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# ‘From Standing Rock to Palestine We are United’: diaspora politics, decolonisation and the intersectionality of struggles.

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> Inter-community building, co-resistance, and decolonization are not just metaphors, they are a set of actions that we are committed to bringing into our everyday struggle for dignity and self-determination. (PYM-U.S.A. 2018)

> I think it’s important to insist on the intersectionality of movements. In the abolition movement, we’ve been trying to find ways to talk about Palestine so that people who are attracted to a campaign to dismantle prisons in the US will also think about the need to end the occupation in Palestine. It can’t be an afterthought. It has to be a part of the ongoing analysis. (A. Y. Davis 2016, 21)

## Introduction

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This article discusses the politics of the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM), a "transnational independent, grassroots movement of young Palestinians in Palestine and in the diaspora worldwide".[1] Initially established with the aim of allowing networks of engagement among a fragmented, de-territorialised Palestinian body politic, the diasporic politics and praxis of the PYM moved soon towards a reconceptualization of the wider Palestine question. No longer framed solely as a project of territorial, national liberation, Palestine is conceived as one of the most visible, present-day materialisations of the "coloniality of power" – a spatial articulation of power that has been constitutive of modernity since the 16th century Atlantic trade (Quijano 2000). In this framework, the temporal differentiation between colonial and post-colonial conditions is problematised: since colonialism is not a derivative historical moment of modernity which ended with independence, modernity continues to be about the production of colonial differences. Modernity unfolded as a planetary racial-capitalist system creating the epistemic and structural conditions for the exploitation and control of black and brown bodies, and of their land, resources and labour. This epistemology of colonial power enables the PYM to build political alliances with other social movements whose grievances are similarly rooted in the structural violence of Western colonial modernity. By de-territorialising and tethering the Palestinian struggle to wider collective struggles against settler colonialism and racial capitalism in liberal democracies (A. Y. Davis 2016; Lubin 2014; Pappe 2018), Palestine becomes, as Loubna Qutami, one of the founding PYM members defined it, an "analytic" (2014) – and ongoing laboratory – of the enduring coloniality of power. This happens through a significant activity and visibility on the web as well through the PYM embodied presence in struggles on the ground – from South Africa to Ferguson, from Palestine to Greece or Tunisia.

In this article we ask which political visions and practices are sustained or shattered by the PYM type of diasporic mobilisation. We hope to contribute to reflections on contemporary forms of radical critical thinking and anti- and de-colonial political practices of liberation (Lubin 2014; A. Y. Davis 2016; Pierre 2013; Mohanty 2013). We suggest that the PYM offers a model of activism that breaks away from conceptualisations of diaspora that have become mainstream, since the early 1990s. Rather than in the postcolonial field of diasporic consciousness, the PYM inscribes itself within the anti-colonial legacy of internationalism (Allen 2018; Tabar 2017) and operates through a "diasporic imaginary" (Mishra 1996) rooted in the intersection between anti-colonial and decolonial standpoints. As third and fourth generation young *Beurs*; as brown bodies or as indigenous subjects in settler-colonial states, PYM activists are subject to regimes of violence and surveillance, whether they live under colonial regimes or in liberal democracies. Their diasporic politics attends, hence, to the systemic racialized violence they experience from within their multiple positions and localities as Arab, Black, Muslim and Indigenous people.

Engaging critically with Hannah Arendt's theory of political action as space of appearance and on Angela Davis's "intersectionality of struggles" (2016), we conceptualise the condition of political action of the PYM in terms of "an intersectional space of appearance": an affective multi-sited political space that makes visible the continuum of systems of subjugation and expropriation across liberal democracies and settler-colonial regimes.

The article is based on research we undertook between 2014 and 2019. The methodology was designed to offer an account of the PYM's political genesis and evolving visions, through reflections and narratives offered by the main figures that led to the

Movement's birth and later participated in its development. We carried out a comprehensive analysis of the movement' online outlets, we participated in some of the PYM's public activities and we undertook in-depth interviews with the movement's co-founders in France, Jordan, Lebanon and the US.[2] Extensive informal discussions and conversations with several PYM activists continued across various locations and on different occasions. The article therefore traces the movement's ideological shifts through the narratives of its participants and offers an analysis of the knowledge production that the PYM engenders about itself and the world.

The arguments unfold as follows. We first discuss the significance of PYM politics and knowledge production for the field of diaspora studies and introduce the concept of the intersectional space of appearance. Next, we provide narratives reconstructing the history of the movement, foregrounding the shift of Palestinian-ness from an identity to a condition, and from a network to a movement type of organisation. We subsequently describe how the PYM partakes in the formation of an intersectional space of appearance in France and the U.S.A, two of the contexts where it has been especially active. We move on by focusing on the role of embodiment and visibility in the weaving of this diasporic politics, which simultaneously exposes and challenges the whiteness of mainstream political spaces of activism. We conclude by showing how the PYM intersectional space of appearance revitalizes the internationalist critical consciousness that sustained the anticolonial movements of the 1950's and 1960's and pushes diaspora studies back to its radical political standpoint.

## Diaspora and decolonial praxis

In the last two decades, diasporic formations have been taken to denote countercultures of modernity, connections that develop laterally and beyond the nation-state, imaginaries and

experiences that dislodge the centrality of territory in cultural, political and subjective identifications, formations and claims (Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Gilroy 2000). Since diasporas have primarily come to be defined against their disentanglement from genealogy and territorialisation, or even, in some cases, as the historical materialisation and utopic ideal of a non-racial/racist community – anchored to memory, place and identity whilst refusing the flesh or myth of the land (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993) – questions arise as to whether the concept of "diaspora" could adequately interpret experiences and aspirations of displaced communities such as those of the Palestinians, who were forced away from their homes and have not abandoned claims to return to their lands (Peteet 2007).

For Palestinian refugees, who mostly live inside, besides, or in a painful proximity to the places from which they were forcibly expelled, the homeland is not a temporally and spatially remote myth or reference but a place entrusted with actual everyday ties and ongoing political claims to return. The emphasis on lateral connections – on homes away from home (Clifford, 1994) – it has been argued, might concur in construing original homes and claims as residual for its diasporas. Further, by blending together varied juridical categories of subjects and communities, such as exiles, refugees and displaced, "diaspora" loses analytical rigour and meaning, and risks disqualifying international law rights and protection (Peteet 2007, 6). In this light, some have called for a use of diaspora as a "condition" shared by Palestinians whose lives are unsafe and uprooted, whether in displacement or at "home" (Schulz and Hammer 2003), while others more recently suggested diaspora to denote modes of being beyond home and host, capturing the "in-between" (Gabiam and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017).

While cognizant of the critiques of diaspora for national liberation movements, we suggest that the PYM diasporic politics offers a radical move away from the apparent tension between diasporas' cultural imaginaries and refugees' political claims – which also painfully crosscuts and fragments the Palestinian displaced community. The intersectional space of appearance is the condition of this mode of radical politics.

Hanna Arendt notably conceived of action as one of the quintessential elements of the human condition and of the *vita activa*, the being in the world. Action is the ability to bring about something new, the *novum*, effected by the gathering, seeing, speaking of individuals who are equal as humans and yet all distinct from one another. Plurality is therefore a condition *sine qua non* of political action. The act of speaking to and being heard by connected and different others is what constitutes the coming into being of political agency. "The fact that men [*sic*], not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" is the condition of human action "because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live " (Arendt 1998, 7–8). The space of appearance is thus constituted by this plurality of individuals coming together and appearing to one another through speech and action, engendering the collective power to potentially unsettle existing inequalities. Critically engaging with Arendt, Judith Butler crucially foregrounds the racialised gendered body in the space of appearance. Not only are speech and action (politics) body performances and not merely utterances, but the ability to appear to one another is not equally afforded to bodies that are differently grievable and precarious. This is where we need intersectionality to think about radical modes of political organizing which can create a new political framework – one which simultaneously exposes and challenges the whiteness of the polity, and the enduring coloniality of the power structures it reflects and reproduces.

Originating in the work of Black women activists and scholars who insisted on the interplay – rather than syphoning – of racial and gender violence (Combahee River Collective 1977; Lorde 1984; Collins 1985; Crenshaw 1989), intersectionality has travelled a long way, becoming a field of study, an analytical strategy, and a critical feminist praxis (Collins 2015, 3). Within academia, however, its mainstreaming has meant the dilution of its antiracist critique and the detachment of intersectionality as a body of theories from radical "social justice-oriented change" (Bilge 2013, 405). Aware of the risks of disarticulation and depoliticization, our use of intersectionality here reinstates Black women's antiracist feminist critique as the cornerstone of radical political projects. We draw specifically on Angela Davis's focus on making visible the "intersectionality of struggles" so that "…when we see the police repressing protests in Ferguson we also have to think about the Israeli police and the Israeli army repressing protests in occupied Palestine". (A. Y. Davis 2016, 145).

After a brief historical contextualization of the birth of the PYM, in what follows we discuss how its members partake in the formation of this intersectional political space in France and the US where most of the activists reside.

**Beyond flesh and myth. The condition of Palestine**

The establishment in 2007 of the Palestinian Youth Network (PYN), the precursor of the PYM, was an attempt by a group of Palestinian youths living in the diaspora to become visible to one another across a de-territorialised Palestinian body politic. The initiative unfolded against the background of what Palestinian scholar and activist Maher Bitar defined as "the global fragmentation" of the Palestinian community and the "slow disintegration of a Palestinian national movement with global reach" (2009, 54) – two interrelated dynamics generated from

the Oslo accords signed between Israel and the Palestinian leadership in 1993. Although the agreement identified Palestinian refugees' right of return as one of the core issues to be addressed, it soon dropped off the negotiating table. The newly established Palestinian Authority (PA) was attributed a nominal state function and a semi-sovereign rule over fractured portions of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in the context of continued Israeli occupation and advancing colonization. The PA establishment went hand in hand with the weakening of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and a deepening disconnection between Palestinians in the oPt or in refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries (Ahmad 2013, 13; Fincham 2012, 129; Høigilt 2013, 350) and Palestinians in other parts of the world. The "collapse" (Abdulhaq 2008), in many countries, of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), the historical student branch of the PLO in exile, further exacerbated fears of isolation and disenfranchisement of diaspora youth born or residing outside of Palestine. Attempts at restricting Palestinian-ness to those now living in the fragmented, disconnected enclaves under a limited PA rule – the aim of which is to disenfranchise diasporas of their right to return – highlighted the strategic importance of opening up the struggle for and of Palestine to resist Oslo-imposed geopolitical logics.

Palestinian youth from various countries came together in this context with a "desire to connect" as Sa'id, a leading figure and founder of PYN/PYM, put it. [3] He recalled that their initial aim was to "gather Palestinians from Palestine and outside to discuss: 'who are we [and] what are our priorities.'" Farah, a Palestinian scholar and activist with multiple backgrounds – born in Italy, pursuing a PhD in the UK and living in Jordan – was among the first to receive a call from a Palestinian young man who was "trying to put together as many Palestinians as possible from all over the world who are already active in their own environment, in order to

know each other and develop something together".[4] These efforts culminated in a ten-day summit organised in France in 2007, attended by over a hundred Palestinian youths coming from twenty-eight countries and diverse social and cultural backgrounds (PYN 2007a, 2007b). The powerful energies unleashed on that occasion led to the establishment of the PYN.

While the "youth" label features as central in the PYN/PYM's self-presentation and membership criteria (PYN 2010, 9), it is more strategic than substantial. Rather than reflecting a specific generational standpoint like in the Arab uprisings (Herrera 2012, 340) or mirroring a "youth quake" unfolding across the Middle East and beyond (Al-Momani 2011; Sloam and Henn 2019), "youth" conveys a positioning organic to post-*Nakba* Palestinian politics while also carrying the legacy of youth's leading role in the struggle for national liberation (Khoury-Machool 2007, 22).[5] PYM activists are indeed adamant in relating their diasporic condition to the genealogy of multigenerational forced displacement and exile, and situating their struggles within the "larger Palestinian struggle" as they define it. This does not aim at (re)building a classic, long-distance, nationalist archetype of diasporic politics. Instead, it is the historical internationalism of the PLO (Allen 2018) that the PYM seeks to retrieve, signalling political distance from the discredited PA and its nomenclature, which accepted to subjection of "Palestinians" to geopolitical criteria imposed by the occupation regime. "Youth" hence signals PYM continuity with the revolutionary ethos of the PLO, but also its significant rupture with the constraining influence of an older generation of (male) leaders responsible for the Oslo stalemate (Ahmad 2013, 5; Joudah 2012, 42) while simultaneously conveying a radical critique to the youth turn in neoliberal governmentalities (Sukarieh and Tannock 2016).

The first PYN meeting was absorbed in attempts at defining a shared identity across diverse backgrounds, languages, attachments, and experiences of dispossession. In these early encounters, knowledge of Arabic, the physical proximity to or life in Palestine or Palestinian camps circulated as the defining traits of Palestinian-ness. Farah for example recalled feeling that her speaking in English due to her shaky Arabic affected the authoritativeness of her opinions vis-à-vis Palestinians from the West Bank. The experience of living under Israeli occupation similarly influenced hierarchies of political legitimacy.[6] It was not before long and painful conversations that participants agreed on the impossibility of converging around a common definition of Palestinian-ness around biological traits, language competencies or experiences of direct suffering. Palestinian- ness, Sa'id recalled: "can't be fixed [for all]."

Overcoming this paralysis prompted a major shift in the Network's political identity and presentation. Sa'id described this as a move from Palestinian-ness as a shared identity, to Palestinian-ness as a "condition" affecting communities in the diaspora, in exile and within historical Palestine. "The Palestinian condition," he uttered, "is for example the feeling of a lack of a homeland, of a place, a home. And that is a feeling that we found among many of us, in different ways." Asim – born in Spain from parents who took refuge in Lebanon at the time of the Nakba, and to which he returned for his graduate studies – also underlined that "part of our [Palestinian] identity is not speaking our language and being alienated from our roots."[7] Palestine as a condition is symbolised by a shared pain for a condition of loss coupled with simultaneous inability or unwillingness to make "elsewhere" home and the scepticism towards home as "orthodoxy and "dogma", what the late Edward Said defined as the loss of home and yet the impossibility of homecoming (2000, 147). Refusing to rely on racial, territorial or cultural terms to define Palestinian-ness, the PYN/PYM effectively situated Palestine beyond

the choice between "the flesh or the myth of the land" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993) yet without jettisoning indigenous territorial claims and refugees' moral and legal rights to return.

In 2011, while the Arab uprisings were underway, the PYN metamorphosed into the PYM (Ayyash 2013, 282–283; PYM 2012b). Sa'id relayed how the move away from a network modality of engagement, of scattered individuals loosely connected online, articulated a radical critique of a "liberal, individualistic approach to politics", asserting a desire "to be organizers, on the ground, [to] organize communities and not to speak in their place".[8] In what follows we explore how activists enacted this political praxis in France and in the US.

**PYM-France: race, colonial continuum and the Arab uprisings**

Young Palestinians in France are inscribed in the postcolonial subject positions of the *Beur*, the racialized term defining second or third generation Arabs, and the children and grandchildren of the former colonies. As such, together with Black, brown and non-secular bodies, they have been facing heightened policing and surveillance, particularly since the 1980s (Streiff-fénart 2012, 293–94; Lentin 2019, 56; Fernando 2009; Kipfer 2011). Ali, who describes himself "born in France and raised inside the working class suburbs where you have many migrants of Arab origins", powerfully recalled how in those circumstances "being a young Arab was not possible politically, you couldn't move as a young political Arab in France and in our [Arab] countries: it was a dead end, it was only leading to frustration, despair."[9]

It is perhaps no surprise that the outburst of the Arab uprisings released in France a "phenomenal" amount of "energy", Sa'id recounted. For Ali, this "allowed us to feel that our Arab political being was possible." The revolutionary momentum restored Arab young men and

women in France with a possibility of being, or becoming positively visible to themselves and the world. The spectacles of young north African women and men engaged in non-violent revolts against their regimes operated as a reflecting image engendering new political imageries. Ali conceptualised the affective release of the Arab uprisings not only as providing new grounds of identification for young French Arabs, but also as an awakening moment, enabling young *Beurs* to first detect – and then name – the persistent coloniality of power: "This colonial continuum in the power structures in which we were moving in Tunis, in France, in Palestine, became more clear to us… there are very common issues and common challenges and common struggles, in which we stand."

In coordination with youth political organisations in Tunisia, PYM-France actively fostered the construction of a transnational, intersectional space of appearance. A concrete manifestation of this politics was the organisation in Tunis of the 'Arab Youth Conference for Liberation and Dignity' (PYM 2012c). As Farah recounted, over a hundred Arab youth from all over the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond converged on the event's conclusive declaration that "the Arab world will never be free if Palestine is not liberated, [and] Palestine will never be liberated if the Arab world is not freed from this neo-colonial system."

This move towards the recognition of the intersectionality of struggles expanded the scope for rethinking Palestine as "analytic", putting this conceptual framework at the core of political alliance-building in France with social movements mobilising against racialised oppression and surveillance such as the *Partie des Indigènes de la République* and the *Brigate Anti-Négrophobie*. This political imaginary is fed by a sustained knowledge production activity through seminars and talks seeking to de-territorialise the history of Palestinian resistance by

tracing its presence in a diasporic map of struggles, subjectivities and artistic productions from across the world. For example, weekly seminars on "learning Palestine" included sessions on the prisoners' struggles in Palestine next to talks on the life and experiences of Palestinians in Algeria and in Latin America, on the role of the Palestine question on the formation of the trade union movement in France, or its influence on global resistance art.

The wave of IS-claimed attacks in Europe and particularly the 2015 shootings in France, however, reduced the space for political mobilisation amidst new measures restricting freedom of speech such as the "apology for terrorism" law regardless of the speakers' intentions,[10] and the criminalisation of support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.[11] Ali recounted that French authorities wanted "to put in the same box resistance against Zionism with Da`ish [IS]" – a dynamic consistent with the broader attempts in many countries to conflate critics of Israel with anti-Semitism (Jewish Voice for Peace 2015; Palestine Legal & Centre for Constitutional Rights 2015). Under this heightened surveillance regime, Arab and Muslim bodies and organisations became the object of novel and intensified security concerns – a condition which fundamentally curtailed the space for political mobilisation.

**PYM-U.S.A.: "From Ferguson to North Dakota and Palestine we are united"**

Building on Black liberation and abolition movements' intellectual trajectories (A. Y. Davis 2016, 50), the PYM-U.S.A. chapter emphasizes the relation between neoliberalism, racial capitalism and the system of surveillance and oppression of racialised people in the US and in Palestine. "[O]ur police department here is actually trained by the IDF soldiers" explained Noor when we met her in San Francisco, articulating what has become in the last few years common awareness among Palestinian activists in the US and beyond (Allen 2018). A careful intellectual

reconstruction of the ways that military-industrial complexes tie in with surveillance and counter-terrorist training across occupied territories and diasporas – serving overlapping corporate and political interests – provides the theoretical and political basis for the movement's broad-based, intersectional alliance with diverse social movements fighting against racialised oppression.

The edifice of this political work is the production and exchange of grassroots knowledge for the formation of a novel collective consciousness among Palestinian youth. Following on the work of the PYN (2009), the PYM-U.S.A chapter for example convenes, since 2015, the bi-yearly summer school for Palestinian and Arab youth (PYM-U.S.A, 2015, 2017, 2019b). Here youth learn about military-industrial complexes, Palestinian resistance, nationalism, incarceration and settler colonialism, and tease out the intersections that weave these struggles together. More mundanely, these are forged through an everyday politics (Bishara 2015) involving wearing signifiers of one another's struggles. This is for example the case of T- Shirts which the PYM produces for fundraising purposes that connect the struggles of Palestinians, Syrians, Blacks, Zapatistas, Native Americans and Indigenous peoples.[12] In parallel, at the Dakota pipeline protests, the first baby born of a Native American was laid in a cot wrapped in the Palestinian *kufiya*.[13]

PYM-U.S.A.'s intellectual efforts in decolonising knowledge and fostering the intersectionality of struggles are at once emplaced and rooted in the local texture, and transnational, that is enacted in key sites of protests globally. For example, alliances with Black movements are rooted in the history of intersecting struggles for social, economic and racial justice in which many PYM family members had historically actively participated. The 1967 war and Israel's military occupation of the oPt had prompted the Black Panther's alignment

with Palestinians based on the view that U.S. imperialism and Israeli colonialism were organically related, or as Alex Lubin suggested: "Palestinians and U.S. Blacks contended with the same enemies: U.S.-inspired imperial violence and racial capitalism." (2016, 83; see also Fischbach 2019). Today, this legacy is particularly vivid in the San Francisco Bay Area. There, activists mobilise within a space that Noor defined as "very special",[14] because "[t]here is a culture here that lends itself to justice, or that lends itself to […] seeking social justice" and this made it "easy for us to be able to engage with our community." On the ground, the intersectionality of Black and Palestinian liberation struggles is fostered by participating in the Black Lives Matter's protests against police violence and brutality, such as in Ferguson (PYM-U.S.A. 2014), whereas the legacy of the "anti-Apartheid and anticolonial/decolonial struggle" is cultivated through the organization of Palestinian activists' delegations to South Africa (ibid. 2019a).

Along similar lines, the mutual recognition of the "struggle for sovereignty" and common "history of enduring settler-colonialism" (PYM-U.S.A. 2018) is the cause of PYM-U.S.A.'s solid ties with the First Nations and Indigenous people. Palestinian activists participated in the Dakota Access Pipeline protests (ibid. 2016) and more broadly in activities protecting Indigenous people's sacred territory from capitalist expropriation (ibid. 2018). Vice versa, acknowledging that "genuine solidarity cannot be strengthened without concrete, sustained, campaigns of reciprocity and hospitality", the PYM brought a delegation of Indigenous and Palestinian activists to Palestine. (ibid. 2018).

The U.S.-Mexican border is a further catalyst of PYM's intersectional politics. For several years, activists in the San Diego chapter collaborated with the *Colectivo Zapatista* in

organising a yearly 'Break Down Borders' 5k-run/walk along the separation wall (Quintanilla & Moghannam 2015) 'to protest the imperialist colonial borders around the world that seek to steal indigenous land and divide our communities.'[15] Noor relayed how she experienced these as very "powerful" and "moving events", because, she articulated: "*we see* [our emphasis] the connections, because you know, the same people that are building that wall, it's the same material and stuff that is used for walls in Palestine."

**Embodied visibility, trust, and critique of whiteness**

PYM activists' narratives strongly convey the importance of embodiment and visibility in the weaving of intersectional spaces of appearance, and as conditions of their own political mobilization. Running together along the wall, sharing emotions and aspirations and standing in key sites of reciprocal protests constitute a strong response to the contemporary pervasive assemblage of power, surveillance and control and work as an antidote to the neoliberal individualising of struggles (Quintanilla and Moghannam 2015, 1045; see also S. Davis 2017).

On an everyday level, this means nurturing face to face relations and fostering engagement and trust among the members. Ahmad for example explained that "[w]hen we have a meeting, most of us will stay talking for hours and hours and then we have a coffee and have lunch together…so when you go to a demonstration, you [feel that you] belong to this group".[16] Noor suggested that "it is harder to be able to organize with people who you don't know, who you don't *see* [our emphasis]", whereas on the other hand, at the local level "you have to interact, we are in the same spaces, you're seeing your comrades, we are able to see each other and build on that on the ground". For Aisheh the strength of the movement rests on activists' knowledge, trust and accountability in and to one another which engenders the force needed

"...to practice the sort of society that you're striving for." The nurturing of these embodied political affectivities proves the more compelling in the context of the heightened racism, surveillance, policing and violent repressions structuring the spaces within which youth increasingly live and mobilise in Europe and the US. Speaking of how PYM started restricting membership to individuals enjoying verifiable trust in order to prevent destructive political infiltrations, Noor recounted that "friendship plays a very important role: out of necessity we've all become friends too, because we want to keep our movement alive".

The coming together as Black, Arab, Muslim, Indigenous activists in a common space of appearance unexpectedly also reveals the whiteness of mainstream spaces of solidarity. This is uttered through frustration for the ways in which white-led forms of political mobilisation marginalise Palestinian experiences and subjectivities. Ali for example thought the French left was dominated by white activists with ingrained and latent Islamophobic attitudes – a critique epitomised in their refusal to being represented in a platform promoting a *Nakba* commemoration by a young woman "with a PhD in philosophy [and] who speaks four languages, but wears the veil [*hijab*]".[17] In voicing a similar frustration, Aisheh was adamant in claiming that: '[w]e're the ones affected by this and we should be the ones determining how we go about struggling for our liberation."[18] Reconciling diaspora and refugeeness as affective junctures of a de-territorialised Palestinian condition, Dana echoed Aisheh's words:

> Palestinians [in the diaspora] can't see themselves in the role of being in "solidarity with" […] You're Palestinian no matter where you are and we have a role to take up to end the occupation and support the liberation movement.

In insisting that one is Palestinian no matter where one is, Dana hints at the post-Oslo normalisation of a geopolitical divide of Palestinians "inside" and Palestinians "outside" of Palestine (Bitar 2009, 54) and asserts her wish to counter the risk of letting go of the very political conditions and claims of the Palestinian diaspora, particularly the right of return. The PYM turned, hence, to be a safe space for young Palestinians and Arabs in the diaspora – an unmediated arena where non-white subjectivities could engage freely with critical work and where, as Dana put it, young activists like herself can: "think openly and talk openly and be really critical about things that might be hard to do in other spaces that aren't specifically Arab- or Palestinian-led".

PYM activists' eagerness to distance themselves from "solidarity" should also be read against the growing disconnection between political action and solidarity work. In Palestine this has been propelled by both the NGOization and professionalization of political activism (Hammami 1995), with the further effect of reproducing hierarchies between international activists' mobility privileges and Palestinian bodies' stuckness, and between bodies that count and bodies that are contained, surveilled and policed. Palestinian scholar Linda Tabar contends that in much of contemporary international solidarity, what she calls First World activists end up "consuming" the political experiences of the colonised, "as opposed to engaging in a collective struggle against systemic power." (2017: 423).

Writing about Internationals' and anti-occupation Israelis' presence in Palestine through the affective lens of the body, Rema Hamami (2016) offers a more nuanced analysis of the complex racialized body politics of in-visibility at work in Masafer Yatta (Palestine). Here International and Israeli solidarity activists witness the brutality of the Israeli settlers and army,

while protecting Palestinians bodies in their everyday acts of existence. On the one hand, Internationals' protection, she argues, does momentarily allow a counter-visibility of the otherwise invisible violence exerted by Israeli soldiers and settlers on Palestinians. Yet, the injured Palestinian body is never humanised. It becomes only visible as a shadow of the subject exercising violence, who acquires visibility in so far as it breaks Israeli gender or racialized normativities. This politics of solidarity therefore relies on and reproduces, rather than erasing, racial hierarchies. Yet, a resistant politics that begins to break down racial hierarchies emerges too in the coming together of grievable and ungrievable bodies, and it opens up spaces of transgression and trust purporting a "defiance of hierarchies of corporeal value" (Hammami 2016, 184).

This analysis on embodied resistant politics of counter-visibility adds crucial insights into the question of what PYM intersectional spaces of appearance, with their inherent embodied racial and human hierarchies, enable. While in Hammami's analysis geopolitical visibility is the condition for grievability, in the case of the PYM's intersectional space of appearance, the coming together of non-white bodies into a space where they become visible to one another is the condition for a novel radical politics. This embodied and intersectional politics of visibility is essential in the de-colonial praxis of the PYM, offering unanticipated avenues for detecting the racialised underpinnings of mainstream spaces of political action.

## Conclusions

Highlighting the power/knowledge nexus in the production of diaspora studies, Jemima Pierre has cogently shown how in the context of the US, an intractable duality between diaspora Black studies and continental Black studies has been closely tied with the violent repression of radical

scholars/activists who aimed at tethering anti-colonial struggles with anti-racist and Black rights scholarship and activism (2013, 187). Undeniably, with diaspora studies becoming invested predominantly with post-colonial identities and cultural processes, the political claims and territorial rights of Palestinian communities across the globe risk being side-lined when inscribed in diaspora approaches, or conceived as antagonistic to diasporic imaginaries with their rejection of fixed identities, rootedness and territorial claims.

This essay offered an analysis of a diasporic activism that breaks the seeming duality between diasporic imaginaries and colonial realities. The PYM diasporic imaginary is not confined to identity politics, nor merely to the Palestinian nationalist struggle of territorial liberation from afar. It articulates an anti-colonial and decolonial standpoint that detects and names the interlocking forms of racialized oppression that are at work across Palestine and its diasporic locations. PYM activists make visible and contest the temporal and conceptual dichotomy between colonial and postcolonial conditions, and between refugees and diasporas. For PYM activists, asserting that refugees are diasporas and diasporas are refugees assumes a particularly acute urgency, since this duality feeds into geopolitical plans to disenfranchise them from their right to their land – a tactic that is particularly salient in the post-Oslo predicament.

Rejecting the colonial/post-colonial divide, the PYM knowledge production and politics simultaneously outmodes the refugee/diaspora duality. The Palestinian identity becomes a "condition", cross-cut by racialised embodied experiences in the transnational topography of youth diasporic existence. PYM members are in fact subject to regimes of violence and surveillance as Muslim Arabs, or *Beurs*, in France; as racialized brown bodies in the US settler state, and they are dispossessed as indigenous subjects in settler-colonial Israel. Palestine is dis-

embedded and reassembled as an analytic of power revealing connections between experiences of oppression across different sites of violence and resistance (Hesse and Hooker 2017). Diasporic lateral connections enable third and fourth generation young Palestinians to frame the Palestine question as a central knot in a continuum between settler colonialism and racialized capitalism in liberal democracies (A. Y. Davis 2016; Lubin 2014; Pappe 2018).

From within an understanding of power as a system of production of colonial differences – across various historical and spatial configurations – Palestine becomes an analytic of a historical global system of exploitation, repression, surveillance effected today through a global regime. Lloyd and Wolfe argued that "the distinctive characteristics of this emergent global regime have been locally prefigured in modes of repression developed internally by settler colonial states." (2016: 112) Arguably, the continuity between settler colonialism – in its historically specific developments – liberal democracy and racial capitalism resides in their shared need to manage "surplus populations" through violence, containment or surveillance and policing (Morgensen 2011).

Against this transnational complex regime of power, however, new horizontal communities of resistance are also forged (S. Davis 2017; Gould 2009). The PYM partakes in what we defined here an intersectional space of appearance, an affective and multi-sited space where the intersectionality of movements mobilising against systemic forms of expropriation, displacement and dispossession is cultivated and where connections between struggles are crucially made visible. This embodied, intersectional, politics is premised on nurturing face-to-face relations of trust and on everyday community work at the local level, as well as on sustained online activism and transnational mobilisation across the globe. Through journeys to

key sites of mobilisation, the intersectional space of appearance encompasses Black Lives Matter mobilisations in Ferguson, the Dakota Access Pipeline camp protests, the Mexico-US border runs, Palestinian refugees in their multiple places of displacement, Tunis uprising and Paris's banlieues.

Visibility in, and of, this transnational cartography of struggles enables the diagnosis of colonial articulations and mutations of power operating at various scales. The intersectional space of appearance operates also by "suspending […] above all the norms of racial hierarchy, and then refusing to move on out of that space." (Mirzoeff 2016). It thus allows detection and diagnosis of the racialized processes and dynamics within mainstream spaces of activism in liberal democracies. This way, from an effect of the power that produces their subordination and vulnerability, the mutual visibility of Arab, Muslim, Black and Indigenous bodies is turned into a springboard for radical imageries and praxes of social change.

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## Endnotes

[1] https://www.facebook.com/pg/Pal.Youth.Movement/about/?ref=page_internal

[2] Interviews were undertaken in 2016. We changed interviewees' names for anonymity purposes.

[3] Interview, 22 January.

[4] Interview, 8 May.

[5] For example, in the diaspora, the GUPS (1959) was established before the PLO (1964).

[6] Scholarship exploring intradiasporic relations among communities who have been subjected to genocides, slavery and racial violence has shown that hierarchies of legitimacy and authenticity based on lived histories of suffering and on eliciting those histories are common (Makalani 2009: 2; Raman 2003: 20).

[7] Interview, 12 May.

[8] This quotation also extends to critique the thin representativeness of formal and top down (i.e. PLO) Palestinian diaspora politics as opposed to the enabling political potential of horizontal and face-to-face mobilization.

[9] Interview, 24 January.

[10] https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/30/frances-creeping-terrorism-laws-restricting-free-speech.

[11] http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/10/28/le-boycott-anti-israelien-est-illegal-en-france_1409557.

[12] https://stores.inksoft.com/palestinian_youth_movement/shop/home.

[13] http://www.whitewolfpack.com/2016/10/the-first-baby-born-at-standing-rock-is.html.

[14] Interview, 23 June.

[15] https://www.facebook.com/events/161122174427247.

[16] Interview, 22 January.

[17] We don't know, but we can speculate that, had she been a man – i.e. a subject unadorned of the garment which more stereotypically signifies the gendered and racialised 'otherness' of Islam – *he* would have probably not encountered the same type of resistance. Elsewhere we discuss in-depth intersectionality in the internal praxis of the PYM (Welchman, Zambelli, and Salih 2020)

[18] Interview, 24 June.

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