

## “When I see them I see us”: Palestinianness, Blackness, and new geographies of resistance

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### ABSTRACT

The complex political configuration in which Palestinian territories and people are seized nowadays is defined by a tight texture of power which expands its range far beyond the material aspects of expropriation and occupation; it is also defined as an everyday experience of subjugation and annihilation led by the suffocating necro-political regime of Israel for which Palestinian lives are considered as an expendable surplus. The material and cultural politics of dispossession has its climax in a precise policy of invisibility, disappearance, and de-humanization of the Palestinian Other. As a paradigmatic case of racialization, the Palestinian experience could be in many ways read alongside that of Black people in South Africa, and also alongside the contemporary situation of Black Americans in the US. While the exceptionalism of the South African and the Palestinian contexts, with their acknowledged status of apartheid, has been discussed in the last years in terms of a critical reflection on this analogy and on the politics of possibility which could potentially derive from it, the recent events sparked in August 2014 (when Israel launched its operation Protective Edge on Gaza, and in Ferguson, MI, a police agent fatally shot Michael Brown, an 18-year-old black man, igniting unrest in the city) have reopened – or simply strengthened – the ties between these two communities who share overlapping histories, emerging from a politics of exclusion and ‘colonial policing’. The article will focus on the transnational and grassroots movement of Black-Palestinian solidarity that have started to emerge, retracing the common lines which pose both plights not only in the global nexus of a horizontal circuit of policing practices, but which also sees them involved in recovering the old solidarity tradition of decolonial and anti-racist movements, evolving into a new transnational movement of liberation.

### The racialization of Palestinians

In *Thinking Palestine* (2008), a collection of essays edited by Ronit Lentin and reflecting on the actualization of Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of the *state of exception* in the Palestinian context, the Palestinian scholar Honaida Ghanim tells the readers the story of Rula. Rula is a pregnant woman desperately trying to cross the checkpoint to reach the hospital on the other side of the border, as she is about to give birth to her child. She cries, she screams, but the Israeli soldiers in charge of administering the passage of the wall do not listen to her or her husband, even when he speaks in Hebrew. The soldiers simply refuse their crossing, and Rula is forced to give birth to her little girl in the dust behind the checkpoint barriers, and see her newborn die a few minutes later.

Sadly, Rula’s story is in no way exceptional. This may happen, and it repeatedly happens because the Israeli Defence Force is allowed to intermittently and arbitrarily impose a ban on

the movements of Palestinian people, acting under a ‘legal’ regime of large discretionality. Such is the routinization of the exposure to violence, that the figure of the pregnant woman giving birth at the checkpoint has somehow become a popular culture character of stubbornness and resilience for the Palestinian people.<sup>1</sup> Rula’s experience is an individual fragment of a collective experience of subjugation through confinement, control, immobility, and brutality. Yet, her story, in many different ways and circumstances, is performed every day in front of hundreds of road blocks and checkpoints – expressions of that *anarchic geography of the frontier* (Weizman 2007, 7), of which the wall is simply one of the many material representations. The Israeli-Palestinian geography is propped up by a multiplicity of mobile frontiers which, in addition to reshaping the borders of Israeli governance, are also outlining the contours of those exceptional states managed through the biopolitical mechanisms of ‘thanatopolitics’ (Ghanim 2008, 67). In other words, those mechanisms that make the lives of Palestinian people liable to be voluntarily expropriated and constantly exposed to the menace of death.

Ghanim’s formulation of thanatopolitics inevitably draws from the idea of ‘necropolitics’ suggested by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, for whom the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in the ability to decide who may live and who must die (Mbembe 2003). To exercise sovereignty, he writes, means to exercise control over mortality and to dispose of the life of others as a manifestation of power; bodies and lives are ascribed to the order of sovereign power essentially in their being *disposable*, an attribute of being that defines also their low value as nothing more than an expendable and transferable surplus. It is essentially through this control, which presupposes and incorporates differential and racist logics, that what is being witnessed today is the constitution of Israeli sovereignty as one in which the main objective is not to fight for the maintenance of its own existence, but is rather about “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (14). Mbembe recalls how for Hannah Arendt (1951) the politics of race is ultimately and intimately related to the politics of death. This *necro/thanato-political* drive of the Israeli state makes itself evident in many cases, as when deploying the rhetoric of *human shields* to justify mass and civilian killings especially in Gaza.<sup>2</sup> This rhetoric is nothing but a political-judicial mask, which contributes to de-subjectify and racialize Palestinian people. It involves “de-realizing their losses,” in Judith Butler’s words (2015), and assigns a degree of threat to the body, which is useful to justify the unjustifiable, and becomes the formula of legitimization for the use of lethal force. But excessive Israeli power over bodies has made itself evident also more recently (since October 2015, with the beginning of a new Palestinian uprising, albeit loose and fragmented, which has been termed *Intifada*), leading to the disproportionate and unreasonable cold blood killings of Palestinians.<sup>3</sup> Those who died, presumably carrying a knife, presumably engaged in a terrorist attack, died simply because of their being Palestinian, their Palestinianness treated as an original sin, a threat intrinsic to the mere fact of belonging to a certain community.

This type of political economy of lives and deaths is the result of the untouchable political and ideological Israeli doctrine that is the *security theology* (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015). According to it, Rula's and other Palestinians' very existence is immediately considered a threat to security. Hence, the Israeli occupation articulates itself through geo-political variables, but is also articulated through a form of *state terror* that, even when it is not lethal, translates itself in forms no less violent and invasive, including the so-called *occupation of senses*,<sup>4</sup> and the industry of fear and control. In this scenario, the practices of land expropriation, forced eviction of the native population and the construction of illegal settlements in the Occupied Territories, thicken the wide spectrum of practices through which the political and military structure of the Israeli State continues

to devalue, debilitate, denigrate, humiliate, exclude and evict Palestinians, morally, economically, legally, territorially. And it does so in the name of their ethno-naturalized or ethno-historicizing difference. (Goldberg 2008, 43)

This concerns not only the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, but also, in different ways, those who live in the present State of Israel, built as the Jewish nation, where the Law of Return is in force. According to this law, everyone who is able to prove that they descend from a Jew in a matrilineal or patrilineal manner, or anyone who has converted to Judaism, is entitled to Israeli citizenship. This enacts a socio-racial hierarchy, for which Palestinians born on that land and declared absentees on Census Day (in 1948 and 1967) are deprived of their nationality. Those who were not expelled during the Nakba, today's Israeli Arabs, are instead subject to the military rule, still based on the *British Mandate Emergency Regulations* of 1945. These regulations virtually abolish the fundamental rights of expression, movement and equality before the law, though granting to the Palestinian citizens of Israel the right to vote and to be elected. Referring to Israel as an imperfect democracy is a euphemism: what it is based on is rather the sealing and the institutionalization of an apartheid regime, what David Theo Goldberg calls a "racial Palestinianization" (2008, 26). This is a fundamental feature of the modern State of Israel. It is a system where, reiterating Judith Butler's expression in her famous dialogue with Gayatri Spivak, there are lives that are more violable than others (Butler and Spivak 2007).

Entrenching itself behind an alleged multiculturalism, Israel subjugates and humiliates the *Philistines*, as they are ironically called in an exaggerated Orientalist undertone, and removes them from the realm of morality and rights, thus placing them at the bottom of a social hierarchy which also sees the state of Israel contesting the Mizrahim, the Arab Jews, though with less intensity.

Palestinians in particular, and Arabs more generically, are treated directly as a subjugated race. Beaten in the name of devaluating stereotypes, concentrated in camps in the name of generalized security, displaced in the name of biblical right (effectively collapsing the historical into the transcendental, the

naturalizing), killed in the name of retributive justice, Palestinians are ordered in the name of race rendered see-through, of a category in denial, of a conception unmarked because of a history cutting too close to the bone. (Goldberg 2008, 43)

In 2003, Israel introduced a law according to which any Arab Jew who married a Palestinian would have to move out of the Occupied Territories or leave Israel. Introduced for the purpose of not altering the demographic balance, this law was just another expression of an “ethnoracial purging,” a practice related to that of ethnic cleansing but carrying a different appearance. That is, as Goldberg writes, “the process of removing, evicting (what Ghada Karmi calls ‘vanishing’, 2004) almost all Palestinians identified as such from Green-Line Israel” (2008, 34). If, before the Oslo Agreements (1993-1995), the introduction of a system of permits and a regime of restraints allowed the state of Israel to keep the Palestinian component at a distance while exploiting its workforce, after Oslo the only goal of Israel has been to externalise the Palestinian “demographic threat,” as Alina Korn writes in her essay “The Ghettoization of Palestinians” (2008). After Israel replaced the Palestinian workforce, Palestinians have been confined to ghettos, sometimes surrounded by barbed wires, fences, walls, evocative of South Africa’s *bantustans*, but with a different political design. In fact, these disconnected islands into which the West Bank is fragmented are not functional to domination but to segregation and ethnic-racial discrimination, built to separate not so much the Palestinians from the Israelis, but to separate Palestinians from other Palestinians.<sup>5</sup> The ghettoization of the Occupied Territories is certainly a method to control Palestinian space, because it addresses the possibility of movement, and it acts as a deterrent against the outbreak of revolts (Hanafi 2009). Adi Ophir described this mechanism bluntly, affirming that the

Israeli domination in the Palestinian Territories means the reduction of lives to ‘bare life’ without eliminating too many people, the destruction of habitable space without expelling too many people from that space, the production of impoverishment without starvation, and the denial of access to medical treatment without allowing the outbreak of epidemics. (2004)

Particularly after 2001, with the eruption of the Second Intifada and with the Israeli involvement in what has been globally termed as the *war on terror*, the imagery projected on the Palestinians has worsened. As a consequence, any Palestinian, even when entering the state of Israel for work reasons, is regarded as a potential terrorist and a threat to the security of the state.

Palestinians, Lebanese, Arabs are all terrorists, hiding bombs under their beds to aim at Israel, lurking at the border ready to kidnap the stray Israeli soldier, scheming incessantly to obliterate the State of Israel. (Goldberg 2008, 43)

The social construction of the *philistine* as a dangerous, threatening subject to be eliminated has probably reached its highest level (or rather the lowest) at the time of the aggression on Gaza in 2014, when even prominent Israeli politicians fomented the debate,

inciting rapes and adopting violent equations between Palestinians and terrorists, with a terrifying choral consensus throughout the media.<sup>6</sup> But, actually, this is a very frequent discursive practice, which is added to an extensive range of material tools that define a complete asymmetry of power depriving Palestinians of meaningful political rights.

Recognizing the politics of racialization, segregation, and territorial fragmentation at stake in the Israel-Palestine area and directed towards the Palestinians, does not mean to affirm that the conflict is to be analyzed through the unique lens of identity or race, it being altogether a question of modern nationalism and colonialism (Lubin 2014, 174). However, it does open up a new perspective, favouring a lucid reading of the extent to which Israel exercises its sovereign power as an advanced colonial state project that uses a democratic façade for Jewish citizens, its *white majority*, while camouflaging its dictatorial practices against a *black minority* living in a *state of exception*: Palestinian citizens of Israel, Jerusalemite Palestinians, and Palestinians residing in the different areas of the Occupied Territories, alongside the refugees inside and outside the camps, and all the Palestinians outside Palestine, who are prevented from returning, or even from visiting their land.<sup>7</sup>

### **Born Palestinian, born black? Merging Palestinianness into Blackness: some observations**

Described in these terms, the peculiarity of the Palestinian condition somehow recalls the apartheid regime that characterized South Africa until the early 1990s and for far too many decades, by undeniable correspondence. Such correspondence might be important to reflect upon, not just for the purpose of delineating some interesting historical analogies, but in order to attempt to understand its implications for the future. A recent collection of essays, *Apartheid Israel* (Soske and Jacobs 2015), has gathered various theoretical and analytical contributions, reflecting precisely on whether there could be an efficient comparison between pre-1989 South Africa and the present internal configuration of the state of Israel, since both contexts share a history of racial violence and exclusion, although in different terms. Although, as the editors write, comparisons between Israel and South Africa stretch back to the 1970s, the past decade has seen a growing recognition that Israel's policies and practices toward the Palestinian people should be characterized as apartheid. Apartheid in South Africa was not invented all of a sudden by the Nationalists in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was sustained by centuries of settler colonialism and an already existent economic and legal regime of segregation. In a similar fashion, its origin in Israel is linked to a process of conquest and settlement justified largely on the grounds of religion and ethnic nationalism (Soske and Jacobs 2015, 4). It might easily be said where the two systems differ: the South African system was based on a racial distinction, whereas the Israeli structure is set on an ethno-nationalist separation, with different and overlapping lines of division. It could also be added that the issue of labour – where exploitation of the native workforce was essential for the segregation regime in South Africa –

loses its centrality in Israel. Yet both peoples (the ‘native’ South Africans and the Palestinians) never ceased to pose a challenge to the settlers’ domination. Nevertheless, whatever the analogies might reveal or ignore, the reality of a system of political exclusion and domination, although experienced differently in the local conditions, leads us to a further level of discussion, where, while recognising the singularities of each case, it is possible to bring multiple stories of oppression into dialogue.

While facing the toxic results of the relationship between colonial domination and racial capitalism, the two communities have had much to share and talk about. South Africa began being engaged with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during the 1980s – when Israel was emerging as an important arms supplier to the Apartheid regime despite the international embargo, and when 35% of Israel’s arms export was destined to South Africa. These were arms tested then and now on the bodies of Palestinian men, women and children (Vally 2015). It has been exactly the export of the weaponry and technology of the Israel military-industrial complex that enacted the first connection. It still constitutes a relevant key in assembling the networks of transnational solidarity movements towards Palestine, as Angela Davis’ recent works on *G4S* and the prison-industrial complex point out (2015). As Salim Vally recalls, the ties between South African Blacks and Palestinians strengthened in the last two decades, with rallies of hundreds of thousands of people against Israeli atrocities in Gaza, and in support of the *BDS Movement* (Boycott Divestment and Sanctions).<sup>8</sup>

More than a socio-historical comparison or a set of solidarity actions, what represents one of the most innovative and radical attempts in connecting these two stories of violent rule, is the overall paradigm shift that this comparison could contribute to when approaching the conflict. To identify Israel as an apartheid regime demands a reconsideration of the situation beyond the frames of a territorial dispute between two ‘nations’. A series of shared experiences of political and critical practices uncover the limits of citizenship and regimes based on exclusion that characterize the formation of the modern nation-state. By this we intend the current anomaly of violence and racialization as a general impact of Israeli politics, following long-term policies defined by settler-colonialism (Wolfe 1999; Veracini 2006; Salamanca et al. 2012). This entails a necessary reconfiguration of the possibilities of overturning the current condition, a possibility that is no longer achievable through a process of peace agreements and international resolutions, but only through a process of decolonization of Palestine and an undoing of the actual asymmetry of power relations as the fundamental premise for any solution.

Bearing this idea in mind, the aim of what follows is to extend and re-map the geographical coordinates of this analogy and solidarity, not in order to build new comparisons, but rather in order to think about how to redesign a decolonial political imaginary that – and here I borrow Alex Lubin’s words – resists beyond modernist racial ideologies and modernity’s most powerful political imaginary (Lubin 2014). Furthermore, the sense of observing the Palestinian

experience alongside that of Blacks in South Africa, lies in the necessity to open up a discussion and to recognize not only the similarities in the ways of defying power, but also – in all their divergences – the global multiplicity of possibilities for those oppressed to subvert the colonial violence. This implies the material and symbolical undoing, through force and representation of that “melding of strength, victimhood and a supremacist complex” (Mbembe 2015, viii) that the state of Israel also uses. Eventually, there are no lessons to be learned, but perspectives to confront, and not only in relation to the Black community in South Africa, but also with regards to Black American politics in the United States, deposited in the cyst of what Keith P. Feldman defines as *US imperial culture* (2015).

In relation to Black Americans, a similar chain of multiple disciplinary and bio/necro/thanato-political powers highlights the many connections and resonances between the articulation of *Palestinianness* and that of *Blackness*. Professor Ebony Coletu argued in her contribution on the *Jadaliyya* roundtable on anti-blackness and Black-Palestinian solidarity, that *Blackness* could be intended as “a predicate that releases those who kill black people from responsibility.” It may also be seen, as Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian discussed on the same occasion, as “the constant creation of death in order to allow the potential of life and living power of the others.” In this case, “the political economy of *Blackness* – in its everydayness, in its intimacy, in its sexuality, in its economic gains, in its geopolitical scope – is also the political economy of *Palestinianness*,” which constitutes itself through a form of *otherization*. It collapses into a way of being perceived in zoological terms. In the end, a dehumanization that both invokes and advances white supremacy.

Thus, more than applying the lens of the Black experience to read other contexts of domination, or finding simple analogies, the aim of this article is to highlight, through *Blackness*, another possible way of reading the Palestinian situation, in all its tragic uniqueness, but at the same time, while never decontextualizing and a-historicizing the roots and the political legacies of the occupation and settler colonial domination, putting into evidence the matrix of dispossessing and dehumanizing violence and containment which is at the basis of these two conditions and to see, beyond an exceptional understanding of domination, how they mutually interfere and affect the lives of these people.

In an article published in the *Salon* magazine, David Palumbo-Liu discusses the “congruencies” between the two contexts in the wake of what happened in Ferguson, Missouri, and in Gaza. In fact, in the same days in which Ferguson saw unrest sparking in August 2014, after the police killing of Michael Brown and Black people’s revolts against endless police brutality, with the suburb of Saint Louis becoming the epicentre of nationwide protests against the hyper-militarized police forces targeting Black and migrant communities, Israel was conducting its latest and longest brutal military attack on Gaza, Operation Protective Edge. Palumbo-Liu writes that both peoples hold a history of dispossession from their land and homes, alongside an ongoing system of oppression, for which “Blacks in America still struggle under the continu-

ing effects of historical slavery, as it shows up in unemployment, lack of adequate educational facilities and access, and institutional racism that expropriates black resources, curtails and contains minority rights, and maintains white advantage” (Palumbo-Liu 2014). Palestinians similarly are still facing a radicalised and continuous colonial rule, which saw its climax in the Nakba of 1948 in terms of forced displacement and dispossession. Nowadays the siege of Gaza and the current occupation of the West Bank represent the evidence of the persisting and longstanding effects of that colonial rule.

Notwithstanding the different political systems, both African Americans and Palestinians experience a *de facto* inequality and systemic discrimination in their access to basic democratic rights, coupled to state violence. The same violence which prevented Rula from crossing the checkpoint while killing unarmed Palestinians, much like what happens in the US, where Blacks are frequent targets of suspicion, harassment, acts of intimidation. According to the data collected by grassroots organizations for the Operation Ghetto Storm report, in 2012 one black man was killed every 28 hours by police, security personnel, or vigilantes. Among the people killed by police, 44% were unarmed.<sup>9</sup> This systematic violence combines with the permanent interruption and containment of everyday life, preventing free movement and enforcing racial segregation: a violence for which no one will be held accountable for. The logic of impunity in the US translates into immunity from prosecution, similarly to the lack of accountability and criticism towards Israeli politics with regards to the violation of human rights. The resonances regarding the violent spectrum of technologies of domination do not single out only the processes of building and enacting a vertical model of sovereignty and subjugation, but also the practices of enduring and defending these forms of domination, through a system of enclaving, isolating, and de-humanizing people, alongside intimidating, surveilling, policing, and punishing any form of resistance or subversion. This can be explained by referring to what Laleh Khalili has called a *horizontal circuit*, “through which colonial policing or security practices have been transmitted across time or from one location to another” (Khalili 2010, 415). A complex, multi-layered and polydirectional traffic and exchange of colonial knowledge practices and ideas of domination, which circulates not only between colonies and metropolises, but also between different colonies of the same colonial power, unravelling what she calls *imperial isomorphism*. In the interlaced formation of combining techniques of governmentality with domestic practices of coercion in the metropole, the knowledge of *policing* – as a disciplinary mechanism for circumscribing anti-colonial intransigence – and the technologies of control spread themselves through a network of learning sustained by transnational epistemic communities. From the Israeli military practices of urban warfare, urban police actions and theoretical studies, well described in Eyal Weizman’s *Hollow Land*, to those of surveillance, Palestine has been rendered “a laboratory for a bilateral US/Israeli security industry that has shaped Israel’s approach to the ‘problem’ of Palestinians *and* the US’s approach to the ‘problem’ of urban black poor” (Lubin 2014, 152).

Not surprisingly, one of the main points of connection established between Palestinians and Black Americans in 2014, and which will be discussed later, was also motivated by the fact that the New York Police Department and other American police departments were trained by the Israeli Defence Force. The transference of the knowledge of counterinsurgency measures – initially used to contrast the drug trade – characterized by “heightened security and military techniques as well as mass incarceration” (152), was targeting a category that is identified and rendered a *surplus* population. In fact, the Israeli expertise imprint has been evident not only in the increasingly military attitude of police towards territories and subjects under surveillance, but also in the containment tactics and repression of activists during mobilizations, very much influenced by practices of mass incarceration, similarly to the way Israel privileges practices of preemptive and administrative detention. The presence in both territories of *Group 4 Security (G4S)*, one of the biggest corporations dealing with security management,<sup>10</sup> representing the privatization of security, imprisonment and warfare, and responsible for the repressive treatment of political prisoners inside Israel, is indicative of the profit-driven character of the private companies associated with the rise of mass incarceration in the US (Davis 2015). This expresses more than a metaphoric connection between the US and Palestine; it is emblematic of the combination of a rapacious capitalism with institutionalized racism, at work in the containment and colonial administration of territories and populations. The sovereign rule over Palestinians has very much to do nowadays with the power of control and containment, a politics of dissolution and rendering invisible (Hochberg 2015) that finds in the Israeli detention, as in Black mass incarceration in the US, and more generally in the prison-industrial complex, a common denominator.

*Captivity*, as identified by the scholar Greg Thomas, is ultimately the key to understanding the intersection in the two narratives. Studying the intersections between Palestine, the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Black Radical tradition, Thomas has brought into focus the reverberations between the *Nakba* and the *Maafa* (Swahili word chosen for the ‘Middle Passage’), as they both translate the same thing: disaster or catastrophe, underlining the necessity to think of the ongoing *Nakba* as part of a regime of *captivity* (2016), in the ongoing Zionist attempt to control Palestinians. Palestinians are captives in their encysted territories fenced in by walls, just like Black people are in their suburbs. In this fashion, the theme of captivity extends well beyond incarceration, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between enclaves, ghettos and prisons, which allows us to understand Black and Palestinian lives as tied together, whether in exile, in the occupied territories or in the controlled suburbs, as captives of the colonial political machines.

**From *Enemy of the Sun* to the *Black-Palestinian Solidarity Movement*:  
transnational conversations and the global freedom struggle**

In a crucial sense, *Palestinianness* is *Blackness*. This is explicitly announced in the eloquent title of the 1996 poetry collection by Suheir Hammad: *Born Palestinian, Born Black*. For Hammad “Blackness describes a double-consciousness that links Arab and African American political imaginaries” (Lubin 2014, 167), so she opens her collection with the famous extract of a poem by the Black feminist essayist and poet June Jordan, “Moving Towards Home,” which in its concluding lines recites

I was born a black woman  
And now  
I am become a Palestinian.<sup>11</sup>

June Jordan wrote this poem after travelling for her first time to Lebanon, after the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982. In this process of becoming other in the face of dispossession, the lines between her and the Palestinians merge in collective grief, moving toward a kind of different home in the world (Saliba 2016). What she was poetically delineating, was the line of a transnational discourse of solidarity and resistance, which encompasses the historical trend across geographical experiences affected by the legacy of colonialism, military occupation, and dispossession. It continues to draw links throughout spatial and temporal divides, whether around the construction of walls, the militarization of borders, the confiscation of the land or the brutalization of incarcerated bodies (Seidel 2016). Comprehensibly, her lines have recently become “a touchstone for naming convergences between racial and gender struggles and struggles for justice in Palestine” (Feldman 2015, 185).

Jordan’s verses did not emerge from a political and cultural vacuum. On the contrary, they were rooted in a historical moment when radical antiracist movements in the US were starting to critique Israeli settler colonialism and to espouse the anticolonial expression of Palestinian solidarity in relation to military occupation. With the 1967 June War, and the beginning of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, the ground for Black and Palestinian solidarity was radically changed. Before that, the 1960s had been the years of the decolonial Pan-African movements gaining space internationally, and the years of the idea of internal colonialism taking ground among Black radicals, with the conceptualization of Black Americans as “a colonized people within a colony” formulated by the BPP. Already in 1964, after a visit to Gaza, Malcolm X published his essay “Zionist Logic” in *The Egyptian Gazette*, examining Zionist attempts to ‘camouflage’ its colonial practices as benevolent.<sup>12</sup> That was the time of the growing US Black internationalist interest in global anti-imperialist struggle, in which Palestine was at the forefront, drastically distancing the Black American movement from its initial enthusiasm for the solution of the Jewish diaspora. Black activists used Palestinian anti-colonial imaginary geography to link a race-conscious critique of the incorporative modalities

of US imperialism to the Palestinian national liberation (Feldman 2015, Chapter 2). Three different statements were issued by the BPP as position papers on the Middle East in 1970, 1974, and 1980 promoting Palestinian liberation. These were the years of the BPP training with the PLO in Algeria, with Huey P. Newton, a key figure and co-founder of the BPP, discussing it as a question of human rights and affirming that “We support the Palestinians’ just struggle for liberation one hundred percent. We will go on doing this, and we would like for all of the progressive people of the world to join in our ranks in order to make a world in which all people can live.”

It is often reported by many researchers that it was a group of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the most important organizations of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, who published in 1970 “Enemy of Sun: Poetry of Palestinian Resistance,” a book edited by Naseer Aruri and Edmund Ghareeb. This was a collection of Palestinian resistance poetry, which was found among other books in the prison cell of George Jackson, a famous BPP militant, after his assassination in the San Quentin prison. The poem “Enemy of the Sun” by Samih al-Qasim was even published in the Black Panther newspaper under the name of “Comrade George,” after a draft copy of the poem written by hand was found in Jackson’s cell. Yet, this erroneous authorship and misattribution has become over the years an anecdotal yet powerful symbolic fact. It has cemented, through the *language of captivity*, and a poetic of prison abolitionist solidarity, a series of tangible and intangible Black-Palestinian connections in resistance to colonial prison regimes and occupation (Gossett in *Jadaliyya* Roundtable, 2016).

To retrace BPP, SNCC, and the Black Radicals’ internationalist engagement with Palestine is undoubtedly an interesting story, with profound and significant relevance, still echoing in the present. In this sense, the summer of 2014 represented a crucial historical conjuncture in which Black-Palestinian solidarity was both reinforced and deepened. Everywhere in the United States, people took to the streets and to social media to condemn so-called Operation Protective Edge. Palestine solidarity activists built bridges with prison abolitionists, immigrant rights activists (under the banner “Stop the War on Children From Gaza to the US/Mexico Border”), and workers (in the Block the Boat demonstrations).<sup>13</sup> On their side, Palestinians were among the first to express solidarity with the Ferguson protesters, advising them on how to resist tear gas and rubber bullets, and – for those residing in America – joining them on the streets in Saint Louis.<sup>14</sup> “The Palestinian people know what it means to be shot while unarmed because of your ethnicity,” was one of the most common banners in social media photo galleries and live protests.<sup>15</sup> Yet, this connection was rapidly triggered not only because the same type of tear gas canister shot in Palestine a few days before was then used in Ferguson, but also because the killing of Michael Brown, that of Eric Garner, and of many more, were immediately linked to what was happening on the other side of the globe. The connection between the Israeli racial state violence in the name of security and the US

racialized extra-legal executions – from drone strikes abroad to the killing of Black men, women, and transgender people at the hands of the police – were elaborated in statements of support and solidarity signed by many Palestinian activists, intellectuals and organizations, widely circulated throughout the media (Kelley 2016).<sup>16</sup>

In October 2015, the *Black-Palestinian Solidarity* (BPS) campaign released a video on YouTube called “When I See Them, I See Us.”<sup>17</sup> Featuring many Palestinian and African-American intellectuals and artists, the video was the visual echo of a connection sewn up again by the events of August 2014, which had redesigned a *geography of anger*. The same *horizontal circuit* discussed above was now activated on the same map of anger and control, but also of struggle: linking Ferguson, Missouri, the whole of the United States of America, with Beit Lahya, Jabalyia, Shujaya and Gaza, Palestine. In the eyes of the activists, the same governing power that disciplines Blackness also disciplines Palestinianness, and unsuspectedly weaves vital connections creating solidarity. It re-activates the old tradition of decolonization and anti-racist movements, allowing them to be read with the same critical look.

We choose to build with one another in a shoulder to shoulder struggle against state-sanctioned violence. A violence that is manifest in the speed of bullets and batons and tear gas that pierce our bodies. One that is latent in the edifice of law and concrete that work together to, physically and figuratively, cage us.<sup>18</sup>

*BPS* is in fact today the political articulation of that African-Arab imagery that was popular in the 1990s and the 2000s as a *structure of feelings* (in Raymond Williams’ terms). That same structure of feelings is now a joint struggle against forms of structural racism and the carceral and lethal technologies that keep it alive. *BPS* is a statement for and a commitment to resistance, against the systems of violence and criminalization that make the lives and bodies of the Black and Palestinian population so devalued and expendable. The stories of Tanisha Anderson and Mohammed Abu Khdeir, Ali Dawabshe and Eric Garner, Sandra Bland and Nadeem Nowarah reminds us how important it is to establish connections between the systems of violence and criminalization that make the Black and Palestinian bodies so easily eliminable. They are all victims of the same mirrored experience, so much so that they can tell each other *when I see them, I see us*.

This was the occasion to imagine in their struggles the possibility of a transnational and indigenous alliance pioneered by the marginalized and the voiceless. Over the course of the last years, a delegation of Black community organizers of the protest in Ferguson and members of Black Lives Matter and Dream Defenders toured Palestine for a ten-days trip, “to allow for the group members to experience and see first-hand the occupation, the ethnic cleansing and brutality Israel has levied against Palestinians, but also to build real relationships with those on the ground leading the fight for liberation.” Similarly, a delegation of ten students from Birzeit University sponsored by the National Students for Justice in Palestine began a

two-week Right to Education tour of the US with a visit to St. Louis and Ferguson.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, more than 1100 Black activists, artists, and scholars signed a “Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine,”<sup>20</sup> as a way to continue their conversation, explicitly endorsing the grassroots Palestinian-led campaign of the *BDS Movement*, and suggesting that the above cited *G4S* be identified as a target for a joint struggle. The statement expressed a determined commitment to the Palestinian liberation, while recognizing Israel’s perpetration of injustice and cruelty, with its system of apartheid based “on ethnic cleansing, land theft [and] the denial of Palestinian humanity and sovereignty,” alongside its legalized regime of discrimination.

In their attempt to continue transnational conversations and the interactions of cultural translations in their joint struggle against capitalism, colonialisms and embedded racisms, such practices are to be intended as a starting point for future engagement with other indigenous people globally and for cross-pollination with other global struggles. It was in such terms that the Palestinian-American novelist Susan Abulhawa wrote about the “essential blackness of the Palestinian struggle,” suggesting an understanding that requires “that we reorient the Palestinian struggle to align with indigenous struggles – struggles of the marginalized and voiceless – which I consider to be spiritually and politically black” (2013). It is not a coincidence, in fact, that both communities converged in support of the Native American “Water Protectors” at Standing Rock in their struggle against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, stating that they were “relatives in this struggle.” This is an example of their willingness to impact beyond the borders of their respective communities, thus building an archipelago of struggles and resistance against various forms of dispossession.<sup>21</sup> The nature and force of these dispossessions varies, but important forms of resistance overlap, in an effort to rethink alternative political and social paths towards liberation, by affirming today, even more strongly than yesterday, that in these violent times of white supremacy and neoliberal ideologies, native, indigenous, Black, and Palestinian lives matter.

### An ending note

Approaching heterogeneous but distinct geographies and intersecting political imaginations is useful not only in order to delineate an active comparison, precious as this is to understand the complexities of the forces at play in our global contexts, but also to create spaces of dissonance and to bring to light the existence of a decolonial imagery that forcefully emerges in contexts of physical, economic, geopolitical, and racial boundaries. In the process of reading *Palestinianness* through the lens of *Blackness*, we can find a set of meanings that go beyond solidarity, commitment, and resistance. Bringing *Blackness* to bear on *Palestinianness* can be a political practice that highlights the limits of citizenship, the violence of belonging, and the exclusionary system that characterizes the modern nation-state. These overlapping narratives that emerge from exclusion, statelessness and exile politics need to be excavated in order to reconstruct, from a figuration of the “broken geographies of modernity,” a new transgressive

and insubordinate geography. This implies a *geography of liberation*, seen as a dialectical space produced in the collision between nationalism and colonialism, between the politics of refusal and subaltern liberation. It calls for a project, a decolonization project, and the construction of a radically diverse and less complicit new world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In *Shades of Anger*, a spoken word pièce by the Palestinian artist Rafeef Ziadah, she recites: “And did you hear my sister screaming yesterday, as she gave birth at a checkpoint with Israeli soldiers looking between her legs for their next demographic threat? Called her baby girl Janeen.”

<sup>2</sup> On the issue of human shielding, see Perugini and Gordon 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/maureen-clare-murphy/israeli-forces-killing-cold-blood-palestinian-families-say>; <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/5/9/palestinian-teenage-girl-executed-in-cold-blood-by-israel>; <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/elor-azaria-and-case-killing-palestinians-962877267>; <http://www.rense.com/general96/coldblooded.html>. Accessed April 25, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian defines as *occupation of senses* another form of violence through which settler colonial dispossession is performed in the occupied Palestinian territories, referring to “the sensory technologies that manage bodies, language, sight, time and space in the colony; the administration of who acts, who speaks, who gives birth and how, and who walks/moves/drives where and how; and what kind of language, music, smells, marches, colours, cultures and scenes are promoted and inscribed over the spaces, lives and bodies of the colonized” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2016, 1).

<sup>5</sup> On the idea of the spatial configuration of the West Bank as an archipelago of disconnected islands, see Lambert 2013; Petti 2007; Weizman 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/rania-khalek/israeli-government-promotes-rape-advocate-expert-palestinians> and <http://warincontext.org/2014/07/24/israelis-promoting-the-rape-of-gaza-and-its-women/>. Accessed April 18, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that far from disregarding the different political implications or generalizing different living conditions minimizing the fractures inside the Palestinian community, what I am trying to delineate with regards to the Palestinian people is the subjective condition of discrimination and exclusion, and thus of estrangement, alienation, *outofplaceness* (in diaspora) or *outsiding* (inside the oPt), which is precisely caused by a certain Israeli politics of domination through displacement and dispossession, involving every Palestinian to varying degrees, in and outside the Palestinian territories.

<sup>8</sup> See the BDS movement website at <https://bdsmovement.net/>. Accessed May 24, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://mxgm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Operation-Ghetto-Storm.pdf>. Accessed May 1, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> As one of the biggest corporations in the global market for private security services, G4S operates on a variety of services and in many geographical areas, crossing the globe from Europe to Africa to North America, and it is exemplary involved in the management of the immigrant detention systems in the United Kingdom.

<sup>11</sup> The full text of the poem can be found at <http://www.al-awda.org/until-return/june.html>. Accessed May 21, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> The text of Malcom X’s “Zionist Logic” can be read here: <https://law.wustl.edu/staff/taylor/protest/aapp3.htm>. Accessed May 22, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/charlotte-silver/us-activists-block-israeli-cargo-mass-shutdown-west-coast-ports>. Accessed April 10, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.merip.org/ferguson-palestine>; <https://www.stl-psc.org/>; <https://www.afsc.org/friends/ferguson-i-am-reminded-palestine>. Accessed April 27, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/1.628702>. Accessed April 27, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> See also <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/rana-baker/palestinians-express-solidarity-people-ferguson-on-mike-brown-statement>. Accessed April 27, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.blackpalestiniansolidarity.com/>. The video *When I see Them I see Us* is on the homepage. Accessed May 10, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> The video script can be read at <http://www.blackpalestiniansolidarity.com/script.html>. Accessed May 24, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.eyony.com/news-views/dream-defenders-black-lives-matter-ferguson-reps-take-historic-trip-to-palestine#axzz4i1NCBlox> and <http://www.eyony.com/news-views/building-unity-wrecking-walls-palestinians-come-to-ferguson-032#axzz3J4VVMrLb>. Accessed May 14, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Read the full text at <http://www.blackforpalestine.com/read-the-statement.html>. Accessed May 24, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://blacklivesmatter.com/solidarity-with-standing-rock/> and <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/10/palestinians-standing-pipeline/>. Accessed May 24, 2017.

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