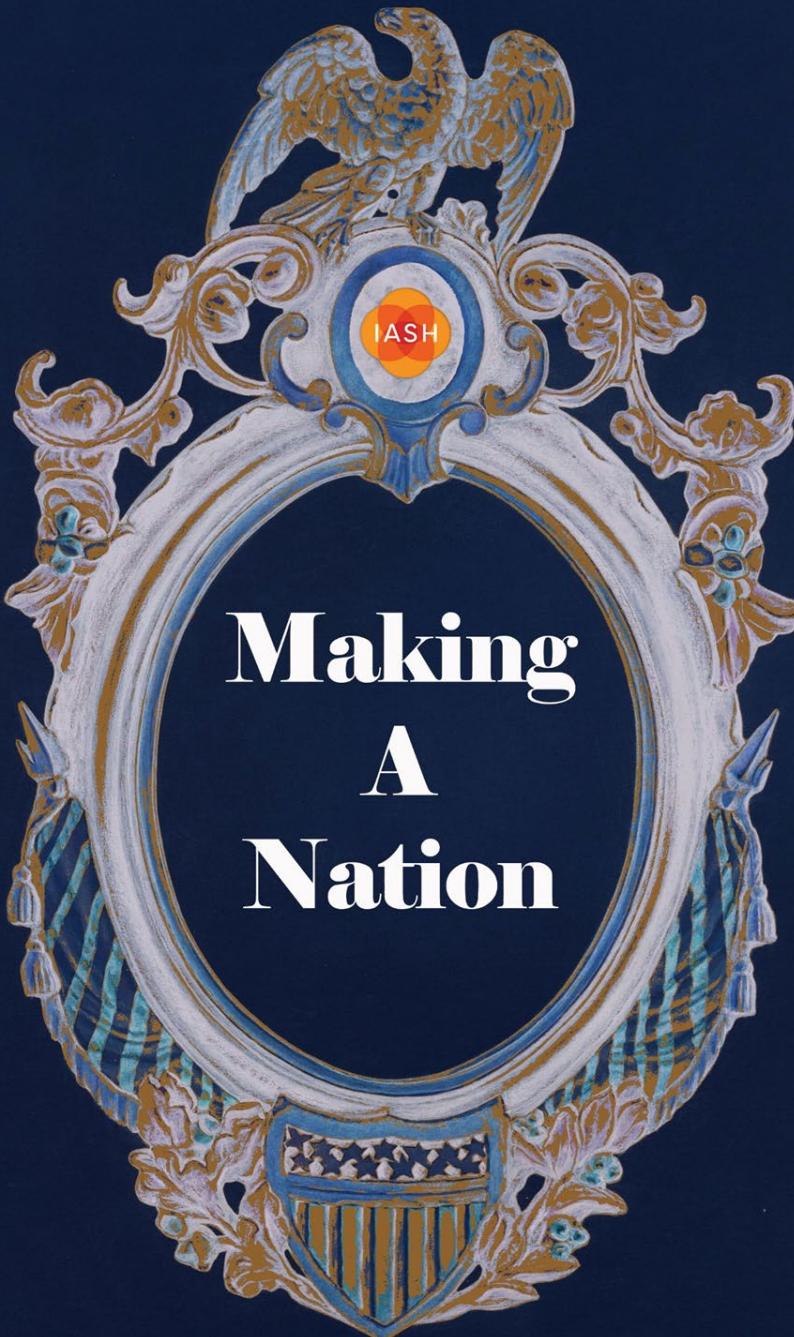


A Nation At The Crossroads: Palestine Between Genocide, Statehood Recognition and Liberation

***Roundtable reflecting on the IA SH 2025-26 theme:
Making a Nation'***

Friday 16 January 2026, 14:30-16:30



Making A Nation

2025 marks the confluence of multiple significant milestones within canonical liberal traditions regarding state-making and national independence. While there always were important lacunae within the narrative and practices of state-making in the 'Western state hemisphere' - to say nothing of those across the community of Commonwealth states, which celebrate their own centenary this year - the need to explore overlooked or marginalised dimensions of state-making practice gains heightened relevance in the context of a tangible fraying of the post-WWII rules-based order; additionally, the rise of neo-populism and the collapse of the liberal centre that had previously provided foundational undergirding to liberal state-making narratives and practices merit consideration.

Nowhere are these tensions felt more intensely than in Palestine today, where the Gaza genocide raises profound questions regarding the extent of the liberal collapse and what its implications are for the Palestinians and other regional players, as well as for the very ideals and international system that once claimed to uphold these values.

While the quest for Palestinian national self-determination has seen the world entertain its recognition for more than a century, the actual practice of national liberation remains elusive. Indeed, it may be in genuine danger of being eliminated in light of the genocide. This remarkable incongruence begs the question as to how this state of affairs emerged, and how Palestinians and others have attempted to defy it. Questions related to various agentive forms of cultural and social resistance have also resurfaced, particularly the revisiting of the conventional definition of archives and documentation in a state-less context.

This roundtable explores the question of Palestine in its current juncture at the crossroads of genocide, statehood recognition and liberation. It explores how 'making a nation' in the Palestinian context has entailed both making and unmaking 'the case' for Palestine and what this entails in terms of various acts of centring, framing, and performing.

This event brings together an interdisciplinary group of Palestine scholars to explore the politics, practice and impediments to state-making in a broader context of the liberal state paradigm and in the shadow of its demise.

MODERATOR: Nicola Perugini

DISCUSSANTS:

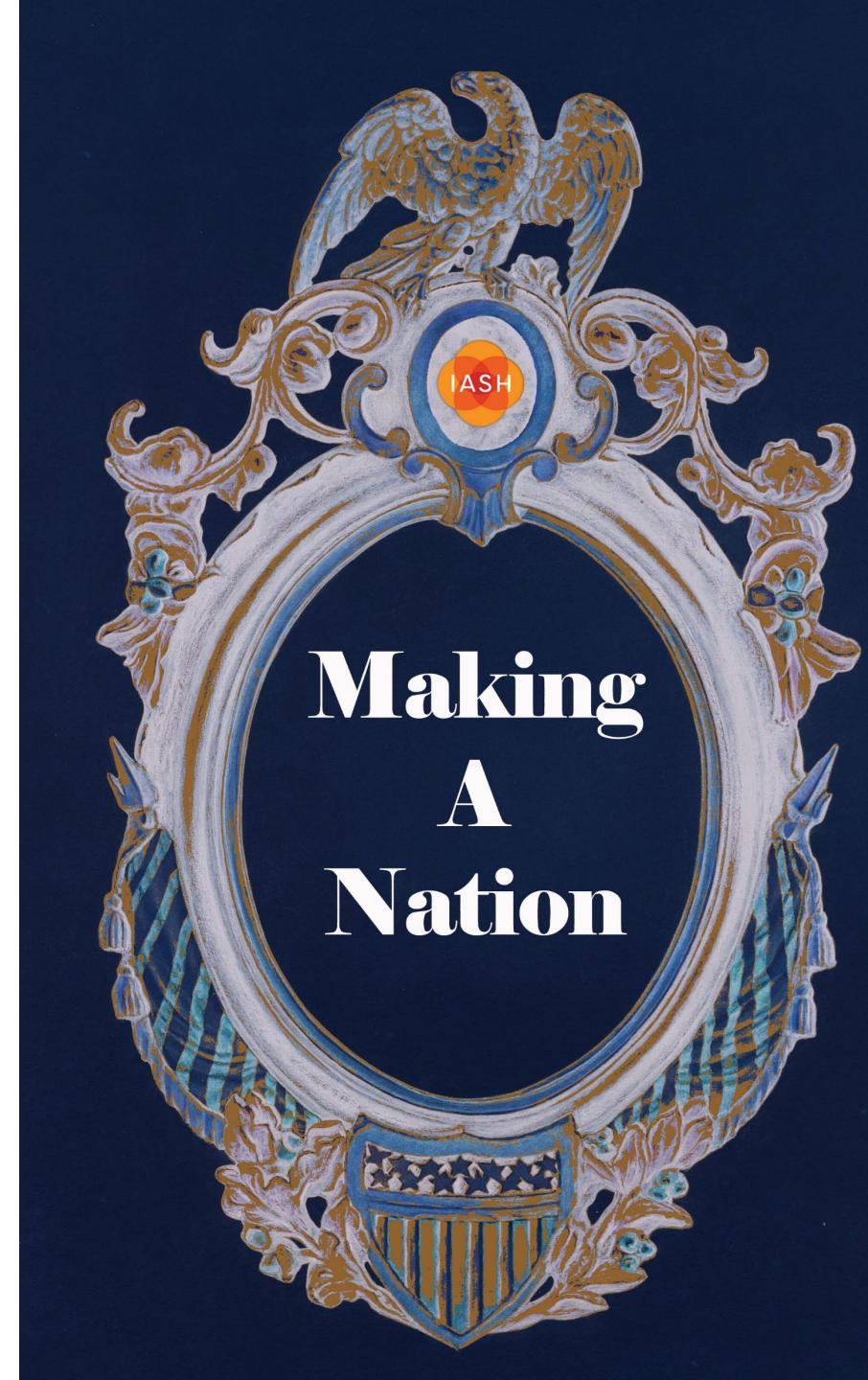
Toufic Haddad: *Liberal Peacebuilding and Statemaking as Prelude to Apartheid and Genocide*

Pietro Stefanini: *Nation-state-making between Empire and Settler Colony*

Farah Aboubakr: *Documentation and Archiving in a 'State-less' Context*

Shaira Vadasaria: *Recognition, Racial Politics and the Question of Palestinian Sovereignty*

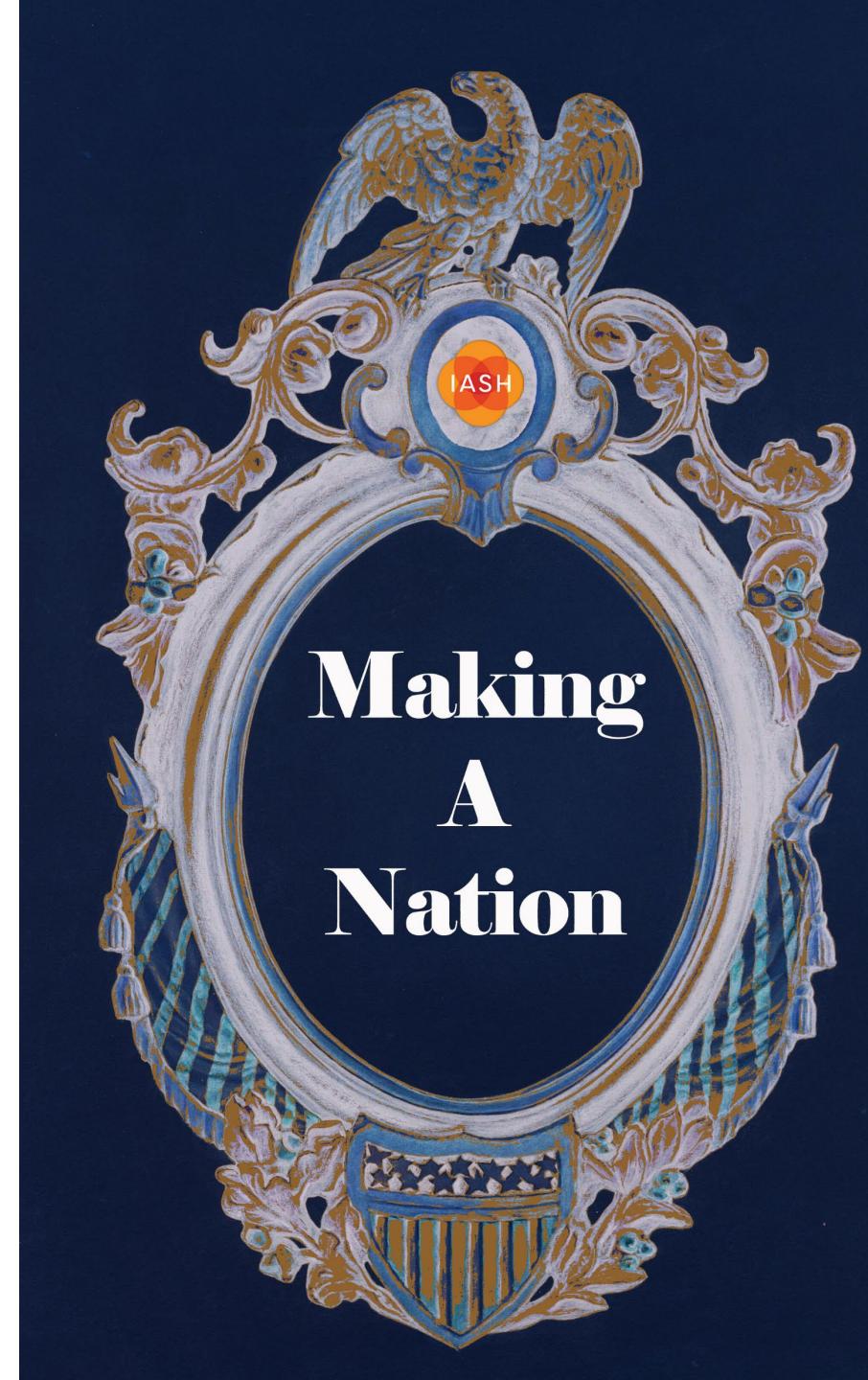
This event is organised by a cluster of Palestine studies researchers associated with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Edinburgh.



Toufic Haddad: *Liberal Peacebuilding and Statemaking as Prelude to Apartheid and Genocide*

Toufic Haddad is a Palestinian American academic and author. He holds a PhD in Development Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and is the author of *Palestine Ltd: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Territory* (I.B. Tauris, 2016). He has worked in various capacities across the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a journalist, researcher, consultant, editor, and publisher. He recently Directed the Council for British Research in the Levant's Jerusalem Branch - the Kenyon Institute (2020-24).

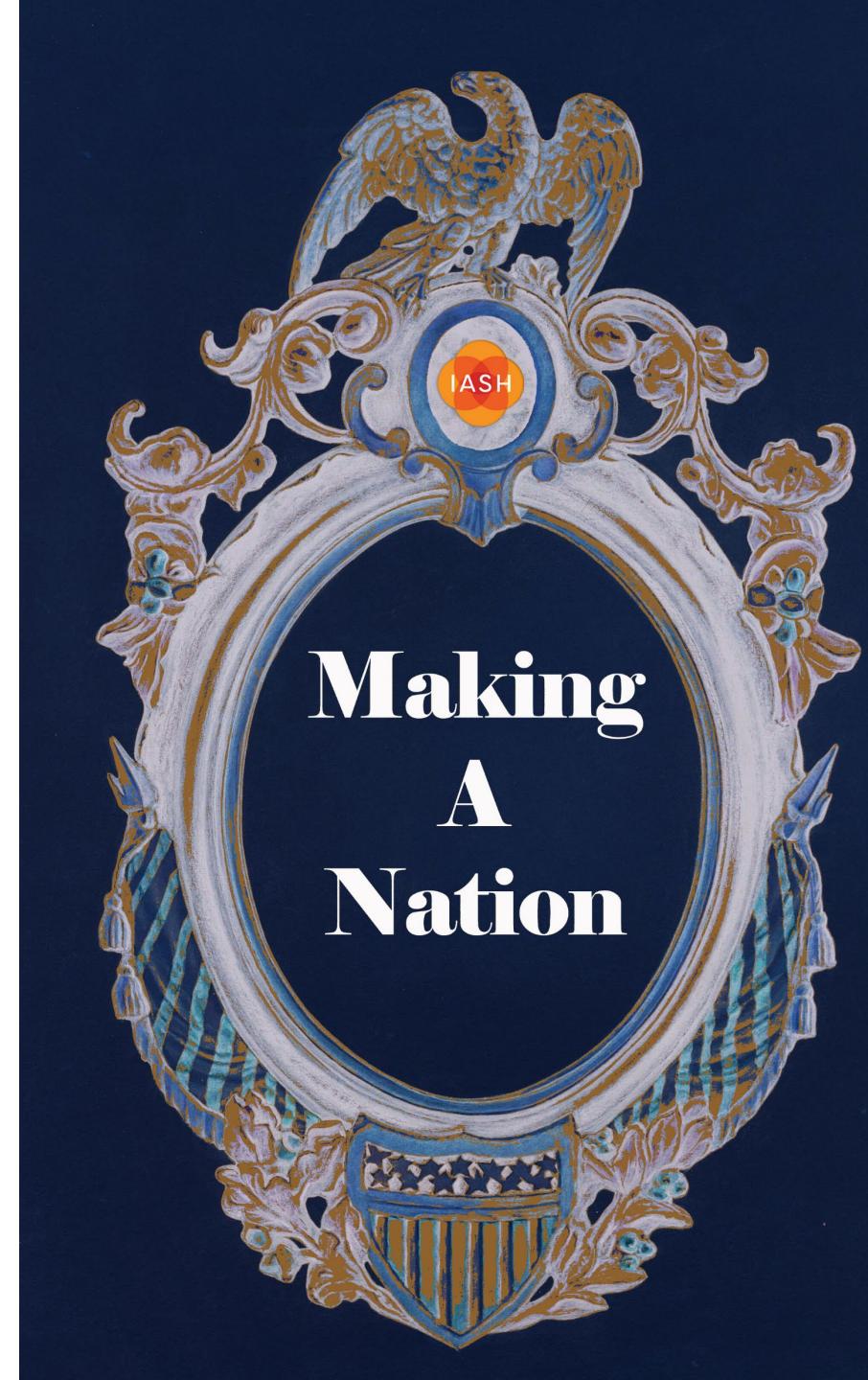
I thought to speak about the liberal statebuilding and development paradigm during the peace process and the illiberal reality it was used to serve: occupation, 'separation' and ultimately apartheid. Practices were marked by an artificial division between 'the economic' and 'the political' which ignored power relations/hierarchies and actor interests. This scenario contributed to persistent trust gaps and leveraging/counter-leveraging measures, as a hybrid version of the Israel-donor agendas emerged, which may have contained the PLO's national aspirations, but which alternatively created wide remit for Hamas and its politics to rise and eventually assume the power of governance.



Pietro Stefanini: *Nation-state-making between Empire and Settler Colony*

Pietro Stefanini is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. His primary research interests are in the international politics of humanitarianism, empire and settler colonialism, and anti-colonial resistance.

In my contribution I will trace the roots of the 'two-state solution' in Mandatory Palestine to the British Peel Commission recommending partition as part of a broader imperial and global drive toward creating racially homogenous nation-states, and how this was legitimated through notions of 'population exchanges' and 'humanitarian resettlement' also during the 1948 Nakba. Then I will discuss how the legacy of this nation-state-making process has prominently manifested in the present with the genocide in Gaza being presented and framed, in part, through humanitarian language and to an international liberal audience.

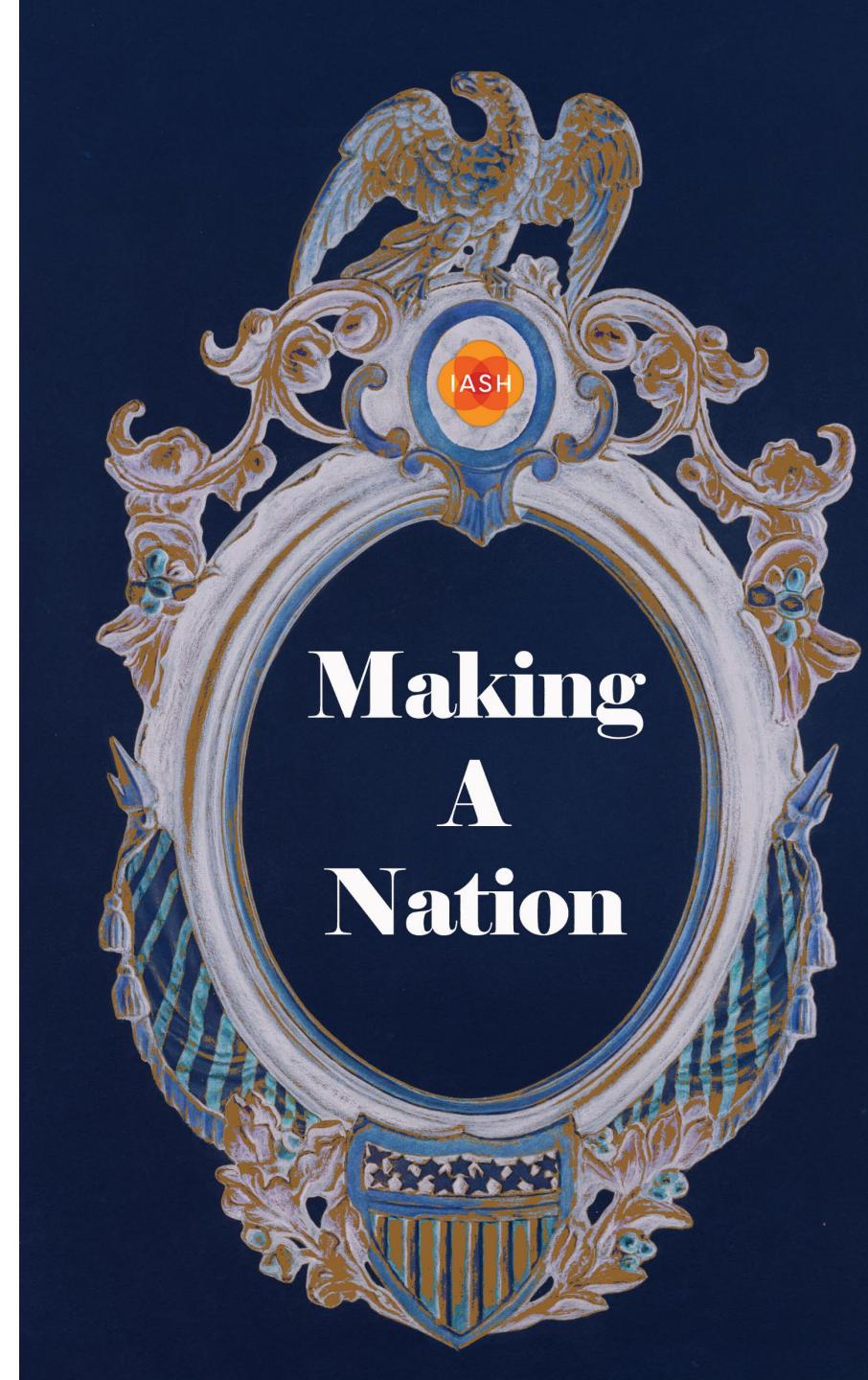


Farah Aboubakr: *Documentation and Archiving in a State-less' Context*

Farah Aboubakr is a lecturer in Arabic at the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. Farah obtained her PhD (2014) in Translation and Intercultural Studies from the University of Manchester. Her research focuses on issues related to memory, identity and cultural productions in the Palestinian context. Publications include *The Folktales of Palestine: Cultural Identity, Memory and the Politics of Storytelling* (2019) and more recently “Archivalism and memory activism: The Nakba (1948) and the Gaza War (2023)” (2025).

I will reflect on other ways of understanding documentation, highlighting in particular creative and artistic practices, and how they may complement documentation processes of a more forensic nature. This is linked to unpacking how the destabilisation brought on by these artistic practices affects how documentation is understood, and what its role in justice processes can be. During ongoing trauma and constant violation of rights, how can we link documentation to nation-building (if any) and/or transitional justice? Some of the questions I will try to reflect on in my intervention are:

- 1- How can we describe the relationship, or the differences, between memory, storytelling, documentary practices and archival practices in the Palestinian context?*
- 2- How can oral storytelling and artistic expressions more broadly contribute to justice efforts differently than traditional documentation practices?*
- 3- How can the 'archival multitude' and the concept of a 'living archive' in the context of the Nakba and the Gaza genocide generate a new understanding of activist-driven documentation work in conflict contexts?*



Shaira Vadasaria: *Recognition, Racial Politics and the Question of Palestinian Sovereignty*

Shaira Vadasaria is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Senior Associate Fellow of the Alwaleed Centre. Her research and teaching advances interdisciplinary social inquiry on genealogies of race & racial violence constitutive of settler colonialism, imperialism and empire, with an interest in ethics, methodology, anti-colonial social movements and social thought. Her recent publications engage with socio-legal analysis and social inquiry on Palestinian expulsion and return, as navigated under and against the racial politics of settler nation building, humanitarianism and legal redress.

Throughout the past several months, we've seen renewed international attention on the question of recognition of Palestinian statehood and the wider question around national sovereignty. The decision to recognise Palestinian statehood at this historical juncture raises key questions around its remit and motivation. Reflecting on what these gestures mean within the imperial core and after two years of genocide, I will discuss what they reveal about the century-long threat of Palestinian sovereignty.

