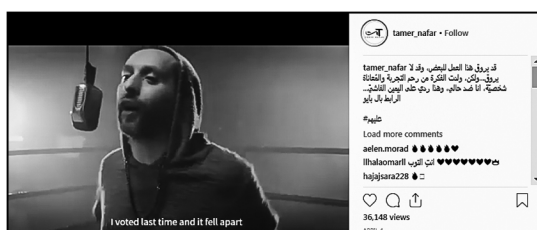


Published each issue, this section strives to capture the tenor and content of popular conversations related to the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict, which are held on dynamic platforms unbound by traditional media. Therefore, items presented in this section are from a variety of sources and have been selected because they either have gone viral or represent a significant cultural moment or trend. A version of Palestine Unbound is also published on *Palestine Square* (palestinesquare.com), a blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies.

This Quarter's Topics

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"Tamer Must Vote"



Tamer Nafar posts a screenshot from his "Tamer Must Vote" music video to his Instagram. His caption reads "This work will please some and not others . . . be that as it may, the idea was born of personal experience and hardship. I am pitted against myself, and this is my response to the fascist Right" (translated from Arabic). (4 April, Instagram)

A week before Israel's 9 April general election, Palestinian rapper Tamer Nafar posted a music video for his song, "Tamer Must Vote," to Instagram and Facebook encouraging Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCIs) not to boycott the election. "It doesn't make sense for me to give up a tool," he raps in the video, "when I hardly have any." While the video garnered significant attention from followers and news outlets both local and foreign, not all of it was positive. The most-liked comment on Nafar's Facebook post, for example, said, "I listened to the song and

remembered why I will not vote, thanks Tamer" (translated from Arabic).

Some PCIs feel that voting in Israeli elections grants unmerited legitimacy to a nation-state that is fundamentally undemocratic and treats their demographic, which makes up 20 percent of the Israeli population, as second class. While the movement to boycott the polls long preceded the 2019 election, a grim confluence of conditions has exacerbated the hopelessness many Palestinians feel regarding the possibility of legitimate representation: 2019 saw the dissolution of the Joint List—a merging of three Arab parties into one united Arab bloc—that had energized Palestinian voters in 2015; and the national election was widely considered a lose-lose situation since the primary opponent of, and alternative to, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz. The former chief of staff of Israel's armed forces and

his security-oriented Israel Resistance Party were barely distinguishable from Netanyahu where Palestinian interests were concerned.

Eleven months prior to the election, PCIs were made explicitly voiceless by the May 2018 passage of the controversial Jewish Nation-State Law, which enshrined their status as second-class citizens by arrogating the right of self-determination exclusively to Israeli Jews. Had PCIs needed further clarification, PM Netanyahu provided it in an Instagram post: “Israel is not a state of all its citizens,” he wrote on 10 March 2019. “According to the Nation-State Law that we passed, Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish People—and them alone” (translated from Hebrew). (For more on the Nation-State Law, see our commentaries and analyses in *JPS* 48 [1] and *JPS* 48 [2].)

Nafar, a founding member of the first Palestinian hip-hop group, DAM (short for Da Arab MCs), is a native of Lydda. His musical career emerged from the Second Intifada and has centered on combatting discrimination and advocating for social change. His 2004 hit, “Born Here,” speaks to the vast disparity in living conditions between Lydda’s Jewish and Palestinian residents. The song and its affiliated campaign were so popular that they purportedly spurred the Israeli government to improve traffic safety at the entrance to Lydda’s Palestinian neighborhood.

In spite of his insistence on making Palestinian voices heard, Nafar is not an unconditional true believer. Indeed, the entire concept of the “Tamer Must Vote” video speaks to his own ambivalence: it depicts a boxing match between two versions of the rapper, one making the case for voting in the Israeli elections, and the other, against. The cynical Nafar says voting is futile; the Israeli government is just “using [PCIs] to look liberal,” and the Arab MKs didn’t “deal with poverty” or “bring us jobs.” In response, the pro-voting Nafar warns that if PCIs don’t take part in the polls, they’ll “end up outside the homeland”—likely exiled by the creeping annexation mandated under the Nation-State Law’s “Jewish Settlement” clause, which declares “the development of Jewish settlement” a “national value,” the “establishment and consolidation” of which Israel “will act to encourage and promote.”



A screenshot of Nafar, the cynic, from his “Tamer Must Vote” music video. (3 April, YouTube)



A screenshot of the pro-voting version of Nafar from his “Tamer Must Vote” music video. (3 April, YouTube)

Ultimately, the anti-boycott persona wins out, and at the end of the video the sparring Nafars reconcile and embrace in the center of the ring. Nafar’s intended audience, however, seems to

have been left unconvinced: PCI turnout in the 9 April election hit a historic low of 49 percent, a more than 23 percent drop from 2015 thought to reflect widespread disillusionment with Israeli “democracy” among Palestinians in Israel.

#DecolonizeThisPlace

On 19 April, members of the Palestinian youth organization Within Our Lifetime broke out into a spontaneous *dabke* on the first floor of the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan, NY. The dancers were surrounded by protesters holding up photos of Palestinians killed during the Great

March of Return and chanting demands for the resignation of Warren B. Kanders, a Whitney Museum vice chairman. Kanders is the CEO of Safariland, which produces “riot control” weaponry that has been used in occupied Palestine, in Puerto Rico, along the U.S.-Mexico border, and in U.S. cities like Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri.

The protest was the sixth action organized at the Whitney by a New York organization called Decolonize This Place (DTP). Members first began to organize around the call to oust Kanders in November 2018. That month, one hundred museum employees and affiliates signed a letter calling for Kanders’s resignation



An Instagram post showing the protest *dabke* Decolonize This Place organized in the lobby of the Whitney Museum. (21 April, Instagram)

and for the implementation of standards with respect to future board appointees.

DTP adopted these demands and convened a town hall meeting to design a long-term campaign. The group also recruited twenty-five like-minded organizations that resist gentrification in New York City and organize solidarity with Puerto Rico, Standing Rock, and Palestine. The coalition announced nine weeks of collective protest and “anti-colonial art” lasting from 22 March until the Whitney Biennial event on 17 May. Over the course of these nine weeks, a number of communities targeted by Safariland weapons have had the chance to express their anger in the lobby of the Whitney.

Defense Technology, a subsidiary of Safariland, sells rubber bullets and tear gas that have been used against so-called rioters in several communities: law enforcement in Baltimore and Ferguson shot Defense Technology tear gas at protesters rallying against the police murders of Freddie Gray and Michael Brown Jr.; Puerto Rican police did the same in May 2018 to attack protestors who were challenging austerity measures imposed by the



A Decolonize This Place Instagram post showing protests in the Whitney’s lobby in solidarity with Puerto Rico. (26 April, Instagram)

U.S. federal government; and in November 2018, when a caravan of Central American migrants seeking asylum in the United States approached the border between Tijuana and San Diego, they were met with at least twenty-four canisters of the same chemical.

Israeli army and law enforcement officials have been making purchases from Safariland for over a decade. The company manufactures so-called sponge grenades and tear gas that have been deployed in the Negev, in the West Bank village of Nabi Salih, and in Gaza. Although these are all advertised as “soft” or “less lethal,” each can be deadly if it hits an individual’s upper body.

DTP and its supporting coalition have promoted their events with the hashtag #DecolonizeThisPlace, which has gained significant traction on social media. What

began only a few years ago as a small grassroots organization now has a following of nearly forty thousand on Instagram. Indeed, DTP’s social media presence and public demonstrations have already begun to bear fruit. Iraqi American artist Michael Rakowitz, who was scheduled to display his art during the Whitney Biennial in May, announced that he would boycott the event in support of DTP. In early April, a group of 120 academics, artists, and activists published an open letter on the Verso Books blog addressed to the Whitney and calling for Kanders’s resignation, and on 29 April, dozens more endorsed this demand by adding their names to the letter—including 46 of the 75 artists who were scheduled to take part in the biennial.

DTP intends to use this support to manifest structural change at the Whitney. According to Amin Husain, a Palestinian artist and cofounder of DTP, “Decolonization means more than better board members.” In the letter that announced the time and place of the original town hall meeting, which DTP published in an art forum called Hyperallergic, the group outlined its goals with respect to the museum. The letter specified that removing Kanders would be the first step toward transforming the Whitney into a place “run by and for cultural workers and their communities as a cooperative platform rather than a money-laundering operation for the ultra-wealthy. A place that de-centers whiteness and dismantles patriarchy. A place that acknowledges that it stands on occupied indigenous territory, and takes reparative measures. . . . A place, in other words, that is undergoing a process of decolonization.”



A poster designed to promote the nine weeks of protests against Warren B. Kanders, a Whitney Museum vice chairman. (26 February, Instagram)

@LegitTayUpdates

On 2 April, within a span of four hours, Twitter user @LegitTayUpdates* posted both a desperate attempt to analyze the symbology of an old Taylor Swift Instagram post and an unequivocal demand to “free Palestine” and “throw Netanyahu in prison.”

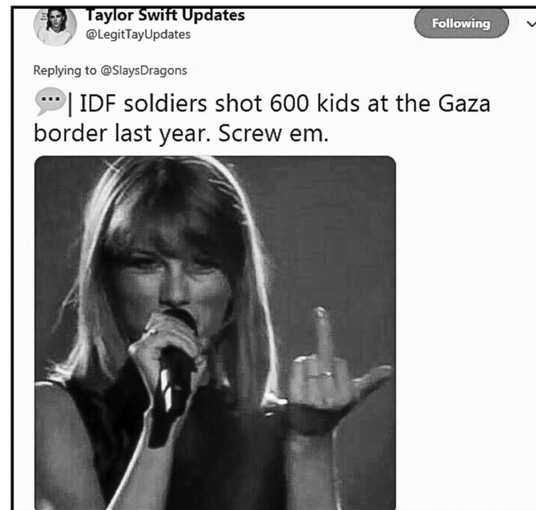
* This account has recently been suspended by Twitter.

For those who are unfamiliar with the account, this coupling of over-the-top Taylor Swift fandom and biting political commentary may seem perplexing, but for the tens of thousands of Twitter users who follow @LegiTayUpdates, posts like these are nothing out of the ordinary. Since early April, the account has spoken out against the occupation of Palestine and raised over two thousand dollars for Palestinian children, while simultaneously promoting the rumor that U.S. pop star Swift intends to “buy Spain.” The voice behind @LegiTayUpdates, an anonymous nineteen-year old Israeli with a lot of love for her favorite musician but not so much for the Israeli military, has been interviewed by dozens of international media outlets.

@LegiTayUpdates is a parody account that posts jokes and promotional material related to pop musician Swift. Most of the account’s over 10.5 thousand tweets cover such topics as Swift’s next album release date and whether the artist has dyed her hair pink. But on 2 April, the account took on a new dimension when the voice behind @LegiTayUpdates revealed that she had spent two months in an Israeli prison as a conscientious objector against the military occupation of Palestine.

The post immediately earned international attention. Just three weeks after the initial tweet, which was shared over seventeen thousand times, @LegiTayUpdates’s follower count increased to over twenty thousand. Media outlets such as Middle East Monitor, Vice, and *Teen Vogue* covered the young Israeli’s tweet, and several published interviews with her under the pseudonym “Na’ama” or simply “N.”

In an interview with *Jacobin Magazine*, N explained that when she was younger, she had “talked to these Palestinian kids who hadn’t seen their uncle or their grandparents in years, because they can’t get out of the West Bank to go to Gaza. . . . Why [is Israel] treating someone like a second-class citizen, just because they’re not Jewish?” Still, N did not immediately overcome the years of Israeli propaganda that had portrayed her home country as a benevolent state with a defensive military. In her words, “I knew a little bit about the things happening in Palestine, but on some level I thought—this is a very bad thing to think, but I thought they kind of deserved it. Because



A Twitter post by anonymous Taylor Swift superfan and critic of the Israeli military, @LegiTayUpdates. (Twitter)



A “typical” Twitter post by @LegiTayUpdates. (20 April, Twitter)

what we were taught is that it is controlled by terrorists.” After learning about Palestine through social media and a trip to Europe, the myth of Israeli innocence was shattered for N, and she decided that she wanted nothing to do with the Israeli army, even though she knew her refusal would almost certainly lead to her imprisonment.

As the popularity of @LegiTayUpdates boosted N to the realm of minor celebrity, Palestinian organizations and Twitter users began to show their support for the account. Palestinian Voices from Gaza, a group that seeks to raise international awareness for the Palestinian cause, tweeted its love on 4 April, and several international users joined in.

Still, not all responses to @LegiTayUpdates’s new political content were positive. The Mossad, Israel’s premier intelligence agency, tweeted, “If it weren’t for Israel’s military, intelligence, and other protective organizations that have made this country survive and thrive until this day, teenage girls wouldn’t be safe at home opening Taylor Swift fan accounts.” The implication that N’s anti-army stance was nothing more than the ungrateful whim of a privileged teenager was widespread in the wake of @LegiTayUpdates’s fame. N herself noted that “a lot of people on Instagram call me lazy, a traitor. . . . That happens a lot. ‘You don’t like it here, go away,’ stuff like that.”

In spite of this active opposition, N hopes that her followers will learn that “the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict isn’t equal.”



The tweet that brought international attention to @LegiTayUpdates. (2 April, Twitter)



@LegiTayUpdates responds to derision from the Mossad. (4 April, Twitter)

#DeactivateAirbnb

On 9 April 2019, Airbnb, the world’s largest online property rental platform, announced that it would “not move forward with implementing the removal of listings in the West Bank from the platform.” The update was a complete volte-face from Airbnb’s earlier “Listings in Disputed Regions” statement from November 2018, when the company declared its intention to delist all of the approximately two hundred properties in the occupied West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. Airbnb’s November statement, which cited a decision-making framework that would require the

company to evaluate “whether the existence of listings is contributing to existing human suffering” and “whether the existence of listings in the occupied territory has a direct connection to the larger dispute in the region” was the culmination of a successful Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. It was led by the #StolenHomes coalition—an alliance of human rights organizations and advocacy groups that rallied international support for its first campaign, which included a petition that collected more than 145,000 signatures. (For more on the #StolenHomes campaign, see Palestine Unbound in *JPS* 45 [3].)

But while BDS activists celebrated their victory, supporters of the Zionist settler enterprise mounted a substantial counter campaign. Municipal governments in Beverly Hills, California and Miami, Florida drafted bills that called for a boycott of the company. In Delaware, New York, and California, Jewish American plaintiffs sued Airbnb for discriminatory practice on the grounds that it was refusing to rent properties owned by Jews. Israeli lawyers applied similar logic to bring a class action lawsuit against the corporation. The scrutiny and legal pressure, it seems, were enough to force Airbnb executives to reevaluate their commitment to abstaining from “contribut[ing] to existing human suffering.”

In an effort to avoid criticism for profiting from occupied land, Airbnb’s update did specify that “any profits generated for Airbnb by any Airbnb host activity in the entire West Bank w[ould] be donated to non-profit organizations dedicated to humanitarian aid that serve people in different parts of the world.” The purportedly conciliatory gesture continues to allow Israeli settlers to access the international digital tourism market by hosting visitors in homes built on stolen Palestinian land, and advocates for Palestinian freedom have not accepted the loss passively.

On a grassroots level, the organizations that formed the #StolenHomes coalition in 2016 picked up several new partners to launch #DeactivateAirbnb on Nakba Day, 15 May. The social media campaign called for a Twitter storm and a massive, coordinated deactivation of the platform. In a press release, Jewish Voice for Peace, one of the coalition’s founding organizers, reported that over twenty thousand digital pledges had been signed by the quarter’s close.



A faux advertisement to promote an international day of Airbnb deactivation to coincide with Nakba day. (15 May, Instagram)



The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement urges Twitter users to deactivate their Airbnb accounts with the hashtag #DeactivateAirbnb. (15 May, Twitter)

In *Silber v. Airbnb*, a case brought by Israeli settlers before a federal court in Delaware, the Center for Constitutional Rights filed an intervention arguing that Israeli settlements constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. This will be the first time that a U.S. court will rule on the legitimacy of human rights claims in Palestine.

This lasting controversy over Airbnb rentals represents a deeper dispute that centers on tourism in the occupied West Bank. On 30 April, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism lifted a restriction on grants to build hotels in Area C, opening the doors for increasing investment in Israeli-owned lodging and entertainment on Palestinian land. This will not only yield profits for Zionist corporations, but it also promises increasing normalization of the apartheid status quo. Commenting on the 30 April announcement by the Israeli government, Gush Etzion Regional Council head Shlomo Ne'eman said, "It's the right step at the right time. It's one more step toward the application of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria."