Vague and unworkable: The fuzziness of the archipelago as a concept and its unsuitability as model for a 21st century Palestinian nation

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Abstract: While it is frequently invoked, the archipelago is such a vague concept that its deployment in fields such as island studies is only productive when the contingency of its use is specified. In this article, we examine the concept itself and then consider the use of the archipelago as a metaphor and/or model for a future Palestinian state. The creation of the modern nation-state of Israel in Palestine in 1948, various Israeli military actions, and (often related) public and private developments of former Palestinian lands has resulted in a substantial proportion of Palestinians fleeing to neighbouring countries (chiefly Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria). Those Palestinians who have remained have largely been confined to territorial isolates within the Jewish state. These isolates have frequently been understood and analogised as 'islands' within Israel, and the aggregation of these isolates has been variously referred to and/or represented as an archipelago. This article examines the development of this metaphoric interpretation of the Palestinian community within Israel in Anglophone, Arabic, and Francophone discourse, and characterises the contortions necessary to imagine Palestinian territories as archipelagic. The conclusion returns to consideration of the notion of the archipelago itself and of its usefulness in island studies and other contexts.

Keywords: Palestine, Israel, archipelago, *archipel*, *al-arkhabil*, islands, metaphor

https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.182 • Received May 2021, Early access December 2021

Introduction

In January 2020, (then) U.S. President Donald Trump presented a plan designed by his advisor and son-in-law Jared Kushner entitled *Peace to Prosperity* that was intended to resolve the long-running dispute between Palestinians and the state of Israel. International response was less than positive, seeing the proposal as heavily weighted towards Israeli interests — an aspect reinforced by the presence and endorsement of (then) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the launch event and the absence of and lack of support from any Palestinian representatives. Key to the plan was the recognition of a Palestinian state comprising a scattered group of areas with majority Palestinian populations linked by various forms of access corridors — literally, 'a state within a state'. A number of critics identified that a major problem was that the proposed state was less a coherent and contiguous unit than an "'archipelago' of enclaves" (Patel, 2020) or an "archipelago of non-contiguous bantustans" (Churches for Middle East Peace, 2020). The deployment of the archipelago as a metaphor in the plan recalled earlier interpretations of the dispersed pockets of Palestinian lands, most notably Julien Bousac's 2009 map, *L'archipel de Palestine oriental* ('The archipelago of Eastern Palestine') (Bousac, 2011; La Valise Diplomatique, 2009). These characterisations also reflect a related perception of the historical 'islanding' of particular Palestinian areas as a result of their isolation within the state of Israel. Opening with a discussion of the archipelago as a concept and motif, this article examines the socio-political islanding of Palestinians within the state of Israel, Bousac's imaginative interpretation of the fragmented Palestinian nation, and the nature of the Palestinian state proposed in the U.S. 2020 plan. Drawing on these discussions, the article then concludes by reconsidering the figure of the archipelago and its usefulness and relevance.

I. The archipelago and island studies

Any consideration of the use of the terms *island* and *archipelago* in discourse concerning the Palestinian community within Israel requires a consideration of the terms themselves. The first is relatively unproblematic; within both geography and island studies, islands are conceived as parcels of land entirely surrounded by water. They are, therefore, entities that can be objectively proved to exist, in that they can be circumnavigated by land or sea, visually perceived as islands from an overhead vantage point, and/or represented as islands by cartographic visualisation. There would be little point in trying to mount a case that an island such as Pitcairn, Zanzibar, Lundy, or Bermuda *wasn't* an island (with regard to accepted definitions of the term). As a result, researchers waste no time in mounting detailed justifications of the grounds of asserting such locales as islands. And this seems reasonable — no one wants to read repetitive accounts of islands being bodies of land wholly surrounded by water, "therefore location *X* is an island," etc. Given this conceptual anchor, problematic cases, such as islands with constructed links to other areas, have been corralled and discussed with regard to the degree of compromise that such links cause to their essential islandness (e.g., Baldacchino, 2007; Brinklow & Jennings, forthcoming). As for the second term, however, neither geography nor island studies offers a clear sense of what an archipelago is. Indeed, (the predominantly anglophone field of) island studies has, from its inception, been surprisingly slipshod in its use of the term, both as a general category and with regard to

specific aggregations of islands. We use the term *slipshod* deliberately, as it combines a sense of being ill-fitting for purpose and of carelessness. The etymology of the term 'archipelago' is well-known, deriving from two Latin/Italian words (themselves derived from Greek) — *archi* (meaning 'principal') and *pelagus* (meaning 'sea'). Note that there is no reference to islands in the original term. The association with groups of islands arose from the term's initial use as a proper name to refer to what is now referred to as the Aegean Sea. The term 'archipelago' was first extended to other groups of islands, implicitly comparing them to those in the Aegean, and was then adopted to refer to groups of islands more generally. There is an epistemological issue here. In contrast to the solid assurance of islandness as not requiring substantiation in anything but marginal contexts, the characterisation of groups of islands as archipelagos, and, thereby, discussion of archipelagos more generally, is far more problematic. Put simply, there appears to be no criterion — *anywhere* — that provides a basis for characterising a group of islands as an archipelago (and, implicitly, another group of islands as *not* one). As Syatauw (1973) detailed, there were attempts in the 1950s and 1960s to establish legal definitions of archipelagos with regard to their role in delineating territorial waters for nation states, but these failed to deliver clear and useful definitions. So, unless we are prepared to say that any and all islands that can be grouped in any way are archipelagos, we have a definitional problem.

When the issue of archipelagic definition was opened up for discussion on the Islands Philosophy email discussion list in September 2020, *Island Studies Journal* editor Adam Grydehøj posed the following question:

> What is wrong with defining an archipelago as "any aggregation of islands that somebody calls an archipelago"? As long as we are clear that archipelagos are human/psychological constructs, then the concept is useful, especially when considering groups of islands that humans use or experience in certain ways because they have grouped them together into an archipelago.

There are pros and cons to this response. The pro side of Grydehøj's argument concerns his clear statement that "archipelagos are human/psychological constructs." We fully concur with this but, with regard to the use of the term archipelago in island studies, his caveat that "as long as we are clear [on this], then the concept is useful" is key. Surveying a swathe of island studies articles, chapters, and books in preparing this article, it has been very difficult to discern that the majority of island studies scholars *are* "clear" about this. Most pointedly, with striking exceptions such as Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel (2020), *if* they are "clear," they fail to convey this in writing about archipelagos. The term 'archipelago' is most usually used as an easy referent for islands that a researcher wishes to refer to and/or discuss en masse. Island studies literature very rarely includes passages where an author states anything like, "I refer to the islands off the south coast of *X* as an archipelago, since they…", etc., or even, "following a common tradition of nomenclative usage, I refer to…". If it was routine to substantiate application of the term in this manner, it would be possible to gain a sense of what the term actually meant and, therefore, to perceive differences in its application.

Grydehøj's response to the Islands Philosophy list debates was an eminently pragmatic one from a central figure in the field. To use an old English saying, there's no point in

'shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted'. Island studies writers have been bandying the term 'archipelago' about since the inception of the field, and the difficulties of doing a 'product recall' on the discipline are so considerable that it is unlikely that a revamped island studies with this particular 'bug' fixed will be rolled out in the near future. We are not the first to identify this issue and to be concerned about it. Stratford and colleagues attempted a similar intervention in 2011 (p. 118), asserting that "in the field of island studies, the archipelago remains one of the least examined metageographical concepts" and cautioning against using the term "uncritically as a descriptive, physical geographical referent" — but there is minimal evidence that their intervention had any impact on the use of the term in the field. In this regard, Grydehøj's suggestion is essentially a 'work around'; a quietly resigned acknowledgment of the issue and of the necessity of accepting its presence in the field. But — product recalls aside — there are a number of small adjustments and proactive interventions that can be made within island studies. One can be made by writers themselves, who can enhance clarity in the field by first asking themselves whether they need to invoke the figure of the archipelago and, if they feel that they do, by explaining what they mean by it. Another can be made by journal reviewers, research supervisors, and editors, who can seek similar clarity in those whose work they assess and advise on. There is also a third initiative: the critical discussion of the figure of the archipelago mobilised in both general and specific disciplinary discourse. This allows us to consider the manner in which the figure operates, and to gauge its usefulness. Indeed, we assert that it is only through examining what the concept means in the practice of its deployment that we can grasp how it is being shaped and projected onto territories and communities.

This article tenders itself as a contribution to these critical discussions of the archipelago. It is also a critical essay that engages with and is inspired by the work of Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel (2020). In their introduction to their anthology of critical literary engagements with the archipelago, Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel (2020, p. 3) sidestep the central vagueness of the notion in island studies by exploring the concept of the archipelago as:

> A lens that may allow us to engage in interdisciplinary conversations about the ways in which space and time are resignified. These resignifications occur and recur in a complex set of human, object, and (natural or built) surface relations that can congeal into a particular meaning […] Archipelagoes happen, congeal, take place. They are not immanent or natural categories existing independently of interpretation. Yet they can also become an episteme, an imaginary, a way of thinking, a poetic, a hermeneutic, a method of inquiry, a system of relations. They are painful and generative, implicated in native cosmologies or cosmo-visions, or assembled as part of imperial/colonial undertakings.

The latter part of this quotation is particularly apposite for our study, as we focus on "painful" attempts to implement fractured and fracturing management of Palestinian territories in a manner that is glossed as archipelagic in attempts to render it palatable and practical to the human subjects of the exercise and their international support-base.

II. The creation of Israel and the islanding of Palestinian communities

The establishment of Israel resulted from a long history of persecution of Jews across Europe and, in particular, from the birth of Zionism in the 1890s in response to fresh waves of repression. The publication of Theodor Herzl's influential book *Der Judenstaat* ('The Jewish State') in 1897 was particularly significant for identifying the value of establishing a state in which Jewish people constituted the majority of the population and in which their values and agendas would predominate. From its earliest stages, Zionism identified Palestine as a prime location for such a state, its relevance as the ancestral homeland of Judaism giving it the edge over other suggested areas in countries such as Argentina or Uganda (Conforti, 2014). Zionism gained traction in Europe in the early 20th century and was given in-principle support by the British Government during their conflict with the Ottoman Empire in 1914–1918 that resulted in Ottoman retreat from the Transjordan (an area comprising Jordan and Palestine). In 1917, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, stated the British Government's support for the establishment of a "national home for Jewish people" in Palestine in a letter to the British Zionist Lord Lionel Rothschild (which has subsequently been referred to as the 'Balfour Declaration'). This policy statement was incorporated into the terms of the British mandate over Palestine approved by the League of Nations, which commenced in 1919. While precise figures are unavailable, the British accepted mandate over a territory in which the Jewish population appears to have numbered around 80,000 (Cabinet of Parliament, 1939, p. 4), representing less than 10% of the total population of the area (Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, 2004). During the 1920s and 1930s, a substantial number of Jews relocated to Palestine, purchasing large areas of land from Palestinians and setting up their own administrative, educational, and welfare systems in scattered — and quickly expanding and interconnecting — enclaves (see Al Jazeera, 2016 for an animated cartographic representation of this process). The rapid growth of a Jewish population within Palestine and the exclusionary nature of its community and institutions resulted in resentment and reprisals by Palestinian Arabs and in low-level but consistent conflict as Jewish migration increased during the 1930s. This conflict intensified in 1937 with an Arab revolt against British plans to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs that was violently suppressed by the British military. Following this conflict, the British Cabinet (1939) issued a 'Statement of Policy' about Palestine that declared its continued support for a two-state model within Palestine and, therefore, its opposition to the reconstitution of the whole of Palestine as a Jewish state. The statement also identified that the British had facilitated migration into Palestine over the two previous decades that had seen the Jewish population rise to 450,00 (approximately 33% of the population) (British Cabinet of Parliament, 1939, p. 5) and contended that this had eroded Palestinians' senses of belonging and security in their own country. As a result, the British government resolved to limit subsequent Jewish migration so as to keep the population ratio around its 1939 levels.

Despite the British government's professed intentions, the outbreak of World War II, and the atrocities committed against European Jews by Axis powers, led to continuing refugee migration to Palestine. Following the armistice in 1945, Zionist activists facilitated the migration of tens of thousands of Jews to Palestine, including by establishing an unofficial

navy to transport them through British naval blockades of the Palestinian coast. This influx of Jewish migrants further inflamed Jewish-Arab tensions, with these coming to a head in 1947 following the United Nations' adoption of a partition plan for Palestine that proposed creating two states and making Jerusalem a shared area (United Nations, 1947, p. 151; see Figure 1a). The proposed division attempted to balance the coherence of each population within Palestine by means of there being connecting points between their respective areas. In the case of the proposed Arab state, these occurred between Nazareth (in the north) and Jenin (at the northern end of the central area) and between the southwestern corner of the central section and Gaza. Depending on which way the map is read, it either represents three sections of the Palestinian state connecting across the Jewish one, or three sections of the Jewish state connecting across the Palestinian one. There was a degree of ingenuity to this, but, in order to achieve this relatively clean separation, a) both sides would have to agree with it, and b) there would either have to be movements of populations from one area to another, to achieve the 'clean split', and/or some populations opting to remain on their lands despite the fact of their being in a new state dedicated to a different cultural-religious group. Note that this plan — and its cartographic representation (see Figure 1a) — does not resemble an archipelago. The three minimally connected areas of each state can be regarded as (semi-)islanded — and the designated Palestinian port city of Haifa and shared city of Jerusalem even more so. The planned partition was never implemented, however, as conflict broke out when Jewish leaders in Palestine declared the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

Despite the intervention of surrounding Arab countries, Israeli forces achieved significant success in the 1948 conflict, occupying the entire northern Palestinian area indicated in the UN model (United Nations, 1947, p. 151), reducing the size of the proposed central area, which was secured by Jordanian and Iraqi forces (and subsequently administered as part of Jordan), and of the Gaza Strip, which was secured by Egypt. During the conflict, approximately 700,000 Palestinians fled occupied territories (US Department of State, 1949, p. 984) and became refugees in the West Bank, Jordan, and Lebanon. While this initiative resulted in the state of Israel being set up with relatively 'clean' cartographic demarcation areas (see Figure 1b), these ignored the significant number of Palestinians left within occupied regions. Aside from a brief Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula in 1956 during the Suez crisis, the 1949 armistice borders remained relatively stable until 1967 when Israel attacked Egypt, re-occupied Gaza and Sinai, occupied the West Bank and the Golan Heights region of Syria, and imposed the state of Israel over the whole of Palestine. Aside from returning Sinai to Egypt in 1979 as part of a comprehensive peace deal, these borders have retained to the present.

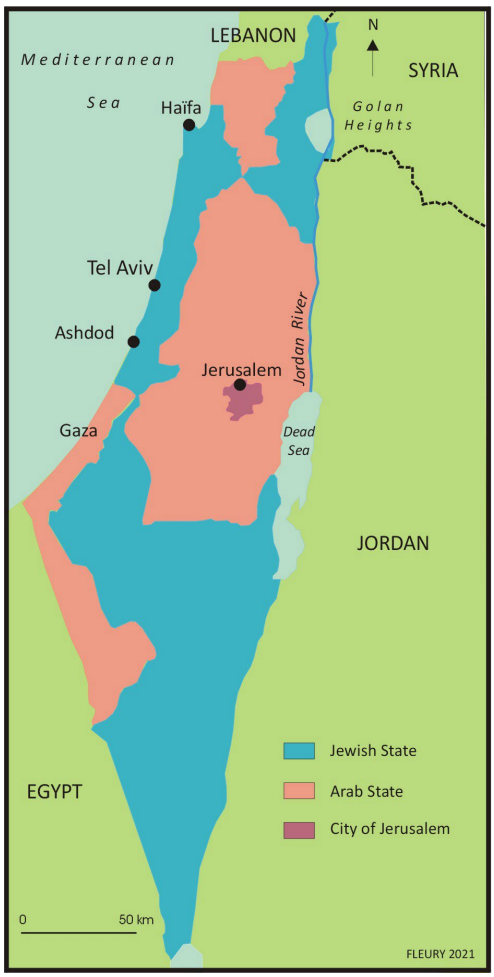

Figure 1a: Map of UN Partition Plan for Palestine, adopted 29 November 1947. **Figure 1b:** Map of areas controlled by Jewish forces following 1949 Armistice. *Source*: Christian Fleury, 2021.

The two occupied territories have experienced significantly different fates. Gaza has had a complex history since 1948 (Efrat, 2006, pp. 166–195) that has now resulted in it attaining substantial internal self-government as a Palestinian zone within Israel with a population of around 1.9 million. Gaza's political system has been dominated by the Hamas party, which is firmly opposed to the existence of the state of Israel, since 2006. This status is a highly strained one, with its border with Israel being tightly monitored and access severely restricted by Israeli forces, and with regular shelling and rocket attacks occurring between Palestinian militants and the Israeli military. The area's southern border with Egypt is also tightly controlled, with the Egyptian Government wary of and opposed to Hamas's Islamic fundamentalist orientation. As such, it is ambiguous whether Gaza can be considered as a Palestinian enclave within Israel that is effectively 'islanded' by tight border restrictions, or as a (politically distinct) exclave of the Palestinian nation that primarily exists in the occupied West Bank. There are further complexities in that the West Bank has seen a slow, incremental establishment of Jewish settlements in the eastern and central regions since the 1970s, leading Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to suggest annexation of these areas in 2020 (see Holmes, 2020). Since 2000, Israeli consolidation in traditional Palestinian areas has also been abetted

by the construction of security walls throughout the West Bank which have severely restricted Palestinian movement in and out of and between various Palestinian and Israeli areas (see Backmann, 2006; Sfard, 2018). As a result, relations between Arab and Jewish communities in the West Bank and in the shared/disputed city of Jerusalem are fraught, fractious, and heavily monitored by the Israeli military. In this regard, the West Bank is a) a substantial Palestinian enclave that is occupied and claimed by the state of Israel; b) a Palestinian area within Israel with a number of Jewish enclaves within it; and c) the symbolic core of the Palestinian community and nation within Israel, a significant number of whose members are located outside of the West Bank and Gaza.

III. Bousac's archipelagic rendition

The highly fragmented nature of the Palestinian community/state within Israel has attracted significant international attention and has resulted in various demonstrations of solidarity on the part of international lobby groups and supporters. With regard to the focus of this article, an imaginative map of Palestine as an archipelagic state within Israel produced by French NGO worker Julien Bousac (2011; La Valise Diplomatique, 2009) is particularly notable. In the late 2000s, Bousac, who does not claim any academic qualifications in geography or cartography but who identified himself as a "mapmaker" in discussions with the authors in March 2021, returned to France after several years spent working abroad, including in Palestine. He was concerned about the gap between the reality of his fieldwork experience in a highly fragmented space and cartographic representations of the Palestinian territories within Israel, especially in term of ruptures, obstacles, or checkpoints. Seeking to reconceptualise space and sovereignty, Bousac produced a map (see Figure 3) that aggregated Israel, Jordan, and Palestinian areas within Israel in a blue monochrome colored area which represents a 'sea' surrounding the emerged zones, Area A (in light green) and Area B (in deeper green). The colonies developed by Israel in Area C are shown in light blue. Bousac was not concerned to represent the Palestinian territories in a realistic way but rather to illuminate their complexity through an overall archipelagic analogy, together with some invented location names of places and false 'legend' (i.e., explanatory) items.

Besides small, unnamed islands, the names of many small groups of islands, such as the *Îles ramalliotes occidentales*, or larger archipelagos, such as *Archipel des Kalkiliya*, are derived from existing locations (such as, in these two examples, the towns of Ramallah and Qalqiliya). Some of the individual islands have fairly banal names, such as the main island, *Île de Grande Palestine*, or *Île du Nord* and *Île de l'Est*, named according to their respective locations in the archipelago. The names of three others — *Île au Miel* (Honey Island), *Île aux Oliviers* (Olive Trees Island), and *Île aux Moutons* (Sheep Island) — derive from the author's imagination, based on a personal vision of space and landscape. While not overtly polemic, the names of two other large islands (*Île Sainte* and *Île Capitale*) reference the historical and geopolitical context. Finally, in the cases where the author invents the names *Île sous le Mur* (Downwall Island) and *Île du Camp* (Camp Island), the extreme tensions between the Palestinian Archipelago and its surrounding environment are emphasised. In most cases, the names given to pseudo-marine spaces, such as the canals, bays, or gulfs (*canal*, *baie*, or *golfe*), derive from the names of Israeli colonies (e.g., Itamar, Shamron, Ariel, Eli, Talmon, Kiryat Arba, etc.).

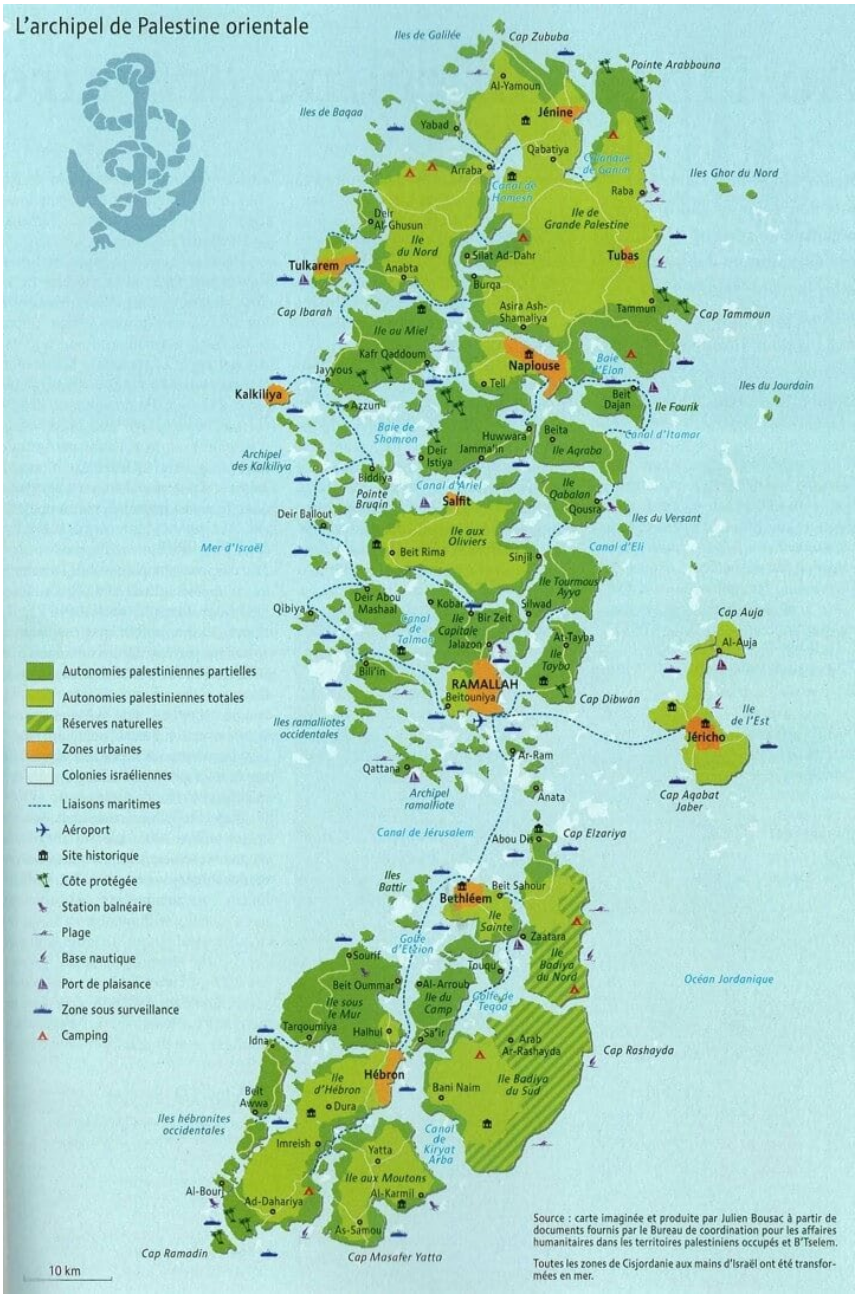

Figure 3: Julien Bousac's *L'archipel de Palestine orientale*, based on documents provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and B'Tselem (Bousac, 2011; La Valise Diplomatique, 2009; reproduced with permission).

The explanatory legends for the map embody another important aspect of Bousac's approach. By combining elements such as colour patches, referring to the Palestinian territories (greens) or Israeli colonies (light blue), and symbols making ironic references to an ideal world where holidays, leisure, and entertainment would prevail and smooth transit between areas could be taken for granted, the awkwardness of the fragmented Palestinian state is highlighted. Through their contextual absurdity, half of the items — *station balnéaire* (sea resort), *plage* (beach), *base nautique* (nautical base), *port de plaisance* (marina), and *camping* —

paradoxically contribute to the dramatisation of the spatial experience of Palestinian people. An environmental tone which sounds quite out of step in such a context is introduced with the mention of protected coastal areas (*côte protégée*). While the indications of *réserves naturelles* make no reference to the protection of environment, these areas were classified as nature reserves by Israel, and other zones have been added since the map's inception in 2009. Reality is still present in two different ways. The 'historic sites' all apply to specific locations and provide a rather reassuring temporal permanence. At the other extremity, coercion is omnipresent in the form of the numerous *zones de surveillance* (checkpoints), symbolised by more than thirty warships. To highlight the absurdity of such a political construction, Bousac introduced a hint of (pseudo-)reality with the invention of two infrastructures highly necessary to the efficient running of a 'normal' archipelagic state: an airport (just South of Ramallah) and, of course, many maritime connections. As Kelly (2016, p. 725) expresses:

> [Bousac's] map details the impossibilities of both movement and any semblance of conventional tourism in the West Bank, demonstrating how settler colonial state practice can create island formations without water, using checkpoints, walls, fences, and military outposts to disrupt any contiguity between Palestinian space.

Bousac's heuristic approach can be considered as a fruitful twist of the representation of *l'espace vécu* (experienced space; Frémont, 1972), a mode of comprehension and representation intended to stimulate reflection, and the map has been identified by him as a resource and shared tool for researchers, artists, and the curious. Bousac's map has superficial similarities to the psychogeographical mapping advocated as a community project by authors such as Biest and Cowell (2011) but differs by virtue of being a highly personal and idiosyncratic rendition of territories perceived directly and indirectly by Bousac as a non-Palestinian commentator.

The map's publication in the monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* in 2009 resulted in it reaching media, activist, teaching, and academic audiences. A poster-sized paper copy of it was produced and is still available on the newspaper's website. During the period following the publication, Bousac, who continued to apply his cartographic distortion approach to other regions and subjects (see http://obgeographiques.blogspot.com), was often asked to present his map to scholars and at cultural events. Feedback was generally very positive. The only negative reactions he has reported came from some bloggers who considered the cartographic engulfing of Israel as reminiscent of a desire to "throw the Jews into the sea," but the author has characterised this kind of reaction as atypical. Illustrating the manner in which many analogies concerning Palestine as an archipelago are external representations of the situation produced in foreign languages and using essentially foreign metaphors, there has been minimal engagement with the map from Palestinian spokespersons or social media users. In this regard, the map can primarily be seen to produce a (deliberately) ridiculous/utopian representation of an archipelagic Palestinian state that invites interpretation by external observers (along the lines offered by Kelly, 2016) and thereby calls attention to the actuality of fractured Palestinian experience.

IV. The Kushner/Trump plan and the figure of the archipelago in Arabic discourse

Given the disparities and tensions discussed in the opening sections of this article — represented imaginatively in Bousac's map — it is unsurprising that there has been sustained

friction between Israelis and Palestinians and a spectrum of Palestinian oppositional action that has ranged from political campaigns and lobbying through civil 'disobedience' (i.e., of Israeli authorities) to violent actions. This continuing instability within Israel and within the region more broadly has seen a series of attempted external mediations, the most recent, ambitious, and (as we shall go on to characterise) flawed of these being the Kushner/Trump plan, launched in 2020.

The term *al-arkhabil* (أرخبيل) — an Arabised version of the English language term 'archipelago' — entered Arabic language around the mid-20th century but did not replace the preceding (and still far more popular) Arabic term, *majmue min aljuzur* (literally, a 'group of islands'). As Issawi (1967, p. 123) has identified, *al-arkhabil* is one of the comparatively few European loanwords used in contemporary Arabic. It has achieved some traction in Arabic geography and is also now commonly used to refer to the small group of islands centred on Socotra, the Yemeni island off the north-eastern tip of Somalia, which is known as the Arkhabil Suqutra. There are also occasional other uses, such as in reference to Kerkennah islands of Eastern Tunisia (whose folk music troupe performs as the El Akhabil Troupe Kerkennah). The islands of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf are, however, rarely (if ever) referred to as *arkhabils*, although the term is used with reference to more distant areas, such as the Indonesian archipelago, which is occasionally referred to as *arkhabil al-Malayu*.

Given the term's relatively recent introduction to Arabic, there is a very limited tradition of its deployment for metaphorical and/or creative purposes in the manner that has occurred in anglophone discourse. One notable exception to this characterisation occurs in the work of Egyptian scholar Gamal Hamdan, who undertook PhD studies in Geography at the University of Reading. In his book, *The Contemporary Islamic World* (Hamdan, 2004, p. 33, authors' translation), he refers to the manner in which Islam started in the Arabian Peninsula and then spread more broadly, identifying that:

> As a religion, [it] may appear to be one solid region. Still it is, as regards its population, basically and precisely made up of an archipelago – the Arab archipelago being only part of it – of concentrated human islands and oases extending throughout a sea of desert or of water, a mix of different ethnicities, with the Arabs constituting only a portion of it.

However, such uses are the exception rather than the norm, and the term appears in few other allusive contexts.

The Arab world is not, of course, a monolithic one, and there are markedly different sets of regional perceptions and sensibilities. The concepts of archipelagality — and/or islandness itself — of residents of Arkhabil Suqutra or the Kerkennah islands and the broader regions and countries they fall within are likely to be more developed and familiar than those of Arab communities in regions more distant from any *al-arkhabil*, such as Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. While the first two countries in particular have long histories of engagement with the eastern Mediterranean, there are no archipelagos in their immediate area, with Cyprus being the nearest (singular) island before the Aegean commences, some 600 km west of the Palestinian/Lebanese coast. While there are deep maritime traditions linking the eastern, central, and western Mediterranean, there has been little recent history of

involvement between the East and the Grecian archipelagos. In this context, discussions of the fractured Palestinian state in terms of the concept of the archipelago do not simply use the term as a loanword but also borrow the paradigm from Western/anglophone discourse and apply it to a specific area and situation.

The most sustained Arabic Language discussion of contemporary Palestine with regard to the concept of *al-arkhabil* has occurred since the former U.S. President Trump administration's announcement of a 'peace plan' in a press conference held at the White House on January 28, 2020, officially titled, *Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People* (National Archives, 2020). The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (2020) identified that the plan envisioned a Palestinian state "with only limited sovereignty subject to Israeli security concerns" and characterised it as "a disarmed and non-contiguous state" within Israel "whose exclaves are connected by tunnels and bridges under Israeli security oversight." As Figure 4 illustrates, the "non-contiguous" state comprised a batch of areas in the West Bank and three small territories along the south-western border with Egypt, with the ports of Haifa and Ashdod as dedicated Palestinian amenities within Israeli areas. As also represented in the map, the plan proposed to link the first mentioned areas by dedicated roads intended for exclusive or primary Palestinian use (their status remains unclear), while the two Palestinian port facilities were to rely on road routes through Israel. Jerusalem was proposed as a split city, home to both the capital of Palestine and its administration and a Jewish population that is rapidly expanding.

The plan was not well received within Palestine, Jordan, or the broader region. An article in the Jordanian *Al Dustour* newspaper describes it as premised on the concept of an *al-dawla al-arkhabiliya* (a novel phrase referring to an 'archipelago state'), made up of scattered and isolated *alijuzur* ('islands', with the term being used metaphorically), with no element of what usually constitutes a state other than a flag and a passport (Al-Rintawi, 2021). The article describes this as an attempt to separate the Palestinians from the Israelis by granting the Palestinians a "hybrid" (Al-Rintawi, 2021) existence in a fragmented state-within-a-state. Similarly, an article published in the online newspaper *Arabi21* also described Trump's plan as resulting in a Palestinian *al-dawla al-arkhabiliya* that it identified (metaphorically) as "surrounded from every side by a sea of Israeli land" (Thrall, 2020). Others evoked the Bantustans of Apartheid-era South Africa for comparison (Jassat, 2020). Similar responses were circulated by Palestinians on social media, several of which were quoted by Edah-Tally (2020), including one that commented, "this is the first time I have seen islands on land."

Figure 4: Conceptual map of "a future state of Palestine" proposed in the Kushner/Trump *Peace to Prosperity* plan. *Source:* National Archives, 2020.

In addition to concern over the viability of the archipelagic scatter of territories, another issue concerns the fragility of the proposed routeways intended to present and deliver the aggregate of areas as a coherent state. The nature of the proposed tunnels and roadways resemble the land corridor between West Berlin and West Germany during the Cold War in terms of their vulnerability to interruption and the potential for areas to be effectively blockaded through closure of a singular route. If a Palestinian *al-dawla al-arkhabiliya* could function as a coherent state, that functionality could be easily neutralised, as roads and other amenities, such as pipelines, could be cut. The latter reference is pertinent since one of the

simultaneously fraught and more positive developments in Palestine in recent years has involved offshore natural gas resources. As a result of Gaza having a Mediterranean coastline, the modern, fragmented Palestinian state is not, like the West Bank itself, landlocked. This delivers the area a small (and often disrupted) fishery within a tightly delimited zone (specified by the Israeli Government), currently extending 15 nautical miles offshore of southern Gaza and tapering to 6 nautical miles in the north (Mahmoud & Shehada, 2019). Due to an ongoing food shortage in Gaza and the lack of transport access to other parts of 'archipelagic' Palestine, Gaza's entire catch is consumed internally. But, while Gaza controls its own fishery, controversy arose from an agreement between the Palestinian Investment Fund (PIF) — a body formed in 2003 that is closely associated with, although separate from, the Palestinian Authority — and the Egyptian Natural Gas Company over the exploitation of natural gas resources off the Gaza Coast. The PIF's actions reflected a perception of Palestine as a (terrestrial) archipelagic state with a coastal area (i.e., Gaza) that has a marine Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ) by virtue of Israeli state's allocation of that space within 'its' territorial waters. As Figure 5 demonstrates, Palestine's allocated EEZ comprises a truncated, triangular zone without the considerable extension offshore that parallel borders running north-west from the Gaza coast would have provided. Controversy arose from the agreement between PIF and Egypt, with the tacit encouragement of Israel, to make the deal without seeking permission from the Gaza administration, which regards the EEZ as its resource, rather than one administered by a non-governmental organisation based in the West Bank (Palestine Chronicle, 2021). The plan is to pipe the gas from a coastal hub on the southern Israeli coast to Gaza, helping resolve the territory's permanent energy crisis but, like the structure of the archipelagic state itself, a singular pipeline running through Israeli territory is also highly vulnerable to intervention and the use of an energy blockade as Israeli leverage in disputes with the Gaza administration. The embattled and isolated nature of Gaza has led to its characterisation as a gulag (e.g., Nader, 2012; Omer, 2015) but — with the exception of Hashim (2013) — commentators have not followed Solzhenitsyn's 1973 characterisation of there having been a "archipelago of gulags" in Soviet Russia by extending that analogy to fragmented Palestinian areas within Israel. This restraint presumably recognises that, aside from Gaza, other Palestinian isolates have a significant (if highly monitored) permeability that deviates from the tight isolation that Solzhenitsyn identifies within Soviet Russia (although it should also be noted that Solzhenitsyn's characterisation of this has itself been criticised in recent years [e.g., Bell, 2013; Shearer, 2015]).

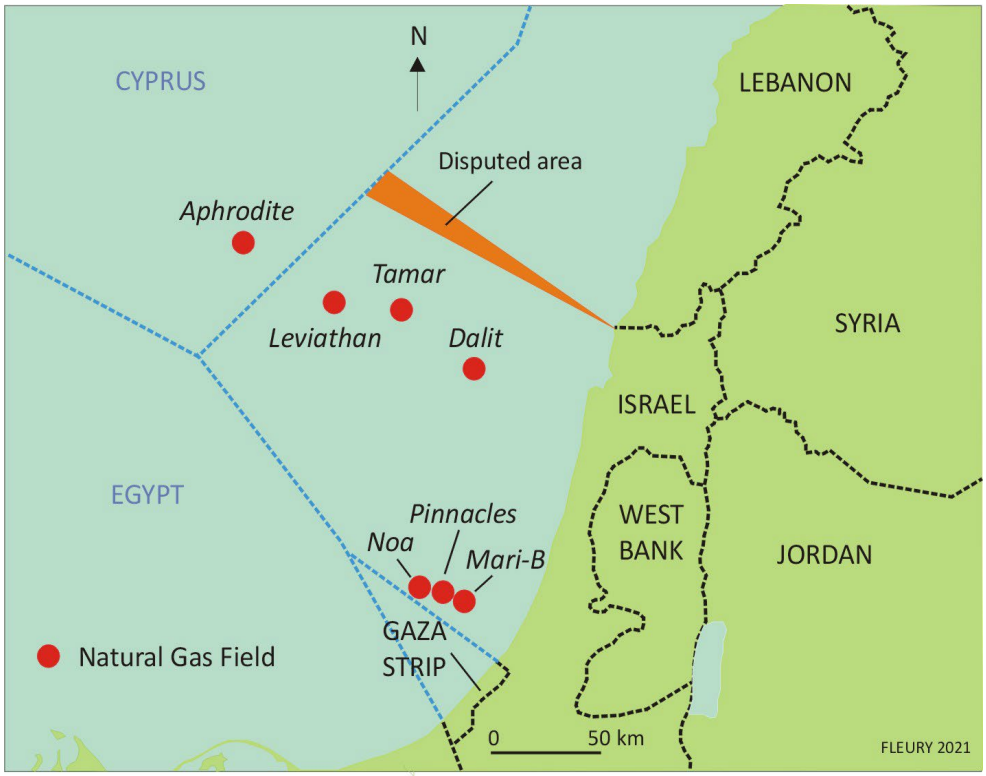

Figure 5: Map of the Gaza Natural Gas field adjacent to the Gaza Strip EEZ (as allocated by Israeli authorities). *Source:* Christian Fleury, 2021.

As might be expected, the mainstream Israeli media refrained from developing critiques of the Kushner/Trump model for offering an innately flawed, quasi-archipelagic vision of a Palestinian state within Israel. This reflects several factors, including the clear advantages to Israel of supporting a plan that largely revived and repackaged earlier proposals for aggressive colonisation of the West Bank, such as the World Zionist Federation's plan for the development of settlements in Judea and Samaria (Drobless, 1980). Another factor that has been neglected in recent discussions is the extent to which a number of Israeli commentators have perceived and analogised the dispersal of Jewish settlements in the West Bank — and their interleaving with Palestinian communities there — as representing a Jewish 'archipelago' off the eastern 'coast' of the 'main island' of Israel (itself surrounded by a hostile 'sea' of Arab nations). The inured perception of insecurity underlying such a mindset was, for instance, apparent in an article by Seth Frantzman published in *The Jerusalem Post* in 2010 — ten years before the announcement of the Kushner/Trump plan. Entitled 'Terra Incognita: The Israeli archipelago', the article suggests envisioning the complexities of contemporary Israel by dropping coloured dots onto a map of the region to visualise the different communities living there (Jewish, Palestinian Muslim, Druse, Maronite Bedouin, etc.) and goes on to assert that:

> The map you have drawn is a map of Israel. Of course there are no borders, there need not be. This is not the Israel you commonly think of, the wedge of land between the Jordan and the sea, with or without the Palestinian territories. This is the Israeli archipelago […] each community segregated from the others. Some rely on fences to keep the unwanted masses away, some live on state lands for free, and

> some are called "racist" […] for, oddly, asking that they be allowed to do what the others have done all along, and have an island to themselves. (Frantzman, 2010)

While the article is silent on Palestinian rights, it concludes by asserting that the way out of the archipelago is by demanding that "those who want to break down the barriers between the islands first tear down the fences around their communities" (Frantzman, 2010) in order to further Israeli cohesion. This liberal, inclusivist vision of Israel is, however, at odds with the highly segregated and 'securitised' Jewish settlements in the West Bank that rely on their managed isolation from a frequently hostile Palestinian community in order to survive.

Conclusion

The discussions presented in this article have illustrated 1) how weak the archipelago is as a concept, both in general and with specific regard to its use in island studies, and 2) how flawed and over-stretched the archipelago is as a metaphor and/or model for Palestinian statehood. There is nothing archipelagic about the cluster of embattled enclaves that can be notionally aggregated as a Palestinian state within Israel. Even understood at its vaguest (simply as something that someone *calls* an archipelago), the figure does little but attract attention to its insufficiency in referring to the phenomenon in question. With regard to Palestine, it is more fitting to reposition and to borrow figures from island biogeography. Unlike island studies, island biogeography is not exclusively addressed to water-hemmed terrestrial isolates but rather deploys the term 'island' to refer to any biogeographical locale that is distinct within a larger biogeographical area. Despite this, the figure of the archipelago is rarely rolled out in island biogeography except when referring to conventional island aggregates (such as the Galapagos or Amami). One reason for the limited development of the concept of the archipelago in island biogeography is that biologists are all too aware of the individuality of biogeographical isolates and the tenuous nature of connectivity between them.

The issue of connectivity has led environmentalists to propose and construct *corridors* (a very un-aquatic term) between ecological isolates in order to allow terrestrial fauna, in particular, to move between them for foraging and/or mating. These corridors are notoriously difficult to establish and maintain and can often expose fauna, such as the endangered koala in Australia, for instance, to various types of peril (attacks by animals such as dogs or cats, interaction with traffic or agricultural machinery, etc.). The thinness of the corridors of vegetation also makes them vulnerable to fires or to deliberate or accidental disruption by humans. In this regard, the isolated patches of Palestinian settlements within Israel and their planned linkage through land corridors and/or tunnels is essentially a social manifestation of biogeographical corridoring in which Palestinians are vulnerable within the isolates and moving between them. We mean nothing demeaning and/or animalising in such a parallel, simply to observe that if we rethink the Kushner/Trump model in this manner, it looks even more unworkable and inappropriate. Perhaps another, more locally appropriate model might be developed that characterises isolated pockets of majority Palestinian populations as *oases* of Palestinian culture and nationality. But oases are very different in nature from islands and there is no collective term for clusters of them in the manner of archipelagos. They are also less tightly defined, in that moisture and vegetation transition off into more arid areas less distinctly than the highly defined edges of islands. But, like islands, they are also notionally

approachable from a variety of locales and, *if* Palestinian isolates can be considered as oasis-like, they are bounded oases — more like walled gardens than natural eco-systems that phase into others. Ultimately, the inadequacy of analogies points to the peculiarity of the fragmented Palestinian community and its incoherence and fragility. In this manner, it is perhaps best understood as its own figure, and we might think of the recent fate of Palestine as being a distinct phenomenon that calls for comprehension on its own grounds with regard to the violent nature of its initial shattering and the mechanisms that have kept it and its populace shattered. Such a characterisation avoids the neat and harmonious connotations of archipelagism satirised in Bousac's map and, instead, returns us to the broader consideration of "painful or generative" processes identified by Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel (2020, p. 3) as part of intrusive interventions by one state into another.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jonathan Pugh for comments on an early draft of the arguments presented in the introduction to this article and for encouraging us to reflect on discussions on the Islands Philosophy list in a broader context; to Helen Carter and Adam Grydehøj for their contributions to discussions on the Islands Philosophy list on the topic of archipelagos; to Julien Bousac, Manal Shalaby, and John Whiteoak for research assistance; and to Gang Hong for astute editorial guidance.

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