



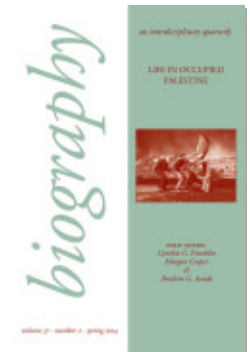
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## Reciprocal Solidarity: Where the Black and Palestinian Queer Struggles Meet

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# RECIPROCAL SOLIDARITY: WHERE THE BLACK AND PALESTINIAN QUEER STRUGGLES MEET

SA'ED ATSHAN AND DARNELL L. MOORE

*I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are not my own.*

—Audre Lorde

## TOWARD RECIPROCAL SOLIDARITIES

The term “ally” is one that has gained currency within countless social justice movements. The question of how to appropriately define this relationship as well as the many ethical considerations regarding how an ally might effectively engage movement work without offense are contested points of conversation, to be sure. Indeed, the ally is often considered one of the key components of transformative justice work precisely because movements require myriad appendages that can forward and actualize political projects. And the questions of who can engage and how one ought to engage are important; they demand consideration. Yet, solidarities are formed through multidirectional relationships—connections that require a type of self-reflexive work on the parts of both the person who is directly impacted by the very structures s/he is moving against and the ally (the indirectly impacted who might also double as an implicit agent in the very injustices s/he is rallying against).

We have participated in movements as both the directly impacted and as an ally. In our experience, movement building and social change has suffered because of the drive to focus only on the issues that matter to us. We admit that we have often fallen short of truly understanding and standing with our allies when they too were in need of support. However, our friendship, and the life narratives that are shared within the space of our friendship, have enabled us to envision and develop reciprocal solidarity.

There are at play various forms of collaboration and ethics that govern the way that allies and those directly impacted engage each other and the work. In most cases, however, it has been our experience in many of the movements of which we have been part that significant effort tends to be placed on the particular cause central to specific movements (i.e., White racism as the central point of interrogation among some committed to anti-racist work; sexism and misogyny as key forms of violence that some feminists choose to respond to; the adult-centered right to marry among a mostly gay and lesbian movement in the United States; et cetera.) What we have failed to experience are the types of solidarities that move social justice advocates beyond the confines of singularity (of mission and work) into a type of work that is give-and-take and intersectional. In other words, there is a need for us to cross the comfortable limits that often prevent us from becoming allies in the movements of those who collaborate with us—a need to shift the focus, if for a moment, from *the* work to *our* work. It is one thing to seek allies who will support the movements that move us, but it is yet another to figure out how we might become allies who are aware of and in support of the struggles that impact the very people we invite into our work. Ally-ship is not provincial and unidirectional.

### QUEER AFFECT AND REPEATED RECIPROCITY

We also acknowledge that reciprocal solidarity is not unique to any particular group of people, and that it is global in reach and has spanned time. For instance, through the writing of Alicia Partnoy, we have gained a rich understanding of how Argentine women political prisoners—in the context of their country's military dictatorship—saw the international and historical reach of their struggle, connecting it with the Vietnamese, Chinese, Bolshevik, Algerian, and Palestinian experiences. “If we feel pain and suffering and transform them into strength,” she writes, “that means willpower, a decision to grow and to give of ourselves, to join in solidarity with those who suffer too” (220).

This is coupled with our understanding of the queerness of reciprocal solidarity, borrowing from Francesca Royster's notion of “queerness in its excess of feeling” as well as her notion of “black queerness” as distinct from models of “queer nation that are increasingly white-centered and that uphold the state” and that “push the boundaries of nation in an LGBTQ civil rights discourse that is clearly US-centric, particularly in its limited definition of rights and tolerance” (“Fela!” 494, 514). In her introduction to “Performing Queer Lives,” Royster reminds us of the impact of struggle on our bodies:

Bodies are ways of dreaming utopia, sites for reaching outside of one's own circumstances, learning and understanding others, serving as a bridge. Understanding how we stand in between. At the same time, bodies bear the cost of struggle and can be the site for conflict within and between identities. (x)

In this essay on Black-Palestinian queer reciprocal solidarity, we recognize how our bodies and life stories are marked for subjugation and even erasure, while also considering the toll of intersectional and structural forms of violence on our bodies and spirits.

Furthermore, as we move toward reciprocal solidarity grounded in and animated by affect—namely, love and empathy—we are inspired by Ann Cvetkovich's conception of "affect as a queer project" to "bring emotional sensibilities to bear on intellectual projects and to continue to think about how these projects can further political ones as well" (6, 9). Thus, the intricate connections of the affective, intellectual, and the political motivate this essay. Additionally, as Jacqueline Shea Murphy and Jack Gray write, we "want to go to a place of empowerment and connectivity, and shift out of this baleful space" while recognizing the "detritus and residue of continuing internal and external colonization" (247). Indeed, in their work on indigenous communities and performance, they state that it is possible to

accept that reciprocal, nonhierarchical, not one-sided, constant interaction and exchange actually is occurring—an equality of exchange between parties who may not themselves be exactly equal, but who enact a kind of balance, an evening out of power, through recurring and reciprocally beneficial interactions. (247)

Therefore, Murphy and Gray remind us to enact and acknowledge "repeated reciprocity," and that "this is what dislodges the baleful colonial residue so it can transform into something else" (247).

Our vision for that something else to which reciprocal solidarity leads is utopian, not only in terms of Royster's notion of dreaming utopia through our bodies, but also in terms of José Muñoz's articulation of "queer utopian memory":

Yet queer politics, in my understanding, needs a real dose of utopianism. Utopia lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity. It permits us to conceptualize new world orders and realities that are not irrevocably constrained. . . . More important, utopia offers us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what *can and perhaps will be*. (35)

Thus, in this essay, which in some ways functions as the retelling of the making of a friendship, we contend that it is through the performing of friendship and repeated reciprocity that we can kindle a queer utopian vision and

reimagine transformed sociopolitical landscapes. As we will explain, our friendship serves as a linchpin for this, recognizing, as Alex de Tocqueville did, the “public and political significance of personal bonds like friendship” and that this “contributes to the successes of democracies, while its absence sets us on a path to despotism” (Mallory 36).

### TOWARD FRIENDSHIP AND ALLYSHIP

Two years ago, on a rainy day in January, the two of us, along with other members of the 2012 LGBTQ solidarity delegation from the United States to Palestine, drove through the lands of what is today called Israel, or what Palestinians refer to as the 1948 ancestral lands of historic Palestine. One of us, a queer Palestinian, served as the co-leader of the delegation, while the other, a queer Black American, was one of sixteen delegates. As part of the tour, we met Abu Husam, a survivor of the *Nakba*, or the 1948 Zionist settler-colonial campaign of displacement and dispossession against the indigenous people of Palestine in the creation of Israel.

Even with his age, Abu Husam stood upright, trim, and proper, with ironed pants and a suit jacket, and kind eyes. He rode on the bus with us as we entered Lajun, the village in which he was born and from which his family, like so many Palestinians, was ethnically cleansed. Lajun is now covered in trees, some natural parts of the landscape, others planted by the Israeli state, which stand amidst the ruins of whatever Palestinian structures that have been able to remain in the village. As Abu Husam looked through the bus windows, it was raining heavily around us, and the sadness in his face of being in his destroyed village—a site to which he is not allowed to return—was evident. “We are the original inhabitants,” he stated:

this is our ancestral homeland and now we find ourselves as strangers on our own soil. I hope that the world understands the level of discrimination and racism that we face. I am sorry, but please allow me to criticize the American foreign policy towards the Palestinian people. Among you on this tour we see ambassadors of justice and freedom. So we present our case for you so that you can share our stories with people when you go home. (“Witness: Palestine”)

Like most Palestinians, Abu Husam was cognizant that American taxpayer dollars account for the fact that Israel is the largest recipient of United States aid in the world. And the delegates know and continue to know very well that this “special relationship” between the United States and Israel must be critiqued and challenged. That is precisely why the delegation produced “An Open Letter to LGBTQ Communities on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine” addressed to an American audience.

It was not long before Abu Husam was in tears, recalling the village that he used to call home: the village where the well once existed where he fetched water, and the school once stood where he was educated. He shed tears as he recalled material facts that had become mere memories invisibilized on the map that he held in his hand. He paused, the tears rolling down his cheeks, and then turned to us and said: "I am sorry. I began to speak without first welcoming you to my village, without first welcoming you to my home." A member of the delegation insisted on leaving the bus at that point, and stood outside in the pouring rain for several minutes. When he returned, he explained to us that he had not prayed for years, but that he felt he had to pray at that moment, in that village, for this man and the people of Palestine as they await peace and justice.

Abu Husam was able to articulate the need for solidarity from Americans to help realize justice, and he identified a particular form of solidarity, one that is based on bearing witness to physical and structural violence, and an allyship based on sharing narratives of suffering and the cry for justice with the world. At the same time, Abu Husam also recognized that even more importantly, these acts must be preceded by human connection and friendship. He seemed to be aware that solidarities are transactional happenings. When we acknowledge each other's humanity, and when we welcome one another into our lives and worlds, it is that powerful form of friendship and joining of the spirits that sustains solidarity among people. Indeed, it was in the moment of deep grieving and friendship building where one of us, Darnell, began writing the draft that would become the delegation's official statement. Friendship, and the sharing of Abu Husam's life story, catalyzed advocacy and connection.

The two of us met on this solidarity delegation, and our subsequent friendship, and the life narratives to which we can attest, which are simultaneously personal and political, offer a foundation for reciprocal solidarity. Furthermore, as queer men, one Palestinian and the other a Black American, reflecting upon our friendship and mutual experiences enables us to articulate how we have come to understand the intersections of our struggles and the need for reciprocal solidarity. Our friendship, and the life writing that it makes possible in this essay, are self-conscious forms of resistance to race, gender, and sexuality-based violence, and the myriad forms of oppression that undergird the subjugation of Black, Palestinian, and queer bodies. The issue foregrounding our writing is a consideration of what is at stake when people with complex identities join in solidarity around a particular struggle and tell their stories despite the risks of erasing their existences in other spheres. We argue that when we tell personal life stories, we open space for structural analyses of inequality and oppression that move beyond a single-variable politics and praxis. The representations of our individual lives have

the power to complicate myopic visions for social transformation. The focus on human relationships, such as our close friendship, demonstrates the revolutionary potential of everyday bodies and lives to transcend physical and psychological boundaries and structural violence. Such personal alliances are attentive to the work of friendship-making as well as political solidarity. Supporting one another is as invaluable as protesting in arms precisely because the stresses on individual bodies and lives may inevitably result in a weakening of coalition. Through friendship, and through allyship, social justice and emancipation become possible.

### ON PINKWASHING AND BLACKWASHING

What brought us together was a shared commitment to resisting pinkwashing—this is a term employed by queer Palestinian activists and other people of conscience to describe the efforts by the Israeli state and its supporters to draw attention to Israel’s purportedly progressive record on LGBT rights to detract attention from Israel’s gross violations of Palestinian human rights. Sarah Schulman, a New York-based lesbian, Jewish, and anti-Zionist writer and academic, has emerged as one of the key figures in the global queer Palestinian solidarity movement, and her efforts were invaluable toward the recruitment of the delegates on the LGBTQ delegation to Palestine.<sup>1</sup> The delegation was hosted by queer Palestinian organizations, namely Al-Qaws (Arabic for “rainbow,” also known as an organization for “Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society”), Aswat (Arabic for “voices,” also known as “Palestinian Gay Women”), and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (PQBDS). The purpose of the delegation was not only to connect queer Americans and Palestinians, following upon a successful speaking tour of queer Palestinians across the United States the previous year, but also to further establish networks to undermine pinkwashing campaigns, and the cooptation of queer Western movements by the Israeli state’s political project. Other leaders in the global queer Palestinian solidarity movement have included Judith Butler, the lesbian, Jewish, anti-Zionist renowned gender theorist; and Angela Y. Davis, the queer, African-American, academic, civil rights leader and prison abolitionist. For instance, in 2012, Davis spoke as part of the “Queer Visions” initiative at the World Social Forum in Brazil, the theme of which was “Free Palestine.”

The growth of the global queer Palestinian solidarity movement has been heartening and energizing for us, and yet the connections between pinkwashing and blackwashing need to be theorized. The latter is a term employed by Palestinian solidarity activists to describe the campaign on the part of the Israeli state to co-opt Black Americans to support Israeli policies. Thus,

African-Americans have been identified by Israeli consulates across the United States as strategic targets in a similar manner as LGBT communities. For instance, the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), one of the most powerful lobbies in the United States, is used to push the Israeli state's agendas on Capitol Hill. AIPAC has been known for actively recruiting Black college students to its conferences and on campuses across the United States in order for them to serve as propagandists for the Israeli state (Moore and Mahfuz). As Seth Wessler of *Colorlines* has reported:

Israel is under growing attack from Palestinian and international activists who call the country a racist apartheid state. In response, its staunchest U.S. lobby is recruiting black students as moral shields to make the case for Israeli impunity. At historically black colleges and universities (known as HBCU's) around the country, AIPAC is finding and developing a cadre of black allies to declare there's no way Israel can be racist.

Such forms of blackwashing, and the pinkwashing we referenced earlier, must be understood as interlinked and integral to the "Brand Israel" efforts of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to improve its image across the world, particularly in liberal and racial minority communities where support for Israel is diminishing rapidly, while support for Israel remains solid and steady among rightwing conservative groups such as some communities of Evangelical Christians in the United States. Israel recognizes that it is facing a public relations crisis, but rather than improve its treatment of Palestinians to improve its global image, the state seeks to render its policies of apartheid and brutal, illegal military occupation more palatable to Western publics, particularly in the United States, given the unprecedented and tremendous financial, political, and military aid that is provided to Israel.

Nonetheless, key figures such as Angela Y. Davis have not only identified the struggle for Palestinian freedom as a queer struggle but also insisted that Black Americans and Palestinians are natural allies. In her own activism and scholarship as a former political prisoner in the United States, and as a queer woman, Davis is able to elucidate how, for instance, the prison industrial-complex links both Israel and the United States. She is known for compelling arguments against the carceral state. In the cases of Israel and the United States, both function as carceral apparatuses that permit the mushrooming of prisons and proliferation of criminalizing policies. Davis publicly campaigns against corporations such as G4S, the British multinational security corporation and the world's largest security company, which is complicit in supporting Israel and its illegal detention and torture of Palestinians in prison facilities, including women and children, in violation of human rights {"Desmond Tutu"). From the *New York Times* we know that the United States has "less



than 5 percent of the world's population. But it has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners" (Liptak). We also know that this system targets minority men, black and brown, disproportionately, as delineated by Michelle Alexander in her book *The New Jim Crow*. And according to Addameer, the Palestinian prisoners' rights organization, Israel has detained nearly 20 percent of all Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, and 40 percent of West Bank Palestinian men. Perhaps the "special relationship" between the United States and Israel that we are so used to being celebrated by American and Israeli politicians is precisely that of mass-incarceration and criminalization of bodies that have been marked as the racialized other.

As our friendship has developed over the past two years, it is a shared experience of the disciplining of our bodies, the pervasive surveillance of a repressive state and its policing apparatuses in our lives, and the deaths and detentions of our brothers and sisters, queer and straight, locally and transnationally, that brings us together and strengthens our bond. In many ways we realize that queer and trans Blacks and Palestinians are born with prison sentences, not knowing whether we will see the light of day tomorrow due to racism, homophobia, and colonial violence. We count our blessings to be alive when we can, and we celebrate our friendship, together. This is what motivates us to serve as better allies.

### **ANTI-SOLIDARITY IN THE ERA OF RECIPROCAL SOLIDARITY**

Just as there has been an outpouring of love and solidarity with the Palestinian people from within American LGBTQ communities on the one hand, anti-Palestinian prejudices, anti-Arab racism, Islamophobia, and sympathy for the Israeli state remain formidable challenges to be confronted in the mainstream gay movement in the United States on the other. Anti-pinkwashing activism is bolstering the former and undermining the latter. Similarly, there has been an outpouring of affection, solidarity, and identification with the Palestinian people from within Black American communities, while the dehumanization of Palestinians that is pervasive in United States centers of power is still reflected in the politics of other Black Americans. Anti-blackwashing activism is also bolstering the former while undermining the latter.

Through our friendship, and the experiences and life narratives we have shared, it is the joining of anti-pinkwashing and anti-blackwashing activism that animates the empathy and affection that tie us together. It is this commitment to a queer, anti-racist, and anti-colonial reciprocal solidarity that has also made us attuned to the manner in which Black bodies, in particular, have been appropriated by the Israeli state and its satellite institutions, while being embraced and invited to instead join the world of Palestinian

solidarity with which they share more in common and with whom they have often come to identify. At the same time, this critical anti-blackwashing and anti-pinkwashing optic must also assess the realities of anti-Black racism, homophobia, and misogyny in Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and American solidarity communities and networks. Certainly, these global forms of prejudice have unfortunately come to be near universal, and they are not completely absent from the orbit of Palestinian solidarity. The narrative of our friendship animates the ways in which structural violences like blackwashing and pinkwashing function in the realm of the everyday; that is, in the material lives of subjects. Our friendship story is but one way to illuminate the usefulness of counter-narratives that can complicate masculinist narratives of oppression against Palestinian and Black bodies because they center on the interior lives of the otherwise imagined “other.”

The rifts between Black Americans and Palestinians are real because of the aforementioned prejudices, and they are exacerbated by the interlinked processes of US support for Zionism and other forms of militarism and imperialism in the Middle East. Drawing upon historical support for the Civil Rights Movement in the United States among American Jewish individuals and communities of conscience, support for anti-Zionist Jewish individuals and organizations today can serve as a powerful bridge between Black, Palestinian, and Jewish communities. In this spirit, we are inspired by the words of Ferrari Sheppard. Reflecting on his experience after participating in a 2014 Black Delegation to Palestine-Israel, he writes: “The fact remains that our delegation was subject to a type of racism I’ve only experienced in the southern states of the United States of America”:

Zionism has convinced many Jews that they are preserving themselves. The common thought is that if the “savage” Palestinians stop resisting, stop shooting rockets, stop fighting Israel’s inevitable domination, there can be peace. I find this peculiar because during my visit, I felt no danger from Palestinians, only from Israeli soldiers. Perhaps it’s because I’m accustomed to being hunted in America. There is no Palestinian-Israeli conflict; there is only oppression. I will never disregard the Holocaust which left millions of European Jews dead or scrambling for survival. There is nothing that will ever right the wrongs committed by the brutal German regime. On the same note, I will never minimize Germany’s first, and little-known, genocide against the Herero and Namaqua of Africa, or King Leopold’s bloody reign on the continent. Tragedy is tragedy, one should not be placed above the other, nor should a past tragedy justify the next.

Until we embrace a notion of “never again” that encompasses all people, regardless of whom the perpetrators and victims may be, tragedies will continue. For every additional form of United States support for the Israeli regime,

for every Black American soldier who harms civilians while deployed in the broader Middle East, for every African domestic maid abused in an Arab country, and for every Arab-American convenience store owner who exploits his Black inner-city customers, the rifts between our communities are more pronounced. Yet they are bridged by shared conditions of colonialism, as well as by further potential for compassion, love, and solidarity.

Palestine, the inner-city United States, Jim Crow America, and apartheid South Africa provide not identical, but parallel histories of segregation, racial violence, and opportunities for connection—and friendship—between Blacks and Arabs, queer and straight. When Black Arabs become legible to us as well, these binaries begin to collapse. Through life writing—namely, narratives of friendship-building and reciprocal solidarity—the Black and/or the Arab are humanized—made real—and, therefore, the state violence that befalls each is similarly evidenced as material and illegitimate. The descendants of African slaves in the Middle East, and other Black Arabs, including Black Palestinians, are parts of the social fabrics of the Middle East, even as they struggle against the legacies and contemporary realities of anti-Black colorism in the region.

Even as the Palestinian solidarity movement has been able to celebrate the huge strides gained last year alone when professional associations in the United States have issued various forms of endorsements for boycotts of Israeli academic institutions complicit in Israeli apartheid and occupation, this has catalyzed conversations and produced a range of responses. The boycott resolutions started with the Association for Asian American Studies, whose action was shortly followed by solidarity statements and resolutions supporting the boycott of Israeli academic institutions from the Association for Humanist Sociology, the American Studies Association, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, and the African Literature Association. Nicholas Brady, the Black American activist-scholar from Maryland, reflecting critically on the historic American Studies Association (ASA) resolution, has written passionately in a blog post on what he saw as a void in the boycott debates when it came to considering anti-Blackness and Black suffering in Israel/Palestine and in the region. We understood Brady's intervention as both an act of protest and a call for a form of reciprocal solidarity in a moment when anti-blackness was seemingly under-theorized. We believe that reciprocal solidarity along the lines that we are delineating, and that are premised on love, friendship, storytelling, and queer kinship, can ameliorate the wedges between our communities when the struggles against anti-blackness or anti-Palestinianness are not shared. At the same time, Brady's intervention can be juxtaposed with the resounding support that the Black American scholar Frederick C. Moten expressed in his

reflections on the ASA boycott resolution well before last year, at the 2009 ASA Meeting:

Selfishly, I am interested in how this boycott might provide some experiential and theoretical resources for the renewal of a certain affective, extra-political sociality—the new international of insurgent feeling. This is to say, finally, that these remarks have been nothing other than a long-winded preface to a declaration of my indebtedness to Palestinians for the fact that, in the end, the boycott might very well do more for me than it does for you, precisely in its allowing me to be in solidarity, which is to say consciously in a mutual indebtedness, with you and with the richness, impossibly developed in dispossession and deprivation as payment of a debt (or being subject to the violent imposition of a kind of credit) that was never promised and never owed. The imposition of credit, and its having been exceeded by an already given debt that is insofar as it is to come, is what comprises Palestinian social life. Thanks for the chance to join that social life, to be, as it were, pre-occupied with it, that your call for solidarity, which is itself an act of solidarity, provides. (“Fred Moten”)

When the anti-blackwashing and anti-pinkwashing movements work in tandem with one another, we march one step closer to this “new international of insurgent feeling.” Through these processes, we can and should help amplify the voices of Black Arabs and others who are committed to Arab-Black reciprocal solidarity.

We hear these voices when the African-American poet June Jordan writes “I was born a Black woman / and now / I am become a Palestinian,” and when the Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad writes “Born Palestinian, Born Black.” To be sure, Jordan’s words were the inspiration for Darnell’s writing of the initial draft of the delegation statement during his time in Palestine and the very first essay he published about his visit upon his return. Words, narratives, matter. And we read these words, together, and we derive further strength, and further determination to live, across our divides, together. We hear these voices through the words of DAM, the Palestinian hip-hop group that has been inspired by the emergence of rap as a genre first among Black Americans, which now has transnational reverberations. DAM sees in American hip-hop not only a musical aesthetic that resonates, but an experience underlying the lyrics and their performance that resonates as well. Outside of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, indigenous Palestinian Christian and Muslim populations still reside in what has been called “Israel proper”—or the “Jewish state.” As a marginalized and oppressed community, Palestinians in Israel can be found in overcrowded urban centers, segregated from mainstream Israeli society, and denied rights and privileges because of their ethno-religious status. Thus, these sites of poverty, crime, under-resourced schools, and inferior social services constitute a political context of racialized structural and physical violence and a repressive state that mirrors what one finds in inner-city

America today. What the Palestinian scholar Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (also a contributor to this *Biography* issue) has called “criminality in spaces of death” among Palestinians in East Jerusalem, for example, would ring true as well to those of us who understand contemporary Black subjectivity in the inner-city of the United States. Thus, as DAM and their music proliferate in Palestine, the broader Arab world, and across the globe, the embrace of Black American rhythms, dress, expression, and ideology is an example of the powerful forms of identification and solidarity that Palestinians so clearly exhibit toward African-Americans. And yet, many of the localized, but interconnected, struggles encountered by African-Americans and Palestinians would otherwise go unrealized unless they were evidenced. Here, again, we point to the role individuals play when telling stories of their shared relationships to localized and global circuits of state violence and injustice. Indeed, within our friendship we discovered connections that are often misrepresented or muted within anti-Black and anti-Palestinian discourses that seek to disempower movements by splintering the very bodies impacted by such discourses.

The work of reciprocal solidarity between Black Americans and Palestinians also requires self-reflexivity on the part of those who choose to be in community. The renowned Palestinian-American writer Susan Abulhawa has called for “confronting anti-black racism in the Arab world” in a widely-read article that historicizes and contextualizes this racism and which was published in *Al Jazeera* (“Confronting”). Abulhawa also calls for “reciprocal human solidarity” in a piece published in *Electronic Intifada*, a pro-Palestinian website (“Palestinian”). The editors of the site later imposed on Abulhawa’s article the title “The Palestinian struggle is a black struggle,” and then refused to honor Abulhawa’s request that they change that title or at the very least add a disclaimer that the author did not approve of it. As a result, she posted the following in the Comments section beneath the article:

I need to make it clear here that I, the author of this essay, did not choose the title. I’ve asked EI to make that disclaimer to the essay, but they refused, saying that their guidelines are clear that they retain the right to choose whatever title they like, apparently even if that title does not accurately reflect the author’s words.

Given this, I need to make it clear here (and hope the moderators will have the integrity to allow this post) that I was careful, in fact, NOT to say that the Palestinian struggle was a Black struggle because I think there is an element of appropriation of someone else’s struggle to this statement. I referred to the “essential blackness” of our struggle and said that our struggle was “spiritually and politically black” but never that it was a black struggle. There’s a difference and I just need to put that out there.

It is unfortunate that the editors at EI would choose to interpret my words and then disregard my objection to attributing those words to me.

This case demonstrates an example of anti-solidarity vis-à-vis Black Americans within the Palestinian solidarity movement on the part of *Electronic Intifada*. It also highlights the importance of remaining vigilant when it comes to the appropriation of another community's struggle in the name of reciprocal solidarity. Life writing, as well as other forms of biographical narration, centers on the life worlds, subjectivities, and inner lives of human bodies. Life writing inevitably privileges the inner life of the subject, and as such, diminishes the possibility of misappropriating one another's narrative and struggles.

### APARTHEID, PAST AND PRESENT

The explicit recognition that Israel is committing the internationally-sanctioned crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people has further entrenched Black support for Palestine, not only in the United States, but also among Black diaspora populations, in the African continent and worldwide. Nelson Mandela was known for having stated in his address at the 1997 UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People: "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians" (CBS News). It was therefore no surprise, given Mandela's support for Palestinian freedom and the apartheid South African regime's close alliance with the Israeli state, that Israel did not send its heads of state to Mandela's funeral. Similarly, in 2002 the BBC reported that the South African anti-apartheid activist and Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu "condemns Israeli apartheid" (BBC News). Tutu has remained a leading figure in the global Palestinian solidarity movement. Additionally, the African National Congress in South Africa has joined the Palestinian civil society-led boycott movement against Israel, which was inspired by the South African anti-apartheid boycott movement. After her recent visit to Palestine, Baleka Mbete, the ANC Chairperson, stated that Israel is "far worse than apartheid South Africa" (Abunimah).

These undeniable parallels between contemporary Israel/Palestine and apartheid South Africa have been reiterated by former US President and Nobel Laureate Jimmy Carter, in his book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, and even by Israeli officials such as Alon Liel, the former Israeli Foreign Ministry Director-General and former Ambassador to South Africa. On its website, the progressive organization Jewish Voice for Peace has assembled quotes from high-ranking Israeli politicians who have made the apartheid analogy.

The Palestinian experience of apartheid galvanizes the support of Black Americans for the global Palestinian movement, reminiscent of their involvement in the global anti-apartheid movement against South Africa and in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States before that. In reflecting on her witnessing of Israeli apartheid, Alice Walker, an activist during the Civil

Rights Movement and Pulitzer Prize winning author, who is also queer, has stated that “the unfairness of it is so much like the South, fifty years ago really, and actually more brutal, because in Palestine, so many more people are wounded, shot, killed, imprisoned . . . there are thousands of Palestinians in prison, virtually for no reason” (“Alice Walker”). Alice Walker also served as one of the esteemed jurists in Capetown, South Africa at the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, which formally established that “Israel subjects the Palestinian people to an institutionalised regime of domination amounting to apartheid as defined under international law.”

We are reminded of why this reciprocal solidarity is so important when we listen to the words of dream hampton, the Black American writer, filmmaker, and community organizer from Detroit, after her visit to Palestine: “I wasn’t prepared for the white supremacy” (Barrows-Friedman). We are also moved and our friendship is deepened when we read the words of African-American UCLA Professor Robin Kelley describing what he witnessed in Palestine: “A level of racist violence I have never seen” (Kane). The choir of African-American voices speaking in support of the Palestinian struggle as linked to their anti-racism consciousness and activism continues to grow, with groups such as the Indigenous and Women of Color Feminists Delegation to Palestine, who affirmed their “association with the growing international movement for a free Palestine,” and joined the call for divestment from Israel (Ransby). Interfaith Peace-Builders has also been organizing solidarity tours in the form of African Heritage Delegations to Palestine, the last of which issued a statement calling on African-Americans to support the Palestinian freedom struggle and to join the boycott movement against Israel (African Heritage). A poignant “Letter to Black America on Palestinian Rights” has also served as a powerful call for solidarity between Black Americans and Palestinians, and it has been signed by prominent Black Americans including Cornell West (US Campaign). Headlines today reveal the extent of this solidarity with Palestinians, as renowned Black American singer John Legend uses his public platform as a commencement speaker at the University of Pennsylvania (his alma mater) to call for the humanization of Palestinians (Salaita), and Black American actor Danny Glover calls for a cultural boycott of Israel (JTA).

Even among the younger generation of African-Americans, Israel’s black-washing has met with only limited success. *Ebony* recently published a powerful piece by queer African-American Stanford University student Kristian Davis Bailey entitled, “Why Black People Must Stand With Palestine.” Furthermore, the same *Colorlines* article describing the pro-Israel lobby’s courting of Black college students reports that Black Americans such as Edna Bonhomme—a queer Princeton University student and Palestine solidarity activist—are resisting the lobby’s efforts and clearly articulating their positions on Palestine:

If you look at South Africa, there were differential sets of laws for people of different races in education, jobs, housing, for example. Having a differentiated and unequal legal system where racial origin differentiates people is apartheid. In Israel and the Occupied Territories the legal structure is that Arab residents have different rights than Jewish residents. It's an apartheid structure. (Wessler)

The support of Black Americans for the Palestinian cause is not a recent phenomenon. In November 1970, for instance, the *New York Times* published "An Appeal by Black Americans Against United States Support of the Zionist Government of Israel" (Abukhater). This appeal calls for an end to racist oppression, a cutting of United States aid to Israel, and for Black American solidarity with Palestinians. Similarly, James Baldwin, the Black gay American writer and poet, was a vocal critic of Zionism and supporter of the Palestinian struggle.

The potential for reciprocal solidarities and friendships bears fruit as we collaborate on this essay. It also has been manifested as one of us—who traveled in community with the other in the other's homeland—is able to write about his experiences and reflections upon his return to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, our friendship, imagined as a noun and verb, functions as space for learning/knowledge production and affective support. And our friendship is also an act of mutual recognition and radical love. Without the deep knowing and empathy that friendship allows it would be impossible for each of us to return to our various communities with a deep sense of connection to the interconnected struggles that we both have encountered across time and space. In fact, it would take more courage to articulate our disparate and intersectional experiences under the conditions of structural violence if we did not have communities of solidarities, friends, who could witness on our behalf and commit to the types of transformative justice work necessary to undo the various violences that befall us. We do not face insular and singular struggles, but expansive and interconnected forms of oppression. As a result, we need interconnected communities of solidarities, which include peoples from diverse contexts, to respond to totalizing forms of structural violence.

Indeed, it has become difficult for a Black American of conscience today to not stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people against Israeli policies. There is increasing cognizance that the Israeli system is one that determines what types of rights one is granted—if one is granted rights at all—based on ethno-religious classifications that privilege Jewish Israelis (primarily Ashkenazi/White Israelis from Europe) over native Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

Additionally, awareness of the significant discrimination against and oppression within Jewish communities in Israel, particularly against Black populations such as Ethiopian Jewish Israelis, heightens the abhorrence with the Israeli regime. For instance, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* has reported that



“20% of Israeli-Ethiopians graduate high school with the necessary credential to go on to university, and nearly 70% live under the poverty line” (Pfeffer). This is a result of pervasive anti-Black racism and a racial hierarchy in Israel that leads to dramatic structural and physical violence. *Haaretz* has also reported on the “almost 50-percent decline over the past 10 years in the birth rate of Israel’s Ethiopian community” and the Israeli practice of injecting Ethiopian-Israeli women with long-term contraceptives (Nesher).

The situation faced by non-Jewish Black refugees and asylum seekers escaping unrest in African states, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea, has been appalling to anyone committed to ensuring basic human rights for all people, regardless of race. Journalists David Sheen’s and Max Blumenthal’s report for *The Nation*, “Israel’s New Racism,” explains how the 60,000 African migrants arriving in Israel have been labeled as “infiltrators” by right-wing Israeli politicians and activists. These refugees face significant persecution, coupled with a detention center in Southern Israel, all in the name of their potential disruption of a Jewish demographic majority in Israel.

Returning to the impact of the Israeli state’s racist policies toward Palestinians, a recent piece published in *Haaretz* by the Israeli journalist and academic Eva Illouz is entitled “47 Years a Slave: A New Perspective on the Occupation.” Her title draws upon the award-winning film *12 Years a Slave*, which is based on the 1853 memoir of Solomon Northup, a free Black man from the North enslaved in the South during the slavery era of the United States. In her article, Illouz argues that “there are strong parallels between black slavery and Israel’s treatment of Palestinians.” She does not contend that the situation of Black Americans under slavery and Palestinians today are equivalent, but that Israel’s complete control and domination over Palestinian bodies and lives constitutes “conditions of slavery” and a contemporary form of captivity.

The histories and present moment of the United States and South Africa, where there is profound asymmetry in power between regimes and Black populations, compel people of conscience around the world to understand that the call for ending forms of apartheid and their structural and physical violence must be unequivocal. The same must transpire with Israel/Palestine today. At the same time, by attending to how colonial violence turns inward—to how structural and physical violence from outside of the home creeps into the home, and to how even within oppressed communities there are internal “others”—we are able to name and must work to rectify the oppression and violence carried out within our communities. Reciprocal solidarity requires that we not lose sight of the struggles against patriarchy and homophobia within Black American and Palestinian society, as well as the anti-Palestinian racism among some Black Americans and the anti-Black racism among some Palestinians. In the true spirit of intersectionality, and inheriting the words

and spirit of Audre Lorde, we understand how all of these struggles are inextricably intertwined. But, more importantly, we would not be able to map the intersections inherent in our struggles if we did not share a friendship space where they could be illuminated. Within our friendship, the sharing of our stories and the practice of empathy make our solidarity work possible. Our friendship is intersectional in theory and practice.

### THE BURDENS OF NON-PRIVILEGE

Our experience has led us to believe that we in the anti-pinkwashing movement have a significant amount of work ahead of ourselves, not only in linking anti-pinkwashing with anti-blackwashing, but also in realizing reciprocal solidarity. Al-Qaws and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions have solicited support from people across the globe, often from the West, which is fundamental to the struggle, given the legacy of Western colonialism, the reality of ongoing Western imperialism, and the role of the United States' unconditional support for Israel. Yet Western allies in the queer Palestinian solidarity movement cannot be made legible and identified in the same manner. Clearly, not every queer and straight ally in the movement is identical. The queer Jewish American who is anti-Zionist combats the pinkwashing within the US Jewish establishment. The queer Native American combats the increasing tide of "redwashing"—or the Israeli state's attempt to co-opt indigenous North American communities and elites in an effort to render the Jewish Israeli population as "native" and to recruit Native American support for Israeli colonialism and apartheid. The fact that redwashing has gained any traction is ironic given the common features of US and Israeli settler-colonialism—perhaps another characteristic that accounts for the "special relationship" between the two countries. Similarly, a queer Black American struggles within her community to combat blackwashing. And all of these modes of resistance—Jewish anti-Zionist solidarity, anti-pinkwashing, anti-redwashing, anti-blackwashing—reinforce one another and move the United States one step closer to ending its complicity in the apartheid, ethnic cleansing, settler-colonialism, and military occupation that have been experienced by the Palestinian people. It also helps move the United States one step closer to ending oppression of populations within its borders.

When subjects are asked to contribute to the Palestinian freedom struggle, some have more resources than others, and some face more limitations, sometimes severe limitations, than others. Despite the significant and overwhelming constraints that Palestinians face and the indignities and Israeli domination that they experience in every aspect of their lives, the spaces for reciprocal solidarity within the global Palestinian solidarity movement must

continue to expand. The transnational dimensions of the Canadian indigenous movement, Idle No More, garnered Palestinian contributions to solidarity with the First Nations of Canada. This exemplified the immense potential for global indigenous networks and activism. For instance, Khaled Barakat, a Palestinian activist, organized a solidarity statement signed by hundreds of Palestinians in support of Idle No More.

We see Black-Palestinian reciprocal solidarity taking hold when, in 2010, Palestinians in Gaza, despite their own experiences with poverty that have resulted from a brutal and medieval Israeli siege, collected Red Cross donations including money, blankets, and food for the victims of Haiti's devastating earthquake. In reporting on this, the *Los Angeles Times* quotes Palestinians in Gaza who stated, metaphorically: "We were exposed to our own earthquake" (Lutz), a way of noting the shared impact of "natural" crises that are exacerbated by human-facilitated structural conditions. The tremors of such conditions can be felt from Haiti to Gaza.

We also see Black-Palestinian reciprocal solidarity when examining the Palestinian response to a central feature of Israeli apartheid: the two-tiered road network in the West Bank, with Israeli-only roads for settlers who live in the Jewish-only settler-colonies and inferior roads for Palestinians. Fadi Quran, a young Palestinian, returned to Palestine after graduating from Stanford University, equipped with the knowledge he gained about the United States Civil Rights Movement and the "Freedom Riders" who boarded segregated buses.



Figure 1. Palestinian Freedom Rider Fadi Quran (photo © copyright and used by courtesy of ActiveStills and the photographer, Oren Ziv).

Fadi realized that while African-Americans were forced to sit in the back of the bus, Palestinians are not even allowed on settler-only roads inside the West Bank, let alone on the buses reserved for these colonists. As a result, he and his fellow activists started the Palestinian Freedom Riders, and they have boarded these buses peacefully, only to be met with the use of force and detention by the Israeli military occupation forces. While drawing attention to the Palestinian struggle against racism and for dignity, the Palestinian Freedom Riders simultaneously honor the legacy of African-Americans in the Civil Rights Movement and celebrate Black agency and struggle that continues in the present. This active form of reciprocal solidarity, resuscitating the American Civil Rights Movement's cry of "We Shall Overcome," has also centered international attention on an otherwise willfully ignored human rights violation.

At the same time, individuals and organizations involved in anti-pink-washing movements must actively consider how allies from non-privileged backgrounds can be supported in return for their emotional and tangible labor. Reciprocal solidarity entails sensitivity to the burden that we place on another and the costs of this work on our bodies, pockets, minds, and spirits. What does it mean to ask a queer Black American—dealing with poverty, racism, and unspeakable violence—to take on the work of Palestinian solidarity? Can his or her complicity with Israeli apartheid as a United States taxpayer be understood in the same manner as a differently raced and classed American subject? Over the course of our friendship and allyship, we have been able to have honest conversations about the weight of barely surviving while trying to assist sisters and brothers across the globe who are also barely surviving. One of us was working full-time in a local organization, while juggling numerous commitments including contributing to pro-feminism writing and establishing support programs for inner-city queer and trans youth of color. Yet on top of this, he devoted time and energy to fundraise the costs of participating in the LGBTQ delegation to Palestine as a delegate. He also had to confront Black American religious leaders who were deeply skeptical of expending the time and resources to support Palestinians, often perceiving and generalizing about them as anti-Black, dehumanized "terrorists" and homophobes, and asserting that the time spent for Palestinians necessarily takes away from a Black person who will not live to see tomorrow. Nonetheless, he made it possible to join the delegation to Palestine while engaging members of his communities on why Palestine is a struggle that cannot be divorced from the Black and queer agendas in the United States. He also experienced how the struggle against increasing levels of Christian Zionism in the United States and support for Israel among Black churches is necessary for the spiritual health of the community and to move away from a political theology that is abusing faith in the service of Israeli oppression. This Christian Zionism

is also rendering invisible the Palestinian Christian population, the descendants of the very first communities to accept Jesus Christ's teachings in the land that the Romans called Palestine. Hence, there is significant work ahead with African-American churches in linking them with Sabeel, the Palestinian Christian liberation theology organization that emphasizes that an anti-Zionist reading of the Bible in support of the Palestinian freedom struggle is the most moral reading of God's will for justice, love, and equality among all people. This concern resulted in working with partners within churches in Newark, New Jersey, and New York City to host a conversation on the Palestinian freedom struggle.

Reciprocal solidarity is made possible when one of us knows that the other will be there for him, such as in taking on all that comes with being part of the Palestinian solidarity movement, while also knowing that the other will be there for him as well. Thus, when continuing the support of programs for inner-city queer and trans youth of color in the United States, and in helping to set up a summer sports camp for these youth in Chicago specifically, it was important for the kids and adult supporters in Chicago to know that financial and moral support came their way from a Palestinian ally. This information was shared publicly with the organization's various stakeholders and donor networks, but it is also frequently discussed by one of the organization's co-founders when he speaks across the country. Just as it carries tremendous symbolic weight for Palestinians to know of the Black American support for their cause and that they are not alone, so is it also essential for Black Americans to know that their Palestinian sisters and brothers stand alongside them, even from a distance, due to the ties that bind us whether we realize it or not. We must be clear that we are not advocating for a conception of reciprocal solidarity as a sort of obligatory demand—do for me or I will not do for you. Instead, here the words of Lila Watson resonate for us: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

### REMEMBERING TRAYVON

In closing, we would like to emphasize the interrelations of queerness, reciprocal solidarity, and storytelling. Not all of the examples of solidarity that we have given in this essay depend on storytelling or friendship, nor are they necessarily queer or reciprocal. Through our journeys alongside one another, we have been able to articulate a model of solidarity that thrives on love, friendship, storytelling, reciprocity, shared experiences and struggles, and queer kinship. When all of these features are at play, the work of reciprocal

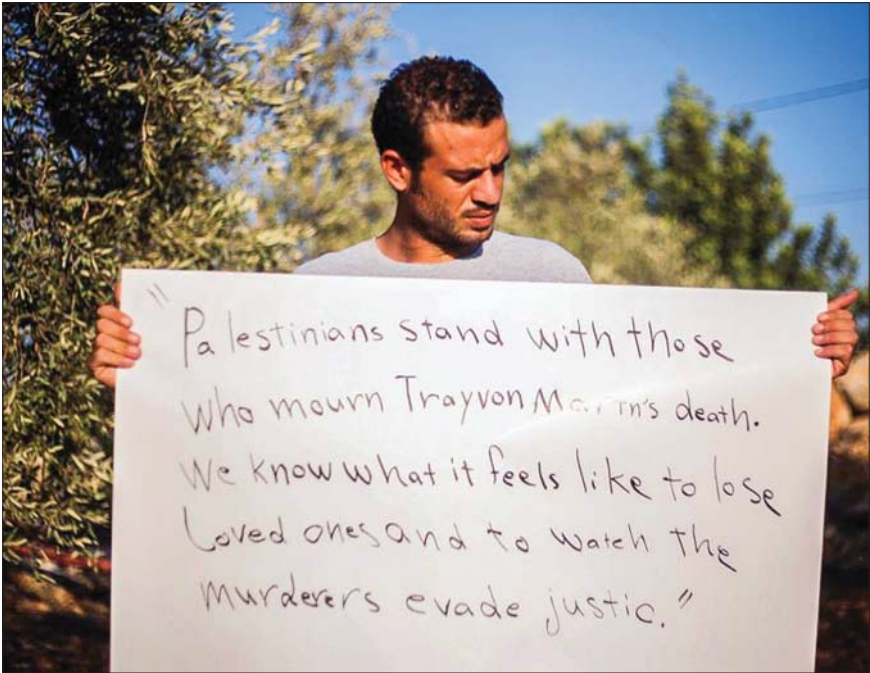
solidarity—embodied and storied—can bring our communities closer together while taking on the injustices in our midst.

Having complex identities does not mean that we can tell our stories as if they function as the TRUTH, as opposed to one of many truths that come together to form a tapestry of shared life narratives that illuminate interconnected and transnational struggles. Telling our personal narratives can be a powerful form of naming and analyzing structural violences and oppression while celebrating resilience. A focus on intense relationships and personal alliances highlights the possibilities of reciprocal solidarities. And friendships provide ways of living solidarity and struggles with one another. When we try to see the collective in the individual narratives of queer, Black, and Palestinian struggle, emancipation for the collective is not as far off as it is when only imagined through individuated lenses.

Reciprocal solidarity requires that we take the words of Wenshun Lee seriously about “deep participation with each other” to recognize love as a radical act and to sustain communities across borders in the face of colonization, neoliberal individualism, and coercion and confinement (Moore, “Liminal”). Through friendship, and empathy, we can realize our potential of living in community and in developing a shared humanity as living-body/soul. Queerness underlies these bonds of love and solidarity. In considering Audre Lorde’s “uses of the erotic” here we emphasize affect’s necessary entanglement not only with sexuality but also with race and nation.

How can we therefore put into words the pain experienced by Black America in the context of Trayvon Martin’s murder? As George Zimmerman was acquitted for taking the life of this unarmed teenager, Zimmerman has emerged as a celebrity, preparing for a celebrity boxing match as we wrote this piece. The pain of Black America clearly had reverberations across the globe. Thousands of miles away, across the Atlantic Ocean, a Palestinian man stands in front of olive groves in a West Bank village, like Abu Husam before him, his face taken with grief as he carries a sign that reads: “Palestinians stand with those who mourn Trayvon Martin’s death. We know what it feels like to lose loved ones and to watch the murderers evade justice.” Not too far away, in the West Bank, on the Israeli-built apartheid Wall in Bethlehem, one can find graffiti of the image of a Black boy in a hoodie, with the words “How does it feel to be a problem? RIP Trayvon 1995–2012” next to it in both English and Arabic, with W. E. B. Dubois’ name written below for attribution of the quote (Figures 2 and 3).

Perhaps if another LGBTQ delegation from the United States arrives in Palestine in the future, we will arrange for them to meet with that man, and to see that graffiti on the Wall. In the meantime, in the absence of justice on both sides of the Atlantic, our friendship will help sustain our spirits,



Living reciprocal solidarity: Figure 2, top, photo © copyright and used by courtesy of the photographer, Hamde Abu Rahme; Figure 3, bottom, photo © copyright and used by courtesy of the photographer, Amira Dasouqi.

remembering our ancestors who could or could not cross oceans. This is our queer utopian memory.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are writing these words after having just participated in an interstate drive to Ferguson, Missouri, as part of the Black Lives Matter Ride (BLM Ride) that Darnell co-organized with Patrisse Cullors. The BLM Ride, modeled after the 1960s Freedom Rides to end Jim Crow state-sanctioned segregation practices in the US, was conceptualized in response to the tragic shooting death of an unarmed eighteen-year old black teen, Michael Brown, by a white police officer. Mike Brown was shot six times and his lifeless body was left uncovered for several hours in a pool of blood on a small street in his neighborhood. His shooting and the subsequent neo-lynching display of his black body has rightly angered many in the US and around the world. In response, a mostly youth-led protest movement has materialized in Ferguson. Protesters have faced down militarized police forces and the National Guard, and in the process, have had rubber bullets fired upon them and tear gas canisters blasted into their direction. The weapons used to “calm” protesters in Ferguson were provided by the State—the same government that has funded the widespread distribution and proliferation of similar weapons in Israel. Furthermore, police from across the US, including Saint Louis, Missouri, have received and continue to receive training in Israel. The abbreviated distance between the mostly black municipality of Ferguson and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Gaza Strip, is apparent at the time of this writing, as the death toll during the latest Israeli military operations in Gaza has risen to the killing of over 2,000 Palestinians, the majority of whom are civilians. And both the occupied in Gaza and the temporarily seized in Ferguson recognize the shared struggle in which they are now engaged. To be sure, some Palestinians have demonstrated their solidarity through social media, have offered counsel to Ferguson protesters on how to handle tear gas, and have contributed financially to the BLM Ride campaign (Marcelin; Mullin and Shahshahani). Meanwhile, some demonstrators in Ferguson have adopted calls for solidarity with Palestine as part of their protests, and organizers in Ferguson are presently considering ways to connect their work to the Palestinian struggle for self-determination in a more robust manner. Reciprocal solidarities are catalyzed when we recognize the matrices of oppression that trap our bodies, politics, and freedoms. Reciprocal solidarities are the doing of intersectional theory, which can be practiced through the sharing of life stories, and which can result in the undoing of globalized apparatuses of discipline and marginalization from Ferguson to Gaza. Now is the time for resistance—the kind that can only be achieved through coalition and the realization of our parallel and articulated struggles as we share our individual stories and collective forms of mobilization.



## NOTES

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1. See Sarah Schulman's article "Israel and Pinkwashing," and her book *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*.
2. For examples of Darnell Moore's writings on Palestine since his trip, see "On Charges of anti-Semitism and Palestinian solidarity activism"; "A response to Judith Butler"; "What is queer about the anti-occupation movement?"; and "The Occupation Stole my Words."

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