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## Palestine in Deleuze

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## **Abstract**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s French philosopher Gilles Deleuze authored a series of articles in which he reflected on the formation of the state of Israel and its subsequent dispossession and colonisation of Palestine and the Palestinian people. Naming the state of Israel as a colonial state, Deleuze's under-discussed texts connect Israel's programme of colonisation to that of United States and the persisting dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In so doing, this article argues, Deleuze offers an analysis of the development of capitalism that takes seriously its relation to colonial violence. Having called attention to Deleuze's writings on Palestine, the conclusion of this article asks why these texts have been marginalized by Deleuze scholars. It asks how we might think of this marginalization as contributing to the subjugation of Palestinian life, and as indicative of how relations of colonialism structure Western social theory.

They have never been given any other choice than to surrender unconditionally. They have  
been offered only death.

(Deleuze, 1978: 23)

They shall not pass as long as there's life in our bodies.

(Darwish, 1982: 12)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Gilles Deleuze authored a series of articles and interviews in which he elaborated upon the formation of the state of Israel and its attendant dispossession and colonisation of Palestine and the Palestinian people (1978; 1982; 1983; 1988). For Deleuze (1983: 31), the creation of the state of Israel was “clearly a matter of colonization,” but one that differed from previous and ongoing colonial projects. Rather than the exploitation of colonized peoples for economic gains, and unidentical to settler colonies that have sought to exterminate their indigenous populations, Deleuze suggested that the state of Israel’s actions were tantamount to “genocide, but one in which physical extermination remains subordinated to geographical evacuation: being only Arabs in general, the surviving Palestinians must go and merge with the other Arabs” (1983: 31). Differing from common uses, Deleuze deployed the term genocide to articulate the systematic colonial erasure of the history and geography of Palestine, and the displacement of the Palestinian people, more commonly referred to as ‘ethnic cleansing’ (see Gordon and Ram, 2016; Pappé, 2007). This dispossessive logic of settler colonialism that Deleuze describes functions, as Edward Said writes, to “not only deny the Palestinians a historical presence as a collectivity, but also to imply that they were not a longstanding people who had a long-standing peoplehood” (2000: 187). Going on to situate Palestinian dispossession in relation to the ongoing colonization of Native north American life, Deleuze’s writings on Palestine de-exceptionalize Israeli settler

colonialism, drawing attention to a global matrix of colonial violence (1983; 1982).

Published in variety of outlets and formats – Mahmoud Darwish’s Palestinian literary journal *al Karmel* (Deleuze, 1988); French newspapers (Deleuze, 1978); in conversation with Palestinian intellectual Elias Sanbar (Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982); and in *Revue D’etudes Palestiniennes* (Journal of Palestinian Studies) (Deleuze, 1983) - Deleuze’s writings on Palestine move between an analysis of the formation and development of the state of Israel, and an examination of capitalism’s reliance on settler colonialism as a means of its global development. Indeed, Deleuze suggests that the mode of capitalist production that Israeli and north American settler colonialism embody, rather than being based solely on a logic of internal exploitation, “is a matter of emptying a territory of its people in order to make a leap forward, even if it means making them into a workforce elsewhere” (1982: 26, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982)<sup>i</sup>. Furthermore, in continually affirming the existence of the Palestinian people as a population with claims to territory, Deleuze articulates a field of life affirming Palestinian resistance. Indeed, from the confines of settler colonial occupation, Deleuze suggests that Palestinians emanate the “profusion of possibles at each moment” (1982: 29, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982).

Interestingly, despite Deleuze’s writings on Palestine offering a critique of the Zionist state building project in line with many prominent analyses (see Said, 1979a; Pappé, 2007; Wolfe, 2006; Sanbar; 2001), they have not been met with the same level of engagement as his other written works, nor have they garnered the same level of attention as the political writings and activities of Deleuze’s contemporaries<sup>ii</sup>. Indeed, while the contemporary and ongoing canonization of Deleuze’s thought has been extensive<sup>iii</sup>, in very few of these studies are his writings on Palestine broached or explored in any depth, nor is the connection

between Deleuze and prominent Palestinian intellectuals and activists, such as Elias Sanbar and Mahmoud Darwish<sup>iv</sup>, examined. Importantly, this is not to ignore or erase the wide range of scholarship that has applied Deleuzian concepts – nomadology, war machine, rhizome, assemblage, line of flight - to the study of Israeli settler colonialism (see for example Svirsky, 2010, 2015, 2017; Al-Nakib, 2014; Al-Zobaidi, 2009; Shihade, 2015; May, 2008). Rather, it is to point to the specific lack of attention and critical engagement that Deleuze’s writings on Palestine have been met with.

In what follows I reflect on Deleuze’s writings on colonized Palestine, contributing to the ongoing investigations of Deleuze’s archive, retelling a radical moment in Deleuze’s history. The first half of this article collects these writings, offering an in-depth reading of these works. Here I examine how, thought together, Deleuze’s writings on Palestine articulate the dispossessive logic at the heart of settler colonialism, importantly tying this logic to a global system of capital accumulation and indigenous dispossession. Such an analysis positions itself against certain contemporary analyses of Deleuze which, in divorcing his philosophical writings from the political scenes in which he was engaged, have articulated Deleuze as an a-political thinker whose apparent abstracting works finds no grounding in the modern world (see Zizek, 2004; Hallward, 2006)<sup>v</sup>. Against these de-politicising readings, I suggest that a careful consideration of Deleuze’s writings on Palestine demonstrate his attentiveness to political struggle, an attentiveness that emerged, in part, through an engagement with indigenous scholars<sup>vi</sup>.

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in Deleuze’s anti-humanist politics, with scholars harnessing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) critique of Man in order to dismantle the anthropocentrism that structures modern life and thought (see for example Lippit, 2000;

Parikka, 2010; Selbach and Loo, 2015; Laurie, 2015; Ansell-Pearson, 1999; Colebrook, 2014; Grosz, 2008). Here scholars have sought to engender the “becoming nonhuman of the human, through becoming-animal, becoming-vegetable, becoming-molecule” (Roffe and Stark, 2015: 11). The final section of this article offers an alternative take on Deleuze’s anti-humanism. Rather than a focus on the non-human, I suggest that Deleuze’s writings on Palestine reveal the fallacies and violences of the category of Western Man through an affirmation of the Palestinian humans who have been “cast out” from Mans colonial orderings (McKittrick, 2014: 3).

Importantly, in drawing attention to Deleuze’s writings on Palestine, I do not claim that they offer new significant insights into what Edward Said has termed the ‘Question of Palestine’ (1979a). Rather, in highlighting these works the dual aim of this article is to reflect on a set of Deleuze’s political writings that remain under-explored and to consider the politics of knowledge production in contemporary social theory. On the latter point, in calling attention to Deleuze’s overlooked writings on Palestine, the conclusion of this article asks after the epistemic evacuation of these texts on Palestine from popular understandings of Deleuze’s work, asking: In what ways is the evacuation of these texts from popular take-ups of Deleuze, in favour of what Alexander Weheliye has called a “quagmire of orthodox Deleuzianism, which insists on transforming Deleuze into a great thinker by reading him exclusively within the western European philosophical tradition” (2014: 47), indicative of the ways in which colonial relations continue to determine the endeavours of contemporary Deleuzian social theory? And how might we think the silence surrounding Deleuze’s writings on Palestine as contributing to the ongoing methodological and social erasure of Palestinian life and history that Deleuze himself so forcibly critiques?

## Settler Colonialism and the Logics of Disappearance

Deleuze's writings on Palestine, while offering a damning critique of the state of Israel, begin with a recognition and foregrounding of the holocaust as a tragedy that warrants reparation. But for Deleuze, the founding of a Jewish state on already inhabited land was not an ethical reparative politic. Deleuze opens his short 1988 essay, *Wherever They Can See It*, by stating that, "Europe did not start paying its infinite debt to the Jews; it rather made another people, an innocent one – the Palestinians – pay back" (1988: 34). Deleuze's call for a reparative post-Holocaust politic is further elaborated in his earlier 1983 essay, *The Grandeur of Yasser Arafat*, where he argues:

The United States and Europe owed reparation to the Jews. And they made a people, about whom the least that could be said is that they had no hand in and were singularly innocent of any holocaust and hadn't even heard of it, pay this reparation. (1983: 30)

Importantly situating his critique of the formation of the state of Israel in an imperial and global frame, recognizing the role that Europe and the U.S. played in creating it, Deleuze affirms the reality of the Holocaust, but simultaneously refuses to grant the state of Israel legitimacy. Deleuze's move to unsettle and disrupt the founding of the state of Israel is an important one given that, as Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian has argued, "in many ways, the foundational violence of the Jewish state remains sacred and untouchable" (2016: 24). Indeed, while dominant narrations and conceptualizations of Palestine frame the context as 'Israel/Palestine' or 'Jews' versus 'Arabs', a narration that, I would suggest, already assumes the existence of the state of Israel in Palestine, Deleuze's writings importantly unsettle the

foundational violences, highlighting the “injustices”, “acts of violence”, “illogicalities” and “false reasoning’s,” that brought Israel into being (Deleuze 1983: 30)<sup>vii</sup>.

Thus, rather than framing the ongoing colonization, blockage and occupation of Palestine as an act of warfare being committed by an always already existing nation state, Deleuze intricately details the founding violences that have been brought to bear against the indigenous population of Palestine, marking them as co-constitutive with Israel’s persisting existence. Documenting these violences, Deleuze elaborates:

The Zionists have built the state of Israel with the recent past of their suffering and upon the unforgettable European horror – but also upon the suffering of this other people and with this other people’s stones. The Irgun was dubbed terrorist not only because it used to blast the British headquarters<sup>viii</sup>, but also because it also wiped out entire villages, such as Deir Yasin<sup>ix</sup> ... destroying villages, blowing up houses, exiling inhabitants, assassinating people: this is the toll that a horrifying history has unravelled at the expense of a new innocent people. (1988: 34)

Deleuze’s line of argumentation, which chimes with the analyses of numerous critics of Israeli settler colonialism (see for example Graham, 2002; Jabary Salamanca, 2015; Abujidi, 2014; Weizman, 2012), draws attention to the ways in which the project of the state of Israel rests upon the expulsion of the native inhabitants of Palestine and the infrastructural destruction of their land. The forced removal or displacement of the Palestinian population is central to logics of Zionist settler colonialism, allowing the territory to appear as empty and awaiting modernisation, at once naturalising and legitimating the Israeli state building



project. Indeed, as Deleuze argues, the destruction of native lands and removal of native peoples outlined above, functions to deny “the very fact of the Palestinian people... from the start Israel has never concealed its goal: to empty the Palestinian territory. And even better, to act as if the Palestinian territory was empty, always destined for Zionists” (Deleuze, 1983: 31)<sup>x</sup>.

The connection that Deleuze draws between Palestinian disappearance and Zionist becoming is predicated on attempts to disremember Palestine and through the forced externalisation of the Palestinian people. Deleuze alongside Felix Guattari elsewhere charts the territorialising process by which State apparatus force everything under their control, operating through a logic of capture (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 495; see also Patton, 2000: 113). For Deleuze and Guattari, it is through this often militarised and violent (re)territorialisation that a State majority model is produced, consolidated and legitimated, maintained by institutional and structural state violence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 494-495). The majority model, here the Zionist social order, is not defined by the size of its geography or population, but rather by its hegemonic and normative status; “what defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it’s a becoming, a process” (Deleuze, 1973: 173). Producing its ideal governable subject – Jewish, modern, European-facing – the Zionist state machine folds out of land and life that which is incompatible, figuratively and materially producing the Palestinian population as an exterior diasporic minority; “[Israel] will act as if the expelled Palestinians came from outside” (Deleuze, 1983: 31).

Thus, for Deleuze, the state of Israel, brought into being through the co-constitutive

disappearance of Palestine and minoritization of the Palestinian people, emerges as a colonial project that operates via the codification and valuing of life, exteriorizing that which is deemed incompatible with the settler colonial social order. Here the landscape of Palestine is figured as a deserted desert awaiting Zionist redemption, and the subsequent transfer of the Palestinian population into refugee camps, exile, zones of blockade and occupation, both allows for, and is justified by, their profiling as ‘outsider terrorists’ with no claim to their homeland, at once naturalizing the existence of the state of Israel; “Arab villages had to disappear... [Israel] cleansed themselves of their own terrorism by treating Palestinians as terrorists from the outside” (1983: 30). This codification and folding out of life which, while not explicitly described by Deleuze as racialized<sup>xi</sup>, deploys identity formations and tropes commonly understood as racializing<sup>xii</sup> – ‘terrorist’, ‘outsider’, ‘Arab’ – leading to a discourse by which, for Deleuze, “Israel’s actions are considered legitimate reprisals (even if they appear disproportionate), while those of the Palestinians are treated exclusively as terrorist crimes. And an Arab death has neither the same value or the same weight as an Israeli death” (1978: 23).

Deleuze’s conceptualisation of Palestinian life as undergoing forced externalization could be read as fatalist, as offering no space for resistance. Yet within Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of State territorialisation and the production of majority and minority models they importantly assert that ‘lines of flight’ are produced, existing in minority spaces with ‘no model’, which can provide the foundation for a different politics existing outside of and challenging the hegemonic order (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Before going on to explore the spaces for anti-colonial resistance located within Deleuze’s writings, I now turn to explore how, rather than describing Zionist settler colonialism as a one-off singular tradition, the Israeli colonial project is situated within a global framework.

Here, I firstly examine how Deleuze coupled Israeli colonialism with the U.S.'s settler colonial project and, secondly, how this coupling allowed him to describe a development in modern capital, one that was predicated on the continued expansion of the West's frontiers, simultaneously pushing populations produced and coded as minor out of the folds of life.

### **Israeli Settler Colonialism & Global Capital**

As scholars have noted (Said, 2000, 1979b; Kanaaneh, 2002; Bass, 2003; Lloyd and Pulido, 2010), the U.S.'s overt support for the Zionist state building project has been key to Israel's continued naturalization and legitimation. For Deleuze, one arena in which this support emerged was through the U.S.'s continual articulation of the Palestinian peoples as Arab, a discourse that functions to deny Palestinians a historical presence as a population, eradicating both their identity as a collectivity and their ties to a homeland. As Deleuze argued, "it is important to maintain the fallacy that Palestinians are Arabs who came from elsewhere, and could very well return there" (1988: 34)<sup>xiii</sup>. Elaborating on the role that the U.S. played in perpetuating this discourse, Deleuze continues:

The Americans made of Israel a super-production in the Hollywood manner: they conceived of the land as a *terra nullius* awaiting the arrival of the ancient Hebrews, its only occupants being a few Arab settlers keeping guard over the place's sleeping stones. In this way, they are pushing the Palestinians towards oblivion. They want them to acknowledge the legal existence of Israel, while the Israelis disavow the palpable reality of the Palestinians. (1988: 34)

The U.S.'s re-coding of the Palestinian peoples as 'Arab settlers', and the pushing of

this new identity onto the Palestinian people, rather than grounded in historical fact, takes on a life administering function - 'pushing the Palestinians towards oblivion' - in the service of naturalizing a newly established settler colony. In conversation with the Palestinian intellectual and diplomat Elias Sanbar, both Deleuze and Sanbar argued that the process of Zionist colonisation was not dissimilar to that of U.S. settler colonialism; "our [Palestinians] one and only role constituted in disappearing. In this it is certain that the history of the establishment of Israel reproduces the process which gave birth to the United States of America" (Sanbar, 1982: 27, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982). A recognition that allowed both Deleuze and Sanbar to argue that the U.S.'s unwavering support for Israel and continued re-staging of Israeli colonialism as a divine return, rather than coincidental, is politically motivated by a shared history of settler colonialism. Referring back with to his engagement with Sanbar's work, a reference that signals Deleuze's sustained engagement with thinkers from the global south<sup>xiv</sup>, Deleuze argued:

The complicity of the United States with Israel does not arise solely from the Zionist lobby. Elias Sanbar has shown clearly how the United States rediscovered in Israel an aspect of its own history: the extermination of the Indians which, there as well, was only in part directly physical. It was a matter of emptying, as if there had never been Indians except in the ghettos, which were made for them as immigrants from inside. In many respects, the Palestinians are the new Indians, the Indians of Israel. (1983: 31)

In coupling the plight of the Native peoples of north America with that of Palestinians, Deleuze points to a global matrix of settler colonial violence and a shared terrain

of native solidarity<sup>xv</sup>. Similar to his analysis of the logics of native dispossession and disappearance in Palestine outlined above, Deleuze argues that American settler colonialism is animated via a productive process of folding native subjects out of land and life.

In invoking this shared U.S.-Israeli settler colonial history, Deleuze makes clear that, rather than motivated purely in a desire for territorial expansion, the ongoing north American and Israeli state building projects represent a key facet of modern capital. Arguing that the violent externalization of the Palestinian population signals a “movement within capitalism,” Deleuze elaborates:

Taking a people on their own territory and making them work, exploiting them, in order to accumulate a surplus; that’s what is ordinarily called a colony. Now, on the contrary, it is a matter of emptying a territory of its people in order to make a leap forward, even if it means making them into a workforce elsewhere. The history of Zionism and Israel, like that of America, happened the second way: how to make an empty space, how to throw out a people? (1982: 26, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982)

In articulating two differing logics of capitalist development, both rooted in relations of colonialism, Deleuze’s analysis makes an important move. While Deleuze takes the newly founded state of Israel and the United States as sites of analysis, his coupling of their colonial economies asks us to simultaneously transcend the nation state as a unit of analysis, unearthing the regimes of capital – colonial economies of dispossession, frontier expansion, and colonial-ordered divisions of labor – which structure a trajectory in the development of

the capitalist world system. Elaborating on this analysis in his 1983 essay, *The Grandeur of Yasser Arafat*, Deleuze argues:

Marxist analysis reveals the two complimentary movements of capitalism: constantly to impose the limits, within which it develops and exploits its own system; and always to push these limits further back, to exceed them in order to begin its own foundation once again on a larger and more intense scale. Pushing back limits was the act of American capitalism, the American dream, taken up by Israel and the dream of Greater Israel on Arab territory, and on the backs of Arabs. (1983: 32)

Here, drawing on Marxist analysis, which stresses the centrality of dispossession to capital accumulation, Deleuze importantly draws attention to the relations of colonialism that underscore these modes of dispossession. Thought together with his analysis of the dispossessive logics of settler colonial erasure, Deleuze draws attention to the ways in which the development of the capitalist world system has been constituted through the creation of settler colonies, redrawing social and spatial boundaries through both the expansion of frontiers – the deployment of *terra nullius* – and through the creation of enclosures – ghettos, refugee camps, reservations. Contrary to many analyses of the history of capitalism which, as Walter Rodney (1972) famously argued, often couple colonial capitalist accumulation with progress and development, Deleuze’s writings on Palestine rupture any such teleological assertion, underscoring the concomitant logics of dispossession and violence that give capital accumulation its modern force. Thus, while Deleuze’s comparison of Israeli and U.S. colonial capitalism fails to unpick the many differences between the two projects<sup>xvi</sup>, his analysis necessitates the acknowledgement of colonialism as a central organizing principle of

Israeli and American markets and capital flows.

Following his writings on Palestine, Deleuze went on to outline what he termed ‘societies of control’, developing Foucault’s concept of ‘disciplinary power’ in order to account for the ways that “technological evolution” had “mutated capitalism” (1992: 6). Arguing that the spaces of “enclosure” are in “crisis” (1992: 3), and that “societies of control... are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies” (1992: 4), Deleuze located the shift from discipline to control in technological and scientific capitalist production. As Deleuze explains;

Societies of control operate with machine... computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose passive one is piracy and the introduction of viruses... this technological evolution must be... a mutation of capitalism... in the present situation, capitalism is no longer involved in production, which it often relegates to the Third World. Capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosion of shanty towns and ghettos. (1992: 6)

This technological capitalist intensification is traceable throughout Deleuze’s analysis of Zionist warfare. Noting that the “Israeli intelligence is much admired by the entire world” (1988: 28), Deleuze argues that the models of colonial control and repression being developed by the Israeli state are exportable and globally desirable. Writing about the Israeli control society, Deleuze elaborates;

The Israel-Palestine model is the determinant in current problems of terrorism, even in Europe. The worldwide understanding among states and the organization of a world police force with worldwide jurisdiction, currently underway, necessarily lead to an expansion in which more and more people are considered virtual ‘terrorists’... Today, the state of Israel leads the experimentation. It is establishing a model of repression that will be converted for other countries, adapted by other countries. There is a great deal of continuity in its politics... It transformed the invitation to withdraw from the occupied territories into the duty to establish colonies there. Currently it considers the deployment of the international force in South Lebanon an excellent idea... on the condition that this force is ordered to transform the region into a surveillance zone or a controlled desert. (1978: 24)

Thus, what we see emerging out of Deleuze’s writings on Palestine is an analysis that entwines settler colonialism with the emergence and proliferation of new regimes colonial capital accumulation and modalities of surveillance and control.<sup>xvii</sup> Yet, despite Deleuze’s writings articulating a forceful, perhaps fatalist, critique of Zionism’s violent and accumulative logics, contained within his writings is an affirmation of the resistive possibilities of Palestinian life. As the final section of this essay will now go on to explore, against the “apocalyptic history” (Deleuze 1982: 29, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982) that Palestinian’s have been met with, Deleuze articulates ongoing Palestinian existence and resistance as a creative force that necessarily challenges the regimes of colonial capital and dispossession that structure their disappearance.



## **Palestinian-ness as Human**

In detailing the ongoing dispossession of Palestine and the Palestinian people, and linking this instance of settler colonialism to a global system of capital, Deleuze's writings reveal the productive interplay between settler colonial regimes and modern capitalist advancement. Here, rather than the *Nakba*, the term used to name the Zionist military expulsion of an estimated 800,000 Palestinians from their homeland in 1948 (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2016), appearing as a one-off event, Deleuze's writings transform the *Nakba* into an ongoing structural machine, or what Laleh Khalili has called a "habit of destruction" (2014). In so doing, Deleuze's writings stress the inability of the modern world order to account for any ontology of Palestinian-ness, marking their identity as co-extensive with death: "They have never been given any other choice than to surrender unconditionally. They have been offered only death" (Deleuze, 1978: 23).

Yet, in unleashing his critique of Israel's settler colonial social order, Deleuze's writings affirm the humanness of Palestinian life, an affirmation that at once demands a reconfiguring or destruction of the category of the human, given that Palestinians have been placed on the "underside" of its racial and colonial orderings (McKittrick, 2004: 3-4). With reference to an article that appeared in the French-Palestinian literary magazine *Revue d'études palestiniennes (Journal of Palestine Studies)*<sup>xviii</sup>, Deleuze writes: "to Israel's arrogant formula, 'We are not a people like others,' the Palestinians have not stopped responding with the cry that was invoked in the first issue of the *Revue d'études palestiniennes*: 'we are a people like others, we only want to be that'" (1983: 32). This simultaneous de-exceptionalization of Israeli Jewish life and affirmation of Palestinian humanness disrupts the denial of humanity that structures Palestinian existence. In harnessing the human as the

central object in the affirmation of Palestinian life, Deleuze opposes the minoritizing tactics – refugee, exile, terrorist – that conscript Palestinians to the realm of specialist, minor or particular subjects, a realm that would only propagate the status of Palestinian life as beyond the grasp of the modern human. Rather, Deleuze’s writings on persisting Palestinian existence and/as resistance - which, he argues, “bears witness to a new consciousness” - concretely affirms Palestinian life as a status that opposes or transforms the colonizing assemblages that define the sociopolitical and economic modern world order (Deleuze, 1982: 25, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982).

Deleuze’s affirmation of Palestinian life may at first appear as at odds with his well-known anti-humanism, often understood as “his commitment to the *univocity* of being, which places the human alongside all other beings... [and] insists on the radical and foundational equality of all beings: televisions, earthworms, stones, pineapples, as well as human beings” (Roffe and Stark, 2015: 10). Indeed, Deleuze’s commitment to the destruction of the category of the human has taken many Deleuzian theorists beyond or outside the category of Man, focusing instead on “pre-human or even non-human elements that compose the web of forces, intensities and encounters” (Braidotti, 2006: 41) (see, for example, Selbach and Loo, 2015; Laurie, 2015; Stark, 2015; Ansell-Pearson, 1999; Colebrook, 2014; Grosz, 2008). Yet within his writings on Palestine, rather than a focus on the nonhuman, Deleuze reveals the fallacies and violences of the category of Man via an affirmation of those humans expelled from Man’s colonial orderings. A life affirming politics that serves as a reminder that the limits of category of the human are formed not just through the subordination of non-human life, but also through the rendering of certain human life as in-human.

Deleuze’s affirmation of the ‘ordinary’ human-ness of Palestinian life chimes with re-

figurings of the category of the human through the praxis of Blackness (see for example Hartman, 1997; McKittrick 2006, 2014; Moten 2013; Weheliye 2014; Wynter and McKittrick, 2014; Hartman 1997). Here, in differing ways, scholars have sought to dismember Man through Blackness, declining the invitation to enter the orderings of Western Man and exploring other ‘genres of being human’ (McKittrick, 2014). In her exploration of Sylvia Wynter’s oeuvre, for example, Katherine McKittrick asks about “the ways in which those currently inhabiting the underside of the category of Man-as-human—under our current epistemological regime, those cast out as impoverished and colonized and undesirable and lacking reason—can, and do, provide a way to think about being human anew” (2014: 3). In doing so, McKittrick asks that we disfigure the subject of ‘Man-as-human’ via the incorporation of the colonial and racist histories that have birthed this figure, an invitation that necessarily brings “being human as praxis into our purview, which envisions the human as verb, as alterable, as relational, and necessarily dislodges the naturalization of dysselection” (2014: 7).

In Deleuze’s (1979a, 1983, 1988) writings on Palestine, Palestinian-ness similarly emerges not as a cultural or biological descriptor, a noun to describe a marginal group, but as a verb, one that articulates Palestinian-ness as a state of being human. Writing in a 1988 edition of *al Karmel*, a Palestinian literary journal published in the Arabic language in Ramallah, Palestine, Deleuze harnesses the ‘underside’ of Man on which Palestinians stand:

Occupation, endless occupation: the hurled stones come from inside,  
from the Palestinian people, as a reminder that somewhere in the world –  
no matter how small it is – the debt has become reversed. The  
Palestinians throw their stones, the living stones of their land. Men are

born out of these stones. No one can pay his debt by murders, one, two, three, seven, ten daily, or by striking deals with anyone other than the people directly concerned. The others may choose to eschew their responsibility, but every dead person calls on the living. The Palestinians have struck deep into the soul of Israel. They are at work on it fathoming and traversing it every day. (Deleuze, 1988: 35)

In restoring Palestinians to their land through the criminal<sup>xix</sup> ‘living stones’ they hurl at the Israeli occupying forces, Deleuze reanimates a field of Palestinian land and life. Producing what he might elsewhere term a ‘line of flight’ – a mode of acting against the dominant system, one that allows for the activation of minor life - Deleuze reanimates Palestinian stones, the rubble of their homeland, and marks these stones as coextensive with modalities of Palestinian life – ‘Men are born out of these stones’. In so doing, Deleuze pertinently reminds us that Palestine and Palestinians live on in spite of, and against, the forces of Zionist capture and erasure. This living on refuses death as the condition of Palestinian life – ‘every dead person calls on the living’ – and entails the production and proliferation of new modes of being. Indeed, Deleuze’s affirmation of Palestinian-ness, his desire to allow them “to become what they are, that is, a completely ‘normal’ people” (1982: 29, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982), demands that we see the inadequacies of pre-existing framings of human life. Or, as Deleuze poetically suggests, a resistive Palestinian-ness that produces a “multiplicity of the possible, the profusion of possibles at each moment” (1982: 29, in Deleuze and Sanbar, 1982).

## **Conclusion**

Through an examination of Zionist colonialism, Deleuze’s writings on Palestine

importantly highlight the centrality of processes of settler colonial dispossession to the formation and maintenance of the capitalist world order. A set of processes that separate bodies out into hierarchized groups, creating a supremacist classificatory system that marks certain populations for minoritized disappearance. Yet, the force of Deleuze's writings on Palestine is to show that these historical injustices of displacement, domination and dispossession are not overcome solely through their documentation. Rather, in harnessing this realm of the 'underside' of Man that the deemed expendable Palestinian population inhabit, Deleuze asks that we think the possibilities of life that emerge when we take the humanness of being Palestinian as praxis (McKittrick, 2014).

Yet, despite Deleuze's affirmation of Palestinian life in the face of their ongoing minoritizing disappearance, his writings on Palestine are left largely unmentioned throughout his wider oeuvre<sup>xx</sup>, and have not been subjected to the same celebratory canonization as much of his other work. While an extensive tracing of the lines of relation between Deleuze's anti-colonial writings and his popular philosophical work exceed the scope of this essay, my aim has been to begin to draw out the political commitments that may have influenced and shaped his broader work. With regards to their marginalisation within the Deleuze canon, I want to conclude by offering some thoughts on how this exclusion might be understood and, importantly, redressed. Indeed, given that, as Deleuze argues, histories of colonial domination and the persisting erasure of indigenous populations continue to structure the contemporary world, the lack of attention Deleuze's writings on Palestine have garnered presents an occasion for us to reconsider the ways that colonial structures of dispossession and erasure permeate contemporary scholarly endeavours.

Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's (1999) discussion of 'sanctioned ignorance', Rauna

Kuokkanen has named the silencing and marginalization of indigenous scholarship as ‘epistemic ignorance,’ a term that refers “to academic practices and discourses that enable the continued exclusion of other than dominant Western epistemic and intellectual traditions” (2008: 60). A framework of sanctioned epistemic ignorance importantly forces us to look beyond good faith suggestions of omission, which would leave Deleuze’s Palestine writings as perhaps unexplored by chance. Rather, both Spivak and Kuokkanen ask that we consider collective silencing and omission as connected to broader patterns of colonial domination and erasure, ones that posit particular texts, locations, peoples, and histories as marginal, specialist, or irrelevant to scholarly knowledge proper. A mode of collective silencing that, in the context of Deleuze’s writings on Palestine, cannot be thought as separate to the minoritization and erasure of Palestinian life that Deleuze so forcibly critiques. If these hierarchical and exclusionary practices of ‘epistemic ignorance’ have deemed Deleuze’s writings on Palestine, and the Palestinian people more broadly, as unworthy of study within the Western philosophical canon, how might we go about addressing this exclusion?

Rather than concluding by asking for the inclusion of the Deleuze’s Palestine writings in the Deleuzian canon, a gesture that would maintain an understanding of his wider oeuvre as not inflicted with an anti-colonial politic, I ask that we take seriously the ways in which an understanding of indigenous dispossession, as well as prolonged engagements with indigenous thinkers, may have been constitutive of Deleuze’s philosophy proper. A consideration that would necessitate an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of our present epistemic regimes in fully accounting for marginal forms of life. The challenge of thinking Palestine in Deleuze, then, is to think against the institutionalised colonial modes of production that operate to foreclose and deem insignificant modes of life that sit outside of the dominant worldview. A challenge that, from the position of Palestinian praxis,

simultaneously offers us the opportunity to think being human anew (McKittrick, 2014).

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<sup>i</sup> In foregrounding colonialism as central to the development of the capitalist system, Deleuze’s line of argumentation follows a long history of radical Black and third world intellectual thought, which includes the works of Eric Williams (1944), W. E. B. Du Bois (1935), Frantz Fanon (2005), and Anna Julia Cooper (1925).

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<sup>ii</sup> While Deleuze's writings on Palestine have not been subject to a mass reception, the political activities and writings of his French contemporaries have been met with analysis, celebration and critique. For example, Michel Foucault's involvement in the French prison struggle has been well documented and analysed (see Zurn and Dilts, 2016; Heiner, 2007; Elden, 2017; Welch, 2011; Brich, 2008; Hoffman, 2012); Jean-Paul Sartre's critique of France's settler colonialization of Algeria (Sartre, 2001) has been met with widespread engagement (see Butler, 2006; Le Sueur, 2005; Ahluwalia, 2010); Derrida's relationship to French colonial Algeria has been met with scholarly reflection (see Derrida, 1998; Morrissey, 1999; Cherif, 2008; Wise, 2009); Pierre Bourdieu's ethnographies of Algeria and the resulting concept of 'habitus' have been subject to critical reflection (Goodman and Silverstein, 2009; Loyal, 2009; Yacine, 2004); Lyotard's writings on anti-Semitism and Algeria have been published in an edited collection (Lyotard, 2002) and met with some reflection (Hiddleston, 2010). Here I exclusively note engagements with the political activities of Deleuze's white European contemporaries because anti-colonial and anti-racist politics were the central, not tangential, subject matter of the works of contemporaries such as Frantz Fanon (2005) and Edward Said (1979a, 1979b).

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, Flaxman, Gergory. (2011) *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Stivale, Charles. (2014) *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge; Storr, Merl and Nigianni, Chrysanthi. (2009) *Deleuze and Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Rizzo, Teresa. (2012) *Deleuze and Film: A Feminist Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic; Colebrook, Claire. (2001) *Gilles Deleuze*. London and New York: Routledge; May, Todd. (2005). *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Hardt, Michael. (1993) *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprentice in Philosophy*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Colman, Felicity. (2011) *Deleuze and Cinema: The Film*



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<sup>iv</sup> In 1982 Gilles Deleuze published an article in conversation with Elias Sanbar, a Palestinian poet, diplomat and historian, *The Indians of Palestine*. In 1988 Deleuze published an essay in *al-Karmel*, a Palestinian literary journal founded and edited by Palestine's national poet Mahmoud Darwish.

<sup>v</sup> The strongest allegation that Gilles Deleuze is apolitical comes from Slavoj Žižek (2004, emphasis authors own), who claims that, "it is crucial to note that *not a single one* of Deleuze's own texts is in any way directly political; Deleuze "in himself" is a highly elitist author, indifferent toward politics."

<sup>vi</sup> Alongside Deleuze's engagements with Elias Sanbar, he also corresponded with Algerian academic Réda Bensmaïa (Deleuze, 1997) and was influenced by George Jackson, an African-American activist and author (see Koerner, 2011).

<sup>vii</sup> Deleuze's unsettling of the founding of the state of Israel is part of a long tradition of anti-Zionist critique, which includes the works of Azoulay (2013), Sayegh (2012), Pappé (2004, 2011), and Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007).

<sup>viii</sup> Irgun was a Zionist organisation that operated in British Mandate Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel (Hoffman, 2011). They engaged in an aggressive programme of violence against both Palestinians and the British colonisers in order to ensure that Palestine would become a Jewish territory for solely Jewish use. The United Nations, British and U.S. governments labelled the organisation a terrorist organisation. After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Irgun were absorbed into the Israeli Defence Forces, which is still in operation today.

<sup>ix</sup> On the morning of April 9<sup>th</sup> 1948, Irgun invaded Deir Yassin, a Palestinian village that had

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roughly 750 inhabitants and, depending on the source, massacred 120-254 Palestinians. In addition, as Frances Hasso (2000: 497) has documented, “Women who remained alive were reportedly raped, and houses were looted and dynamited, gunned, and grenaded.”

<sup>x</sup> The assertion that Palestinian peoples and their land had to ‘disappear’ is one that was openly expressed by Zionist colonisers. Indeed, Theodore Herzl, a founding father of Zionism, wrote: “If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct” (cited in Wolfe, 2006: 388).

<sup>xi</sup> While Deleuze does not name race or racism as a central component of Zionist colonisation, in his conversation with Elias Sanbar, *The Indians of Palestine*, Sanbar names racism as central to the creation of Israel: “Here, the Zionist movement consistently played upon a racist vision which made Judaism the very basis of the expulsion, of the rejection of the other. This was decisively aided by the persecutions in Europe which, led by other racists, allowed them to find a confirmation of their own approach” (1982: 28).

<sup>xii</sup> See Fayez Sayegh (2012) for an analysis of the ways in which Zionist settler colonialism was organised around principals of racial supremacy.

<sup>xiii</sup> It is important to note the temporality of this claim. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the time that Deleuze was writing, Palestinians were commonly referred to as ‘Arabs’, and Zionist colonisation was referred to as the ‘Arab-Israeli conflict’ in international discourse. This labelling shifted someone in the late 1980s, during the onset of the first *Intifada*, where it became “clear in concrete ways that the “Arab”-Israeli conflict was fundamentally about the Palestinians” (Zaharna ,1995: 44).

<sup>xiv</sup> There is much evidence testifying to Deleuze and Sanbar’s close friendship. For example, Sanbar’s 2004 book, *Figures of the Palestinian*, is dedicated “to Gilles Deleuze, in homage to a perfect friendship”.

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<sup>xv</sup> There is a long history on Native American-Palestinian solidarity. For example, in 2016, Palestinian students in Gaza released a letter and accompanying video standing in solidarity with Standing Rock Sioux Native Americans and their fight against the US government plans to install an oil pipeline on their land, stating that ‘When I read your history, I can see myself and my people reflected in yours. I feel in my core that your fight is my fight, and that I am not alone in the battle against injustice’ (Norton, 2016).

<sup>xvi</sup> Deleuze’s brief analysis of U.S. and Israeli settler colonialism could be seen to conflate or elide the important differences between how the two projects have related differently to capital and labor. In the context of U.S. settler colonialism, Native genocide coupled with the importing of enslaved Africans meant that Native people were rarely used as cheap labor (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). While in Israel, prior to the Oslo Accords, Palestinians were commonly exploited for cheap labor (Shafir, 1989). See also Platt and Guido (1985), Solberg (1987), and Adelman (1994) for comparative analyses of these differing settler colonial economies.

<sup>xvii</sup> More recently, Joseph Pugliese (2015) and Eyal Weizman (2012) have documented the profitable industry generated as a result of Israel’s development of technologies of destruction and control.

<sup>xviii</sup> Elias Sanbar, the founder and Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, has noted that it was Gilles Deleuze who provided him with necessary connections to set up the journal (Halevi, 1994).

<sup>xix</sup> The Israeli penal code criminalizes Palestinian stone throwing as a felony. At the time of writing, the state of Israel is currently proposing to extend the current 2-year sentence for stone throwing to 20 years.

<sup>xx</sup> During the same period of Deleuze’s engagement with Palestine, he was in the process of co-authoring *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with Felix Guattari. While

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Palestine is not explicitly mentioned in the text, Francois Dosse (2010: 261) has noted that “the notion of a war machine is particularly appropriate for thinking about the stateless Palestinian people.” In addition, in Deleuze’s essay ‘Mediators’, which appeared in *Negotiations*, he briefly considered Palestine when discussing ‘minority discourses’. Here he asked, “was there ever a Palestinian people? Israel says no. Of course there was, but that’s not the point. The thing is, that once the Palestinians have been thrown out of their territory, then to the extent that they resist they enter the process of constituting a people... So, to the established fictions that are always rooted in a colonist’s discourse, we oppose a minority discourse, with mediators” (1997: 126).

### **Biographical note**

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