



Dena Qaddumi

October 28th, 2025

Epistemic Stakes in the Spatial Politics of Palestine

by Dena Qaddumi



Since early 2024, I have been coordinating the open-access curriculum *Palestine: Spaces and Politics*. The project emerged through an intensive dialogical process between academics engaged in the *Arab Urbanism* platform. Despite varied disciplinary approaches, we shared a research interest in postcolonial spatial politics. Particularly, we were concerned that growing demand for critical analysis on Palestine's built and natural environments was largely consumed by settler

colonial perspectives rooted in ethnic separation, border-making, indigenous dispossession, and land commodification. As significant as these analyses are, they do not clarify the multiplicity of Palestine and Palestinians, nor respond to research concerns and needs produced through internal critique.

Consequently, we produced a frame that positioned Palestine as a critical site to analyse the intersections of the political and the spatial, and not only as an object of colonial violence. In so doing, we repeatedly confronted three predominant (mis)stakes in the spatial politics in Palestine in our discussions. I summarise them below:

1. Reifying the fragmentation of Palestine and Palestinians

The Zionist imposition of borders disciplines Palestinian bodies inside and outside of historic Palestine through containing Palestinians in pseudo politico-legal categories – present absentees, refugees, Jerusalem ID holders, West Bank ID holders, Gaza ID holders, Israeli passport holders, etc. An analogous body of research has emerged that is focussed on mobility, livelihoods, and everyday life. Yet, this work consolidates spatial readings of Palestine that privilege colonial border-making and military infrastructure, particularly through the reproduction of maps of the West Bank and Gaza that layer checkpoints, settlements, buffer zones, and the apartheid wall on the 1949 Armistice Agreement and British Mandatory Palestine borders. This not only reifies the fragmentation of Palestinians, but **'disembodies the spatial logic'** of Israeli ethnocratic planning, from the river to the sea. It also eschews everyday spatial practices of liberation, supported through place-making, for the codification and recognition of **statehood**.

2. Separating Palestine and Palestinians from the wider region

This tendency, also supported through maps, militarised borders, and mobility regimes, disconnects the social and political development of Palestine from a region that was contiguous before colonial invasion. This approach can consider Zionist colonisation of Palestine as a distinct phenomenon from British and French imperialism, while also neglecting historical familial, economic, and cultural connections in the region that have persisted, despite colonisation. Positioning Palestine in a wider (**ecumenical**) frame also centres how migratory flows, ethnic and religious diversity, cross-cultural production, and urban-rural reciprocity were defining features of the region for centuries. This clarifies that Zionism's aspiration for ethnic and religious purity was an aberration in the region; Zionism supported the establishment of unitary socio-spatial identities to the detriment of overlapping and pluralistic ones (e.g. **Arab Jew**).

3. Domainning Palestine as an exceptional and peripheral spatial product

Academic and public discourse on Palestine often considers it an extreme case, one that is too particular to illuminate general concepts while also being too disputed and complex to interrogate in the classroom. This has several consequences. First, it divorces Palestine from other territorial struggles produced through colonialism, racism, religion, and capitalism. Second, thinking of Palestine as an exception dismisses research on Palestine as provincial, restricting it to empirical rather than theoretical contributions. Finally, perhaps most egregiously, it identifies Palestinian scholars who research Palestine as working outside normative scientific (i.e. neutral) parameters of academic work; thus, scholarship by non-Palestinians on Palestine (often produced through the privilege of whiteness and global mobility) is elevated as the case's exemplar. (This echoes the exclusion of much scholarship conducted by colleagues from the Global South.) Yet, academics' disregard for the epistemological frames offered by Palestinians and **Palestine Studies** is a missed opportunity to sharpen core concepts in political, spatial, urban, and architectural theory. It is through learning from and with this work that we can clearly problematise questions of nationalism, public space, race, representation, and modernism. Such concerns are still central in a postcolonial world, whereby the denial of colonial dispossession and the refusal for just reparations continues. In this view, Palestine becomes foundational for revealing contemporary global contradictions while opening research avenues towards alternative futures.

We designed the ***Palestine: Spaces and Politics*** curriculum to problematise these stakes through confronting them directly. We aimed to provide general enquiry with empirical rigour, a diversity of critical Palestinian perspectives in English and Arabic, and topics of regional relevance towards co-learning. Each curricular theme includes an explanation, questions, and key cases that examine and juxtapose political and spatial concepts using Palestine and regional studies. Consequently, we assert Palestine in the study of spatial politics, while centring geography and space in the study of Palestine.

Our own perspectives are undoubtedly also influenced by the hegemonic discourse that produces these stakes. The **recent recognition** of the State of Palestine by the former colonial authority, the United Kingdom, reinforces statehood as synonymous with the aspirations of the Palestinian people. We are compelled to contend with these pervasive frames, even as we push for alternative ones. It is through attentive and generous debates between trusted colleagues that we may be able to do so.

We hope this project inspires academics to incorporate Palestine within their teaching and research practice, while appreciating the stakes of this work. This is even more imperative given the genocide in Gaza, of which epistemic violence has been a defining feature. If we are not vigilant,

research on Palestine will become **preoccupied** by settler colonial practices and anxieties, rather than indigenous acts of stewardship, steadfastness, and resistance.

About the author

Dena Qaddumi

Dena is a scholar of urban politics and the built environment and has conducted research in Palestine, Qatar, and Tunisia. Her forthcoming monograph based on her doctoral research is entitled *City in Revolution: Encounters of People in Regime in Tunis*, and examines how and why key urban sites become consequential for revolution. While at the Middle East Centre, Dena is researching indigenous urbanism and futurity in Palestine. She is on X @denaqaddumi

Posted In: Palestine



© LSE 2025