



August 4, 2019

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We are pleased to share with you this public call for papers for the seventh annual workshop of [New Directions in Palestinian Studies](#) (NDPS) to be held at Brown University on March 6–7, 2020. As detailed below, the theme title “Who Owns Palestine?” addresses a wide range of issues ranging from the political economy of land and other forms of property to competing notions of territorial rights and contestations over historical narratives.

As with all NDPS workshops, proposals that put Palestinians at the center of the analysis are encouraged. We seek explorations of Palestinian experiences of different historical periods and locations—past and present, urban and rural, throughout historic Palestine and outside it—from the perspectives of various academic disciplines, as well as practitioners such as lawyers, urban planners, and artists.

### **About NDPS**

Over the past generation, the field of Palestine and Palestinian studies has grown rapidly, attracting some of the best and brightest scholars. NDPS provides a platform for new lines of inquiry that seek to decolonize, globalize, and de-exceptionalize knowledge production about the Palestinians. Launched in 2012 as a research initiative of Brown University’s Middle East Studies program, NDPS is dedicated to supporting the work and careers of emerging scholars through annual workshops, an endowed [post-doctoral fellowship](#), and a [book series](#).

[NDPS workshops](#)—“Palestinian Homes and Houses: Subjectivities and Materialities” (2019), “The Shadow Years: Material Histories of Everyday Life” (2018), “The Politics of Archives and the Practices of Memory” (2017), “Approaches to Research on Palestinian and the Palestinians” (2016), “Political Culture and the Culture of Politics” (2015), and “Political Economy and the Economy of Politics” (2014)—have earned a reputation for frank and rigorous discussions that bring together three generations of scholars. Ultimately, the discussions consider the intellectual, ethical, and moral stakes of new research agendas in Palestinian Studies and the political spaces they open and foreclose.

### **The 2020 Workshop: Who Owns Palestine?**

This workshop presents an opportunity to discuss the past, present, and future of ownership of Palestine on the material and discursive levels. Ownership in the context of settler colonial dispossession is a terribly complicated and contradictory historical dynamic that faces both inwards and outwards. Within historic Palestine, private land ownership by Palestinians is the primary form

of wealth and a perceived barrier (albeit, often ineffective) against expropriation, especially in highly contested areas such as Jerusalem. At the same time, the very existence of capitalist land markets exposes the territorial patrimony of Palestinians to powerful forms of alienation—namely purchase by the Israeli state and related Zionist interests—and concentrates ownership in the hands of individuals, corporations, and institutions. The use and distribution of property according to gender, generation, class, and forms of territorial and kinship privileges in local social spaces all pre-date colonial rule and structure the different struggles against it. Ownership of land, water, and other resources is, therefore, a problem not only of settler colonial land alienation, but also of what sorts of collective and private interests will determine what future life will look like.

Ownership poses a different set of questions and double binds for Palestinians who have been expelled or displaced. For those able to secure citizenship or other forms of effective legal rights in another country, property ownership is a powerful means of assimilation and enfranchisement, but often at the cost of political debilitation and fragmentation. For those living in refugee camps (in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere), ownership is complex, taking shape through informal markets and antagonistic forms of state and non-state regulation and giving rise to novel modes of accumulation, property regimes, and collective life. Expanding markets and new real estate projects in the West Bank have not only created the opportunity for Diaspora Palestinians with the financial means to acquire property, but they have intensified the sale of land still held by Palestinians who do not wish to, or cannot, return. While often occurring outside the immediate struggle with the Israeli authorities, these practices and processes have formative consequences on what it means to be Palestinian and to have a right to Palestine.

Ownership, moreover, is as much as an epistemological question as a material one. Claims to the “Holy Land” extend beyond liberal logics and institutions, with land infused with religious meaning and ownership divinely ordained. Palestine is also a thoroughly internationalized space, and has been a laboratory for competing visions of civilizational and political futures since at least the nineteenth century. Today, academic theoretical concepts and frameworks draw Palestine and the Palestinians further into spaces of knowledge production, bringing historical narratives and the question of ownership into new domains of disciplinary power. State and other institutional infrastructures of representations (and erasures) of Palestine and the Palestinians—such as naming, drawing, mapping, archiving, digging, and exhibiting—are thoroughly enmeshed in daily struggles and contestations. Who has the right and authority to determine who can and cannot own and what can or cannot be said? The coordinates of these core questions shift in response to forces far beyond the geographic lines of Palestine and interface directly with various approaches to notions of indigeneity and the relationship of these approaches to collective anti-colonial struggles.

Can Palestinians own Palestine under a regime of absolute private property? How does the right to own force the Palestinians, like other indigenous peoples, to prove ownership on the occupier’s terms? How has property ownership shaped social life, and how might current legal and economic transformations shape future collective projects? As the Palestinian Authority’s attempt to survey,

register, and privatize unfolds, how is the relationship between ownership, social struggles, and wider collective territorial questions changing? What are the possibilities and limits of knowledge production shaped by these legal, political, and economic imperatives? How is ownership represented and claimed beyond documents and legal institutions? As Palestine and the Palestinians become both more incarcerated and more dispersed, and as Palestine circulates as a concept and Palestinians circulate as a people, who can legitimately claim Palestine as their own?

### **Format and Logistics**

The 2020 New Directions in Palestinian Studies (NDPS) workshop calls for papers that creatively engage these and the myriad other questions about ownership. The workshop format facilitates intellectual exchange via pre-circulated papers, brief presentations, and extended discussions in panels over a two-day period. Invited senior and mid-career scholars usually chair panels and/or participate in discussions, while most presentation slots are reserved for younger scholars.

If you are interested in presenting an original unpublished paper, please submit a proposal of approximately 500 words along with a brief CV via this [form](#) by November 4, 2019. Selected participants will be notified by November 14 and asked to submit a full-length paper of 4,000–7,000 words by 10 February 2020 for pre-circulation. Panels will be organized around themes that emerge from the papers. All paper presenters are expected to give NDPS first right to publication. We plan to publish selected papers either as double-blind refereed articles in the *Jerusalem Quarterly* and the *Journal of Palestine Studies* or as an edited volume in the NDPS open-access book series with the University of California Press.

Middle East Studies at Brown will reimburse reasonable travel expenses and two nights lodging (three nights for those coming from overseas) for paper presenters and discussants. For those traveling from abroad, please keep in mind that reimbursement is possible only for those entering the United States on a Visa Waiver Business (VWB) or B-1 visa. Please direct any questions to [palestinianstudiesconference@brown.edu](mailto:palestinianstudiesconference@brown.edu).

Sincerely,  
Beshara Doumani  
Professor of History  
[beshara\\_doumani@brown.edu](mailto:beshara_doumani@brown.edu)

Paul Kohlbry  
Research Associate in Palestinian Studies  
[paul\\_kohlbr@brown.edu](mailto:paul_kohlbr@brown.edu)