



Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color, by Michael R. Fischbach. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018. 296 pages. \$85.00 cloth, \$25.95 paper, e-book available.

REVIEWED BY ELIZABETH BISHOP

Michael Fischbach's *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* came off the presses just as the board of directors of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) announced that professor and pro-Palestine activist Angela Davis, "one of the most globally recognized champions of human rights,"* would receive the annual Fred L. Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award. It was an amazing coincidence, which underscored the significance of Fischbach's historical research. Fischbach's book makes two major contributions to the field of Black-Palestinian solidarity: first, a nuanced understanding of politics and second, an insistence on the significance of the historical moment. Resonances with today's headlines fill the book. *Black Power and Palestine* identifies how Middle East politics connected with the development of the African American freedom struggle during the 1960s and 1970s and details the course of two opposing currents within it: the members of the Black Power movement, who embraced the cause of Palestinian national liberation before and during 1967, and the civil rights organizations which "lin[ed] up solidly behind Israel" (p. 3).

With a prologue, ten chapters, and an epilogue, Fischbach's historically driven narrative stands at the cutting edge of scholarship on the Black Power movement. Beginning his research with documents in public and university archives in the United States, Fischbach supplements these with government records (online and microfilm); his own Freedom of Information Act requests (for the U.S. Department of Justice's Foreign Agents Registration Unit, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation); and research he carried out in Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. In addition, the author accessed interviews—whether available online, or his own.

* Jamiles Lartey and agencies, "Birmingham Civil Rights Institute under Fire for Rescinding Angela Davis Honor," *The Guardian*, 7 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/07/birmingham-civil-rights-institute-rescinds-honor-angela-davis>.

Fischbach calls his navigation through this assortment of sources a “dance among the raindrops of racial and ethnic politics” which “intersected with the Arab-Israeli conflict” (p. 87).

According to Fischbach, the persistent allegations of anti-Semitism leveled against supporters of the Palestinian national cause split the Black Power movement from the civil rights movement. He specifically draws attention to the period of 1966–67, when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) asked *all* white members to leave (a directive that was interpreted as an anti-Semitic gesture). Fischbach follows these anti-Semitism allegations to show that they were wielded against virtually all leading civil rights organizations: the National Conference for New Politics, Roy Wilkins and his draft statement for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) of June 1967, SNCC and its August 1967 newsletter, Floyd McKissick and the stance adopted by the Congress of Racial Equality, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s personal response—as well as the response of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—to the National Conference for New Politics and SNCC. Each, the allegations purported, failed to condemn anti-Semitism sufficiently.

One of the shortcomings of the book is that it by and large neglects women (in 260 pages of text, Davis is mentioned only twice—admittedly twice as many times as Mahmoud Darwish). This is especially relevant since Black women have been explicit targets—Davis during the period he addresses, and U.S. representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) in the current historical moment. Heightened by the coincidence of the book’s publication during Davis’s recognition by the BCRI, Fischbach’s neglect of women in general (and Davis in particular), his vision of the Black Panthers as a party without social programs, and a sole reference to boycott being Bayard Rustin’s denunciation of the Arab League’s boycott of Israel (p. 169), from the political Left, is echoed in contemporary neoconservative movements’ fascination with ex-Black Panthers, and a series of equivocal positions on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

Despite these limitations, Fischbach’s book inspires new understandings of the intersection of Black and Palestine solidarity. He offers an interesting observation: “Highly organized pro-Zionist campaigns seeking to bolster Israel and its reputation in the United States emerged almost immediately in the late 1960s and continue to this day; such efforts have included, inter alia, ‘monitoring’ groups, academics, and activities deemed pro-Palestinian and redefining anti-Zionism as a new form of anti-Semitism” (p. 217). Shortly after Fischbach’s book came out, an editorial in *Southern Jewish Life* claimed: “Davis has also been an outspoken voice in the boycott-Israel movement, and advocates extensively on college campuses for the isolation of the Jewish state, saying Israel engages in ethnic cleansing and is connected to police violence against African-Americans.”[†] As Stanford University Press shipped Fischbach’s monograph, the BCRI, which had acknowledged influence from “supporters and other concerned individuals and organizations,

[†] “Prominent BDS Activist Davis to Receive Civil Rights Institute’s Shuttlesworth Award,” *Southern Jewish Life*, 23 December 2018, <http://www.sjlmag.com/2018/12/prominent-bds-activist-davis-to-receive.html>.

both inside and outside of our local community”[‡] rescinded Davis’s award. It was later reinstated by a board vote, but a better demonstration of the issues *Black Power and Palestine* raises is difficult to imagine.

Most years, Elizabeth Bishop is associate professor of modern Arab history at Texas State University, San Marcos. During 2019–20, she is teaching American Civilization at l'Université d'Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed (the course includes the Black Panthers’ experience in Algeria).
