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A New Liberation Theology Ending Racial Violence and Stigmatization: Theological Lessons
from Black Lives Matter and Free Palestine

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Denison University Summer Scholar Project

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A New Liberation Theology Ending Racial Violence and Stigmatization: Theological Lessons from Black Lives Matter and Free Palestine

1. Introduction: Why Free Palestine? Why Black Lives Matter?

Within the United States and Palestine, major minority groups face a race war inflicted upon them. Within the United States, black and brown people face racial backlash as an effect of years of racist violence. Within Palestine, Arab Palestinians suffer violence and unfair treatment because of the Israeli occupation of Palestine which includes racial prejudice against their cultural heritage. The demoralization and dehumanization of people of color can be used to analyze the experiences of these groups' reality in terms of police brutality, racial violence, and exclusion in the United States and in Israel. The behavior and violence subjected to these two communities of people are most apparent through their portrayal within the media, representation within the prisons and refugee population, as well as their accessibility to law. In addition, these two communities' oppressions are rooted in their movement being constrained via surveillance, literal imprisonment, and the inability to leave neighborhoods due to political and socio-economic restrictions.

Each state has stretched the law to fit the state needs and state violence in which they are using their means to control and instill fear among the population. In *Time in the Shadows*, Laleh Khalili analyzes how states create laws on this basis and rely on policing to instill violence which will create compliance by the population. Khalili writes, "indeed law can - and so often does - act as an alibi for violence and that the state of emergency that does sanction torture is constituted in law."¹ In both the United States and Palestine, some laws are allowing the

¹ Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 98.

continuation of oppression through heavy policing, heavy surveillance, and unnecessary violence, all mandated under the guise of officers in charge who are following these laws.

How can we, as a society, dismantle racial violence and stigmatization? To begin, by examining the media portrayal of both the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in comparison with the Free Palestine movement, an opportunity presents itself to better understand the people within the communities. The way that the media chooses to portray certain individuals and their communities can alter the public's perception of certain conflicts and those individuals present within those communities. Media portrayal often distorts the whole picture of a conflict, and the public only gets part of the story; individuals don't truly understand why violence within or against these communities exists. Palestinians and black and brown Americans; however, are finding ways to use social media outlets and images to resist the oppressive images and behaviors. BLM and Free Palestine activists have found new and creative ways to use social media to their advantage; these movements have found ways to restructure the narrative that surrounds their communities. Both the Black Lives Matter movement and the Palestinian Solidarity movement have become internationally recognized thanks to the resistance tactics that have been used by these communities. Social media activism by both BIPOC and Palestinian communities is expanding the way these communities resist the violence and injustice they face. These communities can use social media to bring their communities together and other oppressed groups of the world.

What role can religion play in creating and sustaining social movements? Religion is a powerful tool used to bring communities of people together or to tear them apart. Liberation theology offers an explanation in terms of religious implications because of the military occupation of Palestine and the Black Lives Matter movement within the United States.

Movements in the United States and Palestine use religion to support the causes of freeing the marginalized from oppression. On the other hand, the Israeli and US governments believe themselves to be ordained by God to enact these forms of oppression. Both governments could be compared to the Roman Empire in symbolic terms for the ways in which their institutions mimic the oppressive tendencies of an empire. However, liberation theology offers a unique opportunity to bring resistance movements together across the globe. Palestinians and BIPOC use their faith beliefs to claim their own liberation theologies which have fueled their resistance movements for years. These two communities have found a way to find power within themselves to resist their oppressions and in turn have found a way to connect with one another across the globe.

By highlighting similar struggles and political goals connecting the Black Lives Matter movement to the Free Palestine movement, a better understanding of struggles for justice can be reached. Our project will compare the treatment of black and brown bodies in the US to the treatment of Palestinians by Israel forces due to the similar struggles of oppression these groups both face by an Empire-like government. By examining religion's role in promoting and sustaining the historical and social structures in which racial violence and demoralizing behavior were accepted, we simultaneously discover religion's role in resisting this oppression. Exploring the media's portrayal and movements prompted by these communities, we provide an opportunity to explore possible theological ideas for restoring peace and equality to these communities.

This research paper consists of three parts followed by a concluding discussion. The first section historically analyzes the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Palestinians' religious and secular movements against the occupation. In addition, the first section historically analyzes the

events, ideology, and communities that sparked the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement within the United States, the significance of BLM, and the ongoing racism that black people are facing. The second section will explore the social perception of these two groups, Palestinians and BIPOC communities, in the mainstream media and how that image has perpetuated the racial and religious stigmatization they have faced throughout history. In addition, section two will explore the use of the media and the arts by these groups as a means of resistance to racial stigmatization and behavior. Section three will explore the dialogue of liberation theologies grown out of contexts of U.S. blacks and Palestinians. Through the examination of existing liberation theologies in both contexts, we hope to find a common dialogue between the two movements and consider solidarity among oppressed groups across the globe. Finally, the current global networks of antiracist movements will show shared goals and missions among different communities for liberation and the possibility of building up solidarity across communities.

Comparing global movements, such as Free Palestine and BLM, presents the opportunity to analyze how resistance movements form across different communities and what factors influence those movements. Our analysis of these two movements and the Christian faith portrays an ideology that drives these oppressed communities and provides a possible explanation for other resistance movements—how a community’s faith beliefs influence their willingness to resist. In addition, examining the use of social media and technology has proven to be one of the most influential and critical factors to both resistance movements. Understanding how these resistance movements form and what drives them offers the opportunity to understand other resistance movements across the globe. Finding a

common root to these movements opens the door for global resistance movements to support one another and fight back against their oppressors.

2. Historical Analysis: Israeli occupation of Palestine & Anti-black Racism in the U.S.

This section will offer a brief history on the Israel-Palestine conflict, in regards of the influx of Jewish migration and the foundation that led to Israel becoming an apartheid state. This section will also offer a brief history on the historical events within the United States involving black communities. With a focus on mass incarceration and how this has deeply affected the communities mentioned. Between both issues regarding the black community and Palestinians we dive deeper into the different movements that were formed to fight against the oppressions they have been facing for decades. These movements are both secular and religious, all of which have the common goal of liberation.

a. Historical Background of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Before 1917 the Jewish population within Palestine was less than 7%, around this time is when Zionists begin writing and talking of settling on Palestinian land.² From 1917 to 1948, the British Mandate for Palestine laid out the groundwork for a Jewish state in Palestine to become a reality.³ This is due in part to the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe which forced many Jews to flee Europe and see Palestine as an opportunity to establish a Jewish state. Within this time the Balfour declaration was established on November 2, 1917, which was a statement of British support for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for Jewish people. Between 1929 and 1933 mass protests occurred in which Palestinians were against the increased Jewish

² Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 1.

³ "Timeline of Palestines History," Interactive timeline/history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 1799 - Palestine Remix (Al Jazeera), accessed July 5, 2021, https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/timeline_main.html.

immigration to Palestine, which led to a six-month long general strike taking place in Palestine in 1936.⁴ The influx of Jewish migration beginning in 1933 was in part because of Hitler's rise to power and the events of the Holocaust, which were deeply rooted in anti-Semitism, leading to the genocide of six million European Jews. In total between 1939 and 1948 it is estimated 480,000 immigrants entered Palestine with 90% of them being from Europe.⁵

On May 14, 1948, the UN backed out of Palestine leaving them to solve the issue on their own, on this same day, Jewish settlers in Palestine declared Israel an independent country and began to expand their borders further than what was decided in the resolution the UN came to.⁶ This same day is when the head of the Jewish agency proclaimed the establishment of the state of Israel.⁷ From 1948 to 1949 there was an Arab-Israeli war in which Israelis intended to seize the whole of Palestine and while they were not successful in doing so they expanded their borders to 80%. This war was not just between those residing in Israel and Palestine but included Arabs from surrounding countries which led to an influx of Jewish refugees coming to Israel in which they were granted citizenship because of their religion. This was enacted as the Law of Return in 1950 which allows every Jewish person to immigrate to Israel. While Arab Palestinians were fleeing Israeli held territories because of the violence occurring in their neighborhoods.⁸ The aftermath of this war led to the total refugee population being 940,000 from

⁴“Timeline of Palestines History,” Interactive timeline/history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 1799 - Palestine Remix (Al Jazeera), accessed July 5, 2021, https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/timeline_main.html.

⁵ “Immigration to Israel: Aliyah Bet,” Aliyah Bet (1939-1948) (Jewish Virtual Library), accessed July 5, 2021, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/aliyah-bet-1939-1948>.

⁶ Charles K. Rowley, and Jennis Taylor, “The Israel and Palestine Land Settlement Problem, 1948-2005: An Analytical History.” *Public Choice* 128, no. 1/2 (2006): 79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30026634>.

⁷ “The Arab-Israeli War of 1948,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed July 18, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>.

⁸ Rowley and Taylor. *Israel and Palestine Land Settlement Problem*. Page 83

369 Palestinian towns and villages. Although this number is not exact it is solely meant to show the truth that a significant number of Palestinians were left homeless because of the war.⁹

An important event leading to Israeli occupation is the Six Day War that occurred from June 5th until June 10th, 1967, which reshaped the modern Middle East and marked Israel as a superpower with a strong military. Within this time period Israel took numerous locations, including the Gaza Strip, West Bank, etc., and led to each involved in the war to agree to a ceasefire.¹⁰ This war established how powerful the Israel military truly is and their capabilities in defending the territory they occupy. As a result of this war the occupation became much more severe in the punishments and overall treatment of Palestinians.

Since the Six Day War, mass incarceration of Palestinians has grown. Israeli occupied territories had the highest per capita incarceration rate in the world.¹¹ In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s Israel used mass incarceration as a tactic that would crush political and militant resistance against colonized Palestinian spaces. Khalili writes of the extremely harsh punishments given to Palestinians arrested by Israeli military officers and how they ranged from extreme physical abuse to mental abuse to humiliate and break down those imprisoned.¹² Since the start of the occupation more than 800,000 Palestinians have been detained under Israeli military orders in the occupied Palestinian territory. This consists of 20% of the total Palestinian population and 40% of the male Palestinian population.¹³ At the end of September 2020 4,184 Palestinian

⁹ Selina Kaur Rai, “What Were the Causes and Consequences of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War?,” *E-International Relations*, March 28, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/01/15/what-were-the-causes-and-consequences-of-the-1948-arab-israeli-war-2/>.

¹⁰ “Timeline: The Six Day War,” NPR, June 4, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10694216>

¹¹ Avram Bornstein, “Palestinian prison ontologies,” *Dialect Anthropol* 34, 459–472 (2010): 460 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-010-9197-3>

¹² Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, 105-108.

¹³ “Political Prisoners in Israel/Palestine,” *If Americans Knew*, accessed July 10, 2021, <https://ifamericansknew.org/stat/prisoners.html#>.

security detainees and prisoners were being held in IPS (Israel Prison Service) facilities and in addition to this 545 Palestinians were in IPS for being in Israel illegally.¹⁴

Throughout the past decades Palestinians within Israel have been facing extreme punishments via mass incarceration and a general poor quality of life due to the many restrictions placed upon them. This can be compared to the black community's treatment by the US for the many decades and is ongoing, in which the black community is severely affected by how embedded racism is in the foundation of America. The black community too is being deeply affected by mass incarceration and for decades has been affected by laws in place due to racism within the US.

b. The Upbringing of the Black Lives Matter Movement

Now we shift gears toward the historical events that led to the creation of the BLM movement in the United States. Understanding the root of racial violence and stigmatization in the United States allows the public the opportunity to understand why movements like the Civil Rights movement, black feminists' movements, and other political rights movements, and today, the Black Lives Matter movement are so important and relevant.

The practice of slavery as an oppressive and exploitative labor system was prevalent in both Western Africa and the Americas long before the influence of Europeans. Still, the factors that defined the social, political, and economic purposes and scale of slavery significantly changed, expanded, and intensified with the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and American plantation agriculture introduced by European expansion. As Europeans began emphasizing religious, racial, and ethnic differences between themselves and American Indians and Africans,

¹⁴ "Statistics on Palestinians in the Custody of the Israeli Security Forces," B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, accessed July 10, 2021, https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners.

Europeans began to enable the enslavement of "black" Africans and their African American descendants. Slowly slavery became more race based as development in the United States began to expand, from here to present day black and brown bodies would not be safe from racial stigmatization and violence.

The racial stigmatization and violence seen in modern-day America originate from both early American and European ideas. As a result, much of the United States treatment of black and brown bodies throughout history become justified through historical notions of slavery prominent in early Europe and the surrounding areas. In the 17th century “American slaveholders could point to a classical tradition of reconciling slavery with reason and universal law; ancient Rome provided important legal formulas and justifications for modern slavery.”¹⁵ America studied the ancient Roman philosophical belief that some people were born to be slaves and used it to justify their own form of slavery. In fact, the belief that some individuals were naturally born to be slaves was a common and widely accepted belief at that time. This belief expanded into Western culture and went on to promote the idea and deeply held belief that “in Western culture the color black evokes a highly negative symbolism, conjuring up images of death and sin.”¹⁶ Oftentimes characteristics like dishonor, humiliation, and bestialization were universally associated with chattel slavery and in the New World merged with blackness. Unique to slavery in America was the emphasis and focus on race. Surprisingly, “only in North America did the extremely arbitrary concept of ‘Negro’—denoting anyone with allegedly visible African ancestry—assume such a marked stigma.”¹⁷ Nowhere else in the world had such a focus on the

¹⁵ Philip D. Morgan, “Origins of American Slavery,” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 4 (2005): 51.

¹⁶ Morgan, “Origins of American Slavery,” 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

race of slaves or indentured servants and workers, which is what makes slavery in America so unique.

However, some scholars such as Terance Keel explore the idea of connecting biological science with early Christianity as an explanation for why slavery of black and brown individuals became so popular in the United States. By showing the connections between Christian thought and scientific racial thinking, Keel calls into question “the notion that science and religion are mutually exclusive intellectual domains.”¹⁸ In addition, Keel's studies centering around the 18th and 19th century demonstrate that “Christian ideas about creation, ancestry, and universalism helped form the basis of modern scientific accounts of human diversity—despite the ostensible shift in modern biology towards scientific naturalism, objectivity, and value neutrality.”¹⁹ Scholars have been exploring this anomaly for some time and have yet to understand fully why race was such a descriptive factor of slavery in early America.

On February 1, 1960, one of the first antiracist movements enacted over the fight for racial equality began with a modern group of black students protesting peacefully at a lunch counter known as the Greensboro Sit-In. The sit-in was spurred by the brutal murder of a black boy, Emmett Till, who had allegedly whistled at a white woman in a Mississippi store.²⁰ This small, peaceful act went on to become the largest mass movement for racial justice and civil rights in the 20th century. Unfortunately, the fight for racial equality doesn't end there. Black people in America are still fighting for their basic human rights which are supposed to be granted to them by the Constitution of the United States; however, it appears that many Civil Rights laws

¹⁸ Terrance Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Greensboro Sit-In,” History, accessed June 29, 2020. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/the-greensboro-sit-in>

passed as a way for white people to remain in control while allowing marginalized groups to feel as though things were changing. The criminal justice system has served that purpose. According to studies, “a Black person is five times more likely to be stopped without just cause than white person,”²¹ and “65% of Black adults have felt targeted because of their race. Similarly, approximately 35% of Latino and Asian adults have felt targeted because of race.”²² Blacks and Latinx are disproportionately impacted and targeted by the police because of racial stigmatization. The laws and institutions were created as a way for the racial hierarchy to remain in place and for those at the top to keep their power. Legislation was not passed to enact change, rather it was passed to subdue the black other racial minority populations. The idea of white supremacy and power over black people remain engraved into this narrative which is still perpetuated today.

There are four institutions that exist throughout American history that have changed and influenced the way we approach and understand race and justice: slavery, the after-effect of slavery, Jim Crow Law, and mass incarceration. Slavery as we know had shaped the lives of people of color for years. Aspects and common practices during the reign of slavery influenced many behaviors and practices we have today in modern America. Take the violent nature of lynching for example that in many ways shaped the death penalty in prisons today. Re-enslavement and moral degradation of people of color became a common cultural practice and even accepted by certain populations in certain areas of the United States. Racial terrors and constant threats created by the violently enforced racial hierarchy were “profoundly traumatizing

²¹ “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet,” NAACP, accessed July 21, 2021
<https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>.

²² Ibid.

for African Americans.”²³ The third institution is what Michelle Alexander coins the New Jim Crow or “the legalized racial segregation and suppression of basic rights that defined the American apartheid era.”²⁴ In the United States we have been quick to recognize the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement but slow to recognize the damage done to people of color during that time. We must yet to commit to the reconciliation owed to these communities as a result of racial segregation, racial subordination, and marginalization. The fourth, and final, institution is mass incarceration. Mass incarceration in the United States overrepresents people of color, disproportionately sentences racial minorities, continuously targets, and prosecutes drug crimes in poor communities, and criminalizes immigrants and undocumented immigrants, all of which can only be fully understood through the lens of the United States’ racial history and structural poverty.

Mass incarceration “Operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race”.²⁵ This is the narrative that our society lives by, the narrative that has been perpetrated by white power. We as a society have lived by this narrative for so long that we actually believe this system is just. Mass incarceration emerged in the United States as a “comprehensive and well-designed system of realized social control”²⁶ that functions in a manner very similar to Jim Crow. A system that guaranteed power and control over people, specifically black people. In fact, “the Bureau of Justice Statistics report that black men were eight times more likely to be killed by the police than whites . . . men of color were ‘only’ four

²³ Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2014), 299.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

²⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2011), 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

times more likely to be killed by law enforcement.”²⁷ Racial caste is defined by Alexander as “to denote a stigmatized racial group locked into an inferior position by law and custom.”²⁸ Alexander continues in saying, “We have not ended racial caste in America; we merely redesigned it.”²⁹ This redesign of racial caste is what has allowed groups such as African American men and women, American Indian/Alaska Native men and women, and Latino men to “face higher lifetime risk of being killed by police than do their white peers.”³⁰ By this definition mass incarceration is America’s modern racial caste system. Risk of police violence; however, is highest for black men, “who face about a 1 in 1,000 chance of being killed by police over the life course.”³¹ This redesigned system of oppression has harmed numerous black communities across the country including Trayvon Martin, 17, assassinated while walking in his father’s apartment complex, he was seen wearing a hoodie. Michael Brown, 18, executed while walking down the street, he was deemed “no angel”. Tamir Rice, 12, shot in a playground while playing with a toy gun, he was considered threatening. Freddie Gray, 25, handcuffed and suffering from a snapped spinal cord after police officers failed to strap him into a police van, he lived in a symbolically polluted neighborhood: an impoverished neighborhood in Baltimore.”³² It’s important to remember that racism is highly adaptable to the time and place where it is being used. Racism can adapt new rhetoric, language, and social consensus in order to be retained in a system of

²⁷ Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, 2.

³⁰ Frank Edwards, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito, “Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race-ethnicity, and sex,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116 no. 34 (2019): 16793, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/116/34/16793.full.pdf>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Rima Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies: Moral Pollution, Black Lives, and the Struggle for Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), xv-xvi.

oppression; it's adaptable because it can tailor itself to the constraints of time. Racism has always existed, and it will continue to exist until we bring real, enduring systematic change.

3. Stories of Resistance

The oppressions each of these communities have faced in the past decades has led to a very long history of resistance. Throughout this time many protests, demonstrations, and marches were occurring to resist Israeli occupation, inhumane imprisonment of Palestinians, and lack of international media coverage. These acts of resistance have continued into the current year in which Israeli military officers react in violent ways, the only difference is that it is currently a widespread international issue where many people are watching these violent acts occur and have created solidarity movements with Palestinians suffering at the hands of Israelis. On a similar note, the U.S. has also had marches, demonstrations, and protests occurring in order to fight against the oppressions that the black community has and continues to face. The oppression the black community has faced led to the creation of one of the most influential movements ever which is the Black Lives Matter Movement. The Black Lives Matter movement has gained international media recognition creating a movement that has others across the globe in solidarity with them.

a. History of Palestinian Resistance

Palestinian resistance has been occurring since the beginning of their oppression and has taken on various forms which exemplify Palestinian's steadfastness and drive to liberate their communities. This section starts at the First Intifada up to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement which is still active. The First Intifada is the first mass popular resistance of Palestinians against the oppressions of Israeli occupation. The movement on the side of Palestinians was generally nonviolent but met with harsh Israeli military officers.

On December 8, 1987, the First Intifada began and ended over six years later in September of 1993 which resulted in the Oslo agreement.³³ Within these six years the Israeli army killed 1,550 Palestinians, injured over 70,000 people, and detained between 100,000 and 200,000 Palestinians.³⁴ In particular the symbols of the intifada were the stone throwing children which represented Palestinians with an “unbent political will standing fearlessly against rows of well-armed Israeli soldiers...”³⁵ This intifada was able to show that a large mass of people under occupation could come together and resist against Israeli forces. A new alternative social situation emerged that was national and independent, one aspect of it being women participating as equal partners with men against the struggle they were all facing.³⁶ Showing the strength that ordinary people can have against oppression and the impacts that ordinary people can make within society when all working towards a common goal. In 2000, the Second Intifada began (Al Aqsa Intifada) and lasted until around 2005 in which over 5,000 Palestinians were killed and over 10,000 children were wounded.³⁷ The Second Intifada erupted because after the Oslo Peace Process, Palestinians observed that many aspects of Israeli occupation “deepened rather than abated”.³⁸ Palestinians expected more freedom of movement and socioeconomic standing, yet instead both worsened. In addition, both Palestinian militants and the IDF (Israel Defense

³³ “December 8, 1987 – The First Palestinian Uprising (Intifada)”, International Middle East Media Center, December 9, 2019, <https://imemc.org/article/december-8-1987-the-first-palestinian-uprising-intifada/>

³⁴ “December 8, 1987 – The First Palestinian Uprising (Intifada)”, International Middle East Media Center, December 9, 2019, <https://imemc.org/article/december-8-1987-the-first-palestinian-uprising-intifada/>

³⁵ Edward Said, “Intifada and Independence”, *Social Text*, no. 22 (1989): 23-39, https://www.jstor.org/stable/466518?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “The Second Intifada - Introduction”, American Muslims for Palestine, 2012, <https://www.ampalestine.org/palestine-101/history/intifadas/second-intifada-introduction>

³⁸ Jeremy Pressman, “The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”, Vol. XXIII, no. 2 (Fall 2003), <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/220/378>

Forces) thought that violence would deter the other and the threat of force could lead to more negotiations.³⁹ The First and Second Intifada resulted in thousands of Palestinians being killed and thousands more wounded showing Palestinian's courage and resilience when resisting Israeli occupation.

In 2021, there has been more international coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has led several protests inside Palestine and throughout the world. Many protesters are advocating for Free Palestine which has gained global support. Historically, influential religious and popular resistance leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi recognized that Israel oppressed Palestinians. For instance, Gandhi says, "Surely it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews partly or wholly as their national home."⁴⁰ Gandhi could recognize that Palestine belongs to the Palestinians who reside there and that Israelis taking the land in the name of religion is wrong. Most organizations fighting for Palestinian liberation see the importance of a solution recognizing that Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Palestine deserve full equality and a peaceful way of life. The BDS Movement, launched in 2005, is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice, and equality. This movement encourages global citizens to withdraw support from Israel in every way possible: withdrawal of investments from Israel and companies based in Israel which sustain the apartheid. Thus, the campaign would pressure to ensure fulfillment of moral obligations to end Israeli military occupation.⁴¹ The BDS activists are urging nonviolent actions to pressure Israel to comply with international laws and demand the liberation of Palestinians. They are demanding

³⁹ Jeremy Pressman, "The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", Vol. XXIII, no. 2 (Fall 2003), <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/220/378>

⁴⁰ Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 13.

⁴¹ "Israeli Settler Colonialism and Apartheid," BDS Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, <https://bdsmovement.net/colonialism-and-apartheid/summary>.

the end of occupation and colonization of Arab lands, the dismantling of the separation walls, the recognition of Palestinians right to equality, and the protecting the 7.25 million Palestinian refugees who want to return home.⁴²

In both cases of Palestinians oppression and the black community's oppression, there are influential movements for liberating oppressed people. These movements include educating the public and organizing protests. These movements stem from the long histories of oppression against ordinary people, and their resistance for social justice. They have come up with not only creative ways to resist, but also ways for others to resist in solidarity with them. These people have also used religion as a tool to aid in their fight for liberation.

a. The Historical Lineage of Resistance in the United States

BIPOC resistance movements in the United States have a long history, although this section will focus on the popularized movements from the 1960s. The Black Lives Matter movement in the United States has sparked change and controversy both at home and abroad. Inspiring many to take charge in an attempt to call for change against the racial hierarchy and racial violence against black and brown communities throughout the United States; the BLM movement offers a unique opportunity for change. Founded as a response to the outgrowing display of police violence and brutality against black and brown communities, to many, "The Black Lives Matter movement, in its fierce critique of racism, has a platform to illuminate how the image of the formerly incarcerated person is constructed and racialized."⁴³

The Black Lives Matter Movement was inspired by the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, the 1980s Black Feminist movement, Pan-African movement, and political hip-hop movement,

⁴² "Israeli Settler Colonialism and Apartheid," BDS Movement, accessed July 10, 2021, <https://bdsmovement.net/colonialism-and-apartheid/summary>.

⁴³ Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies*, xix.

and the 2000s LGBTQ+ movement. Black Lives Matter revolutionized black activism in more ways than one and today, America is in yet another mass movement in the fight for racial justice and an end to the United States penal system that exists and functions with a number of interlocking spheres regulated by strict policing and violence. Layered into the American Penal system is the institution of mass incarceration and tends to be categorized as a criminal justice issue as opposed to a racial or civil rights issue. It's not about the astonishingly disproportionate number of black people who are imprisoned but it's made to be about their disrespect for the law. Since George Floyd was murdered at the hands of police officers, millions of people are protesting to change the inherently racist criminal justice system, to end dehumanizing behaviors towards Black people, and simply put, to end racism.

The Black Lives Matter movement embraces ideals that spring from grassroot initiatives directly impacted by racialized behavior. At the height of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, "protests peaked at hundreds of thousands of people, but in the recent Black Lives Matter protests participation was in the millions."⁴⁴ Support for Black Lives Matter is unprecedented and continues to expand today. By studying grassroots movements, communities of color are able to analyze racism in an attempt to deconstruct and diminish state power and subsequently oppressive governments. The socially polluted body, the black body, is one of BLM's biggest focuses. The BLM movement works to reconstruct the image of socially stigmatized identities by working in new and creative ways to redefine and make new meanings out of the black body which many in society deem as a polluted symbol. By critiquing the historical roots of racism, capitalism, sexism, and gender norms, we can think of solutions to structural injustice, including

⁴⁴ Isabella Mercado, "The Black Lives Matter Movement: An Origin Story," Underground Railroad Education Center. Underground Railroad History, accessed July 21, 2021. <https://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/the-black-lives-matter-movement-an-origin-story/>.

racial stigmatization, and to create a society free from structural injustice. We, as a society, have to dismantle the foundations of racist institutions to eliminate demonizing behaviors and practices.

All of these movements focus on liberation from the oppression each group is facing. In addition to these movements, there are movements that exist which center theology as key to liberating groups of oppressed people. In the Palestinian context, multiple groups utilize religion as a tool in resisting Israeli occupation. Black Lives Matter activists have utilized the spirit of love and healing in order to connect to other groups who share similar experiences of oppression in America. Christianity has aided these oppressed communities in resisting and persevering against their oppressors.

b. Liberation Theology in Palestinian Context

Before getting into the context of Christianity aiding in liberation in a Palestinian context it is important to see how some Christians misinterpret the bible and biblically justify the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Christian Zionism is one of the examples of Christians' misuse of the biblical message. Christian Zionism argues that the modern state of Israel fulfills the Biblical prophecy of the second coming of Jesus and thus, deserves support in every way including political and financial.⁴⁵ Christian Zionists believe that by supporting the gathering of Jews in Palestine, they are carrying out the will of God for this world.⁴⁶ They blindly support Israel without questioning Israel's occupation of Palestine or cruel treatment of Palestinians, because their main goal is to ensure the continuation of the state of Israel. Christian Zionists are very different from Jewish Zionists because in the end they wish for the demise or conversion of

⁴⁵ Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

Jewish people within Israel, thus in this light being a form of antisemitism.⁴⁷ They promote a violent and oppressive theology of the doomsday that favors solely Christians who have the same incorrect interpretation of the bible. In relation to the Christians in Palestine, Christian Zionists see them as, “archaic, traditional, unconverted, and nominal Christians, an unwelcomed residue of the past.”⁴⁸ Christian Zionists have a very different theological understanding and approach from Palestinian Christians who are undergoing the oppression from the occupation, and do not care for the oppression happening in Palestine because of their blind support for Israel. While Christian Zionism is a large and growing movement, many other Christian movements are using Christianity in their resistance and liberation from Israeli occupation.

Palestinian Christians use their faith to find hope and strength amidst the unfair treatment they undergo due to Israeli occupation. The way in which Israel is illegally occupying the Palestinian land and treating Palestinians can be compared to the ruling of the Roman Empire. Israel is empire-like in the sense that the colonized do not have full autonomy, while Israel has full control and power over the situation. Zionism practiced by both Jews and Christians in Israel and across the globe is seen from the vantage of PLT (Palestinian Liberation Theology) as faulty. Rosen reflected on that, “We inevitably witness religion at its worst when faith becomes wedded to empire.”⁴⁹ In this case when both Christianity and Judaism are endorsing and promoting Israel’s empire-like practices you are seeing these religions being misused because biblically speaking empires are against God’s will.

⁴⁷ Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 89.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁹ Atalia Omer, “The Cry of the Forgotten Stones: The Promise and Limits of a Palestinian Liberation Theology as a Method for Peacebuilding”, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 43, no.2 (2015): 386, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24586095>.

Theology can be used by the oppressed in a positive and meaningful way that helps them resist. Theology is inherently political and thus, generates political actions.⁵⁰ Jean Zaru writes that “Christ’s teachings are activist, highly political, and often controversial. They sometimes involve dangerous forms of engagement in social and political conflict.”⁵¹ When truly understanding Christianity, we may see how Jesus was engaged in social and political conflicts and resisted the Roman Empire through a multitude of different actions. Therefore, for Palestinians, specifically Christian Palestinians, the practices of resistance to the Roman Empire by Jesus connect them to resistance to Israel’s empire-like oppression. Thus, while resistance in Palestine is not always inherently religious, Christian Palestinians are using their understanding of Jesus in resisting Israel and finding the strength to continue to do so. Atalia Omer speaks of the dual imperative of a Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT) which,

“[E]ntails a Christian theological response to the political abuses of the Bible vis-à-vis the plight of the Palestinians. It also constitutes an attempt to provide a paradigm for a just process of peacebuilding, which would involve Israeli acknowledgment of the injustices done to the Palestinian inhabitants of the land, along with the establishment of a Palestinian state and therefore some venues for truth-telling and compensation.”⁵²

A PLT has to first have a response towards the misuse of the bible which has to an extent allowed the continuance of the oppression faced by Palestinians. In terms of peacebuilding, a PLT needs to ensure that Israel acknowledges its injustices and eventually compensates Palestinians who have been suffering at the hands of the Israeli government for decades. A PLT

⁵⁰ Mark Braverman, "Beyond Interfaith Reconciliation Kairos Theology and the Challenge to the Church." In *Prophetic Voices on Middle East Peace: A Jewish, Christian, and Humanist Primer on Colonialism, Zionism, and Nationalism in the Middle East*, (Claremont: Claremont Press, 2016), 71, doi:10.2307/j.ctvbcd292.7.

⁵¹ Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence a Palestinian Woman Speaks*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 76.

⁵² Omer, “The Cry of the Forgotten Stones: The Promise and Limits of a Palestinian Liberation Theology as a Method for Peacebuilding,” 381.

is arguing universal love, while Zionism has a focus on love for chosen people. It might be safe to say that Zionists do not follow God's will, because God's will is unbiased in their care and love, and God works towards freeing the oppressed in all places without biased love for one particular group.

Sabeel, Center for Palestinian Liberation Theology promotes an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Sabeel was formed in 1989 with focus on local work but also correcting misguided, distorted, and biased views of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Sabeel tackles direct, symbolic, cultural, and structural forms of violence “related to Israeli practices and their authorizing ideologies, cultural misperceptions, and misinterpretations of biblical warrants.”⁵³ This movement formed during the First Intifada to respond to the physical sufferings and “the way these sufferings were being aggravated by the religious argument in the political conflict”.⁵⁴ A Palestinian theology of liberation needs to take into account the complex interrelations among identity indices such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, and culture within a Palestinian context.⁵⁵ An example of these complex interrelations could be looked at in regards to Christian Palestinians because as Palestinians they suffer from the occupation of their land and as Christians they suffer from the wrong interpretations theologians have.⁵⁶

In this suffering, Muslim and Christian Palestinians are alike and are able to restore unity in the fight for liberation from Israeli occupation. They are bound together by a shared culture

⁵³ Omer, “The Cry of the Forgotten Stones: The Promise and Limits of a Palestinian Liberation Theology as a Method for Peacebuilding,” 370.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 379.

and history and a common set of social, behavioral, and moral norms.⁵⁷ Omer writes how Palestinian Christianity can be seen as an ally of Islam in the battle against Zionism, the need to recenter themselves as bearers of an original Christianity and their importance to Christianity, which would in turn help delink Christianity from empire. “Sabeel contextualizes Christian theology by interpreting the daily life of the Palestinians in light of the Crucifixion and their possible liberation with the promise and hope associated with the Resurrection of Jesus”.⁵⁸ This correlates with the idea of Zionism being exposed as the “exclusionary and chauvinistic ideology” it is and the need for a post-ethnic/liberal version of nationalism. The negotiation of the cultural, religious, and political meanings of Palestinian nationalism is integral to the kind of justice advocated and a need to deeply challenge the political theology present in conceptions of Israeliness.⁵⁹ Sabeel has the main objective of liberating Palestinians from Israeli occupation but within this, there are many complex moving parts that impact exactly how this peacebuilding process can occur.

In 2009 Christian Palestinians created a Kairos document asking for the international community to stand in solidarity with Palestine. They write of the Israeli occupation as a sin and, in general, base their document on faith and hope in God. They view true Christian theology as a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed. Therefore, true Christian theology would stand in solidarity with Palestinians. They demand that global Christians pressure Israel in every way possible to stop occupation and that nonviolent resistance is a right and duty of all Palestinians.⁶⁰ The document asserts that “the problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in

⁵⁷ Omer, “The Cry of the Forgotten Stones: The Promise and Limits of a Palestinian Liberation Theology as a Method for Peacebuilding,” 394

⁵⁸ Ibid., 381.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 399-400.

⁶⁰ *A Moment of Truth: A World of Faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*, Kairos Palestine, 2009.

which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church.”⁶¹ Palestinians continue to face this oppression: in this past month (June 2021), during the 11 day bombardment, 257 Palestinians, including 66 children were killed by Israel.⁶² They write that “[H]ope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us”.⁶³ Love, resistance, the church, inter-religious dialogue, the steadfastness of generations, determination to reconcile are emphasized in the Kairos document. Here, resistance is referred to as Christians’ right and duty and the church’s mission as prophetic. The church should speak the word of God, “courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events”.⁶⁴ Resistance to Israeli occupation is necessary for all Palestinians at this moment. Palestinian Christians are one key subgroup that organizes movements to fight against occupation. Free Palestine is a larger movement that includes those supporting Palestinians internationally and many different subgroups in Palestine all resisting Israeli occupation in any meaningful ways possible.

Peacebuilding is crucial to any liberation projects. When examining Palestinian liberation movements and those of black communities in the United States, we can find similarities. However, we should recognize differences between the two movements, too, because their contexts are different. A liberal approach to peace might be too universalistic and secular, ignoring how there will be different narratives of what peace will look like for each community

⁶¹ *A Moment of Truth: A World of Faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*, Kairos Palestine, 2009, 5.

⁶² “Israeli Air Raids Target Gaza for Second Time since Ceasefire,” Gaza News (Al Jazeera, June 18, 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/17/israeli-air-raids-target-gaza-strip-for-second-time-since-truce>.

⁶³ *A Moment of Truth: A World of Faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*, Kairos Palestine, 2009, 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

and that each community has different narratives.⁶⁵ Peace means different things for not only different communities but for those within the same community. Therefore, when looking at the movements encompassing Free Palestine and the Black Lives Matter, we should understand that each one will have different forms of peace, and, yet are still similar because all forms of peace may look for liberation. Both the U.S. and Israel are like empires which oppress black people and Palestinians, and yet, each country's relationship with respective groups is different. In addition, blacks and Palestinians have their unique circumstances such as different historical origins of their oppressions. Finally Omer writes that "people are the best resources for building and sustaining peace and [it] aims to strengthen community capacities to resolve disputes peacefully; to develop trust, safety, and social cohesion within and between communities; and to promote interethnic and intergroup dialogue."⁶⁶ Black people and Palestinians are able to build and sustain peace not only in their communities but also beyond their communities through dialogues of solidarity with other oppressed groups. Both Palestinians and black people can promote their own liberation, simultaneously standing in solidarity with each other.

c. Black Liberation Theology and the BLM Movement

BLM organizers have expressed their founding spirit of love with emphasis on spiritual healing, principles, and practices in their racial justice work. Theologian Trisha Hersey considers human bodies the sites of liberation that connect black Americans to the creator, ancestors, and the universe. She describes rest as a spiritual practice for community healing and resistance. Hersey connects this belief to her upbringing in the Black Pentecostal Church of God in Christ,

⁶⁵ Atalia Omer, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 438.

⁶⁶ Omer, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, 438.

where, she explained, “I was able to see the body being a vehicle for the spirit.”⁶⁷ The movement is committed to spiritual principles, such as “healing justice”, which uses a range of holistic approaches to address trauma and oppression by centering emotional and spiritual well-being, and “transformative justice” which assists with creating processes to repair harm without violence.⁶⁸ Transformative justice, central to the beliefs of many in the BLM movement, is a philosophical approach to peacemaking. Transformative justice can be related to the spiritual transformative healing of an individual who has been freed from oppression. BLM-affiliated organizations utilize spiritual tools such as “meditation, reiki, acupuncture, plant medicine, chanting, and prayer, along with other African and Indigenous spiritualities” to connect and care for those directly impacted by state violence and white supremacy.⁶⁹ BLM’s rich spiritual expressions have also inspired and transformed many American faith leaders to take action in the fight for racial justice. Black Evangelical leader Barbara Salter McNeil credits BLM activists in Ferguson as “changing the Christian church by showing racism must be tackled structurally and not just as individual sin.”⁷⁰ U.S. Buddhist leaders presented a statement on racial justice to the White House in which they shared they were “inspired by the courage and leadership” of Black Lives Matter. Jewish, Muslim and many other religious organizations, have incorporated BLM principles to make their communities more inclusive and justice oriented.

While Christianity has been used by many to exclude non-Christians, black and brown communities used it to resist the racial hierarchy and sustain themselves throughout history. The black community has always had a strong connection to the church and has used that connection

⁶⁷ Hebah H. Farrag and Ann Gleig, “Far from Being Anti-religious, Faith and Spirituality Run Deep in Black Lives Matter,” accessed June 29, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/far-from-being-anti-religious-faith-and-spirituality-run-deep-in-black-lives-matter-145610>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

as a means to resist racial hierarchy, stigmatization, and demonizing behavior. In order to resist through their faith, the black community interpreted scripture in new ways from that of white Christianity as a means to form a unique relationship with God. While symbols of Christianity have been used to reinforce systems of domination over people of color and non-Christians, the black community has retaken those symbols to structure their own resistance. To the black faith “the cross is at the center. The paradox of the cross helps blacks to deal with the contradictions of black living.”⁷¹ The black community views and interprets the bible differently from that of white Christianity giving them a different interpretation of God, how much of the community would coin the freedom of God. The knowledge of the freedom of God is what ensured and sustained the black church throughout the racial stigmatization in the United States. The black community interpreted the free God as one who tells you who you are in relation to your situation on earth and in turn, reassures you that God is working to sustain you and the community you live and interact with. Black communities across the United States interact with racial stigmatization, demonizing behavior, and violence every day. However, we as a society have to remember that “this violence includes not simply the physical brutality meant to harm bodies, but also the systems, structures, narratives, and constructs that do harm.”⁷²

Palestinians and black communities have faced similar challenges in regard to racial and religious stigmatization throughout history. The behavior used against these communities extends back hundreds of years yet continues to worsen even in modern times. Throughout history these two separate, yet similar, communities have found a number of ways to resist their violent oppressors. Whether through their religion and faith beliefs or through unique means,

⁷¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 172.

⁷² Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 183-184.

such as the media and the arts. The next section of our paper will explore and analyze how both Palestinians and BIPOC communities have used the media and the arts as a means to resist racial stigmatization and violence.

4. Popular Resistance Media Activism

What follows is the critical analysis of the use of various social media outlets by the BLM and Free Palestine movements. Both movements' use of social media and other platforms has given the activists an opportunity to fight back against the stigmatization and violence imposed upon blacks and Palestinians. Through media activism, both movements have begun to bring worldwide attention to their causes and change the narrative that surrounds them.

a. Palestinian Youth Media Activism

The media plays an incredibly influential role in allowing the oppressed to resist oppression and spread their narratives of what is happening in their daily lives. Media is becoming more accessible and reliable because people experiencing oppression can share their firsthand experiences through social media. Activists could create mass movements among those in solidarity with the oppressed. Palestinians have been able to share firsthand accounts of their lives under Israeli occupation—they are harassed by Israeli soldiers, arrested for trivial infractions, unable to move freely throughout the state, and so forth. The Palestinian youth participate in what is called sub-activism which is a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is a part of their everyday lives.⁷³

Newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts have played important roles in mobilizing Palestinians for justice throughout Palestinian history. These media outlets served as the primary

⁷³ Sanjay Asthana, “Youth, Self, Other: A Study of Ibdāa’s Digital Media Practices in the West Bank, Palestine,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 1 (2016):106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915600546>.

means for Palestinians pursuing political dialogue throughout the 20th century. During the British mandate, over 200 Arabic language newspapers and journals were established throughout Palestine. After Israeli occupation only one Arabic language paper continued its publication. The occupation in both Gaza and West Bank has led to increased censorship and closing of publications even though it did not follow Israeli law, meaning that the law would have allowed these publications to continue. By 2015 five major Arab language newspapers existed. Four were financed by Palestinian National Association (PA) or Hamas. One was located in East Jerusalem, making it subject to Israeli censorship.⁷⁴ Media of all sorts has played an important role in helping Palestinians express their political stance concerning Israeli occupation, and has allowed for Palestinians across the occupied territories to hear one another and to organize solidarity movements.

In current society, social media allows oppressed people to share their experiences more and in turn, creates a larger network of people standing on their side for liberation. Social media is allowing Palestinians to document their narratives through pictures, videos, etc. The youth, in particular, is actively involved in creating new forms of expression utilizing the media to question and resist Israeli military occupation. For instance, short digital videos capture firsthand accounts of children talking about their experiences of living under occupation and in refugee camps. Videos enable viewers to reflect on children's stories which emphasize the multitude of layers that exist which affect their daily lives. Viewers are able to see the Israeli occupation's impact on Palestinians' family lives and daily lives, gender roles, and Palestinian society.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Philip Mattar, "Encyclopedia of the Palestinians" in *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, ed. Michael Fischbach (New York: Facts on file, 2005).

⁷⁵ Sanjay Asthana, "Youth, Self, Other: A Study of Ibdaa's Digital Media Practices in the West Bank, Palestine," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 1 (2016): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915600546>.

Through the Internet, Palestinians defy their repressed everyday life because it lets them overcome the limitations of checkpoints and occupations, generating the feelings of ‘mobility’ and ‘political autonomy’.⁷⁶ The use of the Internet helps transcend the different physical and intellectual barriers between people and places.⁷⁷ The words of support and solidarity expressed across the globe would have been nearly impossible prior to the Internet becoming popularized. A recent report indicates that 25.8% of residents in the occupied Palestine territories utilize social media for political purposes.⁷⁸

Digital networking allows for links to be forged between local and other local communities along with local and global communities. The inexpensiveness of devices and cameras and the newly widespread availability of the internet have allowed young people to record and document their various events ranging from protests to the arrival of freed prisoners.⁷⁹ While protests occur in the refugee community, prisons, and other places Palestinians reside, the use of social media has allowed mass involvement through usage of hashtags which allow their experiences to go viral.⁸⁰ Different social media platforms continue to expand Palestinians’ messages globally which creates more global solidarity.

In 2000 at the start of the al-Aqsa intifada a large network of activists organized Palestine Media Watch (PMW) in order to combat false information of U.S. news coverage on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The U.S. spoke of Palestinians as terrorists and Israelis as

⁷⁶ Miriyam Aouragh, “Everyday Resistance on the Internet: the Palestinian Context,” *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 1, no. 2 (2008): 110 https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.2.109_1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁸ Eric Ping Li and Ajnesh Prasad, “From Wall 1.0 to Wall 2.0: Graffiti, Social Media, and Ideological Acts of Resistance and Recognition Among Palestinian Refugees,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 4 (2018): 502, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218759582>.

⁷⁹ Miriyam Aouragh, “Everyday Resistance on the Internet: the Palestinian Context,” *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 1, no. 2 (2008): 110, https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.2.109_1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

responding as a defense rather than Palestinian violence being a result of illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.⁸¹ Both inside and outside of Palestine there was the production of websites, mailing lists, and online discussion groups to combat anti-Palestinian myths and became an alternative to mainstream media for many.⁸² Some of the websites created such as the *Electronic Intifada* and *Palestine Monitor* became highly influential reaching up to one million visitors a month.⁸³

Some youth find the media as necessary to counter Israeli propaganda and build solidarity but some are worried about the dangers surrounding the usage of corporate-based social networks which can be used to advance Israel's surveillance.⁸⁴ While social media is necessary to build solidarity, it has a possible danger in harming and countering Palestinians and their acts of resistance.

Media can have negative effects. The language used may skew what is actually happening in the conflict, as “the Israeli authorities have meticulously pieced together the images of the ‘angry’, ‘violent’ and ‘irrational’ Arabs and the civilization force that the Israeli state is.”⁸⁵ The ability for Israel to change the narrative and create a false idea of who Palestinians are, why they are resisting, and their forms of resistance exemplifies how media, specifically social media, can sometimes participate in oppression. While this holds true, social media still holds more positive attributes because Palestinians are able to now show direct pictorial and video proof of

⁸¹ Robert L. Handley, “What Media Critics Reveal About Journalism,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2012):132, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859912440115>.

⁸² Miriyam Aouragh, “Everyday Resistance on the Internet: the Palestinian Context,” *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 1, no. 2 (2008): 117, https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.2.109_1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁵ Mariam Barghouti, “How Mainstream Media Gets Palestine Wrong,” Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, December 30, 2017), <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/12/30/how-mainstream-media-gets-palestine-wrong>.

what is actually happening. This directly proves Israel's points as false and generates a larger community who can spread the truth of the issue.

The expansion of the Internet became a part of the common tactics used without sacrificing the already existing modes of resistance, mobilization, etc.⁸⁶ Other forms of media are also utilized for Palestinians to express their vulnerability and turn it into acts of resilience and resistance through various creative mediums such as artwork, wall graffiti, murals, installations, music, and more.⁸⁷ Specifically graffiti offers sources of agency to its creators, including building identity and community.⁸⁸ The separation wall has graffiti on it which illustrates how the oppressed appropriate the oppressive structure and disavow the original intent of it.⁸⁹ When Palestinians graffiti the separation wall with political messages of the illegal Israeli occupation, they are using the oppressive structure to their advantage as an outlet and mode of resistance. Graffiti has performed and continues to perform as a mode of communication to relay political messages to other Palestinians, foreign supporters, and the occupiers. This is why the messages are written in both English and Arabic.⁹⁰

Despite the many constraints due to Israeli occupation, the Palestinian youth's use of social media activism and activism in general show their steadfastness and ability to continue to resist for the many decades of Israeli occupation. The youth with its new tool of social media have not only been able to share their experiences but also livestream the cruelties of the Israeli

⁸⁶ Miriyam Aouragh, "Everyday Resistance on the Internet: the Palestinian Context," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 1, no. 2 (2008): 120, https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.2.109_1.

⁸⁷ Sanjay Asthana, "Youth, Self, Other: A Study of Ibdaa's Digital Media Practices in the West Bank, Palestine," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 1 (2016): 104, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915600546>.

⁸⁸ Eric Ping Li and Ajnesh Prasad, "From Wall 1.0 to Wall 2.0: Graffiti, Social Media, and Ideological Acts of Resistance and Recognition Among Palestinian Refugees," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 4 (2018): 495, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218759582>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 497.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 497.

occupation at a pace faster than ever. This is not only an act of resistance in itself but it shows their unwavering commitment to exposing these cruel acts by Israeli military. It allows for the truth to remain regardless of what narrative Israel and pro-Israel broadcasts try to say. With this the youth and in general all those that use social media to perform acts of resistance have been able to build networks of support and solidarity across the globe making the movements surrounding Free Palestine stronger through the supporters which now exist all around the world.

Within the Palestinian context, news and media outlets have caused violence and stigmatization against the Palestinian community for years thanks to the Israeli control of such outlets. However, various forms of media such as newspapers, magazines, social media, and even art forms like graffiti have been incredibly useful tools in uniting Palestinians across the State of Israel. Similarly, black communities in the United States have been subject to mainstream news and media outlets stigmatizing portrayal for years. The negative images of these communities have increased violence, incarceration, and stigmatization against Arab Palestinians and black Americans. However, in recent years black and brown people have begun to use media outlets, specifically social media, like Twitter, as a means to resist and change the narrative of violence and destruction that have been broadcast to the public.

b. Black Lives Matter, and the Strategic Use of Social Media

How has BLM begun to use social media outlets as a means to create a new narrative exploring the livelihood of black and brown communities? Understanding the root causes of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States offers a better opportunity to understand why the movement means so much to black and brown individuals both at home and abroad. By studying the BLM movement through social media and news outlets, we can critically

interrogate the causes and needs for social change. BLM's strategic use of social media is largely to blame for the perpetuated image of the morally polluted, guilty black body.

The BLM movement showcases the use of “social media and street demonstrations [to] illuminate the practices of unwarranted police violence against black bodies and refute the dominant narrative that justifies disproportionate force against, arrest of, and incarceration of Black people.”⁹¹ In so doing, protestors humanize and legitimize the black body, and, therefore, create a new narrative. Much of today's “popular media disproportionately contains images of Blacks as shiftless, disorderly, and arrested.”⁹² Within these media outlets many “popular periodicals, television shows, and films play an influential role in depicting and shaping perceptions of Black people as morally polluted.”⁹³ Many commonly used periodicals, films, and media outlets continue to emphasize and perpetuate images and ideas of the moral white prisoner and the immoral ‘other’ who appeared with dark skin. In addition to portraying this image of a dark-skinned predator, black moral pollution is often exaggerated in a way that does not accurately represent crime-race statistics in the United States. Rather, news and media outlets use the image of dangerous black bodies as a way to correlate race and crime to create a problem of violence in communities.⁹⁴ The image of dangerous black bodies in the media creates numerous obstacles for blacks living their lives in society, and one of those obstacles is the job market. One of the biggest obstacles for formerly incarcerated men is finding work or some form of income following release. In fact, formerly incarcerated men become what Vesely-Flad labels permanent labor market outsiders who find only temporary or unreliable jobs that offer little economic stability.

⁹¹ Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies*, xviii.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

The Black Lives Matter movement is unique in finding ways to combat this unfair treatment and perception of black people in the United States. The #blacklivesmatter movement began with the murder of Trayvon Martin when Alicia Garza, a community organizer with the National Alliance of Domestic Workers, posted on Facebook the day of the verdict ending in “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.”⁹⁵ One of Garza’s friends, Patrisse Cullors, a prison reform activist, commented #blacklivesmatter. The Black Lives Matter movement has created what many scholars and activists refer to as the BLM effect or “a willingness for black people to use whatever platform they have—be it social media, political protests or SNL’s stage—to directly address issues of race and inequality.”⁹⁶ Over time the BLM effect has been used to empower everyday people, celebrities, athletes, and anyone who wants to challenge racist practices and institutions. The social media hashtag has become a global network with more than 40 BLM chapters worldwide. BLM “is one of 28 organizations in the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) coalition of 28 affiliated organizations, which has issued a platform for Black liberation . . .”⁹⁷

The BLM movement “relies on social media as well as street protests to confront racialized constructs of social pollution that are institutionalized in policing forces and prisons, as well as schools, housing, and health care systems.”⁹⁸ Social media, perpetually used to discredit and devalue dark bodies, is now being used by those very individuals to reclaim their image. To people of color across the United States “social media has become a site for revisioning, revaluing, and reconstructing the image of the polluted Black body.”⁹⁹ By

⁹⁵ Eric K. Arnold, “The BLM Effect: Hashtags, History, and Race,” *Race, Poverty, and the Environment* 21, no. 2 (2017): 8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44687751>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁸ Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies*, 154.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 169.

reclaiming their own image, black bodies begin to change the narrative of race and violence within their communities and create new images of blackness in the United States. In regard to the BLM movement, some protestors have even taken to the streets to portray black bodies with purity, rectitude, and honor. To many within the community of those perceived as violent and dangerous based upon their skin color “the Black Lives Matter movement privileges the people who are outside of ‘respectability politics,’ who are marginalized *within* black communities due to their gender and poverty, as well as their sexuality and gender expression.”¹⁰⁰ It represents a movement for those represented as outsiders of the mainstream social norms, a chance to change the narrative that whites created for them hundreds of years ago.

Whether street protests or different social media platforms, activists will always find a way to spread their message to the public. In fact, “a change of medium—that is, moving from the television news broadcasts of court cases and protests to ‘live streaming’ and video capabilities via smartphone technology—allows for a change in message, frame, and point of view.”¹⁰¹ The imbalance in the ways that black victims are depicted in the media has been met by innovation in visual strategies and a social media presence can function as a means for political intervention in the public sphere. One platform that takes the stage with the BLM movement is Twitter and “Twitter as a platform offers a way to connect with similarly marginalized communities in the African diaspora.”¹⁰² In addition, “the different neighborhoods that form Black Twitter use tweets to challenge the images that the press has used to represent Black people (and the criminalization of young Black men in particular).”¹⁰³ Black Twitter as

¹⁰⁰ Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies*, 155.

¹⁰¹ Kimberly McNair, “Beyond Hashtags: Black Twitter and Building Solidarity across Borders” in *#Identity: Hashtagging Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Nation*, eds. Abigail De Kosnik and Keith P. Feldman (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2019), 290.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 285.

participatory media has enabled diasporic Blacks to co-create the news and influence the way stories of black people killed by the police have been reported. The use of social media, especially the evolution of Twitter, has evolved into an examination of how social media and smartphone technology are used in international movement building. The innovation of smartphone technology has also continued to influence which members of these communities and across the globe are most active within these movements—the youth. The youth who are “frequent users of social media”¹⁰⁴ and are able to tap into frequencies to build momentum for various campaigns and actions, such as BLM in the United States. A strong social media presence can function as a means for political intervention in the public sphere. Interventions via social media have not only challenged the framing of black victims in broadcast news but have also exposed the inequalities in legal policies that disproportionately affect black people whenever they come in contact with the police or other agents of the state.

The widespread use of social media is changing the way that the public and at-risk communities are approaching conflict. Social media platforms have provided new and improved ways for communities, like communities of color, to coordinate and communicate across the country and abroad as “communication plays a central role for groups seeking to exchange information and expose wrongdoing by incumbents and mobilize and coordinate protest.”¹⁰⁵ In addition, “social media can help publicize perceived wrongs committed by the regime, through creating and help mobilize protestors.”¹⁰⁶ Many people of color view social media as a “Liberation Technology” which has provided the ability for them to facilitate connections among

¹⁰⁴ Kimberly McNair, “Beyond Hashtags: Black Twitter and Building Solidarity across Borders” in *#Identity: Hashtagging Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Nation*, eds. Abigail De Kosnik and Keith P. Feldman (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2019), 293.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Zeitsoff, “How Social Media is Changing Conflict,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 9 (2017): 1974, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26363973>.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1975.

activists, lower coordination and communication costs, get feedback on protest platforms, and raise funds.¹⁰⁷ The use of social media by the BLM movement was successful in many ways, including “providing context and voice to a marginalized population, raising the salience of events in the mainstream media, and finally (in contrast to the Occupy movement), providing a concrete set of goals.”¹⁰⁸ Changes in technology and social media, in particular, have allowed groups engaged in protests and combating violence to more easily target and recruit potential allies and activists. These activists are able to use social media networks to increase the likelihood of political participation through persuasion and mobilization. Overall, “social media further allows individuals to seek out a like-minded group or peers to bounce ideas off each other and build solidarity.”¹⁰⁹

Social media has facilitated immediate organizing across communities against police brutality and violence. Social media platforms such as “Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, and YouTube are strategic implements to shift symbolic boundaries of racialized social pollution” and it is on these platforms that “outrage at police violence, alongside new constructs, narratives, and images of black people are posted, discussed, and confronted in a virtual world.”¹¹⁰ Twitter use escalated after the non-indictment of Darren Wilson on November 25, 2014, “within a few hours of the grand jury’s decision, more than 3.5 million tweets appeared under the hashtag #FergusonDecision.”¹¹¹ The social media communities collectively known as “Black Twitter” have allowed users nationally to participate in a racial justice conversation outside of mainstream venues and thus to combat racialized constructs of polluted black bodies.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Zeitzoff, “How Social Media is Changing Conflict,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 9 (2017): 1975, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26363973>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1977.

¹¹⁰ Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies*, 167.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 168.

Twitter educated people, drew attention to racist constructs of sexualized black bodies—including transgender women—and provided a platform to advocate for institutionalized police reforms. Ultimately, “Twitter emerged as an effective tool to challenge racialized constructs of moral pollution and racialized pollution boundaries.”¹¹² Social media scholars argue that social media uniquely benefits communities associated with pollution, and even social media that is deemed disembodied activism provides a space for activists to contest images of polluted black bodies—“Social media has become a site for revisioning, revaluing, and reconstructing the image of the polluted Black body.”¹¹³

Social media activism has effectively pushed against racialized boundaries of social pollution in large part due to its seamless interaction with street and campus protests. Today, demonstrators employ a range of strategies and tactics to shift pollution boundaries—the use of social media and the engagement of street protests have placed the reconstructed symbol of the black body at center stage. Regardless of identity or circumstances, the black body should be protected from state violence. Black and brown communities across the United States are finding ways to unite and fight against racialized violence and “they are confronting police brutality and advocating for black lives through the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM), its contemplative activism and deeply spiritual resistance.”¹¹⁴

Understanding where the BLM movement started is important in understanding why the movement stands where it does today. Many scholars would agree that “it is important to discuss the state of black communities when Trayvon Martin was killed because the incidents that fueled

¹¹² Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies*, 167

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

¹¹⁴ Barbara A. Holmes, “Black Lives Matter and the Black Church: Twenty-First-Century Contemplative Activism” in *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, edited by Barbara A. Holmes (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 141.

the birth of the BLM movement include very specific social, religious, and political factors.”¹¹⁵ Historically, the black church served as a safe space for spiritual and civil activism. But, as the civil rights generation aged, the church became less relevant to a generation raised on technology and increased global connections. The children and grandchildren of the '60s activists explored spirituality in world religions or no religion at all. Only the churches rooted in community service remained relevant. Although communities of color across the United States, and the globe, wish for peace and justice, the struggle for justice is never completed in one lifetime or one rebellion. The shifting of systems, the turning of hearts, the forgiveness of oppressions, and the dissipation of anger takes time. It is not easy to confront injustice as it requires solidarity and the inevitable loss of life. It requires that each generation plays their part in freeing their communities from oppression. BLM's use of social media activism suggests a new practice of transformative justice present in every part of black lives and society at large.

5. Liberation Theologies: A Dialogue between Contexts

Liberation theology focuses on the idea that God is constantly at work, engaging in liberative acts to free the oppressed from oppression and working to dismantle the connection of white or dominant theology to the biblical tradition. God's work in the present with oppressed communities is engaging in liberating acts. God works to liberate all from all forms of oppression.

Much of Black liberation theology focuses on the idea of living the future in the present by emptying yourself into God's actions and working against oppression. The black faith tradition is how black people find comfort amidst a society full of racial stigmatization and

¹¹⁵ Barbara A. Holmes, “Black Lives Matter and the Black Church: Twenty-First-Century Contemplative Activism” in *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, edited by Barbara A. Holmes (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 143.

violence. Much of this control over blacks and their bodies stems from America's empire-like tendencies and practices. On a similar note, Palestinian liberation theology focuses on the importance of resistance in their daily lives against the oppression they are facing. This theology also allows them to find hope and the strength to continue amidst the violence that the Israeli military perpetuates. Similarly, Israel has acted like an empire. Palestinian liberation theology is known to be anti-imperial as it promotes resistance to all forms of imperialist oppression, and Israeli occupation in particular.

Christianity has been a source for the black community and people of color to protest against racial stigmatization throughout history. Black people and other communities of color have historically been violated and oppressed by white communities. Specifically, in America, to be American means to be white and have lighter skin; cultural norms were built upon the construction of whiteness and white racial superiority. Whiteness in America has been more than the cultural norm of society: it defines the national ideology. By using Christianity and scriptures as a means to pursue and maintain a racial hierarchy in the United States, the white majority has also demonized the black body. Black communities and their worth are determined by the racially privileged. White communities have portrayed black bodies as polluted bodies to maintain control and power over them, justifying their racism as God's purpose. Christianity, specifically many Christian symbols, in America are used to represent and spread racialized violence and demonizing dark bodies. In America, "there is no doubt that the cross reflects the depth and scope of human violence."¹¹⁶ Claiming these symbols and Christian faith is one of the main causes of imperialist behaviors found in the American government and the American public. The racial hierarchy in the United States maintains its power and control over black and

¹¹⁶ Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 183.

brown bodies through religious justification. The stand your ground culture that has become nationally accepted is one of the driving forces for the continued white violation of black bodies. This norm perpetuates the use of violence as a means to maintain the racial hierarchy and white domination. The norm is a modern attempt to “erase the rich religious landscape of Black Lives Matter by both conservative and liberal voices and continue a long history of denouncing Black spirituality as inauthentic and threatening.”¹¹⁷

In the conflict between Israel and Palestine, among many religions, Christianity plays an important role. Christian Palestinians have a two-sided suffering. They are oppressed for being Palestinian and must witness the misuse of the Christianity. Yet, many other Christians such as Christian Zionists have supported Israel and their claim to the land because of false biblical interpretation. Christian Zionists have supported the cruel acts and occupation of Israel, regardless of Palestinian suffering because they believe that it is God’s will. This is an example of how the Christian religion is used to enforce and allow imperialist practices to continue despite the many harms inflicted upon others.

God’s work with the oppressed can be explained by black theology as “Black theology merely tries to discern the activity of the Holy One in achieving the purpose of the liberation of humankind from the forces of oppression”.¹¹⁸ The purpose of God’s work and what Black theology attempts to preach are that God is with the oppressed, working against the actions and beliefs of the oppressors in the present to give the oppressed hope which enables them to live the future in the present with God. The black church has represented the biblical tradition and God’s work against oppression from the beginning. The black church stresses that in order to truly

¹¹⁷ Hebah H. Farrag and Ann Gleig, “Far from being anti-religious, faith and spirituality run deep in Black Lives Matter.”

¹¹⁸ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 3.

understand the biblical tradition you have to understand God's work for the oppressed and actively work with God for the oppressed community. The black church community understands what it's like to suffer, to be treated as nonpersons by the white community. In order for others to understand the biblical tradition and God's work in the present, they have to understand that position of suffering as well. As of right now, the nature of the gospel is being replayed during human rights protests in backlash over the murders of black individuals at the hands of police officers, just as the gospel was at play during the civil rights movement. The Christian gospel represents God's work among the poor and oppressed, at any point in time or history. For "Christian theology is language about the *liberating* character of God's presence in Jesus Christ, as he calls his people into being for freedom in the world".¹¹⁹

The freedom of God is what gives God the ability to be wherever the oppressed people are. There is nothing, or anyone, that can capture God for their own purposes, as proven by the resurrection of Jesus. God holds so much liberating power that even death could not prevail over God's liberating actions. "The resurrection-event means that God's liberating work is not only for the house of Israel but for all who are enslaved by principalities and power."¹²⁰ The resurrection yet again shows that God's liberating power cannot be defeated and that God will always claim victory over the suffering on the cross. God's work within and for the oppressed community is meant to be seen in the form of "liberation as transformative."¹²¹ The resurrection of Jesus allowed God to prove their presence and acknowledge the oppressed community. Now, it is the oppressed community that stands up against injustice and protests against unjust violence inflicted on the members of the community. God's liberating work is actively transforming the

¹¹⁹ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 7-8.

¹²⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 3.

¹²¹ David Woodyard, Introduction to Theology lecture notes, February 28, 2019.

oppressive situation in the present, urging the oppressed community to live the future in the present. If oppressed communities want to transform the present, they have to dismantle the structures that have existed, and continue to exist, to perpetuate the message of those in systems and institutions of power as “no one can be truly liberated until *all* are liberated”.¹²²

The oppression that black communities face in the United States is just one example of oppression. Liberation theology presents the opportunity for a unique dialogue among oppressed groups across the globe. Black communities and Palestinians share similar experiences of oppression based on racial stigmatization and violence. While the two groups have different historical roots of oppression, they have used similar techniques, theological arguments, and methods to resist their oppressors. Both communities have used their faith and the media to resist oppression and violence placed upon them. Many would view these communities as powerless in their current situations. However, liberation theology provides a unique lens to view the power embedded in the resistance of the two communities, as Jesus with the poor and the powerless provides a connection between the two groups. Just like black Americans and Palestinians, Jesus himself was powerless, and at the absolute mercy of those in power, which provides mutual understanding through their faith to understand the position of oppressed people. Jesus recognizes that there is power in powerlessness. Through the powerless, God chooses to make Godself known to the world.

Power in powerlessness is seen through black Americans’ and Palestinians’ Christian faith and use of media to resist stigmatization and violence. Much like liberation theology has given these communities power to resist directly through their faith, social media outlets have given these communities means to expand that resistance. As analyzed earlier, both black

¹²² Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 135.

Americans and Palestinians reclaim their power through social media action. This specific route of action can be viewed as a form of secular liberation theology that takes place everyday within society. Social media and other media forms have created opportunities for communities to recreate the narrative that has been prescribed to them. These oppressed communities' reclamation of their experiences has enabled them to reclaim their power within the media generating more solidarity based on truthful narratives.

Ontological blackness is a term elaborated by James Cone. The term is crucial when discussing liberation theology and oppressed or marginalized communities. An ontological symbol to an oppressed community is equal to a state of being as if one were a member of that community. To be, in this case, ontologically black is to understand where oppressed black communities are coming from. One who understands the root of their oppression and actively works to form an allyship with black communities. While black liberation theology has sought to make Jesus black in a sense, Palestinians have not done so and have tried instead to emphasize Jesus' historical self. They are trying to reclaim Jesus as a Palestinian because that is his identity despite many trying to change and alter this fact. While both communities are looking at Jesus through different lenses, they are both rejecting the popularized notion of Jesus being white. Reclaiming Jesus helps them resist Israeli and U.S. empires and liberate themselves from imperialist oppression. The kind of change that these communities need will take time and we, as a society, need to listen to the change that these communities are calling for. We have to listen to the stories they're telling and understand where the root of their resistance lies.

6. Conclusion

This research project explored the racial stigmatization and violence inflicted upon Palestinian and black communities. The mainstream media's portrayals of Arab Palestinians and

black Americans, mass incarceration of these people, and refugee camps suggest structural violence against the two groups. Our research explored how both communities' oppression has roots in religion (i.e., Christianity) and cultural ideologies instilled in the government and the dominant groups. We also examined how both the United States and Israel use the law as a gateway to heavily police and surveil black Americans and Palestinians while justifying violence against these people. Yet, black Americans and Palestinians have found creative ways to resist racist oppression and fight back structural oppression inflicted on them.

To begin our research, we historically analyzed the Israeli occupation of Palestine and Palestinians' religious and secular movements against the occupation. In addition, we historically analyzed the events, ideology, and communities that sparked the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement within the United States, the significance of BLM, and ongoing anti-black racism. We were able to come to interesting conclusions based on our analysis on the Israel-Palestine conflict, in regard to the influx of Jewish migration and the foundation that led to Israel becoming an apartheid state, and the historical events within the United States involving black communities in terms of "mass incarceration." We were able to uncover much about how the Free Palestine and BLM movements were created in resistance to oppression and how these movements utilize both secular and religious aspects and share the common goal of liberation.

Next, we chose to explore the social perception of these two groups, Palestinians, and black communities, constructed by the mainstream media, and how this perception has perpetuated the racial and religious stigmatization against them for many years. More importantly, we examined the two groups' use of media platforms as a means of resistance to racial stigmatization and structural violence. Media platforms are popular tools of resistance shared between the two groups. Black Americans and Palestinians are reclaiming their power

through social media activism. This route of activism can be viewed as a form of secular liberation theology that takes place every day in society. These communities have reclaimed their identity as a whole and are using it to reclaim their power. Both the Free Palestine and BLM movements have begun to bring worldwide attention to their causes and change the dominant narrative that has portrayed them as socially polluted.

Finally, we explored the use of liberation theology by both movements. Through this examination we were able to find similar outcomes between contexts; both communities can use liberation theology as a means to find their self-power to resist oppressors and social stigmatization inflicted on them. In addition, we were able to conclude that through the use of liberation theology both communities can find a mutual way to understand one another and their individual oppressions. The concept of “power in powerlessness” represents a theological way for these two communities to relate their oppressions with each other to resist racial stigmatization and violence. In addition, these communities' faith foundations give them the core beliefs that they need to resist racial injustices imposed onto them. Liberation theology also offers a way for outsiders of these communities to contribute to the liberation of these communities. Ontological blackness offers an outlet to explain the real-time experiences of BIPOC and Palestinians. Both communities are reclaiming Jesus in order to resist oppression and liberate their communities from the empire-like practices enforced by the U.S. and Israel.

Our research continued to look at the global network of anti-racist movements. Many oppressed and marginalized communities across the globe share similar experiences of oppression and similar political goals of liberation and justice. Palestinians and black Americans as well as outsiders of these groups can use resistance tactics to help stop the racist stigmatization and violence. Tactics include protests, religious and faith beliefs, and even social

media platforms. All oppressed people should fight for one another. Oppressed and marginalized communities around the world are experiencing similar oppressions and stigmatization. By recognizing the interconnectedness of oppression across the globe, these communities can support one another's resistance movements in solidarity.

Further research expanding from the findings of this project could include the exploration of the message of liberation as the correct interpretation of God's love and justice. This research project introduces the idea of the use of liberation theology as a pathway to liberation from oppression for oppressed communities—starting with Black Lives Matter and Free Palestine—expanding to all oppressed communities. Future research could explore what this liberation is from, exactly. For example, liberation theology to the BIPOC community could be an outlet for freedom from oppression from racism, sexism, and classism and where liberation theology for Palestinians could be an outlet for freedom from oppression from religious intolerance. Further research could explore a number of different avenues exploring what liberation theology could mean for oppressed communities across the globe and examine how liberation theology can bring those communities together.

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