

“AL-HARAKA BARAKA”
PALESTINIAN SPORTSWOMEN’S BOYCOTT AS MOVEMENT-BUILDING FOR LIBERATION

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Abstract

This project explores Palestinian sportswomen's use of boycott to resist the Israeli occupation. It investigates how Palestinian sportswomen affirm their position as non-state actors espousing sports boycott as an activist strategy, in accordance with the principles of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. It particularly analyses the “#BoycottPuma” campaign featuring Palestinian sportswomen's boycott call of sponsorship deals and sporting events that seek to normalise the Israeli occupation. The study examines the BDS movement and its mobilisation of sports boycott as an anticolonial tactic to bring the Palestinian liberation struggle to the international spotlight and global solidarity networks. This research relies on an extensive range of sources, such as archival materials on sports in the Middle East and Palestine, primary and secondary sources on anti-Apartheid and anti-racist sports boycotts, and documentaries on Palestinian athletes and their social media outlets.

Résumé de thèse

Ce projet explore comment les athlètes palestiniennes utilisent le boycottage pour résister à l'occupation israélienne. Notamment, l'étude de cas sur la campagne en ligne “#BoycottPuma” met en lumière l'effort des athlètes palestiniennes de lancer un appel au boycottage des initiatives sportives, telles que les ententes commerciales ou les événements sportifs internationaux, cherchant à normaliser l'occupation israélienne. L'analyse de cette campagne montre comment le mouvement Boycott, désinvestissement et sanctions (BDS) lutte contre le colonialisme et souligne la cause palestinienne à l'échelle internationale à travers le boycott sportif. Ce projet de recherche fait usage de plusieurs sources primaires et secondaires, notamment les documentaires sur les athlètes en Palestine, les médias sociaux, les ouvrages et archives sur l'histoire du sport au Moyen-Orient et en Palestine, ainsi que sur le boycott du régime apartheid en Afrique du Sud.

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
IFA	Israeli Football Association
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
IJF	International Judo Federation
IOC	International Olympic Committee
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
OPHR	Olympic Project for Human Rights
PACBI	Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel
PFA	Palestinian Football Association
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PMSMF	Palestinian Motor Sport and Motorcycle Federation
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PYM	Palestinian Youth Movement
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency

Introduction

Sports Boycott from “Glocal” Perspectives

Today, International Women’s Day, Puma is launching “She Moves Us,” a marketing campaign to “celebrate the women who have moved culture and sports forward.”

She Moves Us, but Puma supports illegal Israeli settlements forcing Palestinian women and their families from their homes. She Moves Us, but Puma supports Israel’s military occupation preventing Palestinian women athletes from traveling to matches. She Moves Us, but Puma supports Israeli apartheid, including medical apartheid denying millions of Palestinians vaccines during a pandemic.

Join us in celebrating Palestinian women in sports. Share the video of Palestinian athletes, including a player from the Women’s National Football Team, calling to boycott Puma until it ends support for Israeli apartheid.

—Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “She Moves Us, but Puma helps oppress Palestinian women.”¹

In March 2021, Palestinian sportswomen led the “#BoycottPuma” campaign to protest the brand’s sponsorship of the Israel Football Association (IFA). This boycott call had originally appeared in a 2018 open letter from over two hundred Palestinian athletic clubs urging Puma to cancel the four-year sponsorship deal.² The sportswear brand’s endorsement legitimises the IFA which manages football clubs in illegal settlements and allows matches to take place on the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages.³ Previous pressure from Palestinian civil society groups and international solidarity activists resulted in Adidas’s termination of its commercial agreement with the IFA in July 2018.⁴ Adidas’s decision to stop sponsoring the IFA is one of the success stories of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement’s effort to disrupt the flow of capital into Israel

¹ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “She Moves Us, but Puma Helps Oppress Palestinian Women,” *BDS Movement*, March 7, 2021. <https://bdsmovement.net/she-boycotts>

² Palestinian Athletic Clubs, “More than 200 Palestinian Sports Clubs Urge Puma to End Sponsorship of Israeli Teams in Illegal Settlements,” *BDS Movement*, September 20, 2018. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/more-200-palestinian-sports-clubs-urge-puma-end-sponsorship-israeli-teams-illegal-settlements>

³ Palestinian Athletic Clubs, “More than 200 Palestinian Sports Clubs Urge Puma.”

⁴ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Team Justice Scores. Adidas No Longer Sponsoring Israel Football Association,” *BDS Movement*, July 31, 2018. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/team-justice-scores-adidas-no-longer-sponsoring-israel-football-association>

from international corporations and institutions. Interestingly, different outcomes have emerged from Palestinian campaigns for a sports boycott of Israel, for example, there is a discrepancy between the effectiveness of an institutionally-led boycott and a grassroots-led approach. Whilst the Palestinian Football Association's (PFA) petition to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) to ban Israel from international competitions failed in 2015,⁵ mobilisation from Palestinian civil society and solidarity groups to boycott a football match between Argentina and Israel, which would have occurred on the site of a destroyed Palestinian village, proved to be a success in 2018.⁶

The use of boycott to protest colonial oppression is not a new tactic, including in Palestine. Anti-Apartheid activists deployed BDS tactics—dubbed as the “people’s sanctions” by the African National Congress (ANC)—and called for a boycott of white-owned and produced South African products, as well as institutions complicit in the normalisation of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.⁷ This grassroots campaign was launched by civil society groups from within South Africa, providing inspiration for the Palestinian BDS movement. Decades of Palestinian institutional weakness and sabotage by Zionist forces failed to provide a sustainable framework for liberation and resistance, culminating in the 1993 Oslo Accords. Rather than securing the prospect of Palestinian statehood and liberation, the Oslo “peace process” debilitated Palestinian political institutions, even encouraging Palestinian elite cooperation with Israeli forces to outsource violence against Palestinian civilians.⁸ Moreover, Israel continues to intensify its aggression with impunity, such as expanding settlements and security measures, land grabs, and indiscriminate bombing of Gaza. Facing the absence of a unifying

⁵ Jon Dart, “Palestinian Football and National Identity under Occupation,” *Managing Sport and Leisure*, vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2020), 29.

⁶ Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), Coalició Prou Complicitat amb Israel, BDS Argentina, Comité Argentino en solidaridad con el Pueblo Palestino, “We Applaud Argentina’s Decision to Cancel Israel Football Match,” *BDS Movement*, June 14, 2018. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/we-applaud-argentina%E2%80%99s-decision-cancel-israel-football-match>

⁷ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 61.

⁸ Leila Farsakh, “Undermining Democracy in Palestine: The Politics of International Aid Since Oslo,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Summer 2016), 49.

political institution and the enduring occupation, Palestinian civil society launched the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) in 2004. PACBI would eventually be integrated into the larger Palestinian BDS movement which published a formal call for non-violent pressure on Israel on July 9, 2005. The movement presents three core demands:

1. Ending the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands and dismantling the “security” wall;
2. Recognising the equal citizenship status of Palestinian citizens of Israel; and
3. Ensuring the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and properties, forcibly displaced following Israel’s founding in 1948, as per UN Resolution 194.⁹

Generally, BDS challenges international support for Israeli colonialism by calling for a boycott of settlement-made products, financial support for Israeli institutions, and exchanges with Israeli academic institutions. As world governments are turning to Israel for military and economic exchanges, BDS campaigns educate global citizens about how Israeli colonialism functions and what role they can play to help support Palestinians. This global campaign represents, in Abdel Razzaq Takriti’s analysis, a Gramscian “war of position” to challenge the political, economic, cultural, and moral paradigm surrounding Palestine/Israel.¹⁰ Each BDS victory allows Palestinians to reclaim a sense of control over their own resistance narrative which has systematically been silenced and distorted by the entanglements of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism, capitalism, colonialism, and pro-Israel narratives.¹¹ At the same time, the BDS movement reimagines and reshapes political solidarity by building a horizontal coalition and deploying multiple forms of advocacy, as scholar Chandni Desai

⁹ Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 22-23.

¹⁰ Abdel Razzaq Takriti, “Before BDS: Lineages of Boycott in Palestine,” *Radical History Review*, no. 134 (May 2019), 59.

¹¹ Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Christine Naber, eds., *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), xxxii.

underlines, notably petitions, general strikes, sit-ins, or endorsement of economic and sports boycotts to resist and disrupt the status quo.¹²

Although sports boycott was more central in the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa than it is in the Palestinian struggle, BDS activists do exert pressure in the field of sports, in addition to the economic and academic boycotts, as an integral part of the cultural boycott of Israel.¹³ Because Israel capitalises upon “culture” to whitewash and justify its colonisation of Palestine, the BDS movement specifically targets capitalism’s vulnerabilities in corporate sponsorship, the circulation of products and services, and the promotion of brands. Since the 2005 launch of “Brand Israel” to counter the Palestinian BDS call, Israel has invested in advertisements, the hosting of sports events, and sponsorship of athletic teams around the world, in order to sell its image as “only democracy in the Middle East.”¹⁴ These practices are known as “sportswashing,” a term coined by social media users in the 2010s to describe a country or business which bankrolls sporting events as a distraction from human rights abuses.¹⁵ It gained recent popularity with Qatar’s hosting of the 2022 World Cup despite blatant exploitation of workers building its athletic facilities, or Saudi Arabia’s attempt to lure world-class golfers to be its sporting ambassadors. In Israel, many sporting facilities and events are built and hosted on the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages, and Palestinian athletes who are citizens of Israel face racist abuse on the field. By understanding the triangulation of sports, global capitalism, and sportswashing, solidarity activists disrupt different forms of capitalist exploitation and debunk the notion that sports are “apolitical” games, due to the financial and ideological stake embedded within. From this standpoint, a sports boycott is as cultural as it is economic; it is also as global as it is local.

¹² Chandni Desai, “Disrupting Settler-Colonial Capitalism: Indigenous Intifadas and Resurgent Solidarity from Turtle Island to Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2021), 45.

¹³ Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions*, 50.

¹⁴ Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions*, 190.

¹⁵ Sportswashing is similar to “pinkwashing” and “greenwashing,” since these phenomenon cynically exploit measures promoting the development of sports, the hosting of sporting events, the implementation of environment-friendly practices, and the adoption of queer-friendly legislation to launder reputation. See Kyle Fruh, Alfred Archer, & Jake Wojtowicz, “Sportswashing: Complicity and Corruption,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* (2022), 2-3.

Coordinating boycott campaigns with international solidarity activists, Palestinian athletes and civil society organisations send a strong message to supporters of Israeli institutions: stop the normalisation of Israeli colonialism. Since the 2018 debut of the “#BoycottPuma” campaign, the BDS movement has organised several “global days of actions,” during which solidarity groups around the world stage protests in front of Puma stores.¹⁶ In elite sports, the summer of 2021 witnessed a renewal of sporting solidarity with Palestine following yet another episode of violent oppression. From the pitches of European football to the platforms of the Tokyo Olympics, international athletes took turns raising the Palestinian flag to show their support for the Palestinian struggle for freedom. On social media, they used their privileged status to raise awareness about Israel’s occupation of Palestine, the plight of Sheikh Jarrah residents in Jerusalem, indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, and violations of international law. For instance, in English football, Leicester City’s Hamza Choudhury and Wesley Fofana, alongside Manchester United’s Paul Pogba and Manchester City’s Riyad Mahrez, walked the pitch with a Palestinian flag at the end of their games.¹⁷ At the Olympic games, Algerian judoka Fethi Nourine refused to compete against an Israeli opponent, saying “Palestinian cause is bigger than all of this.”¹⁸ His refusal to acknowledge the Israeli opponent resulted in a ten-year ban for himself and his coach at the hands of the International Judo Federation (IJF).

How can two instances of solidarity produce such drastic outcomes? Whilst the footballers standing in solidarity with Palestinians in 2021 received some to little outrage, the backlash facing Fethi Nourine and his coach costs them their career and reveals the perils of adhering to BDS principles. Not only do Palestinians and their advocates risk losing career prospects and receive retaliation from institutions, but they are also blacklisted and surveilled by Zionist groups. Additionally,

¹⁶ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Join #BoycottPuma Global Day of Action, September 10,” *BDS Movement*, August 1, 2022. <https://bdsmovement.net/puma-day7>

¹⁷ Al Jazeera, “Top Footballers Unite in Solidarity with Palestinians,” *Al Jazeera*, May 17, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/17/from-uk-to-chile-footballers-signal-solidarity-with-palestinians>

¹⁸ Sean Ingle, “Algerian Judoka Sent Home From Olympics After Refusing to Face Israeli,” *The Guardian*, July 24, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jul/24/algerian-judoka-sent-home-from-olympics-after-refusing-to-compete-against-israeli>

the discrepancy between fan activism and clubs' practices generates another obstacle to solidarity-making. For instance, the Green Brigade fanbase of Scottish club Celtic FC regularly display the Palestinian flag and *kuffiyas* in matches, as well as raising money for Palestinian refugees.¹⁹ Yet, the club still purchases Israeli players and benefits from merchandise sales and TV rights earned from matches between Celtic and Israeli clubs. Because athletes serve as economic and social capital sources for their national federations, questions of sponsorship, money, and public image pose a serious challenge to the practice of solidarity. The age of neoliberal capitalism unveils the paradox of solidarity, further complicating the question of the price tag for showing solidarity and who can afford to do so.

This thesis explores the lineage, potential, and limitations of a Palestinian sports boycott of Israel. Studying the “#BoycottPuma” campaign, I postulate that Palestinian sportswomen’s call for a boycott of Israel and institutions bankrolling its colonial oppression constitutes an avenue for Palestinian liberation. I will examine how the sports boycott brings the Palestinian liberation struggle to global solidarity networks. Highlighting Palestinian sportswomen’s leadership role in the boycott, I will investigate the significance of gender, class, and mobility at the intersection of sports, politics, and anticolonialism. My interdisciplinary thesis will be a contribution to the scholarship on women’s sports and particularly to the small but growing scholarship on sports in Palestine. Investigating Palestinian sportswomen’s call for a boycott will also enrich the often-neglected gender analysis in sports studies, whereas the specifics of the ongoing colonisation of Palestine make an ideal case study of the use of sports boycott to protest a military occupation. Because of the specifics of Israel’s settler-colonial project in Palestine, such as the presence of walls, checkpoints, and administrative barriers to hinder physical mobility, as well as the control of information, organising a boycott campaign is not only a local struggle, but also a global effort to pressure the Zionist regime and international governing bodies of sports.

¹⁹ Marc Patrick Conaghan, “Football and Flags: Why Celtic Fans Back the Palestinian Cause,” *Middle East Eye*, August 24, 2016. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/football-and-flags-why-celtic-fans-back-palestinian-cause>

Indeed, modern sports are global businesses with local impacts; adopting a “glocal” perspective is therefore crucial in assessing the Palestinian BDS movement’s effort in implementing a sports boycott of Israel. For sociologist Roland Robertson, locality is constructed trans-/super-locally, as the local-global dialectic can help transcend the limitations, whether temporal or spatial, of nationalism, as well as providing a critique of the statist project.²⁰ Globalisation is thus profoundly involved in the reconstruction and redefinition of home with processes of global colonialism, capital circulation, and solidarity formation playing crucial roles in shaping Palestinian identity. Glocal considerations also elucidate the historical lineages of boycott preceding the Palestinian BDS movement, not only throughout Palestinian history, but also in transnational contexts, such as the anti-Apartheid boycott of South Africa and the initiatives taken by Palestinians in exile and international solidarity activists.

In the first chapter of this thesis, my review of scholarly literature will locate Palestine in sports studies. Whilst little is known about sports in Palestine in academic contexts, materials and resources on Palestinian sports and sports boycott of Israel are widely available within activist circles, such as the Palestinian BDS movement and Red Card Israeli Racism. In this case, academia can learn from knowledge produced and disseminated on the ground by activists, in order to understand the dialectic between theory and practice, as well as how practice can enrich theoretical paradigms. The gap in the literature on sports in Palestine opens a space to build upon works on sports boycotts in Black and African, such as Black athletes’ boycott of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics²¹ and the international sports boycott of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.²² This transhistorical and transnational outlook will help me reflect on the usefulness or not of the “Apartheid analogy.” Indeed, Palestinians have historically posited the Apartheid nature of Zionist settler-colonialism to formulate their resistance to

²⁰ Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, edited by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1995), 26.

²¹ Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

²² Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

the occupation of their land and nation,²³ whereas international human rights organisations have only recently acknowledged “Israeli Apartheid” as a “crime against humanity.”²⁴

Chapter 2 will outline the rationale for a sports boycott of the Zionist regime using Amber Fares’s 2015 *Speed Sisters* documentary, by drawing attention to Israel’s restrictions on Palestinian athletes’ mobility, destruction of sporting facilities, and practices of maiming Palestinian athletes. Particularly, I will study the colonial imposition of slowness—physical, temporal, and psychological—on Palestinians to counter their liberation movement, which is both physical and political. My research will challenge the approach of “peace-building” through sports, as advocated by international governing bodies and sports studies scholars, since this demands that colonised Palestinian athletes and their international counterparts should disregard or minimise the Israeli occupation. My critique of the “peace-building” approach is also linked to a rejection of the Oslo framework, in addition to protesting Israel’s endeavours to establish “sports for peace” programmes to paint itself as the more moderate and rational entity in the so-called “Israel-Palestine conflict.” For Palestinian sportspeople and athletes standing in solidarity with Palestine, to compete against Israeli athletes is to presume an equal access to sporting facilities, state support, financial resources, and freedom of movement between Palestinians and Israelis. In order to better investigate these questions, I will therefore link sports studies and disability studies to focus on restrictions of movement and mobility for Palestinian athletes, as Palestinians are prevented from travelling for competitions and put in “administrative detention” by occupation forces, in addition to being disabled by Israeli gunfire.²⁵ Moreover, connecting sports

²³ Loubna Qutami, “Moving Beyond the Apartheid Analogy in Palestine and South Africa,” *Middle East Report Online*, February 3, 2020.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, April 27, 2021; Amnesty International, *Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity*, February 1, 2022.

²⁵ Laura Jordan Jaffee, “Disrupting Global Disability Frameworks: Settler-Colonialism and the Geopolitics of Disability in Palestine/Israel,” *Disability & Society*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2016); Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Therí A. Pickens, *Black Madness: Mad Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Yasmin Snounu, “Apartheid, Disability, and the Triple Matrix of Maiming in Palestine,” *Peace Review*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2019).

studies and Arab feminism will create a mutually beneficial discussion for both fields, because of the limited research on the experiences of Palestinian sportswomen and on the Palestinian call for a sports boycott of the Zionist regime. In doing so, I will challenge the superficial depiction of Palestinian women as “oppressed,” and analyse the ways in which Palestinian sportswomen navigate and defy the local patriarchy, in addition to being a unifying force for Palestinians of all genders, ages, and class belongings.

In the third chapter, I will examine the recent “#BoycottPuma” campaign led by Palestinian sportswomen, from which I took the opening epigraph of the thesis. The campaign advocates for a boycott of sponsorship deals and sporting events seeking to normalise the Israeli occupation. My study of the campaign will show how Palestinian sportswomen attempt to transcend the physical and informational restrictions imposed by Zionist settler-colonialism to reach global solidarity networks, through their strategic use of hashtags and parody to critique capitalist hypocrisy. I will outline the potential of a sports boycott of the Zionist entity, namely the issues raised by Palestinian sportswomen, using their lived experiences and political demands as athletes and Palestinians. I will also interrogate the applicability of the anti-Apartheid sports boycott to the Palestinian case and discuss whether Palestine solidarity activists can build upon the “Apartheid analogy” as a framework for anticolonial theory and practices.

In the last chapter, I will examine the difficulties in the implementation of a fully-fledged sports boycott of Israel. Building on Chapter Three, I will discuss how the anti-Apartheid sports boycott of South Africa is distinct from the Palestinian BDS movement, as the latter is profoundly affected by the institutional layering of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism, capitalism, and colonialism. Whilst the Palestinian BDS movement has creatively counter-campaigned against pro-Israeli propaganda, the

obstacles created by neoliberal capitalism, the “war on terror” ideology, and international governing bodies of sports ultimately put international sporting solidarity with Palestine “at risk.”²⁶

²⁶ Natalie Kouri-Towe, “Solidarity at Risk: The Politics of Attachment in Transnational Queer Palestine Solidarity and Anti-Pinkwashing Activism” (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2015), 4.

Chapter 1

Locating Palestine within Sports Studies

As a Palestinian, Arab, holding a Palestinian passport, a non-formally recognised state, although we have two governments, travelling has always been an interesting experience. I can tell you how many connecting flights we missed, because passport control officers couldn't find Palestine as an option on their computers.

—Honey Thaljieh, former captain of the Palestine women's national football team²⁷

Sports are not merely games, but networks of power and economic circulation amongst state institutions, non-state organisations, and societal groups. Sports historians, such as Allen Guttman, have underlined the intersection of sports, politics, and nationalism in international contexts.²⁸ Numerous works in sports studies have examined sports as tool of diplomacy, since global sporting competitions normalise nation-states and set aside their inter-state political differences.²⁹ According to James Riordan and Grant Jarvie, sports can be used by one state to send diplomatic messages to a rival state, such as a state's refusal to participate in sporting events or to compete against a particular nation unveils geopolitical tensions between two states.³⁰ States can thus use sports boycott to display their discontent with an event or a group of nations.

²⁷ Honey Thaljieh, "Honey, Football Changed My Life | Honey Thaljieh | TEDxZurich," *TEDx Talks*, YouTube video, 16:55, November 20, 2014. <https://youtu.be/SOB7UwEeo0w>

²⁸ Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

²⁹ Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Allan Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); Adrian Smith & Dilwyn Porter, *Sport and National Identity in the Post-War World* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³⁰ Pierre Arnaud & James Riordan, eds., *Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport* (London; New York: E & F SPON, 2003); Grant Jarvie, "Internationalism and Sport in the Making of Nations," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2003).

For sociologists and anthropologists, sports are often coopted into a masculinist, nationalist imaginary due to male domination in sporting activities.³¹ Nationalist pedagogies seek to rebuild the ideal male model and leader of the nation, such as “Muscular Christianity,” “Muscular Judaism,” or the Soviet “New Socialist Man,” through military training, calisthenics, and gymnastics.³² In the Egyptian context, Wilson Jacob Chacko examines how competitive sports played an important role in the emergence of an upper-class “effendi masculinity” which eventually became integral to the Egyptian nationalist discourse on gender, militarism, and masculinity to counter the British colonial gaze.³³ As the army and athletic training are means through which national identity is expressed, these programmes aim to create and strengthen a militarist facade of a nation, whilst excluding women, people with disabilities, racialised citizens, or queer people who ought to fulfill other roles or have no role at all in the national imaginary.³⁴

Despite the exclusionary practices in which they can be embedded, sports are also a site where dialogue can take place. If colonial powers introduced sports to colonised societies to depoliticise them, sport arenas have become sites of resistance in a so-called “postcolonial world,” thanks to membership to international governing bodies, notably the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA.³⁵ Marginalised groups can build “peace bridges” with the structures and individuals that oppress them in international sporting competitions, whilst renouncing their political agenda in the name of peace.³⁶ Yet,

³¹ Eric Dunning, *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence, and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1999); Joseph A. Maguire, *Sport Worlds: A Sociological Perspective* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2002); Ilse Hartmann-Tews & Gertrud Pfister, *Sport and Women: Social Issues in International Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003).

³² Arnd Krüger, “The Role of Sport in German International Politics, 1918-1945,” in *Sport and International Politics*, edited by Pierre Arnaud & James Riordan, 84; Nicholas Blincoe, *More Noble Than War: A Soccer History of Israel-Palestine* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2019), 46.

³³ Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 229.

³⁴ Susan Birrell & Cheryl L. Cole, *Women, Sport, and Culture* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 11; Grant Jarvie, “Internationalism and Sport,” 538; Jonathan Long, Thomas Fletcher, & Beccy Watson, eds., *Sport, Leisure and Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 2017), 24.

³⁵ John Bale, and Mike Cronin, *Sport and Postcolonialism* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 36.

³⁶ John Bale, and Mike Cronin, *Sport and Postcolonialism*, 23; Daniel Kilvington & John Price, eds., *Sport and Discrimination* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 31.

sports also house a network of contradictions. On the one hand, they promote accessibility and participation, regardless of race, nationality, religion, and—paradoxically—physical ability.³⁷ On the other hand, they, by nature, depend on one’s ability and merit, further complicating questions of “fair play,” discrimination, exploitation, and corruption.³⁸ Proponents of peace promotion through sports thus adopt a reductionist view and remove sports from concerns of power and inequities, yet sports are about space, place, publicity, finances, and hence inherently political.

Marginalised and oppressed groups have understood the centrality of technology, such as photography, television, and social media, in the spread of the popularity of sports and athletes. Televised displays of protest transform sports into an important platform to protest injustice, as athletes and solidarity activists target the vulnerabilities of capitalism to send a message to the oppressive power systems. For example, during their medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, Black athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos wore the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) badge and raised their fists into the air as a “human rights salute.”³⁹ Harry Edwards, the founder of the OPHR, had previously encouraged Black athletes to boycott the Olympics due to the systematic oppression of Black people in the United States and South Africa—a call to which Smith and Carlos were receptive.⁴⁰ Similarly, the anti-Apartheid sports boycott of South Africa was made popular by civil society groups and intellectuals from within South Africa who called upon the international community not to legitimise the racist regime. The withdrawal of more than twenty African and Arab teams from the 1976 Montreal Olympics to protest New Zealand’s sporting links with South Africa was a nod to anti-Apartheid activists’ boycott call.⁴¹

³⁷ Jonathan Long et al., eds., *Sport, Leisure and Social Justice*, 135.

³⁸ Jonathan Long et al., eds., *Sport, Leisure and Social Justice*, 23.

³⁹ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 256.

⁴⁰ Harry Edwards & Samuel J Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 4.

⁴¹ Malcolm MacLean, “Anti-Apartheid Boycotts and the Affective Economies of Struggle: The Case of Aotearoa New Zealand,” *Sport in Society*, vol. 13, no. 1 (January 2010), 75.

In recent years, social media have facilitated displays of solidarity in top-tier sports leagues and competitions; most notably, Colin Kaepernick's gesture of kneeling down at the National Football League became an inspiration for Black athletes to protest systematic racism in the United States. Kaepernick's gesture also evokes a lineage of boycott in sports and by athletes, such as Muhammad Ali's opposition to the war in Vietnam and protest against racial injustice. Yet, whilst the global anti-Apartheid boycott resulted in South Africa's expulsion from international sporting events and associations, individual athletes like Smith, Carlos, and Kaepernick faced media backlash and retaliation from their national federations.⁴² Their reputation was subsequently tainted by the media and corporate sports management industry, but their activism on the field sets in motion waves of protest. Nonetheless, whilst "taking the knee" is televised in Premier League matches to show that racism is not tolerated in sports, discrimination and violence persist. Sports scholars working on issues related to social justice conclude that sports activism may result in social change if concerns with progress and equity are institutionally promoted to benefit society's most vulnerable groups.

Indeed, organised sports are a modern invention and a symbol of globalisation, accompanied by concerns with mobility, management, event hosting, and profit generation, tethering them to the image and function of capitalist institutions. A small number of scholars have made sports in the Middle East a subject of their research. For instance, Magid Shihade and Issam Khalidi have focused on the history and evolution of men's football in Palestine,⁴³ whereas Tamir Sorek analyses football in Israel as an "integrative enclave"—an instrument for Palestinians to achieve acceptance in Israeli society.⁴⁴ Other scholars, namely James Dorsey, Mahfoud Amara, and Abdullah Al-Arian have examined football

⁴² Dave Zirin, *The Kaepernick Effect: Taking a Knee, Changing the World* (New York; London: The New Press, 2021), 7.

⁴³ Magid Shihade, *Not Just a Soccer Game: Colonialism and Conflict among Palestinians in Israel* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Issam Khalidi, *One Hundred Years of Football in Palestine* (Amman: Al Manhal, 2017).

⁴⁴ Tamir Sorek, *Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

competitions in Gulf states and Israel.⁴⁵ Their scholarship has shed light on the intersection of sports, capitalism, and sportswashing. A good example of this is how, the boycott campaign of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar aims to pressure global football associations to stop giving legitimacy to the Gulf monarchy, due to the horrid working conditions and deaths of the workers who build the sporting facilities.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the inconsistency in the application of a sports boycott remains an enigma, as Dave Zirin has pointed out. Whilst Russia faced vehement international opposition for its hosting of the 2018 FIFA World Cup and Sochi Winter Olympics due to its treatment of LGBTQ+ activists, in addition to the immediate sanctions facing Putin's regime following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Palestinians' call for a sports boycott of Israel has often been silenced.⁴⁷ Critics of sports boycott have labelled sports boycott as "wrong" and "overtly political" because it "goes against the spirit of international sports."⁴⁸

Douglas Booth questions the vague objectives of a sports boycott, as well as the aftermath of implementing a successful one, asking whether negotiations and concessions are an adequate measurement of attitude change and the full dismantling of racism.⁴⁹ Marlene Goldsmith contends that sports boycott is part of a package of sanctions against a country, in order to cripple the target country economically and isolate it internationally.⁵⁰ It is also a non-aggressive approach which can bring self-satisfaction to the initiator of the boycott.⁵¹ Goldsmith opposes sports boycott, on the basis that it is unproductive and punishes athletes for the failure of their country's politicians, in addition to violating

⁴⁵ James Dorsey, *Shifting Sands: Essays on Sports and Politics in the Middle East and North Africa* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2018); Mahfoud Amara, *Sport, Politics and Society in the Arab World* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Abdullah Al-Arian, *Football in the Middle East: State, Society, and the Beautiful Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁴⁶ Danyel Reiche & Tamir Sorek, *Sport, Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), 56.

⁴⁷ Dave Zirin, "A Lone Voice in the World Asks: 'What About Palestine?'" *The Nation*, March 16, 2022. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/ali-farag-palestine/>

⁴⁸ Marlene Goldsmith, "Sporting Boycotts as a Political Tool," *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), 18.

⁴⁹ Douglas Booth, "'Unity Talks' in South African Sport: Is It Time to End the Boycott?" *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 4 (Summer 1990), 385-386.

⁵⁰ Marlene Goldsmith, "Sporting Boycotts as a Political Tool," 13.

⁵¹ Marlene Goldsmith, "Sporting Boycotts as a Political Tool," 14.

the principles of the Olympics which consist in building peace through sports. Yet, how do international governing bodies sanction athletes' complicity in the systematic oppression of a people and representation of their country to normalise and legitimise its violations of international law? What are the mechanisms for accountability when armed resistance is out of the equation in a so-called "peaceful game"? The prospect of cancelling mega sporting events is slim, unless the enabling political conditions for hosting them, such as neoliberal capitalism and settler-colonialism, are dismantled. Nonetheless, critics of sports boycott misunderstand the essence of the boycott itself; it not only concerns the tactics, but also the reasons and principles underlying such a boycott.

The use of boycott to protest colonialism is not new in Palestine. Abdel Razzaq Takriti is one scholar who traces the lineage and waves of Palestinian boycott efforts, from the days of Ottoman and British rule to the present situation of Zionist settler-colonialism.⁵² Due to the non-lethal nature of boycott and the close-knit social relations in Palestine, boycott calls are implemented with ease and spread through newspapers, radio broadcasts, and—in today's context—social media platforms. Boycott is one of the liberation tactics that has been adopted by the Palestinian political elite, labourers, and civil society actors who disseminate these calls according to the specific material, historical, and political conditions of their time. Boycott strategies and targets also change based on local and global considerations, as well as the long-term pressure and goals which the campaigns wish to attain. As the Israeli occupation of Palestine and international complicity in maintaining the status quo continue to fragment Palestinian political structures, "peace" processes, such as the 1993 Oslo Accords, have tethered Palestinian political processes to the mould of neoliberal globalisation.⁵³ In a reality dictated by Israel's settler-colonial project, Oslo has further diluted the Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) power, even installing the capitalist international aid regime and encouraging cronyism within the

⁵² Abdel Razzaq Takriti, "Before BDS," 84-85.

⁵³ Tariq Dana, "The Structural Transformation of Palestinian Civil Society: Key Paradigm Shifts," *Middle East Critique*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2015), 197; Leila Farsakh, "Undermining Democracy in Palestine," 49; Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa After 1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3.

Palestinian elite, creating a new cycle of dependency, as Tariq Dana and Leila Farsakh have underlined.⁵⁴ Benoît Challand has also explored how donor-driven initiatives promoting democracy and “good governance” do not reflect the aspirations of Palestinians in occupied Palestine and undermine Palestinians’ autonomy, diversity, and anticolonial resistance.⁵⁵ These neoliberal configurations, in the name of “peace” and “dialogue,” have rather produced more precarious living conditions for Palestinian civilians, as Israel extends its blockade on Gaza indefinitely, expands its settlements in the occupied territories with impunity, and applies more draconian measures to strip Palestinians of their freedom of movement and right of return to their homeland. The failure of and division within the Palestinian leadership have sown distrust from within Palestinian civil society, as the absence of a viable and collective liberation pathway exacerbates Palestinians’ material conditions and proposes individualistic solutions to systematic colonial violence.

The scholarship on the anti-Apartheid sports boycott of South Africa is rich with insights, focusing on state-initiated boycott efforts and international federations’ sanctions to isolate the Apartheid regime. For Håkan Thörn, the struggle against Apartheid benefited from the support of global solidarity groups, such as labour unions and youth movements, by grounding their opposition in the principles of human rights and international law.⁵⁶ Rob Nixon studies closely the anti-Apartheid sports boycott of South Africa and notes that because of the shared sporting lineage within the British Empire, organised sports ban of the Apartheid regime was quickly implemented starting in the 1950s.⁵⁷ The sports boycott increased in popularity thanks to the power of television and photography to generate spectacle and create a visual impact on global consumers.⁵⁸ With pressure on different fronts,

⁵⁴ Tariq Dana, “The Structural Transformation of Palestinian Civil Society”; Leila Farsakh, “Undermining Democracy in Palestine.”

⁵⁵ Benoît Challand, *Palestinian Civil Society: Foreign Donors and the Power to Promote and Exclude* (London: Routledge, 2009), 32.

⁵⁶ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society*, 12.

⁵⁷ Rob Nixon, “Apartheid on the Run: The South African Sports Boycott,” *Transition*, no. 58 (1992), 70.

⁵⁸ Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood*, 78.

from crippling the racist regime economically to isolating it culturally, academically, and in sports, South Africa was expelled from membership in international sporting associations. For instance, in 1964, the IOC barred South Africa from participating the Tokyo Olympics on grounds of violation of the Olympic Charter.⁵⁹ The committee also insisted on the fact that there was no difference between the policies of the Apartheid regime and the South African National Olympic Committee's segregationist practices.⁶⁰ Four years later, South Africa remained excluded from the Mexico City Olympics for its refusal to put in place a non-racial team.⁶¹

With the sports boycott of Apartheid South Africa being a blueprint for sporting activism, the BDS movement similarly aims to halt attempts at the normalisation and sponsorship of the Zionist regime, as sports make up an important part of its cultural boycott. Leaders of the Palestinian BDS movement, such as Omar Barghouti, have drawn parallels between Apartheid South Africa and Israel to call upon international actors and world governments to withdraw their support for the Zionist regime.⁶² A few scholars, such as Jon Dart and Francesco Belcastro, have recently been interested in the Palestinian sports boycott of Israel, and in whether such a strategy merits the label "anti-Semitic." They have critiqued international sporting agencies for depoliticising sports and ignoring concerns with human rights in favour of profit generation.⁶³ Belcastro concurs with Dart that repressive regimes fail to represent the athletic values of the international governing bodies of sports, and boycott campaigns shed light on abuses which are often whitewashed.⁶⁴ Sports boycotts can also exert pressure on

⁵⁹ David R. Black, "'Not Cricket': The Effects and Effectiveness of the Sport Boycott," in *How Sanctions Work*, edited by Audie Klotz & Neta C. Crawford, 215.

⁶⁰ Eric J. Morgan, "Don't Play Ball with South Africa: The United States, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the Davis Cup Protests," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 34, no. 3-4 (2017), 269.

⁶¹ Eric J. Morgan, "Don't Play Ball with South Africa," 269.

⁶² Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions*, 21.

⁶³ Francesco Belcastro, "Sport, Politics and the Struggle over 'Normalization' in Post-Oslo Israel and Palestine," *Mediterranean Politics* (2020); Jon Dart, "Israel and a Sports Boycott: Antisemitic? Anti-Zionist?" *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2017); Jon Dart, "Palestinian Football and National Identity under Occupation."

⁶⁴ Francesco Belcastro, "Sport, Politics and the Struggle over 'Normalization'"; Jon Dart, "Israel and a Sports Boycott"; Jon Dart, "Palestinian Football and National Identity under Occupation."

international federations to initiate sanctions and reveal about the systematic nature of a regime's oppressive practices and the international support for its policies from corporations and propagandist groups, due to the triangulation of sports, capitalism, and neoliberalism. And yet, questions of gender, class, and disability remain largely explored in the Palestinian sporting context, since colonial projects are as gendered and classist as they are ableist in their sportswashing endeavours.

Since the early 2000s, Western academia started developing an interest in the experiences of sportswomen in the Global North, yet it has neglected those of sportswomen in the Global South, as well as athletes in racialised and marginalised positionalities. Issues related to female athletes in developed countries have received considerable attention from Jennifer Hargreaves, Ilse Hartmann-Tews, and Gertrud Pfister, enriching sports studies with a much-needed gender analysis.⁶⁵ In more recent years, Toffoletti, Thorpe, and Francombe-Webb's work discusses femininities and sport in "postfeminist" neoliberal times; they explore the growing visibility of feminism and the link with wider cultural shifts in sports in different global contexts. As sportswomen in various geographical spaces are being given more attention, the injustices facing them are also hotly debated in the media, academia, and activist circles, such as wage disparities or gender testing.⁶⁶ These scholars have critiqued the binary view of sportswomen along the "empowered-oppressed" spectrum, paving the way for upcoming scholarship on women in specific contexts, such as the Middle East in general or Palestine in particular, to build upon. A few publications have tackled the theme of Middle Eastern women in sports, such as Homa Hoodfar's *Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts* and Mahfoud Amara's *Sport and Politics in the Arab World*. They provide some explanations for the lack of attention given to women in sports in Arab and Muslim contexts; namely, (male) access to women's sporting

⁶⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Jennifer Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000); Ilse Hartmann-Tews & Gertrud Pfister, *Sport and Women*.

⁶⁶ Kim Toffoletti, Jessica Francombe-Webb, and Holly Thorpe, *New Sporting Femininities: Embodied Politics in Postfeminist Times* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3.

competitions is restricted due to the requirements of modesty and dress code.⁶⁷ At the same time, these close-knit athletic circles allow sportswomen to compete in safety and solidarity with one another. Whilst the Western-centric discourse on sports has used the visibility of marginalised communities in sports as a measurement of modernity and civilisational progress, it fails to identify local and global conditions rendering Arab and Muslim sportswomen's participation (in)visible. In Palestine, because of the constraints created by the Zionist regime to conduct research and practise sports, including the systematic destruction of Palestinian records and archives, the literature on Palestinian sports, let alone Palestinian women in sports, is scarce. As a result, little is known about Palestinian sportswomen and their sporting activism apart from a few isolated, short papers and online activist materials.

Nevertheless, Arab feminist scholarship outside of the athletic context can complement our understanding of Arab and Muslim women's experiences in general, and those of Palestinian women in particular. Arab feminists reject the white feminist lens of understanding injustices facing women through the sole lens of "gender inequality" and a monolithic understanding of the patriarchy. Adopting an intersectional and anticolonial model of analysis, they align Palestinian women's issues with the radical women of colour critique which was pioneered by Black queer feminism.⁶⁸ Rabab Abdulhadi and Nadine Naber challenge the "oppressed Arab/Muslim woman" narrative in need of "rescuing" or "protection," either by/from colonial powers or the local patriarchal networks.⁶⁹ They move their analyses away from the Western-centric narrative of "rescuing oppressed women from their cultures" and the hardline fundamentalist view casting women seeking justice from within as "pawns of the West."⁷⁰ Arab feminists frame instead the entanglements of (neo)colonialism, capitalism, militarism,

⁶⁷ Homa Hoodfar, ed., *Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts* (London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 2015); Mahfoud Amara, *Sport, Politics and Society in the Arab World*.

⁶⁸ Nada Elia, "Justice is Indivisible: Palestine as a Feminist Issue," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2017), 54.

⁶⁹ Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Christine Naber, eds., *Arab & Arab American Feminisms*, xxxii.

⁷⁰ Mohja Kahf, "Packaging 'Huda': Sha'rawi's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment," in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, edited by Amal Amireh & Lisa Suhair Majaj (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 149.

and internal erasure efforts to deny Arab/Muslim women their agency and autonomy.⁷¹ Palestinian feminists, such as Nahla Abdo, Rabab Abdulhadi, and Nada Elia repudiate the misrepresentation of Arab/Muslim and Palestinian women as a monolith, and examine these women as primary agents of history and society, both in historic Palestine and in the diaspora.⁷² Because of the gendered consequences of Zionist colonialism and militarism, only by ending the occupation and support for Zionism will Palestinian women's conditions improve. And yet, instead of succumbing to mere victimhood, Palestinian women are actively involved in various political and cultural organisations and create spaces for themselves to resist different systems of oppression, connecting gender equality and national liberation consequently.⁷³

Therefore, in the pages that follow, sketching a map of Palestinian sportswomen's simultaneous experiences of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, misogyny, and Zionist oppression requires the identification of the power structures at play, and how their opposition to these systems of oppression serve as the foundation for their political activism. In the next chapter, I will use the example of the Palestinian car racing team "Speed Sisters" to illustrate the barriers to practising sports as experienced by this group of Palestinian sportswomen.

⁷¹ Rabab Abdulhadi et al, eds., *Arab & Arab American Feminisms*, xxxii; Nada Elia, "Justice is Indivisible," 49.

⁷² Nahla Abdo, "Feminism and Difference: The Struggle of Palestinian Women," *Canadian Women Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2 (September 1995), 141; Nada Elia, "Justice is Indivisible," 56; Rabab Abdulhadi et al, eds., *Arab & Arab American Feminisms*, xxxvi.

⁷³ Rabab Abdulhadi, "The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges," *Gender and Society*, vol. 12, no. 6 (December 1998), 651; Nada Elia, "Justice is Indivisible," 60-61.

Chapter 2

Not Allowed to Play under Zionist Colonisation: The “Speed Sisters”

A car rally could easily happen in any country but Palestine, because every few minutes you face a military checkpoint.

—Emirati TV anchor⁷⁴

Understanding the rationale for a sports boycott of the Zionist regime requires a preliminary investigation of the realities of Palestinian athletes on the ground. The lack of available materials showing the experiences of Palestinian sportswomen leads me to examine Amber Fares’s 2015 documentary *Speed Sisters* which provides a rare glimpse into the world of female car racing in Palestine. The accessibility of the documentary allows a researcher, like myself, who is based in North America to remotely and use diverse sources, whilst also bridging the gap between theoretical, academic knowledge and the moving image. The documentary follows a group of Palestinian women divided by the Zionist occupation, yet united by their love for racing. The “Speed Sisters”⁷⁵ are a Palestinian car racing team composed entirely of women in their twenties and thirties at the time of filming: the team leader Maysoon Jayyusi, the underdog Marah Zahalka, the distracted Noor Daoud, the wealthy Betty Saadeh, and the accident-prone Mona Ennab. Having met the racers years prior to making the documentary, Amber Fares spent time bonding with the “Speed Sisters” and accompanying them at practice and competitions in the West Bank, Jordan, and the United Kingdom in the late 2000s and early 2010s.⁷⁶ Aiming to challenge the mainstream narrative regarding the Middle East post-9/11 and amidst the burgeoning Arab Spring, Amber Fares paints a cinematic picture with the Palestinian

⁷⁴ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters* (Palestine: SocDoc Studios, 2015).

⁷⁵ In this chapter, I will use *Speed Sisters* (in italics) to reference the documentary, and “Speed Sisters” (between quotation marks) to refer to the racing team.

⁷⁶ Amber Fares, “Speed Sisters: Racing in Palestine,” *Indiegogo*, 2012. <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/speed-sisters-racing-in-palestine#/>

racers in the foreground, lending them her platform to express themselves through action scenes, interviews, and dialogue. The presence of cameras inside each racer's cockpit enables viewers to connect with the racers on a personal level. Using an all-female crew to build trust and intimacy with the athletes and capture the central theme of sisterhood, the documentary transcribes the real-life events happening during the time of filming in a raw and immediate way. It also delivers a comprehensive, non-stereotypical portrait of the racers whilst examining the political and cultural implications of being the first female racing team in the Middle East and the only in Palestine in a male-dominated field.

Moving along the paths of the "Speed Sisters," racing shatters spatial, temporal, and political boundaries in Palestine, as well as opening up an avenue for both collective and personal liberation. I contend that sports, speed, and movement generate layered and grassroots affective spaces of resistance and community-building amidst the colonial fragmentation of the Palestinian social fabric, geography, and politics. In my analysis of *Speed Sisters* and the metaphor of movement-as-freedom, I will follow Jasbir Puar's elaboration on the "slow life" in Palestine,⁷⁷ which examines the Palestinian experience of time and space under the Zionist occupation. The control of Palestinians, through checkpoints, walls, arbitrary arrests, and administrative delays, is a technology of settler-colonialism imposing a "slow death"⁷⁸ upon them through space-time compression and suffocation.⁷⁹ This colonial scheme of spatiotemporal fracturing of Palestinians culminated in the 1948 mass displacement of the Nakba, the 1967 West Bank conquest, and persists until today under new forms and techniques of violence.⁸⁰ Zionist settler-colonialism hence fragments the Palestinian social fabric and destroys Palestinians' capacity to collectively counter their ongoing colonial predicament. The slowing down of time and shrinking of space allow the Zionist regime to justify more draconian measures against Palestinians,⁸¹

⁷⁷ Jasbir Puar, "Spatial Debilities: Slow Life and Carceral Capitalism in Palestine," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 120, no. 2 (April 2021), 403-404.

⁷⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 95.

⁷⁹ Jasbir Puar, "Spatial Debilities," 404.

⁸⁰ Julie Peteet, *Space and Mobility in Palestine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 3-4.

⁸¹ Julie Peteet, *Space and Mobility in Palestine*, 40.

as Palestinians are seen as “stuck in time” and “slow-moving,” and by extension, “deserving” of discipline and incarceration in a perpetual “iron cage.”⁸² In this sense, slowness carries the physical, temporal, and psychological dimensions in the Palestinian experience of Zionist colonialism.

Nonetheless, far from exceptionalising the “Speed Sisters” as a stand-alone phenomenon in Palestine, I consider this Palestinian car racing team as integral to the liberation struggle due to their use of sports as a platform of resistance to colonialism. Car racing enables the Palestinian female racers to experience a “normal” life—that is, the ability to practise sports without any political and physical constraints—without normalising the military occupation. Because of the sociality of sports, the “Speed Sisters” build up momentum and a movement to nurture Palestinian unity and pride, accentuating sports’ role as an important emotional resource.⁸³ Despite Israel’s regulation of space in Palestine, car racing helps the racers resist the forceful slowing down of movement and time as they strategically use space to train. In creating space to practise their sport, the “Speed Sisters” also craft a space of sisterhood which comprises the Palestinian collectivity, allowing Palestinians of all walks of life to cheer for them. Their example shows the historical continuity of Palestinian women’s crucial role in the resistance, whether in political, social, or spiritual means.

Firstly, I will study car racing as a site of resistance to war and occupation, where the “Speed Sisters” circumvent the deliberate, layered slowing down of Palestinian life and mobility, and express their desire for freedom of movement. In crafting a space of mutual love for car racing, the racers convey their sense of sisterhood and use physical and emotional spaces to improve their skills. Secondly, I will examine car racing as a unifying sport for Palestinians. Contrary to stereotypes of Palestinian society, Palestinian men actively support the “Speed Sisters,” whereas the families of the “Speed Sisters” voice their unconditional approval of their daughters’ passion. Therefore, car racing rebuilds different layers of Palestinian society amidst settler-colonial violence and slow fragmentation.

⁸² Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 31.

⁸³ Jon Dart, “Palestinian Football and National Identity under Occupation,” 31.

Drawing upon the Arabic proverb “al-haraka baraka” and connecting it to the core Palestinian value of *sumud*, I will demonstrate that car racing can engender collective Palestinian movement-building and nurture Palestinians’ spiritual well-being.

Space, time, and racing against immobility

Zionism is an ideological institution which colonises, dispossesses, and aims to erase Palestinians from Palestine.⁸⁴ Via a settler-colonial construction of time, the Zionist regime deploys multidimensional violence traversing the horizontality and verticality of physical space, through the use of checkpoints, walls, and barriers to slow down Palestinians’ experience of time and restrict their space of existence. I will investigate the Zionist normalisation of slowness to subjugate Palestinians, as well as the creative ways in which the “Speed Sisters” resist the prolonging of time and the shrinking of space.

Space-time compression as multidimensional colonial violence

Decades before settler-colonial studies became an institutionalised academic field, anticolonial scholarship had long analysed the colonial spatial order. For instance, Frantz Fanon argued that the colonial arrangements of space entrench compartmentalisation, which divides the world of the coloniser and colonised people into two distinct spheres with police stations separating them and protecting colonial capitalism.⁸⁵ The colonial reliance on policing allows its regime to rule the colonised with speed and mobility, whilst restricting the colonised’s movement and subjecting them to violence, disorder, and death.⁸⁶ Space management thus becomes an instrument of colonisation, as violence habitually occurs and inflicts permanent physical and psychological pain upon those entrapped, using military checkpoints, walls, strip searches, demolitions, and surveillance. For Fanon, these technologies of colonial violence could culminate in the colonised people’s development of

⁸⁴ Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, and Sobhi Samour, “Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine,” *Settler Colonial Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2012), 1-2.

⁸⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1982), 46-47.

⁸⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 47-48.

“psychosomatic disorders.”⁸⁷ In constraining colonised people’s space and time, the colonisers limited their spatial and temporal mobility, and dominated them based on access to space.⁸⁸ Contrary to the conjugation of time as an objective measurement, Mark Rifkin understands the manipulation of time as a tool of colonisation—also known as “settler time”—which is embedded in power relations between the coloniser and the colonised people.⁸⁹

In the field of settler-colonial studies, Lorenzo Veracini discusses the dispossession of space and the control of time as two of the core tenets of settler-colonialism, which endeavours to erase and replace indigenous populations.⁹⁰ Expanding on Fanon’s original writings, Veracini writes that “the current circumstances of Israel/Palestine are determined by colonial conditions and a settler colonial system of institutional and personal relationships.”⁹¹ Israel’s occupation permeates not only the realm of institutions and collectivity, but also bleeds into individual relations and the arrangements of space. Studying Zionist colonialism in Palestine, Eyal Weizman classifies Israel’s mobility restrictions on Palestinians as part of the “politics of verticality”⁹² which entails not only a spatial domination, but also a “splintering of urban continuity” encompassing space and time.⁹³ Spatial and temporal colonisation thus imposes slowness on the daily lives of colonised communities. Slowing down the pace of their lives in such a way compresses their spaces of mobility and living.

As a colonising tactic, the deceleration of colonised people’s lives carries a racist and ableist connotation of “being slow” in the sense of mental retardation and narrow-/closed-mindedness,⁹⁴ which is also linked to the discourse of animality and “uncivilised groups” needing “domestication.”⁹⁵ Settler-

⁸⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre*, 290-291.

⁸⁸ Julie Peteet, *Space and Mobility*, 2.

⁸⁹ Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 26.

⁹⁰ Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 7.

⁹¹ Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*, 1.

⁹² Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), 19.

⁹³ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 49.

⁹⁴ Therí A. Pickens, *Black Madness: Mad Blackness*, 8.

⁹⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 150-151.

colonialism thus aims to dominate all aspects of colonised people's lives, ranging from the physical to the psychological, in order to dehumanise them. At the same time, these many layers of settler-colonial rule and control of space and time fuse different colonised temporalities, as the past, present, and future are compressed altogether to be disappeared from the space that is, in this chapter, Palestine.⁹⁶ The colonial compression of space and time also produces fear, in order to shrink colonised people's physical occupation of space and mobility capacity.⁹⁷ Fear bears a temporal dimension, because one anticipates injury when facing a fearsome object.⁹⁸ On the one hand, fear contains some people and reduces them to a constant state of narrowness and "afraidness."⁹⁹ On the other hand, colonisers weaponise it to further police colonised people.¹⁰⁰ However, the current literature has yet to examine how colonised women, namely female Palestinian athletes, resist the control of space, reappropriate space, and use time strategically to defy colonial violence. The following sections will study the Palestinian women in the "Speed Sisters" car racing team and address these lacunae.

The Zionist normalisation of slow life in Palestine

The normalisation of slowness is one of the central strategies of the Zionist colonial project in Palestine. The multidimensionality of Zionist violence envelops the temporal and spatial dimensions, using checkpoints, walls, travel permits, identification system, arbitrary arrests, and maiming as technologies of violence. Hence, slowing down Palestinians is a form of collective punishment,¹⁰¹ splintering the Palestinian social fabric geographically, politically, economically, and spiritually. Slowing down Palestinians requires the application of physical constraints, creating the impression of Palestinians as "stuck in time" and reinforcing the idea that they are "backward" in order to discipline them.¹⁰² This racist discourse of "laziness" and sluggishness is also tied to the logic of Zionist "security

⁹⁶ Jasbir Puar, "Spatial Debilities," 404.

⁹⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 64.

⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 65.

⁹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 69-70.

¹⁰¹ Jasbir Puar, "Spatial Debilities," 400.

¹⁰² Jasbir Puar, "Spatial Debilities," 404.

theology,”¹⁰³ which constitutes the Zionist logic of surveillance, elimination, and erasure based on the politics of fear.¹⁰⁴ The Zionist regime regulates movement to benefit itself, not only through the racialisation of the labour force, but also through the imposition of borders within its confines, in order to dictate whom to let in, whose entry will be delayed and denied, and who is worthy of mobility in terms of their productivity to generate surplus value.¹⁰⁵ For example, prior to arriving to checkpoints to proceed to the next destinations, Palestinians have to use detours because the roads are segregated into “Jewish Israeli” and “Arab” ones.¹⁰⁶ Whilst “Jewish Israeli” roads are wide, at times consisting of underground tunnels to circumvent Palestinian villages and cities, or sheltered by walls and military presence,¹⁰⁷ “Arab” roads are poorly maintained and often blocked by the Israeli army with rocks, concrete barriers, and militarised vehicles.¹⁰⁸ The occupation-mandated “structured chaos” in the spatial organisation of colonial rule, promotes the violent dispossession of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli state and non-state actors.¹⁰⁹

Here, following Puar, I draw parallels with the “compartment syndrome.” Medically, this syndrome is diagnosed when excessive pressure builds up inside an enclosed muscle space in the body. This dangerous pressure hinders blood flow to the affected issues, requiring surgery to prevent permanent tissue damage and even death. In the Zionist settler-colonial context, this syndrome compresses Palestinians in the smallest space and slowest time possible, as queues of Palestinians move through narrow, compartmentalised cages to be processed like cattle at checkpoints, with the corridors restricting their movement and creating a sense of suffocation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁵ Helga Tawil-Souri, “Uneven Borders, Coloured (Im)mobilities: ID Cards in Palestine/Israel,” *Geopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2012), 167-168.

¹⁰⁶ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 179.

¹⁰⁸ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 143.

¹⁰⁹ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Jasbir Puar, “Spatial Debilities,” 404.

In imposing slow violence, the Zionist regime forges the idea of the elasticity of borders which can be “stretched.”¹¹¹ The occupation invents new ways of tormenting Palestinians,¹¹² not only to prolong the Palestinian experience of time and erect physical obstacles, but also to build new barriers beyond the threshold of detectability, beyond the realms of representation and physical presence.¹¹³ Slowing down Palestinians requires physical violence and psychological warfare to break their will, since borders are not merely physical, but also technological and psychological.¹¹⁴ The thickening of physical and structural borders infiltrates Palestinians’ most private parts of existence, as strip search, humiliation, and sexual violence are facilitated by facial recognition technology and surveillance.¹¹⁵ These different layers of violence steal Palestinians’ time and intimidate them in a non-consensual metaphor of bondage and discipline interweaving the verticality of surveillance and the hierarchical positioning of the colonisers. Standing in a higher place, the occupiers inspect Palestinians from panopticons, security cameras, or through their rifles’ scopes, whereas Palestinians on the ground, shackled and blinded, appear small and slow when watched from above. The ability to see, the speed at which one sees, and the perspectival positioning of the colonial gaze allow the occupiers to rule faster in a wider, more open space.¹¹⁶ The verticality of Zionist colonial domination is thus a spatial hierarchy, which in turn translates into racial hierarchy in the control of Palestinians.¹¹⁷

Moreover, the curtailment of Palestinians’ mobility also extends to colonial bureaucracy, in a mixture of physical and psychological bordering. Each of the “Speed Sisters” holds a different mobility status within the Zionist-mandated identification system for Palestinians to dictate Palestinian

¹¹¹ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 7.

¹¹² Julie Peteet, *Space and Mobility*, 1-2.

¹¹³ Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2019), 20.

¹¹⁴ Helga Tawil-Souri, “New Palestinian Centers: An Ethnography of the ‘Checkpoint Economy’,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2009), 230.

¹¹⁵ Gil Z. Hochberg, *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (London; Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 80-81.

¹¹⁶ Gil Z. Hochberg, *Visual Occupations*, 79.

¹¹⁷ Julie Peteet, “Stealing Time,” *Middle East Report*, no. 248 (Fall 2008), 15.

(im)mobility.¹¹⁸ Although Noor and Maysoon hold East Jerusalem residency status which allows them to access most of Palestine, they still live under constant threat of status revocation.¹¹⁹ Marah, Betty, and Mona on the other hand are granted status as West Bank Palestinians, barred from living in some parts of occupied Palestine, and face continual threat of dispossession from settlers. West Bank Palestinians must also travel permits from Israeli authorities, which entails administrative delays and even refusal.¹²⁰ The PNA plays a limited role in the permit issuance; instead, this is the task of the Israeli army to regulate Palestinians' movement.¹²¹ These mechanisms of control limit Palestinians' mobility options and complicate unification, in order to beget further displacement whilst forcing Palestinians to remain in the same confined space.¹²²

In her testimony on the effects of the "separation wall," a project started following the 2000 Intifada to disintegrate Palestinian social and political cohesion, Maysoon laments the slow traffic around the Qalandia checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah.¹²³ Approaching the checkpoint, Maysoon smells tear gas, forcing her to close the car window, as she recounts its "normal" odour during her childhood when experiencing the events of the 1987 Intifada. The sounds of bullets and ambulance sirens fill up the background noise, whilst the camera zooms onto Israeli soldiers pointing their rifles at Palestinians who are throwing rocks and rolling car tires at the barricades in their acts of resistance. This scene opposing the Israeli army and the Palestinian youths defying the occupation shows the complexity and functionality of Zionist-regulated borders and zoning techniques to govern Palestinians. Helga Tawil-Souri calls the Qalandia checkpoint a "nonplace" where physical, social, and political contradictions play out: gathering and dispersal, mobility and immobility, suffocation, and

¹¹⁸ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹¹⁹ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Uneven Borders," 158.

¹²⁰ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Uneven Borders," 163.

¹²¹ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Uneven Borders," 157.

¹²² Nadia Abu-Zahra and Adah Kay, *Unfree in Palestine: Registration, Documentation and Movement Restriction* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 6-7.

¹²³ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

liveliness.¹²⁴ Amidst these contradictions, Zionist mechanisms of fragmentation at Qalandia entrench a material reality of delay, postponement, and even “retardation”—temporal and mental—to paint Palestine as “disordered” and “dangerous.” These depictions insert them into a colonial discourse of primitiveness and animality that dehumanises Palestinians. With space and time being the dimensions of slowness and (im)mobility, the slowing down of time and shrinking of space convey a sense of Palestinian temporal “backwardness,” preventing Palestinians from moving forward and, by extension, victim-blaming them for their own subjugation.

Resisting the compression of space and racing against time

Car racing allows the “Speed Sisters” to resist Zionist slow violence, as racing is an act of acceleration to counter the deliberate compression of time and space. Sports are a field where power is negotiated and contested, allowing us to understand how it is linked to politics.¹²⁵ They also present a therapeutic option for participants, by promoting a sense of camaraderie and personal improvement, as well as attenuating feelings of powerlessness.¹²⁶ In an Associated Press report, Betty attests: “When I race, I feel like I am fighting the occupation. The occupation is not easy to live, I can’t go with my car to the beach, to Tel Aviv, to Jerusalem, so driving, racing makes me feel freedom, passion, tough.”¹²⁷ Mona echoes Betty’s affirmation, saying: “When I drive, I understand freedom. As racers, we get a taste of normality. We are used to being stopped at checkpoints, but on days we have races, we fly through them. One day, a woman from Palestine will win an international Formula race.”¹²⁸ In *Speed Sisters*, Maysoon discusses the obstacles facing the female racers when finding space to train. One scene in the film features the racers’ training session in an open spot next to the Ofer prison, located

¹²⁴ Helga Tawil-Souri, “Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace,” *Space and Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2011), 4-5.

¹²⁵ Susan M. Shaw, “Conceptualizing Resistance: Women’s Leisure as Political Practice,” *Journal of Leisure Research*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2001), 187.

¹²⁶ Susan M. Shaw, “Conceptualizing Resistance,” 193-194.

¹²⁷ Associated Press, “Middle East ‘Speed Sisters’ Drive for Pride,” YouTube video, 1:18, January 3, 2013. <https://youtu.be/bZIBEnafJX0>

¹²⁸ Amber Fares, “Speed Sisters: Racing in Palestine,” *Indiegogo*, 2012.

between Ramallah and Beitunia, where thousands of Palestinians, including children, are held indefinitely in “administrative detention” without access to their families, lawyers, or healthcare.¹²⁹



The imposing structure of the panopticon is a constant reminder of the occupation’s watchful eyes, showing the different layers of activities and uses of space in the same frame. This is a contrasting picture between the threat of incarceration and the female racers’ defiance in their appropriation of space. The “Speed Sisters” sustain their passion for the sport and refuse to submit to the occupation’s physical violence and psychological warfare. When Noor is interviewed by an Emirati television channel, she discusses the lack of space to race, forcing her team to practise in any open place and even in the streets. This leads the television anchor to proclaim that “a car rally could easily happen in any country but Palestine, because every few minutes you face a military checkpoint.”¹³⁰

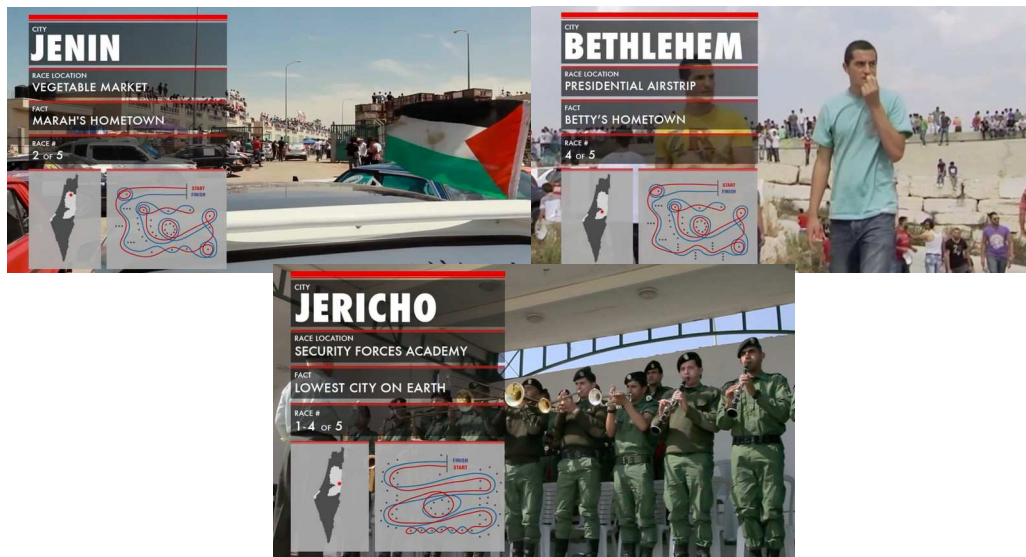
Nevertheless, the lack of space enables the racers to be creative with space-making. The “Speed Sisters” and the Palestinian Motor Sport and Motorcycle Federation (PMSMF) convert vegetable markets, helicopter landing sites, and army academies into racing circuits on the days of the competition in the West Bank. Specifically, markets carry a communal, political, and social significance for Palestinians, for they are spaces of exchange, survival, and movement flows.¹³¹ To

¹²⁹ Addameer: Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association. “Torture and Ill-Treatment Beyond Interrogation: Violent Raids Against Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Occupation Prisons,” June 30, 2021.

¹³⁰ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹³¹ Helga Tawil-Souri, “New Palestinian Centers,” 228.

transform a market into a racetrack is to multiply its purpose in the affective and social utilisation of Palestinian space, as well as the meaning of Palestinian spatial resistance.



Racing translates their wish for the freedom of mobility and movement, and, at the same time, their desire to race against the “stealing of time”¹³² by the Zionist occupation, in order to regain a sense of control over their lives. There is a certain queerness to the “Speed Sisters,” not in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity, but in their subversive sense of temporal and spatial (dis-)orientation and relationship to the Zionist power structures. Moving in opposition to the Zionist forces, the racers’ movement bears imprints of a “queer phenomenology,” which Sara Ahmed describes as the ways in which individuals inhabit the world and are shaped by their contact with spaces and one another.¹³³ If the occupation forces sketch a bumpy road for the racers, using checkpoints and walls, to produce a sense of disorientation and alienation, then the racers use speed and movement to orient themselves. A queer phenomenology of (dis-)orientation entails the bodily, the spatial, the temporal, and the political, and reveals thus the mechanics and economics of social relations in space.¹³⁴ As per Eve Sedgwick,

¹³² Julie Peteet, “Stealing Time,” 14.

¹³³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006), 23.

¹³⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 23.

“queer” is a “continuing moment, movement, motive,”¹³⁵ emphasising the queer occupation of space and time, and the preoccupation with intentionality and emotionality. Movement also encompasses dynamic, physical movement, for the female racers’ queer and non-linear mobility concurs with zigzagging, drifting, hitting corners and walls. The racers find creative solutions to overcome not only physical obstacles, but also the space-time compression and the imposition of the slow life.

Under the military occupation, the “Speed Sisters” must also race against time as a survival strategy. In the documentary, a German magazine invites Maysoon, Noor, and Betty to an interview to see them train.¹³⁶ On their way to the meet-up location, they encounter a roadblock, and their car suddenly hits a rock, causing a group of Israeli soldiers to move closer to them due to “suspicious activities.” The soldiers, standing in a higher place with a full view of the racers, fire a tear gas canister at Betty, hitting her lower back as she bursts into tears. Abandoning their plans, the team rushes Betty to the hospital, making speed and mobility a form of mutual protection. Because of the omnipresence of violence, Maysoon has pressured the PMSMF and the PNA to provide her team a safe place to train. Eventually, Betty comes back with a bruised lower back, telling Noor and Maysoon that she “never imagined such a thing could happen!” in Maysoon’s boutique.¹³⁷ Maysoon explains to Betty and Noor about a time where the occupation forces shot a rubber bullet at her in the shoulder when driving in her car with journalists. Noor’s humouristic comment on Betty’s plight summarises the reality of living under the occupation for Palestinians: “because you’re blond, sorry, ya3ni, or because I’m dark, or because you’re pretty they’re not gonna shoot you! But no, they shot you in the ass!”¹³⁸

Although Maysoon and Betty recovered from their injuries, their experience illustrates a larger Palestinian encounter with the settler-colonial regime of debility exercising the power to shoot and kill

¹³⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.

¹³⁶ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹³⁷ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹³⁸ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

to dominate.¹³⁹ Their narration of their injuries and bodily fragility symbolises a form of “sociopolitical commentary,” in the words of Black disability scholar Theri Pickens, on hegemonic institutional and social practices.¹⁴⁰ The racers’ bodies are their main way of accessing the world and the reality of living under a military occupation which continually attempts to erase their embodied experience as Palestinian women and athletes.¹⁴¹ In the larger context of debility in Palestine, the occupation’s indiscriminate maiming slows down Palestinians with rubber bullets which wound and disable them.¹⁴² It also fires prohibited ammunitions, such as exploding bullets which are a war crime under international law, to target Palestinians’ knees and spine, since these bullets create fragments upon contact with the body which would require total amputation of the affected body part, altogether causing permanent disabilities.¹⁴³ Tear gas and white phosphorous prevent them from seeing and breathing, slowing them down and disorienting them as a result.¹⁴⁴ To deter Palestinians from protesting, the Zionist armed forces collude with settlers to implement a policy of “breaking bones” to impose disability as a means of political control and a marker of racial/national distinction.¹⁴⁵ The occupation forces also abandon injured Palestinians on the streets, bleeding in agony and enduring a slow and painful death, and even obstruct paramedics from being able to care for the victims.¹⁴⁶ The stalling of life in Palestine, through deliberate maiming and targeted killing, aims to impede coordinated forms of Palestinian resistance and community-building. And yet, through bodily movement, joint kinship, and the love for the sport, the “Speed Sisters” articulate their act of existing,

¹³⁹ Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 108.

¹⁴⁰ Theri A. Pickens, *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

¹⁴¹ Theri A. Pickens, *New Body Politics*, 34.

¹⁴² Yasmin Snounu, “Apartheid, Disability, and the Triple Matrix of Maiming in Palestine,” 466; Jasbir Puar, “Spatial Debilities,” 394-395.

¹⁴³ Yasmin Snounu, “Defying Exclusionary Democracy through Resilience in Palestinian Higher Education,” *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2019), 68.

¹⁴⁴ Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 53.

¹⁴⁵ Yasmin Snounu, “Defying Exclusionary Democracy,” 69.

¹⁴⁶ Yasmin Snounu, “Apartheid, Disability,” 467-468.

living, and being athletes as constitutive of their resistance to the Israeli occupation and their reclamation of freedom.

Movement-building and the sociality of movement in sports

Racing entails movement and speed which allow Palestinian female racers to reclaim a sense of freedom of mobility, whilst moving their communities through emotions of unity and pride as a form of movement-building. Generally understood as “movement” in Arabic, the term “haraka” has more than one connotation. Its triliteral root, ح-ر-ك, signifies “to move,” “to drive,” “to set in motion,” and even “to awaken” and “to excite.” As a noun, its definition ranges from “motion,” “political movement,” to “impulse” and “physical exercise.” On the one hand, “haraka” translates into political movement, which is the larger Palestinian liberation project. On the other hand, it also means physical movement, as in the proverb “al-haraka baraka,” meaning “physical movement is a blessing,” which underlines the role of physical activity in nurturing physical and spiritual wellness. Therefore, “haraka” connotes the sociality of movement, as well as the emotionality of being together in a movement and executing movements in a sporting collective.

Moving together, moving one other in a collective of sporting sisters

In the realm of physicality, the Zionist entity’s imposition of a slow life shrinks the female racers’ space to train, as deceleration amplifies their frustration and hinders their capacity to practice a sport in which speed is paramount. In the affective sphere, the prolonging of time entails endless waiting, causing Palestinians an emotional toll and erasing space(s) of mourning, since they must deal with survival first. Yet, the notion of “sisterhood” in *Speed Sisters* is central in the understanding of the relationships amongst the racers, as they depend upon one another, not only to collectively improve their skills, but also for mutual survival in a context where despair and the atomisation of Palestinians are normalised.

One example of this sisterhood is how, as conflict arises, Maysoon showcases her leadership skills to bring the racers together, encouraging her team not to abandon racing, because the occupation steals everything from them, namely their space, mobility, and will. Understanding the differences in each racer's personality, Maysoon reminds her team of their passion for racing and their plight under Zionist settler-colonialism which seeks to divide them. Furthermore, Noor and Marah lift each other up during each competition; when Marah has to go through a checkpoint to travel to Yaffa, Noor patiently waits for her. Because Zionist-issued permits are only valid for a limited time and do not always guarantee a Palestinian's mobility,¹⁴⁷ there is a possibility that Marah would be denied movement. Fortunately, after Marah comes out of the checkpoint with a permit, Noor picks her up and they join Maysoon at the sea to take advantage of their numbered seconds spent together. Waiting, in this context of sisterhood, can be seen as caring for one another in their common experience of the slow life, as sports and movement help the "Speed Sisters" survive the cruelty of colonialism. In the interstices and cracks of the "slow life," Palestinian sportswomen forge affective spaces to transform their experience of time.¹⁴⁸ Solidarity and sisterhood thus reinforce resistance as the women bond through shared strengths and resources, instead of through their experience of victimisation.¹⁴⁹

The affective sphere of sporting sisterhood also needs kinship relations, for movement-building necessitates familial support and unity. Participating in car racing requires a certain degree of economic privilege; not only do the "Speed Sisters" have to pay to race and refurbish their cars, but they also have to spend money to object to the Federation's rules or unfair practices. Moreover, the "Speed Sisters" belong to different socioeconomic strata in Palestine. For instance, Betty comes from a wealthy Christian family with a racing tradition in Bethlehem. She strategically uses her socioeconomic status, diaspora background, and beauty to secure sponsorship deals, and even accompanied Anthony

¹⁴⁷ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint," 11-12.

¹⁴⁸ Jasbir Puar, "Spatial Debilities," 409.

¹⁴⁹ bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," *Feminist Review*, vol. 23, no. 23 (June 1986), 128.

Bourdain in her expensive Peugeot race car during his visit in Palestine. Her positionality as a Mexican-born Palestinian broadens her horizons to promote female car racing in Palestine and the Palestinian struggle against colonialism internationally through media appearances. These possibilities require a deep understanding of the capitalist patriarchy, specifically the male gaze, in Palestine and on the international scene, in order to take advantage of the systems' vulnerabilities.

In contrast to Betty, Marah is the underdog from Jenin; she hails from a working-class background and faces several mobility—economic and physical—restrictions due to the military occupation. Despite having followed the regulations, Marah was unjustly disqualified by the Federation's President for raising concerns with fairness and opposing arbitrary rules during the racing events in Bethlehem. She and her family contested Betty's victory with photo evidence, pointing out that Betty's car trunk was opened throughout the race, but the referees had not noticed this security loophole. As Maysoon explains in the documentary, the trunk must stay shut at all times to respect security norms for participants and spectators.¹⁵⁰ Despite Marah's and her family's contestation of this rule violation, Betty is still allowed to compete in the next race and wins in the absence of Marah. This incident causes a friction not only between Marah and Betty, but also between Marah and the Federation which rejects Marah's plea for fairness.

Marah's mother was a driving instructor and introduced her to the automobile world, whereas her father noticed her talent and love for cars in her childhood. Marah races in an old car with which her mother used to give driving lessons, which was repurposed and upgraded for racing by scavenging for used car accessories. In scenes of Marah's family, the film shows how racing has helped them experience a "normal" life. Marah's father is proud of her as the "champion of Palestine," whilst her grandfather, despite his initial disappointment with her racing career, remains supportive of her achievements. Marah's father is originally from Haifa, but his family was expelled from the city as the

¹⁵⁰ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

events of the *Nakba* unfolded after 1948. They were then displaced to Jenin where they now live as refugees.¹⁵¹ During the events of the Second Intifada, Jenin suffered destruction and killing at the hands of the Israeli army in the 2002 massacre of the Jenin refugee camp.¹⁵² Marah recounts the hardship of living under the Zionist-imposed curfew as a form of collective punishment of Jenin residents, in addition to expressing her frustration with the mobility restrictions. Visibly distraught at the news reports of yet another Israeli assault on Gaza, she questions her future in racing should the occupation forces reinstate draconian policies in her hometown.¹⁵³ Via space-time compression and collective punishment, the perpetuation of uncertainty is embedded in Zionist settler-colonial violence.¹⁵⁴



Despite all of this, Marah’s parents endorse her unconditionally, even postponing their plan of buying a piece of land and building a house to cultivate her racing dream. In times of uncertainty, Marah’s father invests everything he can in Marah’s passion, creating an opportunity for her to live a semblance of “normal” life and resist the slow death that the occupation forces have inflicted upon them. Marah’s mother insists that car racing has opened up new horizons and allowed Marah to meet new people, instead of living an “ordinary life” sketched out for her by the Zionist occupation.¹⁵⁵ If Marah succumbed to Zionist slow violence and psychological torture by ceasing her sporting activities, which have strengthened her relationship with her family and racing team, then the occupation would

¹⁵¹ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹⁵² Nurhan Abujidi, *Urbicide in Palestine: Spaces of Oppression and Resilience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 24.

¹⁵³ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹⁵⁴ Jasbir Puar, “Spatial Debilities,” 406.

¹⁵⁵ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

have succeeded in annihilating their will to live. Kinship relations and community-building are paramount when facing the fragmentation of collective life in Palestine.

Moving Palestine through car racing

Because car racing is a public sport involving spectatorship, large groups of Palestinians from all walks of life, ages, and genders cheer for the female racers. Unlike popular depictions of Arab/Muslim/Palestinian women in Western media who always seem to need to be “saved from their culture and patriarchy,”¹⁵⁶ Palestinian men and boys are, in fact, the biggest supporters of the “Speed Sisters.” They encourage the racers in various ways, most prominently Marah’s father who is her biggest advocate. Despite his authoritarian style and temporary banishment of Marah, the Federation’s president, Khaled Oaddoura, has always provided a car for any Palestinian woman who wanted to participate in the sport.¹⁵⁷ On the racing tracks, Palestinian men help the “Speed Sisters” with mechanical issues, in order to boost the racers’ performance and help bring trophies back to their hometowns as collective victories. Marah mentions at the beginning of the documentary about making the people of Jenin proud by winning racing competitions, not only in Palestine but also abroad.¹⁵⁸ Sports thus make accessible the experience of a “normal” life for Palestinians, as the “Speed Sisters” are regarded as local heroines. Because sports enable participants—whether athletes or spectators—to move together and move one another emotionally, the sociality of movement facilitates the rebuilding of a community fragmented politically, socially, and spiritually by settler-colonialism. Feelings of hope and communal pleasure enable Palestinians to resist the colonial normalisation of slowness and emotional numbness.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 29.

¹⁵⁷ AthenaFilmFest, “Speed Sisters Q&A,” YouTube video, 25:10, February 26, 2016. <https://youtu.be/z-M0K8Dzi3M>

¹⁵⁸ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

¹⁵⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 164.

The tradition of Palestinian women's resistance envisions alternative strategies of liberation which are sustainable, oriented towards movement-(re)building,¹⁶⁰ and rooted in the core Palestinian value of *sumud*, mentioned briefly above.¹⁶¹ Although *sumud* does not have an exact English equivalent, Palestinians translate the term as “steadfastness,” conveying the idea of ever-evolving collective strength and self-determination to resist the Zionist occupation.¹⁶² Etymologically, *sumud* comes from the root ص-م-د, which carries a spatial connotation—to be firmly fixed in space—as well as a temporal dimension—with *šamad* depicting the “eternal,” an epithet of God in the Qur'an. Thus, *sumud* articulates a fact that Palestinians are physically and firmly rooted in the space of Palestine, whilst simultaneously advocating their historic, present, and future temporalities of resistance.¹⁶³ Interestingly, there is the word “fastness” in the English translation of *sumud* (“steadfastness”); in being stead/fast, the “Speed Sisters” stay put in Palestine as they remake the meanings of space and time and enrich the ideas of *sumud* in the (re)building of *haraka*. *Speed Sisters* highlights Palestinian women's resistance as one of the driving forces in society and public life in Palestine. Although patriarchy remains a major obstacle to Palestinian women's agency, it is not an exceptional “cultural” phenomenon intrinsic to Palestine, but complex entanglements of questions of access to economic resources and power, as well as the overarching Zionist settler-colonial scheme. For instance, in endorsing the racers' safety, Maysoon must deal with the patriarchal Federation which invents arbitrary rules and bans Marah from competing. Maysoon points out the fragility of the local patriarchy which fears strong women capable of challenging the structures of power.¹⁶⁴ Her speech sheds light on a

¹⁶⁰ Liyana Kayali, *Palestinian Women and Popular Resistance: Perceptions, Attitudes and Strategies* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 4.

¹⁶¹ Lena Meari, “*Sumud*: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 113, no. 3 (Summer 2014), 549-550.

¹⁶² Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 225-226.

¹⁶³ Lena Meari, “*Sumud*,” 551.

¹⁶⁴ Amber Fares, director, *Speed Sisters*.

tradition of Palestinian women's resistance in different sites of the liberation struggle, whether it be in political leadership,¹⁶⁵ oral history,¹⁶⁶ prisons,¹⁶⁷ or sports.

As emotions are experienced in relation with others in space, the expansiveness of hope and pleasure opens people to one another. As Paulo Freire eloquently writes, “hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it,”¹⁶⁸ whilst communal hope allows the oppressed to continue resisting and finding ways to resist erasure. It is hence the hope for liberation that drives the Palestinian collectivity towards the love for and the commitment to the anticolonial struggle. Expanding on Freirean pedagogy of hope, bell hooks and Antonia Darder reject the fatalism of oppression which ultimately confines the marginalised to the realm of despair, powerlessness, and even the normalisation of precarity.¹⁶⁹ The revolutionary potential of hope produces love and incites political commitment to liberation, consequently transcending the violence of capitalism and colonialism. Altogether, this emotional connection enables the collective to take up more space in its public displays of joy and love. For Sara Ahmed, hope and pleasure are “queer feelings” putting individuals, who have been barred from congregating by the splintering occupation, in the same space and interactions.¹⁷⁰ This contact, facilitated by a sport, reshapes Palestinians and generates new forms of Palestinian relations to counter colonial spatiotemporal regulations. “Queer feelings” of pleasure and hope are not simply about bodily contact and sexual intimacy, but the gathering of people in space to shape new forms of activism and reclaiming space.¹⁷¹ Activism without hope is self-defeating, and it is hope that brings

¹⁶⁵ Rabab Abdulhadi, “The Palestinian Women’s Autonomous Movement,” 649.

¹⁶⁶ Rosemary Sayigh, “Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998), 42-43.

¹⁶⁷ Lena Meari, “Resignifying ‘Sexual’ Colonial Power Techniques: The Experiences of Palestinian Women Political Prisoners,” in *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World*, edited by Maha El Said, Lena Meari, and Nicola Pratt (London: Zed Books, 2015), 60.

¹⁶⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York; London: Continuum, 2005), 91-92.

¹⁶⁹ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 12; Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 36.

¹⁷⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 165.

¹⁷¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 165.

pleasure into the resistance as individuals establish “affective bonds” with one another.¹⁷² Hope is therefore political and allows Palestinians to feel that decolonisation is not impossible, encouraging them to be proactive in their present, rather than waiting for a future that may not arrive.¹⁷³

To counter multidimensional violence, female Palestinian racers create a sense of localised solidarity and pride to connect with their families, their hometown, and the larger Palestinian society. Representing Palestine internationally is the future goal of the “Speed Sisters,” which also constitutes their dream of mobility beyond the settler-colonial borders. This decentralised sporting resistance to Zionist settler-colonialism mirrors Lila Abu-Lughod’s notion of “alter-native self-determination,” which is a form of Palestinian sovereignty constructed by ordinary Palestinians living in occupied Palestine and displaced in the diaspora.¹⁷⁴ It assembles different layers of Palestinian selfhood, as well as the different levels of “popular sovereignty” from the river to the sea and on a transnational scale. Alter-native self-determination rejects the nation-state model which has violently dispossessed Palestinians, whilst at the same time revealing the breakdown of the Palestinian statist project in the post-Oslo context,¹⁷⁵ in which the PNA has been complicit in police violence against Palestinians.¹⁷⁶ The disillusionment with power politics and technologies of governance empowers Palestinians to mobilise their localities and collectivities in unconventional ways, outside of and beyond the language of statehood and the masculine leadership and the feminine metaphor of the homeland.¹⁷⁷ Self-initiated efforts, namely through sports in the documentary *Speed Sisters*, foster new social and political imaginations, as sports produce direct social and emotional impact on Palestinians.

Moving forward with the resistance

¹⁷² Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 184.

¹⁷³ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 188.

¹⁷⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Imagining Palestine’s Alter-Natives: Settler Colonialism and Museum Politics,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 47, no. 1 (Autumn 2020), 23.

¹⁷⁵ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Imagining Palestine’s Alter-Natives,” 23.

¹⁷⁶ Liyana Kayali, *Palestinian Women*, 92.

¹⁷⁷ Amal Amireh, “Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 4 (2003), 758-759.

In analysing space, time, and resistance in *Speed Sisters*, I have examined the Zionist normalisation of slowness to subjugate Palestinians, using multidimensional violence traversing the horizontality and verticality of physical space, altogether structured by the construction of settler time. Nevertheless, the racers have shown their creative ways of resisting the prolonging of time and the shrinking of space. Through speed and movement, the racers mobilise against the space-time compression and the politics of fear and slow death, in addition to creating sustainable affective spaces of resistance. *Speed Sisters* thus demonstrates the role of Palestinian women in general, and Palestinian sportswomen in particular, in rebuilding their communities and in crafting their own narratives of resistance and aspirations through sports and the medium of cinema. This initial form of movement-building also allows them to broadcast their political message for liberation to the global audience using various strategies and platforms: a call for a sports boycott of Israel and the use of social media to coordinate their movement.

Chapter 3

“#BoycottPuma”: Tackling the Neoliberal Funding of Zionist Settler-Colonialism

As one of the world’s top athletic apparel makers and the only international sponsor of the Israel Football Association, Puma’s sponsorship brings international legitimacy to the IFA’s actions. The IFA, as documented by Human Rights Watch, includes football clubs based in illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land. Puma’s current and past exclusive licensees in Israel have operations in illegal Israeli settlements.

Israeli settlements are illegal land grabs that form an integral part of Israel’s occupation infrastructure pushing indigenous Palestinian families off their land, robbing Palestinians of natural resources and denying Palestinians their right of movement.

Puma’s sponsorship of the IFA helps keep its direct involvement in violations of human rights and international law off the field, allowing Israel’s settlement regime to continue and expand.

The IFA has refused to take measures to end its complicity, despite being repeatedly condemned by UN advisors, dozens of elected officials, civil society and human rights groups representing millions and public figures.

—BDS Movement, “Boycott Puma”¹⁷⁸

In 2018, Adidas announced that it would cease sponsoring the IFA, which administers several Israeli football teams based in illegal settlements in the West Bank.¹⁷⁹ Under international law, these settlements are war crimes, as per the Fourth Geneva Convention and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334.¹⁸⁰ Years of organising pressure campaigns from Palestinian sporting clubs and solidarity activists from around the world delivered over 16000 signatures to Adidas’s headquarters in Amsterdam, calling upon the brand to halt its complicity in the colonial oppression of Palestinians.¹⁸¹ Adidas’s decision was seen as a major victory in the eyes of BDS activists, yet obstacles soon followed after Puma sealed new deal with the IFA and FIFA showed apathy towards the Israeli occupation on

¹⁷⁸ BDS Movement, “Boycott Puma,” *BDS Movement*. <https://bdsmovement.net/boycott-puma>

¹⁷⁹ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Team Justice Scores.”

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2334 (2016),” *United Nations*, December 23, 2016. <https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>

¹⁸¹ BDS Movement, “Palestinian Football Clubs to Adidas: End Sponsorship of Israeli Settlement Teams,” *BDS Movement*, March 12, 2018. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/palestinian-football-clubs-adidas-end-sponsorship-israeli-settlement-teams>

different occasions, declaring that the IFA was not responsible for the political dealings of the Israeli government.¹⁸²

Coordinating a global boycott campaign against Israel in the field of sports requires a tremendous capacity for information exchange and mobilisation amongst the coordinators. In this case, the groups involved are the Palestinian BDS movement and international solidarity groups. The goal of the Palestinian resistance is to circulate information and disrupt Zionist colonial practices; if Palestinians' mobility is restricted and their movement hampered, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, they will take their grievances to the other outlets, such as the Internet, to disrupt Zionist propaganda and reveal the truths on the ground. As Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh note, online activism in Palestine is shaped by the offline realities which Palestinians endure.¹⁸³ My analysis of the “#BoycottPuma” campaign in this chapter will present the Palestinian BDS movement's call for a boycott of the Zionist entity in sports as a form of alter-native self-determination, as originally coined by Lila Abu-Lughod.¹⁸⁴ The boycott campaign is, ultimately, a critical intervention of the BDS movement to examine and challenge settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism.

First, I will read “alter-native”—in its original form “alternative”—as offering another possibility and challenging existing norms and institutions, whilst at the same time revalorising the Palestinian narrative which has been censored and erased. From this viewpoint, BDS challenges the status quo comprised of the Zionist occupation and the PNA's complicity in colonial oppression, transcending the limitations of the statist project which has amplified their precarious conditions and failed to provide a sustainable pathway to liberation. No longer needing the “permission to narrate,”¹⁸⁵ they autonomously broadcast their voices on social media platforms and build coalitions with

¹⁸² Jon Dart, “‘Brand Israel’: Hasbara and Israeli Sport,” *Sport in Society*, vol. 19, no. 10 (2016), 1410.

¹⁸³ Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh, “Intifada 3.0? Cyber Colonialism and Palestinian Resistance,” *The Arab Studies Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 105.

¹⁸⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Imagining Palestine's Alter-Natives,” 23.

¹⁸⁵ Edward Said, “Permission to Narrate,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring 1984), 29.

international solidarity groups. Second, “alter-native”—as spelled by Lila Abu-Lughod—inserts Palestine into the global justice project encompassing the fight against settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. This contemporary battle for global justice extends the lineage of prior anticolonial struggles, Third World solidarity formation, and indigenous sovereignty movements. The underlying principles of this battle echoes Steven Salaita’s definition of “inter/nationalism,” which is characterised by global Indigenous movements’ participation in and practice of BDS, forming a transnational space of solidarity and challenging the physical and legal parameters of colonial, neoliberal capitalism.¹⁸⁶

In the first part of this chapter, I will trace the historical precedents of the BDS movement’s sporting activism by discussing the 1968 Mexico City Olympics and the anti-Apartheid sports boycott of South Africa. I will also write a brief overview of contemporary activism in sports, such as the role of football fans in the 2011 Egyptian revolution and the struggle against racism in American football. In the second part, I will connect this to my examination of how the BDS movement instrumentalises sports as a platform for advocacy to conduct its online “#BoycottPuma” campaign and links issues which are sport-specific to the bigger picture of Zionist colonialism in Palestine. This assessment will allow me to uncover the impact of the campaign and provide some reflections on the Apartheid analogy, namely the differences between the anti-Apartheid sports boycott of South Africa and the Palestinian call for a sports boycott of Israel and its normalisers.

Sports as a platform for advocacy: then and now

Athletes and sports fans in modern times have been some of the most vocal leaders at the forefront of social and global justice causes. Harry Edwards traces the history of Black athletes’ boycott of racism in sports in the United States in the 1960s up until the events of the 1968 Olympics, with a focus on the athletic-industrial complex of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

¹⁸⁶ Steven Salaita, *Inter/nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (New York; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 62.

Following the dismantling of Jim Crow policies, the establishment and the media started marketing sports, recreation, and athletics as “peace-building,” “apolitical,” and potentially emancipatory for Black citizens.¹⁸⁷ Amy Bass, expanding on Edwards’ foundational work, views the athlete as the site to cultivate ideals of race and nationalism, with athletic programmes becoming nationalist programmes to create “good male citizens” and a form of “muscular assimilationism.”¹⁸⁸ But athletics are also a means to counter crime, racism, and poverty for marginalised groups, based on the principle of merit. More specifically, she posits the Black athlete as the site for exploring national and racial identity formation in twentieth-century United States;¹⁸⁹ American heroism celebrates the Black athlete as an icon of political and social progress in a triangulation of sports, race, and politics.¹⁹⁰ Because of corporeal capitalism in sports, money, reputation, and sponsorships are meant to advance athletes’ careers, most prominently the financial potential of American football. In reality, American sporting institutions, such as the NCAA, exploit Black college athletes in what has been called a “plantation system,” as white athletes only acknowledge Black athletes for their physical ability through the lens of a racist discourse in sport science, but not Black athletes’ humanity.¹⁹¹

At the 1968 Mexico Olympics, Black sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists into the air as they stood on the podium for their medal ceremony wearing the OPHR badge and black socks—a gesture that was deemed contrary to Olympic formalities. Providing extensive contextualisation of the lead up to John Carlos’ and Tommie Smith’s human rights salute in Mexico City, Edwards identifies several structural and institutional barriers that render Black athletes’ experiences precarious. Firstly, their revolt stems from their lived experiences under racist institutions and systems and their sociopolitical conditions. For instance, college education in the United States can

¹⁸⁷ Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 86-87.

¹⁸⁸ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 43.

¹⁸⁹ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 5-6.

¹⁹¹ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 284.

create a pathway for Black athletes to obtain scholarships based on their physical ability, yet these US colleges are often founded and funded by racist figures, philanthropy schemes, and governmental agencies, in order to depoliticise Black people and grant upward mobility to “non-threatening Blacks.”¹⁹² If Black athletes dare “cause trouble,” they are seen as “ungrateful” and “unpatriotic,” as can be seen in the press vendetta and repercussions taken against Muhammad Ali who protested the war against Vietnam and refused the draft.¹⁹³ Secondly, racism affects Black athletes on a personal level when participating in team sports as well. In the United States, athletics and academics are historically interwoven in the settler-colonial project, as the system serves the white male elite to preserve the hierarchical order and subjugate and erase Black and Indigenous presence in education.¹⁹⁴ In intercollegiate sports, Black student athletes are only considered commodities, whilst their intellect is devalued.¹⁹⁵ Under a racist coaching system, white coaches encourage their white players to exclude Black players from teamplay, creating a profound sentiment of injustice and disgust amongst Black athletes.¹⁹⁶ The cruelty of the racially mixed athletic reality further dehumanises Black athletes, since they are only recognised for their athletic prowess, yet the excessive pressure to maintain good athletic and academic excellence burdens them with the threat of failure and potential of loss of their athletic and academic careers if they falter and lose their scholarships.¹⁹⁷ Thirdly, the protest orchestrated by the Black Olympians exposes the truth on the field for Black athletes, such as the exploitative and racist nature and practices of sports at the collegiate and international levels.¹⁹⁸ This revolt was a part of the Black liberation movement of the 1960s, and has precedents in Black people’s historical struggles against enslavement and racism around the globe.

¹⁹² Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 91.

¹⁹³ Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 164.

¹⁹⁴ Camika Royal, Marc Lamont Hill, T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T Edwards, & James Earl Davis, “Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era,” *Urban Education*, vol. 53, no. 2 (2018), 183.

¹⁹⁵ Camika Royal et al., “Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics,” 184.

¹⁹⁶ Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 87-88.

¹⁹⁷ Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 101.

¹⁹⁸ Harry Edwards & Samuel J. Skinner, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 263.

In his study of the emergence of a globalised anti-Apartheid movement, Håkan Thörn connects the Black struggle in the United States and the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa to the waves of economic, cultural, and sports boycott of the Apartheid regime in Europe and around the world. He characterises the first wave of the anti-Apartheid boycott as an economic boycott of South African goods. This initial boycott was called by the South African Congress movement, aiming to raise people's consciousness and bring attention to the racist oppression, in order to isolate and cripple the Apartheid regime economically.¹⁹⁹ Consumer boycott is a useful strategy in a deeply globalised world with market liberalisation, free circulation of capital, goods, and services, emphasising the power of collective action and everyday participation in and practice of solidarity—the people's sanctions.²⁰⁰ A boycott is often accompanied by a call for divestment—that is, to deprive companies that profit from military occupations of financial and reputational success—to introduce sanctions and deny the regime customary economic and political interactions on the international scene.²⁰¹ Apartheid sports in South Africa reflected the white supremacist belief that non-whites were inferior in intelligence and physical capacity to whites. According to C. Roger Rees, participation in sports became an important marker of class and racial superiority, with rugby being transformed into the sport of Afrikaner nationalism.²⁰² As an initial internal boycott effort, South African weightlifter Dennis Brutus urged the IOC to investigate Apartheid South Africa's exclusion of black weightlifters from its national team and international tournaments in 1955.²⁰³ Seven years later, he founded the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, calling upon countries not to compete against South African teams.²⁰⁴ Doing so would give legitimacy to the racist regime and normalise racism in not only sports, but also in ordinary social and

¹⁹⁹ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Society*, 61.

²⁰⁰ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Society*, 61.

²⁰¹ Neta C. Crawford, "Trump Card or Theater? An Introduction to Two Sanctions Debates," in *How Sanctions Work: Lessons from South Africa*, edited by Audie Klotz & Neta C. Crawford (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 5.

²⁰² C. Roger Rees, "Race and Sport in Global Perspective: Lessons from Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, vol. 20, no. 1 (February 1996), 23.

²⁰³ Scarlett Cornelissen, "Resolving the 'South Africa Problem': Transnational Activism, Ideology and Race in the Olympic Movement, 1960-91," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January 2011), 158.

²⁰⁴ Scarlett Cornelissen, "Resolving the 'South Africa Problem'," 158.

political relations. By boycotting South African teams, the international sports scene managed to single out South Africa, especially white South Africans, in what became a quasi-universal rejection of the Apartheid institutions—an international consensus which took a while to come to fruition.

Indeed, sports are part of a mediatised global scene thanks to the development of the radio and television, and nowadays social media. During Apartheid in South Africa, a visualised transnational media space started to take shape, highlighting the power of the moving and the still image to capture important moments in history.²⁰⁵ Rob Nixon, in his study of Hollywood representations of the struggle for Black liberation and the impact of the Harlem Renaissance on South Africa's Sophiatown writers, shows how the camera brought Apartheid crimes to the American audience in the late 1970s and 1980s, through films, documentaries, media coverage.²⁰⁶ Images of South African teams reminded viewers of the realities of segregation and racism on a daily basis. On the one hand, as sports were a tool of segregation to maintain colonialism and racism under Apartheid, the performance and success of the Apartheid team helped maintain and boost the regime's legitimacy and public image. On the other hand, boycotting Apartheid in sports created the opposite effect, as a form of "everyday informational activism" to show the ugliness of racism and delegitimising the Apartheid regime's claim to sporting supremacy.²⁰⁷ The media was thus important in the dissemination of information about the Apartheid regime, but the regime also tried to whitewash its image using the same tool.²⁰⁸ Every international victory would be a major blow against South Africa's enemies, with South African athletes acting as spin doctors to influence the foreign public opinion in favour of the Apartheid regime.²⁰⁹

In contemporary sport culture, multiple instances of activism from athletes and fans have marked the past two decades. In Egypt, the events of the January 2011 revolution marked the peak of

²⁰⁵ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Society*, 16.

²⁰⁶ Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood*, 82.

²⁰⁷ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Society*, 109.

²⁰⁸ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Society*, 101-102.

²⁰⁹ Richard E. Lapchick, "South Africa: Sport and Apartheid Politics," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 445 (September 1979), 157.

popular resentment towards the state-mandated militarism and patriarchal neoliberal regime. Utilising social media to orchestrate their protests, the Ultras of Egyptian football clubs al-Ahly and Zamalek were instrumental in the march for freedom and justice and led the battle against police brutality and state violence.²¹⁰ Their historical feud with the police and the elite stemmed from their own experiences of living under a militarised regime which worsened precarious conditions and unemployment, whilst also surveilling and brutalising them.²¹¹ The Ultras' coordinated activism helped them reclaim autonomy in public spaces and galvanise emotions, representing a massive carry-over from the stadium mobilisation to the street setting of the revolution.²¹²

In American football, the National Football League has prolonged the regime of exploitation of the NCAA at the elite level. In 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick made the decision to kneel down, fist raised, during the national anthem, an act of protest against the police murders of Black people and against institutional racism in the United States.²¹³ Refusing the show pride for a country founded upon genocide of Indigenous people and enslavement of Black people, and which continues to oppress racialised communities, Colin Kaepernick extended the prior lineage of sports boycott and civil rights protests in the American context, from Rosa Parks to Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King Jr. Yet waves of violent rage from the white American public condemned Kaepernick's act of protest and defamed his reputation.²¹⁴ Instead of rallying behind his values and action, his team and league cancelled his contract in fear of losing face and sponsorship money, as though he ceased to carry any marketable value to them following his act of protest.²¹⁵ Nonetheless, the impact of "taking the knee" is most visible within activist and racialised circles; following his model,

²¹⁰ Ronnie Close, *Cairo's Ultras: Resistance and Revolution in Egypt's Football Culture* (Cairo; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2019), 22.

²¹¹ Samuli Schielke, "Boredom and Despair in Rural Egypt," *Contemporary Islam*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2008), 256.

²¹² Carl Rommel, *Egypt's Football Revolution: Emotion, Masculinity, and Uneasy Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 12.

²¹³ Dave Zirin, *The Kaepernick Effect*, 2.

²¹⁴ Dave Zirin, *The Kaepernick Effect*, 4.

²¹⁵ Dave Zirin, *The Kaepernick Effect*, 6.

millions of young athletes in different sports started to take the knee, sending a message to the Establishment and sports industry that they will continue the movement that Kaepernick created.²¹⁶

The neoliberal status quo has redefined material and ideological conditions in the twenty-first century, through market-based governance and decision-making, as well as through an emphasis on individual responsibility.²¹⁷ With sports being commercialised and spectacularised in contemporary popular culture, they are embedded in a neoliberal “common sense” to reproduce and maintain the neoliberal order through consumption.²¹⁸ Therefore, sports are a reflection of broader and more globalised social, economic, and political phenomena, instead of being merely games. Understanding the principles underlying a sports boycott can account for the indivisibility of justice at the local and global scales and demystify the networks of international support for the Zionist regime coming from corporations and propagandist groups.

The sports boycott: a field of possibilities for the Palestinian BDS movement

Sports offer an alternative avenue for the Palestinian liberation struggle to challenge existing norms and institutions in the field. In tackling neoliberal capitalism and apologism for colonialism in sports, the BDS movement reclaims the Palestinian narrative which is continually erased and censored by Zionist efforts in recasting the claim of indigeneity onto settlers.²¹⁹

The place of sports in the cultural boycott

“#BoycottPuma” emerged in 2018 as a reaction to the commercial agreement between the German sportswear brand and the IFA. This is not the first time that the BDS movement and pro-Palestine activists advocate for Palestinian rights in sports; as I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the BDS movement successfully petitioned Adidas to halt its sponsorship deal with the IFA in

²¹⁶ Dave Zirin, *The Kaepernick Effect*, 7-8.

²¹⁷ Stuart Hall, “The Neoliberal Revolution: Thatcher, Blair, Cameron – The Long March of Neoliberalism Continues,” *Soundings*, no. 48 (2011), 10-11.

²¹⁸ David L. Andrews & Michael L. Silk, “Sport and Neoliberalism: An Affective-Ideological Articulation,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2018), 512.

²¹⁹ Timothy Seidel, “Neoliberal Developments, National Consciousness, and Political Economies of Resistance in Palestine,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 21, no. 5 (2019), 730.

2018. The movement also pushed for a boycott of Israel in international football, with projects such as “Red Card Israeli Racism.”²²⁰ Unlike South Africa’s dominance in rugby and cricket in the twentieth century, Israel is not a prominent athletic powerhouse, but football remains its largest sport. Throughout history, because of Israel’s occupation of Palestine and Arab lands, as well as its role in being a Western settler-colonial outpost in the Middle East, numerous countries have excluded it from regional sporting federations.²²¹ For instance, Israeli football clubs can only play in the UEFA Champions League and Europa League, and Israel reserves the right to bid for the hosting right of European football tournaments.²²² In Asian athletic federations, in contrast, Israel was excluded from the Asian Games and Asian Football Confederation in the 1974 and the Olympic Council of Asia in 1981 following pressure from Arab countries.²²³

The right of a colonised people to resist a colonial power, by any means available, is enshrined in international law.²²⁴ One such means of resistance is BDS’s call for a sports boycott of brands, sports teams and clubs, as well as country-specific sporting federations normalising the Zionist regime and its occupation of Palestinian lands. For BDS, normalisation consists in “dealing with or presenting something that is inherently abnormal, such as oppression and injustice, as if it were normal.”²²⁵ Furthermore, normalisation with/of Israel is:

the idea of making occupation, apartheid, and settler colonialism seem normal and establishing normal relations with the Israeli regime instead of supporting the struggle led by the Indigenous Palestinian people to end the abnormal conditions and structures of oppression. A key principle

²²⁰ Red Card Israeli Racism, “The Sports Boycott of Israel – The Case of Football,” *BDS Movement*, May 22, 2016. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/sports-boycott-israel-case-football>

²²¹ Danyel Reiche, “Not Allowed to Win: Lebanon’s Sporting Boycott of Israel,” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 72, no. 1 (Winter 2018), 32.

²²² Red Card Israeli Racism, “The Sports Boycott of Israel.”

²²³ Jon Dart, “Showing Israel the Red Card: Activists Engaged in Pro-Palestinian Sport-Related Campaigns,” *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2017), 521-522.

²²⁴ Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 111.

²²⁵ Palestinian BDS National Committee, “The BDS Movement’s Anti-Normalization Guidelines Explained,” *BDS Movement*, October 30, 2022. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/bds-movement-anti-normalization-guidelines>

underpinning anti-normalization work is that it is a tactic entirely based on ethical and political considerations which are in perfect harmony with the BDS movement's rejection of all forms of racism and racial discrimination. Countering normalization is a means to resist oppression, its mechanisms and structures.²²⁶

The BDS movement's call for a sports boycott is embedded in the global justice project which views Zionist violence not as an exception, but part of a larger colonial project contrary to the so-called values of international sports. BDS does not challenge Israel's existence as a state, but contests its colonial policies through coordinated global campaigns. Palestinian athletes also urge the international sporting community to stand in solidarity with not just themselves, but also all of their people in occupied Palestine and in the diaspora. In this context, Palestinian alter-native self-determination focuses on human rights, as international governing bodies of sports are bound by international law. At the same time, BDS also targets corporate complicity and demands accountability, by actively pointing out the paradoxes of consumerism and by showing the disruptive nature of colonial, neoliberal capitalism to thwart its flows of capital and services.²²⁷

Puma branded an accomplice: of puns and détournement

The Palestinian call for sports boycott of the Zionist entity is a global effort, aiming to halt all international support for Zionist institutions and the violent oppression of Palestinians. In order to launch the “#BoycottPuma” campaign, Palestinian civil society organisations, athletic clubs, and global solidarity groups have to develop a deep understanding of the role of sports in neoliberal capitalism, consumer society, branding, marketing, and commercial sponsorship. BDS activists and Palestinian sportspeople frame sports through the lens of global justice to help the world comprehend their plight and highlight the hypocrisy of the sports industry. Taking advantage of trendy concepts and practices,

²²⁶ Palestinian BDS National Committee, “The BDS Movement's Anti-Normalization Guidelines Explained.”

²²⁷ Rafeef Ziadah, “Palestine Calling: Notes on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement,” in *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences*, edited by Samar El-Bekai et al. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016), 83.

such as “ethical consumption” or “corporate responsibility,” to target minds and wallets, they exploit the vulnerabilities of global capitalism and support networks for the Zionist regime to disrupt the circulation of goods, services, and reputation. The BDS movement mobilises the spectacular aspect of sports—mediated by social media, photography, and video montages—to make them a platform for advocacy and raise points and concerns which have been systematically erased and censored. They have launched different waves of “#BoycottPuma” through a strategic use of hashtags and social media platforms, as well as taking advantage of profit-generating sporting events and the omnipresence of brands to boost the campaign, namely the 2021 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 World Cup.

The movement looks critically at the relationship between sportswear, identity, and symbolism to formulate their campaign slogans. As Naomi Klein contends, corporations’ wealth and influence depend upon their ability to produce brands and images of their brands, stressing the importance of marketing.²²⁸ Brands rely on a spectacular conception of identity and symbolism, using advertisement to convey the essence of corporations which own them.²²⁹ Historically, Puma was the first brand to ever sponsor a Black athlete, lending its products to Jesse Owens who would win four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.²³⁰ At the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, Tommie Smith and John Carlos were photographed wearing Puma products as they raised their fists into their air to stand for human rights and show solidarity with Black people in the United States and South Africa, as well as to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr., who had been assassinated in April of the same year.²³¹

In the 1970s, Puma started marketing its products to non-athletes, allowing the brand to directly impact popular culture and people’s lives. This new campaign enabled Puma to mould its brand image with slogans such as “Be Brave” or “Never Afraid to Take Risks” through association with athletes’

²²⁸ Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador USA, 2000), 24-25.

²²⁹ Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo*, 25.

²³⁰ Graeme Wearden, “Sports Shoe Feud That Keeps On Running,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2007. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2007/apr/10/1>

²³¹ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 256.

acts of protest.²³² The psychology of advertising also deploys cognitive processes to link an event or an athlete to a brand, such as extreme sports and Red Bull, Cristiano Ronaldo and Nike, Arsenal FC and Emirates, the Olympics and Coca-Cola, or the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and Gazprom—a partnership which ended in February 2022 following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.²³³ Writing on sports economics, Gerd Nufer remarks that brand marketing through sports events becomes incredibly profitable for companies, since it generates “a positive image transfer from the sports event to the brand or the company.”²³⁴ With global sporting events reaching a worldwide audience through television and social media, brands’ messages are communicated through attractive sporting environments in the most efficient and cost-saving way.²³⁵

One example of Puma reaching a technologically savvy global audience is its initiative to mark International Women’s Day in 2021, with the campaign “She Moves Us” aiming to paint Puma as an empowering brand for women everywhere around the globe.²³⁶ According to the brand, the “Puma Woman” is active, confident, successful, and inspires other women to become so.²³⁷ Nonetheless, the “Puma Woman” remains an arbitrary representation of womanhood generated by hegemonic discourses of consumerism and neoliberal capitalism,²³⁸ as she only seems to be a Western-based, middle- to upper-class consumer who has reached notoriety by overcoming barriers in her personal life and career through hard work and self-love.²³⁹ This idealisation of the “Puma Woman” corresponds to the mainstreaming of Western feminism which emphasises individual successes and responsibility, regardless of one’s material conditions or sociopolitical context. The “Puma Woman” appears to be

²³² Puma, “This is Puma,” *Puma*. <https://about.puma.com/en/this-is-puma>

²³³ UEFA, “UEFA Has Today Decided To End its Partnership with Gazprom Across All Competitions,” *Twitter*, February 28, 2022. <https://twitter.com/uefa/status/1498354465845522433>

²³⁴ Gerd Nufer, *Ambush Marketing in Sports* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 1.

²³⁵ Gerd Nufer, *Ambush Marketing in Sports*, 1.

²³⁶ Puma, “She Moves Us,” *Puma*. <https://about.puma.com/en/this-is-puma/brand-campaigns/she-moves-us>

²³⁷ Puma, “She Moves Us,” *Puma*.

²³⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *boundary 2*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Spring-Autumn 1984), 334.

²³⁹ Puma, “She Moves Us,” *Puma*.

unaffected by racism, colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism; she adopts a “girlboss” outlook on life and inspires other women to emulate her path in a project of female empowerment, led by a white saviour.²⁴⁰ Not only does this homogenisation of women’s experiences fail to examine institutional and structural systems of oppression in the West affecting racialised women, but it also erases the struggles of women and people in non-Western contexts who are not politically, socially, and economically privileged enough to achieve enfranchisement through merit.²⁴¹

Additionally, this colour-blind and ahistorical portrayal of womanhood ignores the antiracist and anticolonial struggle of Palestinian women’s movements,²⁴² as well as their material conditions under the Zionist regime.²⁴³ Neoliberal identity politics constitutes a form of recuperation, which is defined by the Situationist International as the usurpation of non-normative ideas, images, and experiences to empty them of their radical and contestational purposes solely to extract their spectacular marketability.²⁴⁴ For example, although Puma features Black women and other racialised women in “She Moves Us,” this superficial politics of neoliberal representation neglects class analysis and the examination of systematic oppression, and merely recuperates acceptable facets of Blackness, racialised identities, and womanhood to drive consumption. Consequently, neoliberal capitalism shrinks “the political to the personal”²⁴⁵ and the collective to customisable individualities, and suppresses collective experiences of oppression which are considered unfit for consumption.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Frankie Mastrangelo, “Theorizing #Girlboss Culture: Mediated Neoliberal Feminisms from Influencers to Multi-level Marketing Schemes” (PhD Dissertation, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021), 5-6.

²⁴¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” 335.

²⁴² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2013), 969.

²⁴³ Rabab Abdulhadi, “Where is Home?: Fragmented Lives, Border Crossings, and the Politics of Exile,” in *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*, edited by Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Christine Naber, 316.

²⁴⁴ Guy Debord & Pierre Canjuers, “Préliminaires pour une définition de l’unité du programme révolutionnaire,” *Internationale Situationniste* (July 20, 1960).

²⁴⁵ Susan Muaddi Darraj, “Personal and Political: The Dynamics of Arab American Feminism,” in *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*, edited by Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Christine Naber, 250.

²⁴⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Transnational Feminist Crossings,” 971.

Challenging the version of reality presented by neoliberal capitalism, the BDS movement responded with “Puma helps oppress Palestinian women” and the hashtag “#SheBoycotts.”²⁴⁷ BDS launched a counter-campaign featuring short videos of Palestinian sportswomen who voice their grievances about their inability to practise sports because of the Zionist occupation. Highlighting other Palestinian sports teams’ protests, they denounce Israel’s restrictions on their mobility with checkpoints, arbitrary detention, and non-issuance of travel permits, preventing them from travelling to official matches, not only within Palestine, but also internationally.²⁴⁸ They also call upon the international sporting community not to ignore:

1. Israel’s destruction of Palestine’s sporting facilities as a result of Israel’s land grabs and indiscriminate bombing of Gaza;
2. Israel’s deliberate maiming and detention of Palestinian athletes; and
3. Israel’s use of sports as a cover for its crimes, a practice known as “sportswashing.”²⁴⁹

Leading the campaign in a male-dominated arena, Aya Khattab, a player for the Palestine Women’s Football team, underscored the plight of Palestinians living with physical handicaps as a result of Israeli army’s constant and deliberate maiming of Palestinian athletes and protesters.²⁵⁰ The Palestinian Paralympic team, in addition to their physical limitations as a result of Zionist violence, faces the lack of equipment, athletic clothing, and spaces to train.²⁵¹ Aya Khattab also referenced the occupation forces’ killing and incarceration of Palestinian youth football players, in an effort to destroy Palestinian sporting futures and erase Palestine from the local, regional, and global sporting map. One of the best known cases is the detention of Palestinian National Football Team player, Mahmoud Sarsak: in 2012,

²⁴⁷ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “She Moves Us. But Puma Helps Oppress Palestinian Women.”

²⁴⁸ Jon Dart, “Israel and a Sports Boycott,” 169.

²⁴⁹ BDS Movement, “Boycott Puma – Why?” *BDS Movement*. <https://bdsmovement.net/boycott-puma>

²⁵⁰ BDS Movement, “Palestinian Women’s National Football Team Player Calls to Boycott Puma,” *BDS Movement for Equality & Palestinian Rights*, YouTube video, 0:28, March 8, 2021. <https://youtu.be/MTAoby7Utw>

²⁵¹ Issam Khalidi & Alon Raab, “Palestine and the Olympics – A History,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 34, no. 13 (2017), 1413-1414.

he was incarcerated by the Zionist regime in Ramleh prison without any trial or charges. He staged a hunger strike to resist the illegality of the Zionist entity and protest the murder of his teammate, Zakaria Issa, who died shortly after being released from Israel's so-called "administrative detention."²⁵² An international campaign calling for his release soon followed, with Celtic FC fans, the Green Brigade, being the main organisers of the advocacy effort alongside former football stars Eric Cantona and Frédéric Kanouté.²⁵³ Since 2011, the PFA and Palestinian civil society groups urged UEFA to cancel Israel's right to host of the 2013 European Under-21 Football Championship, citing the Zionist regime's torture of Mahmoud Sarsak amongst the reasons for the boycott, only to face UEFA's and the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) indifference and non-interference attitude towards national politics.²⁵⁴

Echoing Aya Khattab in the March 2021 campaign, basketball player Helena Musallam gave her own testimony about Israel's raids on Palestinian stadiums to confiscate sports equipment and sabotage local matches.²⁵⁵ Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza involves the maintenance of the siege and indiscriminate bombing, resulting in the destruction of sporting facilities, most notably the destruction of Rafah stadium and deaths of Palestinian footballers in the aftermath of Israel's 2008 aerial assault on Gaza.²⁵⁶ Several women in cycling, running, football, boxing, and gymnastics, located on different continents, also called for a boycott of Puma for sponsoring the Zionist regime.²⁵⁷ The BDS

²⁵² Ali Abunimah, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2014), 13.

²⁵³ Andrew McFadyen, "A Celtic Message to Palestine," *Al Jazeera*, June 13, 2012. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2012/6/13/a-celtic-message-to-palestine>; Ali Abunimah, "'In the Name of Sporting Solidarity': Top European Athletes Call for Israel to Release Mahmoud Sarsak," *Electronic Intifada*, June 16, 2012. <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/name-sporting-solidarity-top-european-athletes-call-israel-release-mahmoud-sarsak>

²⁵⁴ Jon Dart, "Israel and a Sports Boycott," 174.

²⁵⁵ BDS Movement, "Palestinian women basketball players call to Boycott Puma, sponsor of Israeli apartheid," *BDS Movement for Equality & Palestinian Rights*, YouTube video, 0:42, March 8, 2021. <https://youtu.be/1eji41raGn4>

²⁵⁶ Malcolm MacLean, "Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts: From Rugby against South Africa to Soccer in Israel," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 31, no. 15 (2014), 1842-1843.

²⁵⁷ BDS Movement, "Women in Sports Call to Boycott Puma in Support of Palestinian Women Athletes," *BDS Movement for Equality & Palestinian Rights*, YouTube video, 1:32, March 8, 2021. <https://youtu.be/k1Z5o8J4YZc>

movement shows the double standard facing Palestinian sportswomen whose rights are curtailed by the brand's normalisation of the Zionist occupation.

To craft counter-campaigns and challenge the discourse of infinite growth in neoliberal capitalism, the movement cleverly mobilises the athletic jargon. For instance, “#NoRestforPuma” emerged in July 2022, months prior to the World Cup which would take place in Qatar. The new hashtag emphasises the centrality of rest in growth, recovery, and improved sport performance, yet saying the opposite represents a form of disruption and even implies sabotage. In light of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Puma halted all commercial dealings with Russian teams and clubs.²⁵⁸ Two months later, BDS activists slammed Puma's hypocrisy when it came to sanctioning Russia whilst staying silent on Israel's oppression of Palestinians.²⁵⁹ BDS's new hashtag “#GivePumatheBoot” borrows from football vocabulary to express the will to campaign for Palestine until Puma drops its commercial agreement with the Zionist entity. Puma's normalisation of the Zionist regime constitutes a form of recuperation, creating a more acceptable and friendly image of Israel and the brand to promote consumption and ignore processes of exploitation and colonisation. Sponsoring the Zionist entity gives legitimacy to and disregards its colonial practices, whilst connecting with international customers of both Puma and “Brand Israel.”²⁶⁰ This enables the Zionist regime to profit from neoliberal capitalism and settler-colonialism to “sportswash” its crimes and advertise its global image as a “modern, democratic country.”²⁶¹

Using irony, satire, and *détournement*, BDS reminds consumers that the separation of sports from politics is impossible. For the Situationist International, *détournement* clashes with established political and social conventions, and can be a powerful means of proletarian artistic expression at the

²⁵⁸ Puma SE, “Sports Company PUMA Has Decided to Suspend Operations of All Its Stores in Russia,” *Twitter*, March 5, 2022. <https://twitter.com/pumagroup/status/1500143660125597696>

²⁵⁹ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “We Call Hypocrisy on Puma,” *BDS Movement*, April 6, 2022. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/we-call-hypocrisy-puma>

²⁶⁰ Mahfoud Amara, *Sport, Politics and Society in the Arab World*, 100.

²⁶¹ Jon Dart, “Israel and a Sports Boycott,” 168.

service of the class struggle.²⁶² *Détournement* can occur in everyday social life, such as the appropriation of words and gestures, as shown in BDS's twists on the original capitalist slogans to place them in the proper context of Zionist occupation and present the Palestinian realities affected by colonial violence and neoliberal capitalism. *Détournement* is thus disruptive and subversive. Here, I draw parallels with Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy* which explores, in one part, the historical impact of sabotage to disrupt the flows of carbon energy. He traces the origins and practice of sabotage to highlight workers' use of the system's vulnerabilities to interrupt global energy flows in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Coal and rail workers discovered the effectiveness of general strikes to halt the chains of production and demand more egalitarian reforms guaranteeing better working and living conditions.²⁶³ Sabotage emerged henceforth as their means to obtain new rights for themselves. The tradition of using direct action to interrupt the flow of oil and gas can be seen in Indigenous communities' struggles against energy corporations in the present time, from Turtle Island to the Niger Delta. For example, to disrupt the sources of energy from being transported to generate profit, the Wet'suwet'en community has been blocking and sabotaging the Coastal GasLink's pipeline in the colonially constructed province of British Columbia.²⁶⁴ Similarly, Lakota activists and environmental groups in the United States and Canada have opposed the Keystone pipeline, a project, if completed, would deliver Albertan tar sand oil to the American energy market.²⁶⁵ Phase 4 of Keystone was ultimately invalidated by Joe Biden through executive order, leading to its termination.²⁶⁶

Interestingly, “#BoycottPuma” translates to “قاطعوا بوما” in Arabic, and the triliteral root ق-ط-ع carries meanings ranging from “to cut off something” and “to dissociate,” to “to disrupt” and “to

²⁶² Guy Debord & Gil Wolman, “Mode d’emploi du détournement,” *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 8 (May 1956).

²⁶³ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011), 21-22.

²⁶⁴ Unist'ot'en Camp, “Timeline of the Campaign: A Timeline,” *Unist'ot'en Camp: Heal the People, Heal the Land*.
<https://unistoten.camp/timeline/timeline-of-the-campaign/>

²⁶⁵ Arlo Iron Cloud, “Keystone XL Pipeline,” *Lakota Times*, October 29, 2020.
<https://www.lakotatimes.com/articles/keystone-xl-pipeline/>

²⁶⁶ Native American Rights Fund, “Tribes Respond to KXL Pipeline Termination,” *Native American Rights Fund*, June 9, 2021. <https://narf.org/keystone-xl/>

boycott.” On the one hand, to practise BDS is to emphatically break apart the links in the capitalist chains of goods and services, both globally and locally. To boycott Puma, a symbol of corporate complicity in the violent oppression of Palestinians, is to make evident capitalist hypocrisy and disrupt its entitlement to profit. On the other hand, BDS is a grassroots initiative dissociating itself from the colonial interstate politics of Zionism and the PNA.

As the 1993 Oslo Accords ushered in neoliberal policies in Palestine, economic interdependence became a priority for the PNA, whereas political independence went out of style. To respond to the requirements of the Zionist and international donor regimes, the PNA favoured political stability, security, and privatisation, encouraging joint development projects between Israel and itself.²⁶⁷ For Andy Clarno, this normalisation of Zionist institutions at the state level is a result of the combination of settler-colonialism and neoliberal racial capitalism—neoliberal colonisation.²⁶⁸ This allows the Zionist regime to colonise, fragment, and sow distrust within Palestinian communities, whilst outsourcing colonial violence to Palestinian security forces who, in turn, police their own people, creating a situation of plausible deniability. Because of the PNA’s complicity in Zionist settler-colonialism, BDS’s alternative liberation strategy rejects Israel’s logic and practice of elimination of indigenous Palestinians, as well as leading initiatives to serve Palestinians directly affected by colonial violence.

The BDS movement’s adoption of the Puma boycott and online coordination of the campaign also represent a form of Intifada in the virtual realm, that some have referred to as “Intifada 3.0.” Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh remark that the Second Intifada witnessed a transformation of the Palestinian resistance, as citizen journalism emerged to influence global public opinion whilst also struggling against the occupation’s control of Internet infrastructures.²⁶⁹ During the Second Intifada, the Zionist regime imposed curfews to isolate Palestinian communities and disrupt their social relations,

²⁶⁷ Timothy Seidel, “Neoliberal Developments, National Consciousness, and Political Economies,” 729.

²⁶⁸ Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*, 89.

²⁶⁹ Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh, “Intifada 3.0?” 121.

denying Palestinians freedom of movement.²⁷⁰ Cities soon became ghost towns and families were placed under house arrests as a form of collective punishment. But despite the situation, Palestinians connected with each other and the world through the Internet, reconfiguring Palestinian communication and exchanges with the outside world as a means of survival.²⁷¹ Thanks to the Internet, Palestinians have found ways to cope with territorial fragmentation and heal their collectivity, despite ongoing obstacles generated by the Zionist regime and its sympathisers.²⁷² In her explanation of the term “intifada” and its emergence in the Palestinian colloquial lexicon, Amal Amireh challenges miriam cooke’s mistranslation of “intifada” which confines the Palestinian struggle, and particularly Palestinian women’s resistance, to the domestic circle.²⁷³ Imposing a Western reading of gender on the Palestinian rebellion against settler-colonialism fails to account for the totality of the Palestinian national body, which includes women, men, children, as well as queer and gender-non-conforming people. Akin to cutting off the links in the chains of neoliberal capitalism, the boycott campaign is a revolt shaking off the chains of the Zionist occupation and the PNA. Ultimately, this effort in contesting the enabling conditions of their predicament also necessitates coalition-building and comradeship beyond the arbitrary confines of the occupied territories.

Maximum pressure: no room for a draw in justice-seeking

With the support from global solidarity networks, choosing sports as an alternative and additional field of struggle inserts Palestine into the global battles against settler-colonialism and extends the legacies of the Third World solidarity formation. This allows the Palestinian liberation movement to actualise itself and engage in a dialectic of local-global struggles for justice and indigenous sovereignty. As Israel denies Palestinian athletes and ordinary Palestinians—in occupied

²⁷⁰ Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet, and the Construction of Identity* (London; New York: IB Tauris, 2011), 3-4.

²⁷¹ Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online*, 91.

²⁷² Helga Tawil-Souri & Miriyam Aouragh, “Intifada 3.0?” 104.

²⁷³ Amal Amireh, “Palestinian Women’s Disappearing Act: The Suicide Bomber Through Western Feminist Eyes,” in *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*, edited by Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Christine Naber, 30-31.

Palestine and in the diaspora—the right to mobility, the BDS movement finds alternative means to generate and build a movement for glocal justice. Each year, the BDS movement issues several global days of action to commemorate important events in Palestinian collective memory, most notably Land Day (March 30) and Nakba Day (May 15). Likewise, starting in 2019, the movement has coordinated a global day of action specific to the “#BoycottPuma” campaign, uniting global solidarity activists to organise. On this day, Palestinians and their comrades take actions at Puma-branded stores, Puma offices, and Puma-sponsored sports clubs, by organising protests and raising awareness of the brand’s complicity in Zionist violence against Palestinians.²⁷⁴

In cyberspace, the hashtag “#BoycottPuma” received over seven million tweets and became the most used hashtag related to Puma in June 2019.²⁷⁵ As a result of fans’ mobilisation, numerous athletes and clubs soon joined the campaign and dropped Puma as a potential sponsor. From Malaysia to Ireland, teams refused to renew their kit deal with the German brand or pledged not to sign any sponsorship deal with it, citing Israel’s violations of Palestinians’ rights. In 2020, despite the restrictions resulting from the global COVID pandemic, solidarity activists were able to send thousands of emails to Puma headquarters and jammed the brand’s customer service phone line.²⁷⁶ These campaign strategies are so effective at maintaining maximum pressure on the brand that Puma’s lawyer, in a street exchange with a Palestine solidarity activist, said that the campaign “is making our lives miserable.”²⁷⁷ In a strange occurrence of *détournement*, capitalism becomes a parody of itself: a

²⁷⁴ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Human Rights Supporters and Sports Fans in 20+ Countries Join #BoycottPuma Global Day of Action,” *BDS Movement*, June 20, 2019. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/human-rights-supporters-and-sports-fans-20-countries-join-boycottpuma-global-day-action>

²⁷⁵ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Human Rights Supporters and Sports Fans in 20+ Countries Join #BoycottPuma.”

²⁷⁶ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Boycott PUMA Campaign Timeline,” *BDS Movement*, July 4, 2022. <https://bdsmovement.net/boycott-puma-timeline>

²⁷⁷ Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), “Puma Says #BoycottPuma Campaign is ‘Making their Lives Miserable’,” *BDS Movement*, February 26, 2020. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/puma-says-boycottpuma-campaign-making-their-lives-miserable>

grassroots, justice-seeking movement such as BDS managed to make executives of a billion-dollar corporation feel sad and poor.

Another notable success of “#BoycottPuma” is the campaign’s ability to make Palestine visible, not only in the global sporting landscape, but also in the global justice project encompassing the struggle against settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. Activist scholar Chandni Desai highlights the practices of settler-colonial regimes to undermine indigenous social and political structures, such as the deployment of militarised forces and legal decrees to confiscate lands for resource extraction and settlement expansion.²⁷⁸ Desai cites the example of the solidarity between Palestinians and the Wet’suwet’en community, which demonstrates the strengthening of movement ties through the recognition of parallels.²⁷⁹ Reaffirming the call for transnational indigenous solidarity, Steven Salaita engaged with Native American studies and Indigenous anticolonial approaches and practices, and developed the concept of “inter/nationalism” which articulates a commitment to mutual recognition and struggle against settler-colonialism and capitalism. Salaita identifies three main phenomena turning Palestine into a nexus of inter/national possibility:

1. The propagation of decolonisation discourses spread on social media;
2. The positionality of Palestinians as indigenous, sharing a same lineage of dispossession as Indigenous populations elsewhere; and
3. The growth of the BDS movement.

Drawing from Salaita, the BDS movement allows Palestinians to have a voice, one which has long been suppressed by Zionist forces and their supporters. The birth of BDS resulted from a rights-based liberal approach which grew out of other avenues of resistance, from the armed struggle attempts throughout the twentieth century to the failure of “bilateral dialogue” to put in place a “peace process”—a euphemism for normalisation of the Zionist settler-colonial enterprise and the push for

²⁷⁸ Chandni Desai, “Disrupting Settler-Colonial Capitalism,” 46.

²⁷⁹ Chandni Desai, “Disrupting Settler-Colonial Capitalism,” 46-47.

neoliberal, capitalist state-building.²⁸⁰ For Omar Barghouti, the idealisation of dialogue between oppressors and the oppressed led to the establishment of a “peace industry,” financed by Western governments’ and agencies’ philanthropic schemes to depoliticise the Palestinian resistance and create crony capitalism within the Palestinian political elite.²⁸¹ Another aim of the “peace industry” is to mask Western complicity in anti-Palestinian violence, as well as Western settler-colonial regimes’ own oppression of indigenous and racialised communities. To enact BDS with other Indigenous, racialised, and solidarity communities is to be aware of the extent of Israel’s colonisation of Palestine, not only within the confines of Palestinian geography, but also elsewhere in the world, in spaces of militarised oppression and counterrevolutions.²⁸² Being one of the rare avenues for Palestinians to practise resistance, BDS is a request to stop validating, honouring, and accepting Israel’s colonialism, and, by extension, Western colonialism.²⁸³ The BDS movement call’s for sports boycott is hence how Palestinians practise alter-native self-determination, with the support of global solidarity activists.

Moving forward to build solidarity through the Apartheid analogy

Through the campaign “#BoycottPuma,” the Palestinian BDS movement uses sports as an alternative platform for advocacy and tackles the neoliberal and colonial arrangements of the sports industry. In pointing out capitalist hypocrisy and in coordinating an international campaign with the help of solidarity activists around the world, BDS affirms Palestinians’ alter-native self-determination and puts forth Palestinian voices which have been censored by the Zionist regime and its supporters. Understanding and tracing the lineage of sports boycotts, most notably the example of the anti-Apartheid boycott of South Africa, are crucial epistemological tools for Palestinians to situate themselves and their strategies on a historical continuum of anticolonial struggles.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Omar Barghouti, “BDS: Upholding International Law, Asserting Palestinian Rights,” *The Palestine Yearbook of International Law* (2014), 129.

²⁸¹ Omar Barghouti, “BDS: Upholding International Law,” 131.

²⁸² Steven Salaita, *Inter/nationalism*, 62.

²⁸³ Steven Salaita, *Inter/nationalism*, 44.

²⁸⁴ Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions*, 26-27.

Reporting on the April 2019 visit of the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) in South Africa, Loubna Qutami remarks that whilst it is important to draw parallels between struggles and reflect on settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism at transnational and transhistorical scales, Palestinians have raised questions on the usefulness of the Apartheid analogy and the adaptability of the anti-Apartheid framework to formulate their liberation roadmap.²⁸⁵ During this exchange, the PYM and their South African comrades underlined the importance of not using a single framework to examine and refine their ongoing resistance.²⁸⁶ Further, Chandni Desai and Heather Sykes attest that the application of the anti-Apartheid framework to describe the plight of Palestinians can overlook issues of settler-colonialism and indigenous sovereignty.²⁸⁷ Although Palestinians have viewed the Zionist settler-colonial project as a form of Apartheid, there remain key differences between Palestine and South Africa, as well as between the Palestinian BDS movement and the anti-Apartheid boycott of South Africa. Despite the shared experience of living under racial capitalism, Qutami identifies the pattern of labour exploitation as one of the main differences between Palestinian and South African modes of revolt and relationship to the colonial power.²⁸⁸ Another difference is Western superpowers' ongoing, unconditional support of the Zionist regime, whereas the Apartheid system became ungovernable due to anticolonial armed resistance, organised Black labour strikes from within South Africa, and, eventually, widespread international boycott and sanctions.²⁸⁹

As a matter of fact, Palestinians understand their history as a history of the present, which is continually produced and written, yet also erased and censored by the material conditions of the era. Moving beyond, as Qutami's article title suggests, or past an analogy or a phenomenon does not presuppose a "post" condition, as in "postfeminist," "postmodern," or "postcolonial"—have feminism,

²⁸⁵ Loubna Qutami, "Moving Beyond the Apartheid Analogy."

²⁸⁶ Loubna Qutami, "Moving Beyond the Apartheid Analogy."

²⁸⁷ Chandni Desai & Heather Sykes, "An 'Olympics without Apartheid': Brazilian-Palestinian Solidarity against Israeli Securitisation," *Race & Class*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2019), 39-40.

²⁸⁸ Loubna Qutami, "Moving Beyond the Apartheid Analogy."

²⁸⁹ William Sales, "Making South Africa Ungovernable – ANC Strategy for the '80s," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 15, no. 6, (December 1984), 2-3.

modernity, and colonialism truly exhausted their epistemic and interpretative possibilities? Nor does it have to connote an end and a need for closure, but a re-examination of the space and time in/during which a liberation movement is conducted to understand the convergence and divergence of interests. Similar to Audre Lorde's theorisation which states, "There is no hierarchy of oppressions,"²⁹⁰ Steven Salaita writes, "Suffering is never local."²⁹¹ His statement encapsulates and contextualises the constellation of settler-colonialism, from Palestine to Turtle Island and South Africa. As colonial powers are interlinked in their destruction and violence, colonised societies must remain even more interconnected, for revolutionary communities have much common ground upon which decolonised futures and possibilities of kinship and solidarity can be nurtured. Reciprocal solidarity is hence the baseline from which we can combat the atomisation of struggles and interests—the neoliberal, neocolonial tactic of divide-and-conquer.²⁹²

Ultimately, it seems an impossible task to simply reform capitalism without dismantling the conditions enabling exploitation and oppression. Despite the nominal end of Apartheid and the emergence of non-segregated teams as the new sporting norm in South Africa, the Apartheid regime's racist, classist, and capitalist foundations continue to haunt South African sports and the country's political and social relations.²⁹³ Precisely, the so-called "post-Apartheid order" has failed to dismantle the neoliberal economic system, entrenching instead individualism, police brutality, misogyny, queerphobia, transphobia, to whitewash the political elite's project of "rainbow nation-state" building.²⁹⁴ The work of justice activists in South Africa continues to go on and challenge these social issues.

²⁹⁰ Audre Lorde, Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta B Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 219.

²⁹¹ Steven Salaita, *Inter/nationalism*, 160.

²⁹² Darnell Moore & Sa'ed Atshan, "Reciprocal Solidarity: Where the Black and Palestinian Queer Struggles Meet," *Biography*, vol. 37, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 700.

²⁹³ Dare Leke Idowu & Olusola Ogunnubi, "Music and Dance Diplomacy in the COVID-19 Era: Jerusalema and the Promotion of South Africa's Soft Power," *The Round Table*, vol. 110, no. 4 (2021), 466.

²⁹⁴ Otrude Nontobeko Moyo, *Africanity and Ubuntu as Decolonizing Discourse* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 138.

Returning to the example discussed in this chapter, even if Adidas ended its agreement with the IFA, Puma did not hesitate to profit from Israel's colonial oppression of Palestinians. Yet, by boycotting one brand for its support of the Zionist entity, the BDS movement has exposed the networks of colonial, neoliberal capitalism, from the discursive to practical levels. It is thus imperative to target the entirety of the systems of exploitation and violence, instead of boycotting individual brands, to avoid emulating trajectory of neoliberal fragmentation of the collective and veneration of individualism. Since, in the words of Angela Davis, "freedom is a constant struggle," activists must learn to make their struggle as horizontal and as holistic as possible, by taking into account different forms of systematic oppression and forming bonds of camaraderie.²⁹⁵ The Apartheid framework has allowed Palestinians to evoke their existence and struggle to convince mainstream currents of thought to stand in solidarity with them. And as the Palestinian liberation struggle continues, several obstacles to implementing a fully-fledged sports boycott of the Zionist regime and its legitimisers remain—obstacles which will be discussed in the next chapter. Solidarity is "at risk" as long as colonialism and capitalism, as well as their changed forms, remain the foundations of political and social relations.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Angela Davis, Cornel West, & Frank Barat, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 135.

²⁹⁶ Natalie Kouri-Towe, "Solidarity at Risk," 4.

Chapter 4

Global Sporting Solidarity and Its Contradictions

No one should accept any killings in the world, or oppression, but we've never been allowed to speak about politics in sports, but all of a sudden now it's allowed. And now that it's allowed I hope that people also look at oppression everywhere in the world. The Palestinians have been going through that for the past 74 years, but I guess because it doesn't fit the narrative of the media of the West, we couldn't talk about it. So now we can talk about Ukraine, we can talk about Palestine.

—Ali Farag, Egyptian squash player²⁹⁷

This final chapter explores the factors making Palestine solidarity “unspeakable” in sports, as the epigraph above suggests. I am interested in the question of whether we can fully use sports as a platform to practise solidarity with Palestine in neoliberal times. In a context where a sports boycott of the Zionist entity and its normalisers, even if successful, remains a symbolic effort, is the term “sporting solidarity” an oxymoron? In this chapter, my argument will follow Natalie Kouri-Towe’s characterisation of transnational queer solidarity with Palestine as “at risk,”²⁹⁸ meaning that the practice of solidarity in the twenty-first century is complicated by neoliberal and capitalist structures.²⁹⁹ As neoliberalism fragments collective struggles and atomises individuals, it impedes the prospects of profound social and political transformation. Justice causes are exceptionalised and commodified as single-use products, whereas activists are isolated and represented as single-issue advocates, disconnected from the globality of the anticolonial, antiracist, and anticapitalist struggle. Modern sports bank on neoliberal funding and capitalist-driven spectacles to boost revenue and showcase the so-called “peaceful” and “apolitical” beauty of the games, whilst at the same time erasing “undesirable” and unmarketable images of exploitation and colonial oppression occurring behind the scenes.

²⁹⁷ Dave Zirin, “A Lone Voice in the Sports World Asks ‘What About Palestine?’”

²⁹⁸ Natalie Kouri-Towe, “Solidarity at Risk,” 4.

²⁹⁹ Natalie Kouri-Towe, “Solidarity at Risk,” 25-26.

To explain why sporting solidarity with Palestine is “at risk,” I will examine the historical institutional silencing of Palestinian voices and expressions of solidarity with Palestine in sports. Using the example of the 1972 Munich Olympics, I will investigate the criminalisation of pro-Palestine activism in international sports, which still echoes until today through the equation of “Palestine” with “terrorism.” Next, I will outline the repercussions against Palestinians and solidarity activists for speaking out against Zionist settler-colonialism in sports, illustrated by international sporting federations’ application of disciplinary measures against athletes, teams, and fans. This will be coupled with an exposé on Israel’s practice of sportswashing through its hosting of international sporting competitions and self-branding as a modern, athletic nation. Finally, I will use the example of the 2022 World Cup to present the contradictions of practising solidarity under conditions of colonial, neoliberal violence, and attempt to sketch a transnational politics of hope for a decolonised future.

Pro-Palestine sporting activism at the crossroads of anti-Palestinian racism and neoliberal capitalism

In international sports, expressions of solidarity with Palestine are stigmatised as a form of “hijacking” due to the legacies of the 1972 Munich Olympics and the ongoing “war on terror” ideology. To paint a contrasting picture between the “cowardly terrorists” and a “brave nation,” Zionist neoliberal capitalism produces hasbara campaigns and invests in sporting infrastructures to advertise Israel as a modern athletic nation and further discredit pro-Palestine activism.

No solidarity with the “hijacker-turned-terrorist”

In Christian Ghazi’s documentary *Resistance, Why*, Ghassan Kanafani, a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) leader, evokes the power of words in the formulation of liberation struggles, as well as the enemy’s manipulation of language to distort realities.³⁰⁰ Kanafani explains in the film that, in its journey to gaining political and economic acceptance, the Zionist regime

³⁰⁰ Christian Ghazi, director, *Resistance, Why* (Lebanon: Nadi Lekol Nass, 1971).

manipulates discourses to dehumanise Palestinians and censor their voices.³⁰¹ For example, former Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir's infamous quote "There was no such thing as Palestinians" summarises Israel's denial of Palestinians' existence.³⁰² In the contemporary discursive landscape, Nada Elia contends that Palestinians continually face censorship and arrogance preventing them from speaking up for themselves in different settings, from international institutions, academic conferences, social forums, to the mainstream media and activist circles.³⁰³ Whenever they provide evidence for Zionist racism and violence, Palestinians are silenced and accused of "hijacking" discussions, ultimately victim-blaming them for their predicament.³⁰⁴ They are vilified by the "anti-Semitic" label due to the sensitivity around the criticism of Israel and the North American hegemonic discourses conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.³⁰⁵

As a matter of fact, Palestinians have historically used different modes of resistance, including strikes, boycott, demonstrations, and hijacking. From the late 1960s to the 1970s, the multiplication of Palestinian resistance activities resulted from a change in liberation strategies, as Palestinians understood the unequal nature of their fight against Zionist settler-colonialism and Western sponsorship of their oppression. Inspired by the Vietnamese, Cuban, and Algerian revolutions, Palestinian resistance fighters engaged in armed confrontation, notably the 1968 Battle of al-Karama and the plane seizure operations in the 1970s featuring the *munadila* Leila Khaled.³⁰⁶ Etymologically, the word "hijack" is reported to have originated in the American English lexicon in the twentieth century, depicting the act of robbery of merchandise in transit. This Western construct is today weaponised to describe the Palestinian efforts in reaffirming their history and serves not only as a form of interpellation of the American popular culture and "war on terror" ideology, but also associates Palestinians with the realm

³⁰¹ Christian Ghazi, director, *Resistance, Why*.

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³⁰³ Nada Elia, "The Burden of Representation: When Palestinians Speak Out," in *Arab & Arab American Feminisms*, 143.

³⁰⁴ Nada Elia, "The Burden of Representation," 143-144.

³⁰⁵ Nada Elia, "The Burden of Representation," 146.

³⁰⁶ Arab Loutfi, director, *Ehki ya Asfoura* (Independent Production, 2007).

of illegality. The reductionist view that posits Palestinians as “hijackers” is tied to a historical framing of the Palestinian resistance—including many other anticolonial movements—as “terrorism” since the early days of the Palestinian struggle against British rule and Zionist colonisation to the aftermath of 9/11 and the present day.³⁰⁷ This outlook on the Palestinian anticolonial struggle exceptionalises high-profile examples, such as the plane hijacking operations of the 1960s and 1970s, and ahistoricises them as the only Palestinian tactic.

Occurring around the same time as the plane hijacking operations was the 1972 Munich Olympics, during which Black September resistance fighters—a faction within the Palestine Liberation organisation (PLO)—kidnapped and killed eleven Israeli Olympians as a response to Israel’s destruction of Palestine since the 1948. Taking advantage of the televised mega sporting event to present the existence of the Palestinian resistance, the group demanded the release of more than 200 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons.³⁰⁸ As retribution for the loss of Israeli lives, the Zionist regime proceeded to bomb PLO bases and raided Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, murdering civilians who did not have any connection to the Black September group nor the Munich incident.³⁰⁹ The Mossad, the Israeli Intelligence Agency, sent death squads to assassinate alleged Black September operatives in Europe using falsified passports,³¹⁰ and even killed a Moroccan national mistaken for a Black September member in Norway.³¹¹ Whilst the Israeli government escaped punishment for its coordinated killings in Europe and gratuitous bombing of Lebanon and Syria, the aftermath of the Munich incident left a stain on Palestine’s presence and pro-Palestine solidarity on the international sporting scene. The reductionist association between “Palestine” and “terrorism” portrays

³⁰⁷ Angela Davis, Cornel West, & Frank Barat, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*, 8.

³⁰⁸ Aaron J. Klein, *Striking Back: The 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and Israel’s Deadly Response* (New York: Random House, 2005), 54.

³⁰⁹ Aaron J. Klein, *Striking Back*, 141.

³¹⁰ Aaron J. Klein, *Striking Back*, 19.

³¹¹ Aaron J. Klein, *Striking Back*, 308.

Palestinians as “collectively violent,” contrasted with a “courageous” and “level-headed” Israel, that, despite the Munich incident and the “threat of terror,” continues to thrive and invest in sports.

“Brand Israel” and colonial sportswashing

Although Israel is not a sports powerhouse, it has made recent attempts to instrumentalise sports to whitewash the occupation. In 2005, the Israeli government officially launched the “Brand Israel” campaign in collaboration with right-wing Zionist and American agencies to improve Israel’s international reputation, following its violent suppression of the Second Intifada and the expansion of its colonial apparatus.³¹² The Zionist regime also recognised the effectiveness of the BDS movement’s strategy to undermine the “Israel brand” through different forms of boycott. The propaganda campaign expunges any mention of the Israeli occupation: the siege on Gaza, the separation wall, the daily demolitions of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem, or settlers’ looting of Palestinian lands.

With the aim of making Israel visible on the international sporting scene, “Brand Israel” emphasises the hosting of sporting competitions to help the country prove its humanity and athletic spirit in times of “war,” “menace from Hamas,” and “hostile Arab countries.” For example, in May 2018, the Giro d’Italia took place for the first time outside of Europe with its courses running through illegal settlements and destroyed Palestinian villages following a lobbying campaign by Canadian-Israeli billionaire Sylvan Adams.³¹³ The organisation of the European cycling event became a financial and reputational success for the Zionist entity and the Canadian-Israeli corporation Israel-Premier Tech. Yet, mentions of the Great March of Return in Gaza, started on Land Day in 2018, were omitted from the promotional material prior to and during the cycling event. Over the course of the Great March of Return, Israeli snipers wounded numerous Palestinian athletes in the knees and legs with exploding bullets, and amongst them was cyclist Alaa al-Dali who was set to compete at the Asian Games in the

³¹² alQaws, “Liberation in Palestine, A Queer Issue – Haneen Maikey,” YouTube video, 44:16, December 27, 2014, <https://youtu.be/aI4Pp7QYcnE>

³¹³ Francesco Belcastro, “Sport, Politics and the Struggle over ‘Normalization’,” 8-9.

summer of 2018.³¹⁴ Four years later, “Brand Israel” scored another victory in international cycling; Hugo Houle, a Québécois cyclist racing for Israel-Premier Tech, won the sixteenth individual stage of the 2022 Tour de France, adding a *façade* of prestige to the Zionist team. Following his victory, he participated in the Grand Prix Cycliste de Montréal in September 2022, where he continued to ride under the banner of Israel-Premier Tech. The Grand Prix was the subject of a sports boycott campaign organised by Montreal-based Palestine solidarity group Palestiniens et Juifs Unis (PAJU) who object to the normalisation of Zionist settler-colonialism and sportswashing.³¹⁵

Moreover, “Brand Israel” is an attempt to paint the Zionist entity as a cosmopolitan sporting haven, where Palestinian footballers who are citizens of Israel play alongside their Jewish-Israeli teammates in clubs and in the Israel National Football team—a success story of integration through sports. Tamir Sorek describes football in Israel as an “integrative enclave” for Palestinian citizens of Israel and pushes the view that sports are an instrument of integration for Palestinians to achieve acceptance.³¹⁶ In reality, anti-Palestinian hatred in Israeli football is a rampant phenomenon, with the notorious example of Israeli club Beitar Jerusalem whose policy excludes the signing of Palestinian players.³¹⁷ Beitar Jerusalem fans are also renowned for espousing the chauvinistic ideology of Ze'ev Jabotinsky and making racist and queerphobic chants against Palestinians and other Muslim players.³¹⁸ Paradoxically, the Israeli system has created an avenue for several Palestinian athletes to practise sports and achieve notoriety, due to its well-developed infrastructure, facilities, and connections with international sporting networks. To further complicate this, there is the question of solidarity: Do Palestinian athletes who progress through the Israeli system and compete under the Israeli banner

³¹⁴ Maha Hussaini, “Israel Bullet Destroys Dream of Gaza Cyclist Heading to Asian Games,” *Middle East Eye*, April 27, 2018. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/israeli-bullet-destroys-dream-gaza-cyclist-heading-asian-games>

³¹⁵ Palestiniens et Juifs Unis (PAJU), “Arrêter la course: Non à la collaboration avec l’Apartheid israélien,” *PAJU*. <https://paju.org/fr/grand-prix-cycliste-montreal/>

³¹⁶ Tamir Sorek, *Arab Soccer in a Jewish State*, 6-7.

³¹⁷ Tamir Sorek, “Threatened Masculinities Marginalise Women in Israeli Football,” in *Doing Fandom: Lessons from Football in Gender, Emotions, Space*, edited by Tamar Rapoport (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 203.

³¹⁸ Tamir Sorek, “Threatened Masculinities,” 203-204.

“deserve” solidarity? Should their team and club be targeted by a boycott call? In the end, the liberal Zionist positing football as an “integrative enclave” for Palestinians represents Israel as an “egalitarian society” where sports have enabled “peaceful cohabitation” and “dialogue” between Israelis and Palestinians. And yet, the entirety of Israel’s regime is built on the foundations of settler-colonialism, racism, and militarism—the material conditions annihilating Palestine’s sporting facilities in the first place.

Manufacturing its whitewashed image as the benevolent “peace-maker,” the Zionist regime has also founded and sponsored a number of “peace-building” projects in sports. “Sports for peace” initiatives are not a new tactic to downplay colonial oppression; as I highlight above, the call for a boycott of Apartheid South Africa was met with opposition which idealised the power of sports to “create peaceful dialogue” and “inspire hope in situations of conflict.”³¹⁹ Entrenching the neoliberal order, these initiatives rely heavily on the international donor system which is disconnected from the realities of most Palestinians and Palestinian athletes in particular, in addition to depoliticising the Palestinian resistance in the name of “peace.”³²⁰

One example of the sports-for-development ideology is the Israel Judo Federation’s 2016 “Judo for Peace” project, in collaboration with the International Judo Federation, claiming to promote better access to sports to women and Bedouin youth.³²¹ In reality, this programme posits Israel as the spreader of civilisation and feminism to the Bedouin population, neglecting any mention of the gendered violence of its occupation against Palestinian women, as well as Israel’s treatment of Bedouin people.³²² The sports programme also portrays Israel as an “exception” leading innovative sporting programmes in the region, crafting a contrasting picture between Israel and Palestine: a nation of “movement and

³¹⁹ Jon Dart, “Sport and Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine,” *Journal of Global Sport Management* (2019), 2.

³²⁰ Tariq Dana, “Crony Capitalism in the Palestinian Authority: A Deal among Friends,” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2020), 252.

³²¹ Nicolas Messner, “Judo for Peace in Israel,” *International Judo Federation*, November 17, 2016. <https://www.ijf.org/news/show/judo-for-peace-israel>

³²² Ahmad Amara, Ismael Abu-Saad, & Oren Yiftachel, editors, *Indigenous (In)Justice: Human Rights Law and Bedouin Arabs in the Naqab/Negev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

modernity” versus an “immobile and backward” territory. Envisioning peace through sports without dismantling the foundations and practices of settler-colonialism is a form of normalisation of colonial violence against Palestinians, as though Israeli and Palestinian athletes were standing on equal ground to participate in a peaceful dialogue under the supervision of international sporting federations and mediating states.

A three-way game: international sporting federations, regional normalisation with the Zionist entity, and athletes’ and fans’ activism

In addition to boycotting Israel and its corporate normalisers, Pro-Palestine activists have had to confront international sporting federations and pressure them into applying sanctions against Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights. However, they often face apathy from the international governing agencies of sports, especially their inconsistency in the application of sporting regulations which are largely derived from international. At the same time, they have found alternative avenues to display their activism, such as in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where pro-Palestine solidarity encountered the paradoxes of neoliberal capitalism and regional normalisation with the Zionist entity, further putting sporting solidarity with Palestine at risk.

International sporting regulations as an ideological battleground

As a consequence of the entanglements of the criminalisation of pro-Palestine activism and the evolving discourse of liberation under the neoliberal order, the Palestinian BDS movement and Palestine solidarity activists have had to remain flexible in their tactics and have grounded their demands on a rights-based approach stemming from international law and universal human rights.³²³ At the same time, they face international sporting institutions’ disciplinary measures and their inconsistency in the application of rules. For instance, in 2016, Scottish club Celtic received fines from UEFA due to their fans’ display of Palestinian flags at a UEFA Champions League match between

³²³ Omar Barghouti, “BDS: Upholding International Law,” 136.

Celtic and Israeli club Hapoel Be'er Sheva, invoking the presence of “illicit banners” as the reason for the disciplinary measure.³²⁴ Replying to UEFA’s threat, Celtic fans conducted the social media campaign “#MatchFineforPalestine” and raised money for Palestinian children to equal the amount of the fines.³²⁵ Similarly, Malian striker Frédéric Kanouté and former captain of the Egypt National Football team Mohammed Aboutrika were penalised in 2009 for showing solidarity with Palestine on the clothes they were wearing in match in the aftermath of yet another episode of Israel’s collective punishment of Gaza.³²⁶ At the 2022 Tokyo Olympics, Algerian judoka Fethi Nourine’s refusal to acknowledge the Israeli opponent resulted in a ten-year ban for himself and his coach, Amar Benikhlef, at the hands of the IJF.³²⁷ The Federation accused Fethi Nourine and his coach of violating the Olympic Charter and using the sports venue to promote “political and religious propaganda.”³²⁸ Regional and global football federations’ criminalisation of pro-Palestine activism perpetuates the tradition of putting Palestine in the realm of illegality, showing the gap in the understanding of the (a)political function of sports between fans and athletes, and the sports establishment.

In contrast, Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine sparked waves of solidarity with Ukrainians and sanctions against the Putin regime. Multinational corporations and sports federations, including Puma and UEFA, ended their commercial agreements with Russian companies and teams. FIFA also banned the Russia National Football team from the 2022 World Cup a few months prior to

³²⁴ MEE Staff, “UEFA Investigating Celtic After Its Fans Flew Palestine Flag,” *Middle East Eye*, August 19, 2016. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/uefa-investigating-celtic-after-its-fans-flew-palestine-flag-29055109>

³²⁵ Areeb Ullah, “Celtic Fans Raise Thousands for Palestine in Protest at UEFA Charges,” *Middle East Eye*, August 30, 2016. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/celtic-fans-raise-30000-less-24-hours-match-any-fines-palestine-flag-protest-1568152364>

³²⁶ Sky Sports, “Kanoute Fined For Goal Message,” *Sky Sports*, January 10, 2009. <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/4775280/kanoute-fined-for-goal-message>; Ramzy Baroud, “FIFA’s Hypocrisy in Palestine and the Ukraine,” *Mondoweiss*, March 10, 2022. <https://mondoweiss.net/2022/03/fifas-hypocrisy-in-palestine-and-the-ukraine/>

³²⁷ Sean Ingle, “Algerian Judoka Sent Home From Olympics After Refusing to Face Israeli.”

³²⁸ International Judo Federation, “Fethi Nourine and Amar Benikhlef: Disciplinary Decision,” *International Judo Federation*, September 10, 2021. <https://www.ijf.org/news/show/fethi-nourine-and-amar-benikhlef-disciplinary-decision>

the start of the competition in Qatar.³²⁹ Messages of solidarity from world sporting associations inundated sponsors' banners in stadiums, television screens, and social media, condemning the Putin regime and offering support to Ukraine.³³⁰ Previously, Russia was under scrutiny for hosting the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and 2018 World Cup, since the Putin regime had annexed Crimea—a violation of international law—and prosecuted LGBTQ activists.³³¹ Solidarity messages subsequently flooded social media discourses in support of the Russian LGBTQ community and imprisoned human rights advocates. Drawing attention to this double standard in the reception of Ukraine and Palestine, and the sanctions—or lack thereof—against Russia and Israel, is not an apology for Russia's militarism and imperialist policies, since they are integral to the global colonial and capitalist hegemony. This differential treatment demonstrates not only the West's silence on the ongoing Zionist colonisation of Palestine, but also its apathy towards racialised people whose identities and existence fall outside of the boundaries of whiteness and marketable identitarian ploys.

In addition to defending capitalist interests, international governing bodies of sports were created to serve colonial powers and derived their regulations from international law, there are risks in appealing to the rules codified by the same colonial forces. Legal scholar Noura Erakat contends that law is politics because its definition and application are created according to the historical context of its emergence and deployment.³³² International law can therefore be biased towards colonial powers and hinder Palestinian demands for liberation, because its configurations have maintained a “failed peace process.”³³³ To illustrate Erakat's argument with an example from sports, the Olympic Charter contains the rules and regulations codifying the principles of the Olympics, and create provisions by which

³²⁹ FIFA, “FIFA/UEFA Suspend Russian Clubs and National Teams From All Competitions,” *FIFA*, February 28, 2022. <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/qatar2022/media-releases/fifa-uefa-suspend-russian-clubs-and-national-teams-from-all-competitions>

³³⁰ Tamara Nassar, “Boycotting Russia is Compulsory, While Boycotting Israel is Punished,” *Electronic Intifada*, March 2, 2022. <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/tamara-nassar/boycotting-russia-compulsory-while-boycotting-israel-punished>

³³¹ Jon Dart, “‘Brand Israel’: Hasbara and Israeli Sport,” 1405.

³³² Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 4.

³³³ Omar Barghouti, “BDS: Upholding International Law,” 130; Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 11.

global governing bodies of sports abide.³³⁴ Yet, some of the rules outlined in the Charter were written in 1898 by an able-bodied, wealthy, white, heterosexual French man, Pierre de Coubertin, who believed in the power of sports to promote peace and understanding across cultures, but opposed women's participation in sports. In our contemporary context, the IOC and other international sporting federations, using the same regulatory text, have systematically rejected Palestinians' request to sanction and exclude Israel from international sporting associations, and even disciplined athletes standing in solidarity with Palestine. Sports are therefore imbued with contradictions, particularly the inconsistency in the application of regulations and the context in which solidarity is permitted.

Palestine at the 2022 World Cup and the paradoxes of solidarity

Since the announcement that Qatar would be the host of the 2022 World Cup in December 2010, the Arab and Muslim world was starting to undergo sociopolitical changes.³³⁵ Tunisia saw its first popular uprisings in December 2010, leading to the ousting of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. Protests soon spread to Egypt, Syria and Yemen, where demonstrators demanded democratic reforms and leadership change. In the Egyptian case, football fans were instrumental in the coordination of protests on social media and led the street battles against the armed forces to shield protesters from police violence, as I mentioned in Chapter Three. Because football is the most popular sport in the Arab and Muslim world in general, and in Egypt in particular, the political elite fears the organising power that fans can bring to anti-government rebellions, and consequently mobilises state apparatuses to brutalise them.³³⁶ In addition to enacting laws to ban fans from attending matches in the Egyptian Football League, the Egyptian government, first under Mohamed Morsi and eventually under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, also prohibited all assemblies in public space and cracked down on football fan groups on the Internet.³³⁷ In the years that followed the Arab Spring, the status quo remained as protests

³³⁴ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne: Maison Olympique, 2021).

³³⁵ Abdullah Al-Arian, *Football in the Middle East*, 31-32.

³³⁶ Ronnie Close, *Cairo's Ultras*, 56.

³³⁷ Carl Rommel, *Egypt's Football Revolution*, 154-155.

were soon extinguished by militarised regimes. Israel continued to attack Palestinians with impunity, whilst settler-colonial states, such as the United States under the Trump administration, advocated for Israel's settlement expansion programme and claim to Jerusalem, and promoted normalisation between Arab states and the Zionist entity in exchange for economic development and military cooperation.³³⁸

Recent official normalisation schemes between certain Arab states and the Zionist entity saw the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan signing the Abraham Accords.³³⁹ Brokered by the Trump administration between September 2020 and January 2021, these accords set up provisions for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the four states and Israel, including their recognition of Israel's sovereignty, as well as for economic collaboration.³⁴⁰ One notable example of economic investment as a result of the Abraham Accords was Emirati Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Nahyan's purchase of stakes in Israeli club Beitar Jerusalem.³⁴¹ Additionally, for the duration of the World Cup, the Qatari government practised a form of "soft normalisation" by allowing direct flights from Israel to arrive to Qatar for the first time. The lack of diplomatic relations between Qatar and Israel did not prevent these flights from taking place, since they are operated by Cyprus-based Tus Airways.³⁴² FIFA stated that Palestinian media and ticket holders would enjoy freedom of movement on these chartered flights which would be under Israel's security supervision.³⁴³ Commenting on the news, FIFA President Gianni Infantino declared that "Israelis and Palestinians will be able to fly together and football

³³⁸ Elham Fakhro & Tariq Baconi, "A Shared Vision: Security Convergence between the Gulf and Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2022), 50.

³³⁹ US Department of State, "The Abraham Accords Declaration," *US Department of State*. <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/>

³⁴⁰ US Department of State, "The Abraham Accords Declaration."

³⁴¹ Mustafa Abu Sneineh, "UAE Royal Buys Half of 'anti-Arab' Israeli Football Club Beitar Jerusalem," *Middle East Eye*, December 7, 2020. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-beitar-jerusalem-uae-royal-half-stake-football-club>

³⁴² Al Jazeera, "First Direct Tel Aviv to Doha Flight Brings Fans to World Cup," *Al Jazeera*, November 20, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/20/first-direct-tel-aviv-doha-flight-lands-hours-ahead-of-world-cup>

³⁴³ FIFA, "Israelis and Palestinians to Fly Together to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022," *FIFA*. <https://www.fifa.com/fifaplus/en/articles/israelis-and-palestinians-to-fly-together-to-the-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022>

together,” emphasising football’s “power to bring people together” and potential to “improve relations across the Middle East.”³⁴⁴

Indeed, football has the power to strengthen fan culture and create avenues to nurture self-expression and contestation in a shared affective sphere of joy and passion across cultures. The 2022 World Cup further became a platform championing the Palestinian cause and fostered a sense of Arab solidarity and collective celebration. Although Palestine did not qualify for the 2022 World Cup, the Palestinian presence was still felt at the event under the forms of chants, flags, and armbands. Engaging with the Arab and international media, fans and athletes openly took advantage of the spectacular, mediated aspect of sports and displayed their solidarity with the Palestinian people, despite some of their countries’ normalisation with the Zionist entity. Notably, the activist group Qatar Youth Against Normalization issued a public statement opposing the presence of Israeli media and fans at the 2022 World Cup, especially the flight arrangement which brought Israelis to Qatar.³⁴⁵ The group also organised multiple solidarity events outside of stadiums as a form of resistance to this form of normalisation, attracting fans from different nations to join the public displays of solidarity with Palestine.³⁴⁶ Additionally, standing with Palestinian athletes and the Palestinian people were Moroccan footballers, who, after each of their victories, waved the Palestinian flag on and off the pitch.³⁴⁷ From donning the *kuffiyah* to storming the grass field waving the Palestinian flag and ignoring Israeli media, football fans sent an emphatic message to the political and athletic establishment: Palestine shall not be

³⁴⁴ FIFA, “Israelis and Palestinians to fly together.”

³⁴⁵ QAYON (Qatar Youth Against Normalization), “Statement: The 2022 World Cup and the Pitfalls of Normalization,” *Qatar Youth Against Normalization*, November 11, 2022. <https://qayon.org/2022/11/11/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%83%D8%A3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-2022-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9/>

³⁴⁶ Palestine Chronicle, “‘We Are All Palestinian’: Fans Show Solidarity with Palestine Ahead of World Cup in Qatar (VIDEOS),” *Palestine Chronicle*, November 20, 2022. <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/we-are-all-palestinian-fans-show-solidarity-with-palestine-ahead-of-world-cup-in-qatar-videos/>

³⁴⁷ MEE Staff, “World Cup 2022: Palestine Wins on the Pitch Following Morocco’s Historic Victory,” *Middle East Eye*, December 10, 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/world-cup-2022-palestine-wins-pitch-following-moroccos-historic-victory>

censored.³⁴⁸ Notwithstanding the Arab elite's collaboration with the Zionist entity in economic development and security policies, there is a discrepancy between interstate politics and fans' and athletes' pro-Palestine activism which continues to challenge colonial and neoliberal capitalist narratives. At the same time, how do activists reconcile the classist violence targeting migrant workers in the process of preparing for the 2022 World Cup, the silencing of LGBTQ expression at the hands of FIFA and Qatar, and the special sporting platform where Palestine is seen, acknowledged, and celebrated? How could one support LGBTQ rights and not Palestinian rights—are they mutually exclusive? Since the tools with and through which we build solidarity can reinforce hegemonic financial and political interests, further putting solidarity projects at risk,³⁴⁹ how can solidarity be as wide-reaching as possible under the entanglements of these conflicting issues in neoliberal times? I do not have the answers to these complex questions, for now, but will attempt to draft a politics of hope for a decolonised future in sports in the next and final part of this chapter.

Hope for a decolonised future?

Living in a world governed by the logic of individualism and the paradoxes of colonial, neoliberal capitalism, building solidarity remains a challenging journey when facing Israel's sportswashing and international sporting institutions' apathy and inconsistency in their application of regulations. Solidarity as a project and solidarity activists are "at risk" because of not only the threat of erasure, but also because of the multilayered consequences of aligning their political convictions with the Palestinian liberation struggle. Palestinians and solidarity activists are well aware that they cannot use "the master's tools to dismantle the master's house,"³⁵⁰ but Palestine advocacy in sports has been promising, as the spectacular facet of sports allows for a greater visibility of the cause. And in spite of the ravages of Israel's settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, Palestinian athletes have

³⁴⁸ Nadda Osman, "Qatar World Cup 2022: Why Are There So Many Palestinian Flags?" *Middle East Eye*, November 24, 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/qatar-world-cup-palestine-flags-so-many-why>

³⁴⁹ Natalie Kouri-Towe, "Solidarity at Risk," 39.

³⁵⁰ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 106.

demonstrated incredible resilience and steadfastness; the rise of amputee football clubs and cycling teams in Gaza is an unfortunate reminder of the Zionist regime of debility, yet also shows how Palestinian para-athletes will continue to practise sports despite the colonial occupation of their homeland.³⁵¹ Furthermore, the 2022 World Cup, despite its contradictions, became a platform for pro-Palestine advocacy to flourish, with support coming from fans and athletes alike.

Ultimately, in order to amplify the Palestinian cause, athletes and activists' goals are not to "single out Israel," but to present Israel's settler-colonial project as part of a global pattern of violence practised and financed by Western superpowers. Whilst international governing bodies of sports were originally founded to benefit imperial powers and modern sports are still used as a tool of colonisation and capitalist expansion, athletes and fans have advocated for social progress and solidarity on and off the field. Solidarity is collective, transformative, and restorative; it concerns building alliances, individual transformation, and restores justice to communities who continue to be oppressed. Solidarity forges relationships and comradeship, instead of merely committing oneself to feel-good individual actions. Finally, solidarity is prone to conflict and disagreements, as perspectives on social and political change are diverse and thus "the conditions of transnational solidarity are always embroiled in tension and negotiation."³⁵² For this reason, activists must grasp the divide-and-rule tactics deployed by colonial powers and neoliberal capitalism to sow chaos and mistrust within solidarity circles, instead of abandoning solidarity projects. They must also understand their own positionality and the dynamics which they introduce to solidarity circles, in the construction of sustainable, accountable solidarity for a decolonised future.

³⁵¹ Middle East Eye, "Back on the Road: Gaza's Amputee Cycling Hero Rides Again," *Middle East Eye*, YouTube video, 5:38, July 9, 2021. <https://youtu.be/jRmEtY1eIPg>; Maram Humaid, "Palestinians Launch First National Amputee Football Team in Gaza," *Al Jazeera*, December 3, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/3/palestinians-launch-first-national-amputee-football-team-in-gaza>

³⁵² Natalie Kouri-Towe, "Solidarity at Risk," 22.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown how sports constitute a platform of advocacy for Palestinian athletes and Palestinians to advance the Palestinian liberation struggle, with a focus on the BDS movement's call for sports boycott of the Zionist entity. I also attempted to identify the gap in the sports studies literature as it pertains to the issues of Palestine and pro-Palestine sporting activism. Because of the lack of scholarly materials on sports in Palestine—a result of the Zionist regime's destruction of Palestinian records and policies preventing research on Palestine to be conducted—I traced the lineage of sports boycotts by drawing inspirations from the twentieth-century examples of the anti-Apartheid boycott of South Africa and the antiracist and anticolonial protest of Black athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the podium of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. Looking at the contemporary landscape of activism in sports, I highlighted the importance of fans and athletes in the battles against militarised regimes and racism in the Egyptian and American contexts, notably the street leadership role of the Egyptian Ultras in the events of the January 2011 revolution and Colin Kaepernick's act of "taking the knee" to protest the militarist, racist, and anti-Black establishment in the United States.

Building on my discussion of the aforementioned instances of activism and solidarity in sports, I turned to the investigation of the lived experiences of Palestinian athletes in my analysis of Amber Fares's documentary *Speed Sisters*. The documentary allowed me to propose that sports, speed, and movement generate layered and grassroots affective spaces of resistance and community-building amidst the colonial fragmentation of the Palestinian social fabric, geography, and politics. This reconstruction of the Palestinian collectivity at the grassroots level facilitates Palestinians' capacity for collective mobilisation to call for a sports boycott of Israel and its normalisers and coordinate strategies with international solidarity groups, as shown in my study of the "#BoycottPuma" campaign.

Finally, I outlined the obstacles facing BDS activists, athletes, and fans standing in solidarity with Palestine, namely the systematic criminalisation of pro-Palestine activism in sports through the association of Palestine with “terrorism” and anti-Semitism. Additionally, international governing bodies of sports instrumentalise international law to censor and discipline athletes refusing to compete against Israeli opponents, framing them as “spreaders of political and religious propaganda.” International regulations are thus political, yet they only allow marketable and permissible causes to be expressed.

As Palestinians’ mobility in their homeland is severely constrained by the Zionist occupation, they have had to resort to online activism to spread information about the Zionist settler-colonial regime and communicate with the outside world, whilst at the same time connecting with exiled Palestinians as a means of survival. Nevertheless, because technological infrastructures are built, financed, and owned by corporations based in settler-colonies around the world, Palestinians and their supporters face incessant censorship and cyber-colonialism for speaking their voices.

In the end, despite the Zionist regime’s erasure of Palestinians and international complicity in maintaining colonial, neoliberal capitalism, there is hope that pressure on international organisations and corporations, under the form of campaigns, boycott, or divestment, would amplify Palestinian voices and put the Palestinian liberation struggle to the foreground, not only in sports, but also in other aspects of social and political life. As long as activists identify common ground on which mutual recognition and collective liberation from colonialism, neoliberal capitalism, and racism can take root, solidarity and a decolonised future appear to be a possibility.

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