historical time for the nation. Multiple, significantly distinct trajectories of Palestinian national experience sprung forth—in the Jordanian West Bank, Egyptian Gaza, for Palestinians newly made citizens of Israel, and for refugees. Each trajectory has its own history and has experienced historical time at different speeds.

About 750,000 Palestinians became refugees as a result of the war.⁴ United Nations’ sponsored camps established in Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan (including the West Bank), and Syria still house refugee inhabitants today, a situation Lucas Oesch has characterised as “lasting temporariness.”⁵ Sizeable Palestinian populations also moved to Egypt, Kuwait, and further abroad. By the beginning of 2017, the registered refugee population had swollen to 5,869,733 individuals, more than the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza.⁶ The approximately 160,000 Palestinians who did remain in 1948 in lands that became the State of Israel, were absorbed by the Jewish state, although this population was geographically circumscribed, with relatively few permitted to live in their pre-war homes, villages, or towns. Officially citizens, Palestinians were ruled over by an Israeli military government until 1966. They were effectively cut off from most interaction with the Arab world until 1967, when Israel conquered the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights in the June war. Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel number almost two million, comprising one-fifth of the Israeli population.⁷ Still feared by mainstream Israeli society to be a fifth column within the country, Palestinian citizens of Israel have only gradually come to express their

- 4 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), accessed September 21, 2020, <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>.
- 5 Lucas Oesch, “Materiality of Refugee Camps,” in *Arrival Infrastructures: Migration and Urban Social Mobilities*, ed. Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut, and Bas van Heur (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 229–248.
- 6 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), data as of January 1, 2017, accessed December 7, 2018, www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/unrwa-figures-2017. The Palestinian census of 2017 counted 4,780,978 Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, many of these refugees registered with UNRWA. Al-Natā’ij al-awliyya lil-t’adād al-’ām lil-sukkān wa-l-masākin wa-l-munshāt 2017 (Primary results of the General Census of residents, residences, and facilities, 2017), accessed December 7, 2018, www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2364.pdf.
- 7 At the end of 2018 Jewish citizens of Israel numbered approximately 6,668,000, comprising 74.3 percent of the population, and there were 1,878,000 citizens identified as Arab, comprising 20.9 percent of the population. Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, accessed July 31, 2022, https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2018/394/11_18_394b.pdf.

Palestinian identity publicly. While supporting the Palestinian freedom struggle, they also continue to work actively within Israel for the transformation of the Jewish state into a state of all its citizens.⁸ Mainstream Israelis and official parlance refer to Palestinian citizens of the country as Israeli Arabs, denying their Palestinian identity, or as Arab citizens of Israel, distinguishing them from citizens without qualifying adjectives. In the West Bank and Gaza, these Palestinians are referred to as *‘arab thamāniyya wa-‘arba’in*, the Arabs of [19]48. In Palestinian historiography, Palestinian citizens of Israel are treated as a separate chapter, reflecting their experiences removed from the post-1948 mainstream of Palestinian national society and history.⁹

Refugees as a group have also been written out of the mainstream of the national narrative which—since the Oslo peace agreements signed 25 years ago between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)—has become circumscribed to the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. The refugees have not been historicised. That is, while the refugee ‘problem’ is a significant part of Palestinian history, the experiences of the refugees as a group—or groups—are not periodised *within* the historical national narrative, conveying a sense of objectification and of stagnation.

- 8 The debate whether a self-declared Jewish and democratic state can truly be—or is—democratic is long-standing. Most recently “The Basic Law: Israel—the nation state of the Jewish people,” passed into law in July 2018. Text of the law in English: <https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/BasicLawNationState.pdf>. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* extensively covered the stormy debate about this law. See, for example: Allison Kaplan Sommer, “Explained: The controversial law that would allow Jewish-only communities in Israel,” *Haaretz*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-explained-the-bill-that-would-allow-jewish-only-towns-in-israel-1.6265091> and, by the same writer, “Basic Law or Basically a Disaster? Israel’s Nation-state Law Controversy Explained,” *Haaretz*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-nation-state-law-controversy-explained-1.6344237>. All sources accessed July 31, 2022.
- 9 For recent research on the history of Palestinian citizens of Israel, see, for example: Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker, *Coffins on Our Shoulders: The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel’s liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Nadim N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, eds. *Palestinim ba-Israel: ‘Iyunim ba-historia, ba-politika ve-ba-hevra*, Palestinians in Israel: Studies in History, Politics and Society, vol. 2 (Haifa: Mada al-Carmel, 2015) (Hebrew); Maha Nassar, *Brothers Apart: Palestinian Citizens of Israel and the Arab World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017). Additionally, a large corpus of poetry and literature by Palestinian citizens of Israel poignantly, passionately, and realistically expresses the complexities of life and identity of this national minority. The 2016 “Strategic Report: Palestinian Citizens in the State of Israel: Future Scenarios” by I’lam—Arab Center for Media Freedom Development and Research, headquartered in Nazareth, addresses the current and possible future situation of this minority, <http://www.ilam-center.org/en/files/userfiles/Strategic%20Report%20-%20English%20-%20I%27lam%20I%20I%202016.pdf>. See also the 2018, Israeli Institute for National Security Studies study, “Integrating the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israeli Society: Time for a Strategic Change,” ed. Ephraim Lavie, https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/INSS_EphraimLavi.pdf. All sources accessed July 31, 2022.

Generation after generation remain refugees, even though their numbers are substantial and growing, and some form of a right of return remains a Palestinian requirement for a peace settlement with Israel.¹⁰ Finally, the West Bank and Gaza populations are also separate societies. Passage between the two regions for Palestinians, when permitted at all, is a circuitous route through Egypt and Jordan.¹¹ It stems from these actualities that a singular periodisation of Palestinian history cannot realistically encompass these distinct orbits of the nation.

Secondly, for Palestinians, the defining moment of national history is a tragedy that erases divisions between memory and history. Any Palestinian, asked where they are from, irrelevant of the location of their residence or birthplace, will answer with the name of the town or village in which their parents, grandparents, great grandparents, or great-great grandparents lived in 1947/8. The Nakba (Arabic, catastrophe), as the tragedy of these years is called—massacres, expulsions, transfers, the physical obliteration and erasure of villages—affected and continues to affect every Palestinian.¹² Since the 1980s, many Palestinian village histories have been published about these destroyed Palestinian locales. With subtitles such as “our Palestine in the story of a village,” “a homeland that refuses to be forgotten,” “my village,” “from memory of the elders to the hearts of the youth,” and “a flower on the bosom of the Galilee,” the simultaneously personal, local, and national dimensions of this history are undeniable.¹³ Unresolved tragedies of nations, such as the Nakba for Palestinians, the Armenian genocide for the Armenian nation and state, and the 1944 *sürgün* (deportation) for

- 10 There is a wealth of human-rights and anthropological literature on Palestinian refugees. Badil publishes book-length biannual reports on Palestinian refugees and displaced persons. These are accessible in English at <http://badil.org/en/publication/survey-of-refugees.html>, accessed October 26, 2020. Artwork, novels, poetry, and both artistic and documentary film have also poignantly dealt with the refugee experience. A notable and commendable project in this regard is the documentary series *Chronicles of a Refugee* (2008). Project directors and filmmakers Adam Shapiro, Perla Issa, and Aseel Mansour interviewed and filmed in more than 15 countries to make this approximately five-hour, six-part film.
- 11 See, for example, Elisha Efrat, *The West Bank and Gaza Strip: A Geography of Occupation and Disengagement* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 12 A number of comprehensive documentary projects have catalogued in great detail the events of the Nakba. See Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: the Palestinian Villages occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); the massive visual, written, and oral-history video documentary project <https://www.palestineremembered.com>, founded in 1999; and at the American University of Beirut, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs has conducted and recorded more than 1,000 hours of testimonies from Palestinians in Lebanon, in its Palestinian Oral History Archive.
- 13 I have used a number of these books in my research on the late-Ottoman district of Hebron. Village books have been the subject of research by Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Titles are taken from her bibliography.

Crimean Tatars, are simultaneously experienced today as both afterlives of tragedy, that is, a remembered tragedy, and as an ongoing tragedy.¹⁴ Pierre Nora developed his concept of *lieux de mémoire* through reflection on “hopelessly forgetful modern societies” which “inherently value the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past.”¹⁵ For stateless nations, these sites of memory exist, too,¹⁶ but within a larger *milieu* of memory that has not dissipated. The past is not a cornerstone but, rather, the steel frame of the edifice of their present legitimacy as nations. The continued repercussions and reverberations of these present-versus-past defining moments engender a temporal complexity that suggests the suitability of multiple, overlapping historical times, a plurality of temporalities, with the period of the defining tragedy’s long life layered over other, shorter periods that *have* come and gone.¹⁷

Thirdly, there is no disinterested Palestinian or Israeli history. This is not to make a claim about an absence of rigorousness in the scholarship. Rather, it affirms the obvious: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ignites passions around the world, including those of academics—on both ‘sides.’ Tensions in Israel/Palestine are incessant. Crisis after crisis fuel a 24-hour local news cycle, and long ago created a relentless sense of urgency regarding the future among all who follow these events. This urgency is part of the *chronologics* of writing this history, it is often expressed in the prefaces and afterwords of histories of the conflict, of Israel, and of Palestine, by drawing direct comparisons between the historical subject of study and present-day events—what Ilan Pappé has characterised as “the inevitable link”—and by offering prescriptions for the future.¹⁸

Palestinian studies, as a subject, seems at times to only be circling round and round, struggling not to drown in the whirlpool of denial in which it is compelled to

14 See, for example, Greta Lynn Uehling, *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars’ Deportation and Return* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); chapters 6 and 7 in Brian Glyn Williams’ *The Crimean Tatars: From Soviet Genocide to Putin’s Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Sergey Minasyan, “Armenia’s Attitude towards its Past: History and Politics,” *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 8, no. 9 (2013): 10–13; and Ihab Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

15 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 8, 12.

16 The most recent *lieu*, the Yasser Arafat Museum, opened in Ramallah in late 2016. On its “About” page, the museum characterises itself as “a museum of the Palestinian contemporary national memory,” accessed September 21, 2020, <https://yam.ps/page-12178-en.html>. Visitors wind through a long, ascending and descending pathway of photos, sound, and artifacts that relate national history from the late-Ottoman era to the recent past, ending in the government *muqata’a* (headquarters) besieged by Israel in 2002.

17 This complexity was artfully expressed by Anton Shammas in his Hebrew-language novel, *Arabesque* translated into English under the title *Arabesques* in 1988.

18 Ilan Pappé, “Introduction: New historiographical orientations in the research on the Palestine Question,” in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4.

keep swimming, fighting for its voice to be listened to thoughtfully by mainstream Israel and Zionists. It is their listening that is the primary benchmark for acceptance. The United Nations and 137 of its member states—71 percent of the world’s recognised countries—have recognised Palestine as a state. That said, this recognition has been powerless to help realise actual statehood. Dina Matar asked in the opening line of her 2011 book, *What it means to be Palestinian*,

How do you write a book on Palestine and the Palestinians when the very act of writing about, giving voice to, or representing the Palestinians is beset by two larger, interrelated problems: first that Palestinian history tends to be viewed solely in relation to Israeli history or narrative; and second that the story of the Palestinians, as ordinary human beings subjected to violent forms of power, remains a largely hidden one?¹⁹

In 2017, Columbia University’s Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies and editor of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* Rashid Khalidi opened his essay introducing a special issue of the journal on commemoration, by expressing a similar frustration, noting its longstanding quality: “the Palestinians continue to be elided from the historical record; in the words of Edward Said [in 1984], they have been denied ‘permission to narrate.’”²⁰

Historically speaking it is only recently, with the signing of the Oslo accords, that doors began to open to legitimization of Palestinians, their nationhood, and their history. Beshara Doumani’s now-classic *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900*, published in 1995, was representative of this new legitimacy. Doumani explicitly characterised one of his book’s main goals as writing Palestinians into history.²¹ Since then, this project has met with spectacular success, overcoming obstacles such as the scattering, destruction, or inaccessibility of much documentary evidence of the past. Nonetheless, the politically motivated denial of Palestinian nationhood and history, in the academy and outside it, continues vociferously and acerbically and flames tensions worldwide. One popular illustration is the publication and rise to best-seller status on Amazon in 2017 of *A History of the Palestinian People*:

19 Dina Matar, *What it Means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), xi. Matar’s assessment reverberates that of Rashid Khalidi in his 2006 book, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press), xxix: “It is a hidden history, one that is obscured, at least in the West, by the riveting and tragic narrative of modern Jewish history.”

20 Rashid Khalidi, “Introduction: Historical Landmarks in the Hundred Years’ War on Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 47, no.1 (Autumn 2017): 6.

21 Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), xi.

from ancient Times to the modern Era by the Israeli Assaf Voll. The book was purposely comprised solely of hundreds of blank pages.²² All this suggests, alongside other evidence, an undeniable immediacy of both the past and the future in the present—a *chronologics* of denial?

Coupled with a sense of non-progression politically by and for Palestinians—overall, stagnation and powerlessness—this has prompted a view that a long twentieth century that has not yet ended may best be characterised as one period of Palestinian history. Louis A. Pérez has described the decades of Cubans' long independence struggle as “a state of continual becoming” in which “[t]he past had never really passed because it had never really ended.”²³ In essence, Khalidi argues the same has occurred with Palestinians, characterising the nation's history since the Balfour declaration of 1917 as a hundred years' siege.²⁴

These snags in the fabric of Palestinian historical time reveal that the nation's history is spatially diverse and progresses along multiple, overlapping temporal tracks, each experiencing the passage of time at different speeds, from fleeting to frozen. It encompasses at any given historical moment the past, the present, and the future in a non-linear manner. These co-existing temporalities are all, simultaneously, present-day political battlegrounds. All this may be said to confound any periodisation or *chronologics* of Palestinian history as well as to suggest a dizzying array of historical periods. In the following sections, I will first examine the existent periodisation scheme of Palestinian history, which I characterise as principally colonised, and analyse its uses and its usefulness. The final section of this chapter will explore alternative periodisations.

Historiography of Palestinian History

There have been fewer long-range studies of Palestinian modern history written since the Oslo accords than one may have assumed. Edward Said opined in 1999,

the fate of Palestinian history has been a sad one, since not only was independence not gained, but there was little collective understanding of the importance of constructing a collective history as a part of trying to gain independence. [...] because of the collective Palestinian inability as

22 “Empty Book on Palestinian History Becomes Instant Best-seller on Amazon,” *Haaretz*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/empty-book-on-palestinian-history-is-amazon-best-seller-1.5487473>, accessed July 31, 2022.

23 Louis A. Pérez, *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 15, 19.

24 Khalidi, “Introduction” (see note 20).

a people to produce a convincing narrative story with a beginning, middle, and end (we were always too disorganized, our leaders were always interested in maintaining their power, most of our intellectuals refused to commit themselves as a group to a common goal and we too often changed our goals) Palestinians have remained scattered and politically ineffective victims of Zionism, as it continues to take more and more land and history.²⁵

The corpus of long-range studies is heavily weighted instead toward histories of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and histories of historical Palestine, which is both a broader and at the same time a more circumscribed subject than the history of the Palestinian nation. There are also many long-range national histories of modern Israel.²⁶ The first long-range modern history of the Palestinian nation appeared in 1993, a research synthesis authored by Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling and American professor of international relations Joel Migdal.

Palestinians: the Making of a People was updated, expanded, and renamed in 2003.²⁷ In 1997, Palestinian sociologist Samih Farsoun's *Palestine and the Palestinians* was published, authored with Christina E. Zacharia. An Arabic translation is used as a textbook in some Palestinian universities today.²⁸ The English version was revised and expanded in 2006.²⁹ Also in 2006, the Palestinian Authority's Education Ministry introduced a *History of modern and contemporary Palestine* as a textbook for upper-level high-school students on the humanities track, one of seven educational paths students can choose to follow as juniors and seniors.³⁰ In the Palestinian Authority's educational system, history is taught from the fifth grade onwards, but national history is not the

25 Edward Said, "Palestine: Memory, Invention and Space," in *The Landscape of Palestine: Equivocal Poetry*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Roger Heacock, and Khaled Nashef (al-Bireh: Birzeit University Publications, 1999), 12, 13.

26 In the past decade alone: Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: Morrow, 1998, 2nd, expanded ed. 2008); Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, trans. Anthony Berris (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2012); Colin Schindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1st ed. 2008, 2nd ed. 2013); Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

27 Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *Palestinians: the Making of a People* (New York: Free Press, 1993) and (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). The 2003 edition was published under the title *Palestinian People: a History*, also by Harvard University Press.

28 At Hebron University, for example. *Filastīn w'al-filastīniyyūn* was published in 2003 by *Markaz dirasāt al-wahḍa al-'arabiyya* in Beirut.

29 Samih K. Farsoun with Christina E. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997). The revised and expanded edition was written with Naseer H. Aruri and published one year following Farsoun's death, under the title *Palestine and the Palestinians: a social and political history*, also with Westview Press.

30 The other six are agriculture, commerce, industrial, hotellery, Islamic law, and academic.

focus. Fifth graders study ancient civilisations. The sixth graders' textbook is *History of the Arabs and Muslims*. In seventh grade, the Middle Ages are taught, primarily from a Middle Eastern point of view, followed by *History of the Arab and Islamic civilization* in eighth grade, and modern and contemporary Arab history in ninth grade. Tenth graders study a history of the modern and contemporary world. From the first grade, however, students annually study aspects of Muslim and Christian history in Palestine, as well as Palestinian culture, heritage, and history, in national and civics classes (*tarbiyya waṭaniyya* and *tarbiyya madaniyya*).³¹

Instead of the modern *longue durée*, the field of Palestinian history has developed primarily as a burgeoning conglomeration of microhistories focused on subsets of the population or regions of Palestine, or of particular events and short-term phenomena. Most research has not straddled political regimes, which changed rapidly in historical Palestine over the course of the twentieth century, from the Ottoman Empire to the British Mandate, to Israeli, Egyptian, and Jordanian rules, then to Israeli and, finally, Israeli and Palestinian governments. Long-term research requires polyglotism: knowledge of Arabic, Ottoman and modern Turkish, English, and Hebrew.³² Additionally, research in the main repositories of remaining documents requires multi-country travel to Turkey, England, Israel, the Palestinian Authority territories, and Jordan, which creates budget strains, logistical difficulties, and right-of-access issues for researchers.³³ These difficulties of researching modern Palestine history have made it difficult to trace continuities across regime change and have likely contributed to the according periodisation of Palestinian history.

31 In 2017, digital versions of all Palestinian-school textbooks were still downloadable from the Palestinian Education Ministry website at pcdc.edu.ps. As of this writing, the textbook webpage is defunct.

32 Modern Turkish is prerequisite to understanding Ottoman Turkish. It is also necessary to navigate Ottoman archives in Turkey; document catalogues are available only in Turkish.

33 For recent researches documenting newly uncovered Palestinian records housed by Israeli institutions, and the difficulties of accessing them, are Rona Sela, *Le-'iyun ha-tsibur: tatlume Palestīnim be-arkhiyonim tseva'iyim be-Yisra'el, minshar le-omanut* (Made Public: Palestinian photos in military archives in Israel) (Tel Aviv: Helena, 2009), an updated and expanded version of which was published in Ramallah in 2018 by Madār; Sela, "The Genealogy of Colonial Plunder and Erasure—Israel's control over Palestinian Archives," *Social Semiotics* 28, no. 2 (2018): 201–229; and Gish 'Amit, *Eḳs libris: hiṣṭoryah shel gezel, shimur ve-nikhsh be-sifriyah ha-le'umit bi-Yerushalayim* (Ex libris: a history of looting, conservation, and appropriation at the National Library in Jerusalem) (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yan Lir bi-Yerushalayim: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uhad, 2014). While Amit was still a PhD student, Benny Brunner made in 2012 a documentary film based on Amit's research. The English version of this film, *The Great Book Robbery*, is available online on al-Jazeera's YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myvobIkWkNM>, accessed 31 July, 2022. Access difficulties are not limited to Israeli archives; they are also encountered in archives in Jordan and the West Bank, revealing the ongoing political sensitivity of the past.

The Periodisation of Palestinian Modern History

Although the periodisation scheme of modern Palestinian history has not been the subject of sustained discourse, a study of relevant historical literature permits the observation that it has coalesced into the following recognised periods: the Ottoman period, until 1917;³⁴ the British Mandate period from 1918–1948; the Nakba—generally, the events of 1947 to 1949, also sometimes viewed as an ongoing period since 1947/8; dispersal and chaos 1948–1967; geographical reunification of historical Palestine under Israeli rule and the coalescence of a Palestinian political and armed liberation movement outside historical Palestine, 1967–87; the first Intifada and Oslo years, during which the focus of Palestinian history returned to the territories of historical Palestine occupied by Israel in 1967 and to Palestinians living there, 1987–2000; and, since the collapse of the Oslo peace process, what has come to be called the post-Oslo period, for lack of a coherent theme or emerging direction. The official Palestinian position has remained committed to the idea of negotiations with Israel for its recognition of a Palestinian state based on the principle of an exchange of land for peace.

In evaluating the usefulness of this periodisation we must analyse the narrative that emerges from these building blocks. What *Zeitgeist* do these periods reveal, and what do they say about the nature of change from one period to the next? How does this scheme reflect Palestinian agency, priorities, and values? What does it define as important in Palestinian history? Analysing the accepted periodisation, one notes firstly that these many short historical periods reflect, from the vantage point of the present, a long century of frequent, significant ruptures, highlighting regime change following wars and uprisings—World War I, the 1948 war, the 1967 war, and the first Intifada. Secondly, while, this periodisation highlights the primacy of politics and non-indigenous governance in Palestinian history, it does not, for example, distinguish qualitatively between the Ottomans and the British, or name, in what would be a parallel fashion, the Israelis. The common theme is foreign domination. Similarly, while the characterisation of the years 1947–1967 expresses what happened to Palestinians, the characterisations of the preceding periods and “the post-Oslo period” exclude Palestinians as either subjects or objects of history. Thirdly, and related to this, Palestinian helplessness and victimhood is implicit in this framework through the absence of their agency as defining factors during periods of their history for most of the twentieth century and into the current one.

One central historiographical discussion of Palestinian studies in past decades has been a debate on the most suitable framework for analysing Zionism, Israel, and the character of Israel’s past and present relationship with the indigenous Palestinian population. The suggestion of a colonial-settler paradigm is not new, and it is not relevant

34 The Ottomans conquered *Bilad al-Sham*, including Palestine, in 1516/17, but this date is considered irrelevant to Palestinian national history because it predates national consciousness.

to discuss its appropriateness here. That has been done elsewhere.³⁵ Rather, I wish to remark upon the significant attention given to this debate in order to draw attention to the significant neglect of an equally reported, related framework question—what is the most suitable periodisation scheme for studying Palestinian history? Before addressing the possibility of alternatives to accepted periodisation, it is pertinent to first address the matter of why this question has been widely neglected. I will do so by pointing to the periodisation scheme's utility. First, the current periodisation is not historically inaccurate; war and regime change are often used as markers of historical periods. Secondly, the obstacles mentioned above to conducting historical research on Palestine lend themselves to the temporal divisions in place. Thirdly, we may consider the underlying message of the current periodisation. It is commonplace that periodisation is teleological; it needs to explain how we arrived at the present, but where have the Palestinians arrived at? Until recently, independence was the only foreseeable national outcome sought for and by Palestinians. With progress toward statehood the measuring stick by which historians have retrospectively analysed the overall trajectory of Palestinian history, the theme of that trajectory necessarily appears either as failure and incapability or, at best, the naïve, powerless fighting of an impossible struggle against the powerful, colonial settler and their allies. As such, paradoxically, the current, colonised historical periodisation ignores Palestinian agency across much of Palestinian history. This is distinct from the historiography, which does not do this, and which is appropriately both appreciative and critical. In contrast, the periodisation scheme builds the framework of a narrative that one may argue highlights—in the absence of agency—Palestinian patience and steadfastness in a struggle against a series of all-powerful occupying aggressors. These themes of *ṣabr* and *ṣumūd* continue to be important cultural motifs. I do not intend to suggest with this observation that the promotion of these values is conscious in the periodisation. Generally, however, one may surmise that these three, broad efficacious qualities of the current periodisation have probably contributed to the lack of attention the temporal divisioning of Palestinian history has received.

35 To begin with, Faye A. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*, Palestine Monographs 1 (Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Center, 1965) and Maxime Rodinson, "Israël, fait colonial?," *Les Temps modernes* 253 (1967): 17–88. This extended essay was translated into English several years later as: *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, trans. David Thorstad (New York: Monad Press, 1973). Lorenzo Veracini has written extensively on this subject, beginning with his *Israel and Settler Society* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006) and, most recently, "Israel-Palestine through a settler-colonial studies lens," *Interventions* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2018.1547213>. Many articles in *Settler Colonial Studies*, founded in 2011 and quarterly publishing peer-reviewed academic research, focus on Palestine/Israel. Reflective of the widespread nature of the controversy this paradigm has prompted see, for example, Arnon Degani, "Israel is a Settler Colonial State—and that's OK," *Haaretz*, September 13, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-israel-is-a-settler-colonial-state-and-that-s-ok-1.5433405>, accessed July 31, 2022.

By Way of Conclusion: New-Old Thoughts on Time and Periodisation

Time has its own history. Firstly, one may recall that in the Ottoman Empire, to which Palestine belonged, from at least the late-fifteenth through the late-nineteenth centuries, that the day was divided into two periods of twelve hours, with the length of each ‘hour’ varying in length with the season.³⁶ Globally, time was universalised only at the beginning of the long twentieth century.³⁷ Universal adoption of the Gregorian calendar for secular affairs took decades longer, and its efficacy for dividing and regulating the passage of time remains contested today.³⁸ Furthermore, we can consider that some physicists now believe that time has two dimensions, a theory that appears to be able to resolve the paradox of existent phenomena, such as dark matter and dark energy, which one-dimensional models of time cannot explain.³⁹ A century ago, Hermann Minkowski’s *chronotopical* four-dimension model was revolutionary. Minkowski recognised time, “spacetime,” as a degree of freedom of direction like the three widely accepted spatial dimensions.⁴⁰ “The present,” of course, is all that exists

36 Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 32. This method was also current in Europe. Ogle, “One Calendar for All,” 10.

37 The International Meridian Conference was convened in Washington, DC on October 1, 1884.

38 On adoption of the Gregorian calendar, see Edward L. Cohen, “Adoption and Reform of the Gregorian Calendar,” *Math Horizons* 7, no. 3 (Feb. 2000): 5–11. In 1930, Elisabeth Achelis established the World Calendar Association, which remains active today, to replace this calendar. On Achelis and her organization, see Dr. Richard McCarty, “The World Calendar,” accessed September 21, 2020, <http://myweb.ecu.edu/mccartyr/world-calendar.html>; “Miss Elisabeth Achelis,” accessed September 21, 2020, <http://myweb.ecu.edu/mccartyr/achelis.html>; and Vanessa Ogle, “One Calendar for All”, chap. 7 in *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). Other efforts are also under way. On a proposal by Johns Hopkins University physics and astronomy professor Richard Henry and his colleague, economics professor Steve Hanke, see, “The case for an Entirely New Calendar: Why the Gregorian Calendar is so Last Year” by Renuka Rayasam, December 30, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20151222-the-case-for-an-entirely-new-calendar>, accessed July 31, 2022.

39 Itzhak Bars explains this dimension in layman’s terms through the analogy of shadow. We cannot experience the second dimension of time but, rather, we can perceive it through its shadows in the same way a two-dimensional creature on a wall could perceive a three-dimensional object in a room by studying the patterns of the shadows of it that lights from variously placed sources cast on its two-dimensional space. Itzhak Bars and John Terning, *Extra Dimensions in Space and Time* (New York: Springer, 2010), 56–58.

40 Hermann Minkowski, “Space and Time,” chap. 2 in *Space and Time: Minkowski’s Papers on Relativity*, ed. Vesselin Petkov, trans. Fritz Lewertoff and Vesselin Petkov (Montreal: Minkowski Institute Press, 2012), text of a lecture given at the 80th Meeting of the Natural Scientists, Köln, September 21, 1908. See also, Paul S. Wesson, “Time as an Illusion,” in *Minkowski Spacetime: A Hundred Years Later*, ed. Vesselin Petkov (New York: Springer, 2010), 307–317.

in simultaneity, irrespective of the space it occupies or one's ability to perceive it. This simultaneity is, however, relative. Any object or point in three dimensions of space will appear differently to an observer depending upon their position along the fourth dimension, "spacetime." This experience of space relative to time posits time as curved, not straight. Metaphorically, historians may infer from these premises that time—as well as our experience of it—bends to history, not history to time. Minkowski's turn-of-the-century theory may have influenced historian Joseph Ward Swain's inquiry into "What is history?," also published almost a century ago, in *The Journal of Philosophy*:

History, then, is not a science as physics and chemistry are; except in a few superficial details, the historian is a scientist neither in purpose nor method: his purpose is to make a certain view of the world prevail, his method is to tell history in such a way that this philosophy will seem to be immanent in it.⁴¹

If this is a profound and fruitful philosophy, much of value will surely result. This is what is meant by the statement that while he deals with the past, the historian is creating the future. Finally, it would also follow, that from these considerations no history will ever be final, that, as was said, history will never 'stay put.' Each age requires a philosophy of its own ... Each age must create its own past as it creates its own present and future.⁴²

With an acute, 'general' awareness today of the constructed and intertwined, collective and simultaneously personal natures of not only identity and history but also of memory and time, it is appropriate that historians critically re-evaluate the meaningfulness of the fairly harmonious marriage between historiography and a rigidly constructed notion of chronological time, that carried us through most of the twentieth century. In no case is this more essential than with the case of unsettled histories, many themselves the result of twentieth-century events. Unsettled histories may be said to have discernible beginnings and subsequent stages, but no perceptible ending, and thus no obvious middle. One may ask, how can Palestinian national history—or that of any stateless nation—be said to have transitioned from one historical period to a next if each period ends with the same failure to achieve the goal of statehood that drives national history? We may attempt to examine, as Khalidi did in *The Iron Cage*, the various circumstances and reasons in each period that may have contributed uniquely

41 Joseph W. Swain, "What is history?—V," *The Journal of Philosophy* 20, no.13 (June 21, 1923): 348.

42 Swain, "What is history?" (see note 41), 349.

to renewal of this failure.⁴³ But any measure of ‘progress,’ the grander meaning of any one political failure-victory or the cumulative effect of them all, will remain elusive until the goal of statehood is either renounced or achieved. The ultimate outcome and, thus, the significance of present and past national action for effecting that outcome, a national political solution, is still speculative. This is a conundrum of the historiography of stateless nations.

On the other hand, history is not only or always about progress. It explains development, which is not unidirectional. Swain reminds us that history, like the experience of time and like periodisation, is relative. So how, from the point of view of today, is it most meaningful to periodise Palestinian national history? What is clear or, hopefully, what has become clear in this chapter is that the current periodisation scheme—or *chronologies*—has outlived its usefulness. It accounts only partially for the breadth of national history and ascribes negligible agency to its supposed subjects of history. I argue that logically, since periodisation is a construct, it is merely a convention of convenience to order it linearly. With events of the Palestinian past continuing to be experienced consciously as present, notably among them the Nakba, suitable periodisation might reflect their long lives. Further, Palestinian history is transnational. It cannot easily be confined within one narrative thread. A comprehensive periodisation of the nation’s history conceivably could comprise multiple, overlapping periods of various lengths of nationally experienced time: the apparent glacial slowness of refugee times; the ongoing and also changing nature of a long Nakba; the evolvment of the Palestinian community with Israeli citizenship; and, more universally, generational spirits and trajectories. In sum, if the main function of periodization is to sensibly order historical narrative, then it is not calendar time but, rather, historical events and phenomena and our understanding of them and their enduring significance across time to which periodization owes its primary allegiance. These are not revelatory arguments about the nature of time; it is an observation that the periodization of history has thus far followed a convention of time which, we generally acknowledge today, the human experience of time and history does not and, therefore, this is a suggestion that it need not.

Beshara Doumani and Alex Winder have recently noted, discussing the structure of Palestinian commemorative politics, that a history that highlights “destruction, loss, and colonial machinations” incarcerates that history in a discursive iron cage.⁴⁴ I believe the same can be said of its periodisation. More broadly, I would argue that the histories of stateless nations cannot be periodised effectively with the same methodology

43 Khalidi is explicit that his project is as much about past as present (ix) and posits the question whether it is best, or if “are we perhaps too obsessed” with the idea of state at the center of the national historical narrative of the nation (xiii).

44 Beshara Doumani and Alex Winder, “1948 and Its Shadows,” *Introduction to a special issue of the Journal of Palestine Studies*, 48, no. 1 (Autumn 2018): 8.

of periodisation utilised for histories of states. While states rely on their histories to instill identity and bolster allegiance, history books and their teaching in state schools are just two of the tools at a state's disposal to teach the nation and reinforce its existence and belonging to it. Stateless nations lack many institutions and props of state and often lack geographical unity. Their national identity and legitimacy are rooted in the past. History is the primary weapon of the weak, nevertheless. The telling of it as well as its organisation and ordering needs to unify its many trajectories under an umbrella of inclusion, one wide enough to encompass the nation and, as Swain said, to convincingly write its future.

