

@ShoalCollective
shoalcollective.org

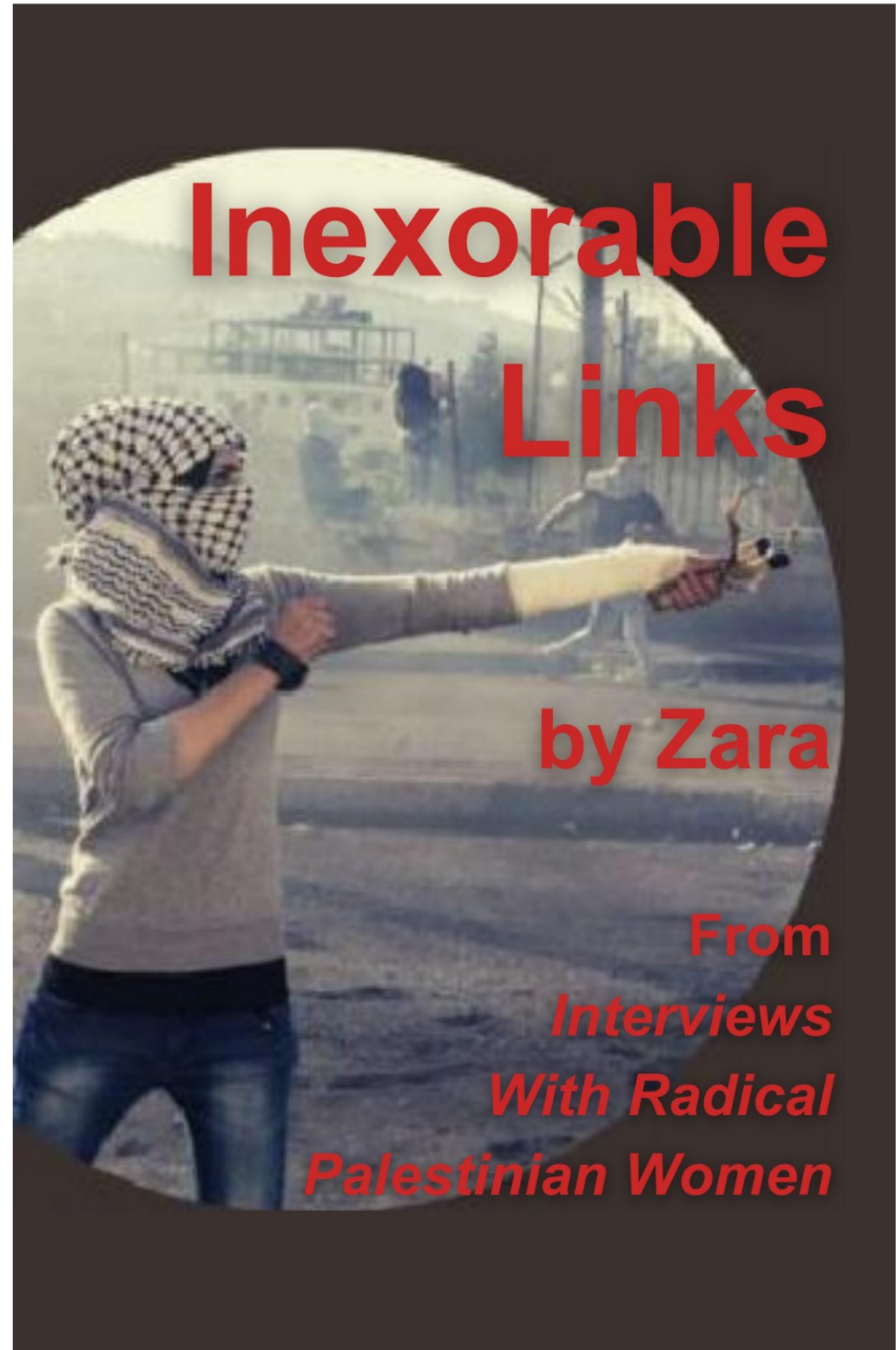
activedistribution.org



Inexorable Links

by Zara

From
*Interviews
With Radical
Palestinian Women*



The following text was originally published in Interviews with Radical Palestinian Women and edited by the Shoal Collective, an independent cooperative of writers and researchers which produces news articles, investigations, analysis and theory-based writing as a contribution to, and a resource for, movements that are attempting to bring about social and political change. It was originally published by Active Distribution. The introduction below was written by Shoal Collective.

London, UK

Zara is a Palestinian artist and curator living in London. She contributed this article about her experiences in 2021, a year in which the Israeli military launched a full-scale assault on Gaza, and uprisings took place across Palestine. The title of the article is Inexorable Links.

What remains is rage. What remains is literature. Those are our monuments, and we must protect them fiercely. As a Palestinian, I am forever indebted to Black revolutionary thought to form my discursive political frameworks. The first revolutionary text I read was Assata Shakur's autobiography. That was the text that led me to the works of other Black Panthers, like Malcolm X, who was a vocal anti-Zionist and stood firmly in support of Palestinian liberation and against American funding of the settler-colonial project. Angela Davis's text, Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine and the Foundations of a Movement, is an incredibly urgent rallying call for cross-border solidarity in the face of institutionalised racism and state violence. Those texts deepened my understanding of race, political action, and biopolitics as more than abstract concepts and helped me understand my decolonised, radical thinking capacity. Indeed many Black revolutionaries, from Nelson Mandela to the contemporary BLM movement, have been steadfast in their support of Palestinian liberation. The links are apparent: between the settler-colonial roots of the US, synthesised by the enslavement of Africans, and the mass incarceration of Black folk in America, to apartheid South Africa, to the formation of the settler-colonial apartheid state of Israel, consolidated by the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians and the ethnic cleansing of over 500 villages in the 1948 Nakba that is an ongoing event until this day.

I am also reminded to be constantly vigilant regarding the imperialist cultural exploitation of struggle narratives. We shouldn't need western discourses to dilute and reassess the realities of the aftermath of western imperialism in the Third World; the social and economic precarities are systematically reframed for western colonial justification. We should be wary of that same mainstream decontextualisation of radical abolitionist movements such as Black Lives Matter – as Palestinians, to justify our existence in a world that has been desensitised to our oppression. Instead, we should focus our revolutionary energies on organising together against imperialism and towards genuine decolonisation. There is still hope and fight within me, and I hope it is alive within you too.

explosive recognition of Israeli hostility on these complicit social media platforms (whose mechanism of oppression is the algorithmic censorship of Palestinian content, even more pointed than that of other platforms such as Twitter), was ignited by Muna and Muhammad Al-Kurd's fearless documentation of the forced expulsion of Palestinians in their neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

Muna and Muhammad have been documenting their experiences living under occupation since childhood, when social media was not as prevalent. This is radical for multiple reasons, one of which being that the Al-Kurds have viscerally opposed the enormously debilitating monopoly of controlled political discourse on Israeli military occupation. They did so by exposing the pervasiveness of Israeli ethnic cleansing that was taking place in real-time in their neighbourhood, all magnified by the use of images and live feeds documenting the intense militarised violence they were subjected to. This served as an unravelling magnifying glass mirroring all the other underway, undergone, and soon to be undertaken, ethnic cleansing programs (or what is referred to by Israeli apologists as population-exchange programs') that had effectively created and maintained the settler-colonial project that is the Israeli state since its conception in 1917, with the signing of the Balfour Declaration – lest we forget why they are in this goddamn mess.

May 25th 2021 also happens to be the first anniversary of George Floyd's murder, and the mass protests his murder galvanised. I am reminded of how we all watched as institutional racism in contemporary western life was called out en masse online last year. After the grief, guilt and empathy experienced by the collective British social consciousness had dissipated, what remained of the takeaway? I recall how the UK mainstream narrative focus quickly shifted from the extrajudicial killing of Black people to the destruction of property, the removal of statues of slave traders and colonists and the importance of maintaining 'law and order'. How transparent is the racialising biopolitical logic of security?

There are no monuments erected in remembrance of the Black Britons who have lost their lives to police violence in recent memory, just as there are no monuments commemorating the countless Palestinians who lost their lives, livelihoods and homes to ethnic cleansing as the world watched.

This piece of writing has lived through an accelerated carousel of multiple psychological realities of my existence as a diaspora Palestinian artist and activist living as a migrant in England, so please forgive me if it appears to sprout multiple ideological heads in the time it takes you to read. I consider it an informal personal and political recap of 2021 so far; these realities are inexorably linked. For Palestinians, one's personhood is ultimately condemned to be political.

Recently I have been thinking about the ways in which we as Palestinian women can sublimate the degrading and hostile narratives projected onto us by the colonial apparatuses of truth-production, and how to navigate my understanding of myself as an artist and my worth amongst the interpersonal manifestations of that same apparatus as an outspoken migrant woman living in England. After being invited to participate in a group exhibition at a Berlin-based self-professed 'decolonised' art space, I took it upon myself to de-zionize the space itself after they conflated anti-zionism with anti-semitism in a public statement responding to the viral #savesheikhjarrah hashtag in 2021. I have learned that it is not enough to 'take up space' and engage in visibility politics in those art spaces (and by doing so, further facilitate the art-washing of occupation abroad); it is essential to attack, boycott or reform complicit art institutions where possible.

I began working on the third iteration of my project Thicker Than Blood, a curatorial biopolitical* analysis of Israel's weaponisation of the coronavirus vaccine in April 2021, three months after Israel declared itself to be the world leader in inoculating its citizens against the coronavirus – and denying five million Palestinians access to the coronavirus vaccine which, as an occupying power, it is obligated to provide under international law. Israeli government officials claimed that the Oslo Accords overruled international law and absolved them of the responsibility to inoculate Palestinians

*Biopolitics is a concept developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault: "Biopolitics is a complicated concept that has been used and developed in social theory since Michel Foucault, to examine the strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority over knowledge, power, and the processes of subjectivation." (from <https://anthrobiopolitics.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/biopolitics-an-overview/>)

living under occupation. The UN refused this argument and condemned the decision.

Experts at the UN are undoubtedly experts at ultimately useless public condemnations.

The quickly narrowing gap between the political and biological body and its subjection to bio-managing by governments was nothing new for Palestinians living under occupation. Test and trace programmes across the world have illustrated how the government categorises such bodies and how they can then mobilise the divided groups towards vaccination and, eventually, re-entering both working and consumerist spaces. For Palestinians, those who did not hold an Israeli passport would only have access to Israel's supply of the COVID-19 vaccine if they worked for Israeli companies, a decision undertaken by and at the discretion of the Israeli company heads in order to maintain the safety of their Israeli employees.

The geopolitical setting of Israel demands international collaboration with its implementation of medical apartheid against Palestinians living under occupation. This is important to remember when considering Israel's capacity for further political subjectivisation of Palestinian civilians. It has also been one year since Keir Starmer, a self-professed Zionist, became leader of the UK Labour party, and whose first act as leader was to affirm the party's dedication to the Israel lobby and to legitimise the bogus anti-semitism claims against his predecessor and veteran friend of Palestine, Jeremy Corbyn.

Just this month, Labour party officials prevented a party debate on introducing sanctions against Israel, claiming that the discussion "would undermine the party's ability to provide a safe and welcoming space for all members, particularly Jewish members".

UK Labour officials are indeed dedicated to officialising Zionism's usage of secular Jewish identity as a socio-political shield to justify its violent settler-colonialism.

I could not collect my thoughts in time to crystallise one argument before another Israeli atrocity, another airstrike, another court-ordered demolition would take place. Running parallel to all this, as I sat safe from the abject horror of apartheid in England, I was experiencing an intense succession of personal and professional

blows in response to the increasing inter-relatedness of my activist and artistic practices, and realisations that many of the people closest to me were only interested in privately expressing solidarity. To be in service to a broader struggle is not a concept that works in tandem with progressive neo-liberalism; extreme individualism is a capitalist ideal that has been re-established for contemporary usage through liberal frameworks that centralise identity politics as the utmost ideological form of activism. I have, as a result, become acutely aware of how that individualism, which in itself is a by-product of colonial arrogance, is used to silence and derail non-participants, such as working-class 'violent' activists and abolitionists, to maintain the status quo where revolutionary action is discarded in favour of visibility politics.

Visibility politics takes a central role in the Instagrammification of activism – as a result, I have always been wary of doing activist work that fits within the parameters of Instagram – this is because I feel that critical political discourse is often discarded in favour of quickly-digestible infographics that can be reposted instantly and forgotten about. However, since Black Lives Matter's radical abolitionist movement went viral last year, activism on social media played a vital role in proving that discursive political thought will not be silenced amidst global lockdown measures. The following paragraph outlines how this played out for the movement for Palestinian liberation and looks into the problems faced by frontline activists in Palestine who used Instagram to disseminate experiential information.

Since May 2021, we have witnessed a massive shift in the online narrative surrounding the Palestinian struggle and Israeli war crimes. This shift towards the recognition of Israel as a violent settler-colonial apartheid state on social media platforms such as Instagram, a platform headed by Israeli-American businessman Adam Mosseri, was coloured by Instagram's well-documented censorship and removal of Palestinian content and shadow-banning (content being unable to reach people), which I experienced on my account after curating a free library on Palestinian texts (tinyurl.com/palestinetexts). Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz spoke to officials at Facebook and Tiktok, urging them to remove pro-Palestine content. The widespread explosive recognition of Israeli hostility on these complicit social