

**Recognition as Decolonization: An Intellectual-Cultural History of the Two-State Solution,  
1948-1988**

*Eli Osheroff*

On November 15, 1988, the Palestinian National Council of the PLO met in Algiers to declare the independence of the State of Palestine, in accordance with the 1947 partition principle of the United Nations. This was the first time that the official Palestinian leadership agreed to the demands of the international community for the division of its homeland and claimed sovereignty over only a part of it. This arrangement was seen as a bitter compromise by the Palestinian public, yet it is also engraved in Palestinian collective memory as a moment of hope and possibility. The purpose of this study is to describe the history that culminated in this moment of Palestinian reckoning in 1988, with a focus on the following question: What changes in the Arab discourse about the State of Israel took place between 1948 and 1988 that permitted the Palestinian national movement to compromise on its greatest ambitions—i.e., an unpartitioned, independent homeland—and, nonetheless, to consider this to be a moment of liberation?

To answer this question, I conduct a discourse analysis, situated in Arabic intellectual history as well as social and cultural history. I seek to reconstruct Arab political thought on the State of Israel, Israeli society, and other related issues, from the end of the 1948 war to 1988. At the same time, I ask how this discourse of recognition came to terms and ultimately intertwined with a simultaneous Arab discourse on historical justice, collective rights, freedom, sovereignty, and other aspects of decolonization.

This intellectual history is based on two main sets of sources. The first is the pan-Arab discussion of the “Palestine question,” carried out in periodicals, newspapers, non-fiction, essayistic literature, and fiction published in the Arab world. The second set of sources is the documentation found in the archives of the State of Israel and the archives of the Israeli Defense Forces, as well as international and colonial archives in the United Nations’ headquarters, and Britain.

From a certain point in time, this research assumes, the Palestinian liberation movement had to take seriously the existence of a new Jewish collectivity in the heart of the Middle East.

This existence was explained, rationalized, and sometimes integrated into the picture of an independent Arab future. The present study, therefore, seeks to connect two seemingly contradictory concepts, decolonization and recognition, and thus to expose the relationship between the Arab recognition of the “Other”- be it the Zionist, the Jew, or the settler - and the process of anticolonial liberation.