

# Liberation is not integration

## On liberal Zionism, one-state fantasies, and what Palestinians actually want

By Lara Kilani  
Researcher, member of the  
Good Shepherd Collective

### OPINION

A few weeks ago, on our walk back from the market in Bethlehem's old city, my friend abruptly turned to me and declared that she could not imagine a one-state solution because it would certainly mean the transformation of our beautiful city as we know it and the alteration of so many of the things we love about it. Her comment and the discussion that followed, our voices rising in volume as we carried on down Star Street, stayed in my mind on the way home and over the weeks that have followed. The questions that arise from discussions of political solutions and decolonization are many, and since publishing some thoughts on decolonization two years ago, the practical questions remain, nagging to be answered — or at the very least, put to words and shared.

As my friend astutely noted, the common slogans representing what has seemingly become the international leftist vision for Palestine's future can be boiled down to a few, vague catchphrases: "one-state solution," "one democratic state," "equal rights for all," and the like. There is significant scholarly engagement with this concept as well — academic treatises on the need for a binational approach, Omar Barghouti's emphasis on "equality" over separation, and the ever-present lamentations that the two-state solution is dead. Still, there is no shortage of liberal organizing spaces in the West in which these fuzzy, imprecise calls for a one-state solution are bandied about without tackling the difficult questions that come with them. For example, who makes up the "all" in "equal rights for all"? What does it mean to be "equals" when one group of people has built their collection of rights and privileges by stripping them from others? Furthermore, do settlers who have freshly arrived from the United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, or the United States have the same rights as Palestinians who will return from languishing in Lebanon's refugee camps for almost 80 years? Do Israelis have collective rights? Do Palestinians? Who controls the military? What is the economic arrangement of the state? Do Israelis have to return more than 100 years of looted wealth, land, and resources, and if so, to whom? What will the process of unmaking their settler status look like? For those of us who understand anti-Zionism as a necessary form of decolonization, the question of recent settlers — dual citizens who arrived from the United States, Australia, and Europe — is not ambiguous. Historical decolonial movements in Algeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and elsewhere recognized that dismantling settler-colonial structures required the return of settlers to their metropolises. This was not punitive but necessary as it facilitated breaking the material and ideological infrastructure of colonialism, establishing legal precedents for indigenous sovereignty, and creating the political conditions for genuine self-determination.



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Allowing settlers to remain unchallenged preserves the very power asymmetries that decolonization seeks to dismantle. At the same time, for settlers arriving from settler colonies like Canada and the United States, is the just response to send them packing back to their more established settler-colonial points of origin? This brings us to the question at the heart of my friend's outburst: who wants to be made to live and share space with genocidares? In Bethlehem, this is not a theoretical question. Already having been separated from Al-Quds (Jerusalem) artificially, by the wall and checkpoints, villages and towns surrounding Bethlehem city are also set to be annexed by Israel, with a census of their residents reportedly beginning in the new year. In September, Zionist forces installed new barriers to separate Beit Sahour, immediately southeast of Bethlehem city, from Dar Salah and cities in the north of the West Bank by disrupting the primary road. Now, a settlement has been approved in Oush Ghrab, only a short distance from Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. As Bethlehem becomes more physically isolated from other Palestinian cities, while its residents are also prevented from reaching the lands occupied since 1948 by Israel's colonial permit regime, and settlements grow closer and closer to the city, the violence of liberal notions of "integration" is foreboding. Under Zionism, integration is not a peaceful affair. The presence of Jewish settlers in Palestine is inherently violent, and until now has been characterized by the continual elimination of Palestinians for the purposes of replacement. The questionable desirability of living alongside settlers as "equals" is also amplified by the conversations happening about Palestinians and around Palestinians by self-described Jewish anti-Zionists, though often without much thought for Palestinians themselves. Just over a month ago, Jewish Currents published a podcast episode titled "Confronting the Anti-Zionist Right," focusing on the expressed rejection of Zionism by white supremacist characters such as Nick Fuentes, Candace Owens, Tucker Carlson, and the like, and discussing the history and politics of the commentators' antisemitism. There is very little in the way of discussion about what anti-Zionist values should be, though the host acknowledged that "we are in a competition with the right for what kind of anti-Zionism we're

going to practice, what it's going to look like, and what, at core, its values are." The podcast episode mimics a recent talk in Jerusalem by Peter Beinart, Jewish Currents' editor-at-large. Beinart also gestured at the growing influence of characters like Carlson in the movement away from Zionism by some elements on the US right, and laudably noted the long ties Jewish American institutions have made to white supremacy and its agents. However, Beinart and the podcasters frame these moves (both Carlson's proclaimed anti-Zionism and the history of collaboration with white supremacists) as dangerous for Jewish people, and fail at what are arguably the more important endeavors beyond this: 1) identifying the responsibility of Jewish institutions and individuals who do not wish to maintain ties to white supremacy and Zionism, and 2) how any of this affects Palestinians, who have long been the victims of both white and Jewish supremacists. Both Beinart and the podcast contributors evade essential questions underlying the reality of the Jewish institutional investment in Zionism: how do we begin to calculate the responsibility of, say, Jewish Federations in the harm they have done to Palestinians by funding Zionist projects? Can organizations that are materially committed to colonization and genocide be reformed? Not even three months ago, the Jewish Federations of North America collaborated with the Jewish Agency to leverage \$130 million in loans to Israeli "reservists," but only those who had served more than 200 days since October 7, 2023. What do these investments in the ongoing violence against Palestinians mean for civic organizations and other "social justice" groups that receive money from these Jewish Federations? Do organizations bear some responsibility for the politics of their funders, whose contributions to their "social justice efforts" may serve as a form of philanthropy-washing, or a smokescreen to distract from a more significant and consistent support for the violence of maintaining this colony in Palestine? Most importantly, figures like Beinart and the Jewish Currents podcasters offer no framework for dismantling structural violence, no mechanisms to prevent the liberal modes of colonization embedded in one-state proposals, and no meaningful centering of Palestinian voices in determining Palestine's future. In

the case of the podcasters, by offering nothing new to consider, they have rendered anti-Zionism as a marketing technique, wholly divorced from theories of justice. Their visions remain abstract, untethered from the material realities of power — outside of where power intersects with antisemitism. Palestinians, meanwhile, need no theoretical education on the imperialism latent in arrangements that promise equality while preserving asymmetry — they have the lived experience of the Oslo Accords, which offered the language of peace and statehood while entrenching occupation, fragmenting territory, and outsourcing the policing of Palestinians to Palestinians themselves. One-state proposals that fail to address land return, settler removal, and the redistribution of power risk becoming the new "Oslo peace process" with different branding. Data shows Palestinians fully understand that Zionism and imperialism can be repackaged within the one-state framework. October 2025 polling from PCPSR reveals the complexity of Palestinian political preferences. While 53% oppose a two-state solution outright, when asked to choose among options, 47% still prefer two states based on 1967 borders — compared to just 12% favoring a single state with equality between Palestinians and Israelis. Opposition increases sharply (to 59%) when a two-state framework is tied to Arab normalization with Israel. Meanwhile, Palestinians show stronger enthusiasm for joining international organizations (73%), unarmed popular resistance

(54%), and dissolving the Palestinian Authority (45%) than for abandoning two-state advocacy in favor of one-state organizing (27%). The apparent paradox — opposing two states while also not embracing integration — reflects deeper currents. For many Palestinians, a single state premised on "equality" with Israelis is not liberation but continued entanglement with a society that has perpetrated and largely supported their dispossession. Separation offers something integration cannot: sovereignty, self-determination, and distance from those who have participated in or were indifferent to ethnic cleansing. There is also justified skepticism that equality within a single polity is achievable given the power asymmetries, institutional racism, and demographic anxieties that define Israeli political culture. For Palestinians emerging from genocide, the desire may be less for coexistence than for safety, autonomy, and the space to rebuild without their survival dependent on Israeli consent. My dear friend's passionate comments on Star Street were not close-minded or lacking in political imagination — rather, they were, as the data suggests, widely shared opinions. The international left's embrace of "one democratic state" as the self-evident endpoint of Palestinian liberation often fails to account for what Palestinians themselves wish to preserve: not just rights in the abstract, but a way of life, a cultural fabric, cities and villages that remain theirs. Bethlehem under a single state would not simply gain Jewish residents; it would be subjected to the same forces of settlement, capital, and demographic engineering that have transformed every inch of land Israel has controlled. The slogans sound liberatory, but they can obscure a kind of erasure dressed in the language of equality. What my friend articulated — and what the polling reflects — is a desire not merely for political arrangement but for protection: of home, of identity, of the right to continue existing as Palestinians in Palestine, without that existence being contingent on integration with those who have sought to eliminate these things.

The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.

The left's view of Palestine's future often reduces to vague terms like "one-state solution" or "equal rights for all," but few address the tough questions they raise, especially: how can Palestinians live with those who carried out the Gaza genocide? Separation offers something integration cannot: sovereignty, self-determination, and distance from those who have participated in or were indifferent to ethnic cleansing.

The writing on a roadblock in Bethlehem near the separation barrier, built by Israel along and within the West Bank, reads, "This is illegally occupied land." ● [travelsofadam.com](#)

