



Palestine Unbound

Maggie Nye Smith

ABSTRACT

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.

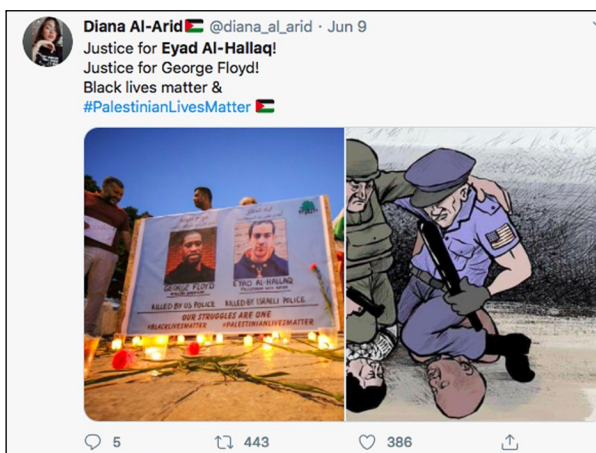
This Quarter's Topics

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#JusticeForEyad and #BringAhmadHome

This quarter was a particularly brutal one for Palestinians venturing near Israeli checkpoints. On 30 May, Eyad al-Hallaq, an unarmed thirty-two-year-old man with autism, was gunned down by Israeli security as he crossed the Lion's Gate (Bab al-asbat) checkpoint on the way to his special-needs vocational school in Jerusalem. His aide, Warda Abu Hadid, said Israeli forces ignored her repeated entreaties for them to check his ID for disability designation and opened fire on the cornered al-Hallaq, who huddled in fear inside a roofless enclosure used for waste disposal. A statement by the Israeli Justice Ministry claimed Israeli Border Police suspected al-Hallaq was a terrorist “in light of certain characteristics of his behavior.” What these characteristics might have been, his family and care providers cannot imagine.

Major media sources like CBS News and *The Guardian*



Palestinian soccer player Diana al-Arid tweets two images comparing Eyad al-Hallaq to George Floyd. (9 June, Twitter)

reported on the public comparisons being drawn between al-Hallaq's shooting and police brutality against Black citizens in the United States, particularly the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, five days earlier. Thousands of demonstrators gathered in Bethlehem and Tel Aviv to mourn al-Hallaq's death and protest Israeli violence against Palestinians.

On social media, the hashtags #JusticeForEyad and #PalestinianLivesMatter (in solidarity with the U.S.-born hashtag and social justice movement #BlackLivesMatter) trended.

Less than a month after al-Hallaq was shot dead, twenty-seven-year-old Abu Dis resident Ahmad Erekat was shot and killed by Israeli forces. On 23 June, Erekat crashed his car at a checkpoint between his hometown and Bethlehem while traveling to pick up his sister from a beauty salon where she was readying for her wedding later that day. Footage of the incident shows Erekat's car veering into the checkpoint security booth and striking a border policeperson who falls to the ground but quickly gets back to her feet. When Erekat exits the car with his hands in the air, he is immediately fired upon by another member of the border police.

Israeli authorities claim they were responding to a so-called ramming attack—that Erekat intended to harm the Israeli guards on duty at the checkpoint. However, friends and relatives of the deceased, including now-deceased Palestinian politician Saeb Erekat and *Journal of Palestine Studies* Editorial Board member Noura Erakat, dispute the logic of this narrative. Why would Ahmad have carried out an attack on the day of his sister's wedding? As tweeted by his cousin Noura, Ahmad's wedding was scheduled for the following month. The tweet continued: "We failed to protect him. I am so sorry."



U.S. rep. Marc Pocan (D-WI) uses trending hashtags #BringAhmad-Home and #BringThemAllHome to demonstrate his support of the return of Erekat's body to his family. (29 July, Twitter)

release of Erekat's body. The IMEU campaign video, which had been viewed over 23,000 times at the writing of this article, featured notable U.S. social justice advocates and Palestine solidarity

What is indisputable is that Erekat was unarmed, that he was denied medical attention for over an hour, and that at the time of writing, six months after his killing, Erekat's body had still not been released to his family for mourning and burial.

As pointed out in a story on *Palestine Square*, the blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies, "Withholding the corpses of slain Palestinians for months at a time (and more) is a common practice in Israel" that was upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court in a formal 2019 ruling.

The Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU) launched a social media campaign calling attention to Israeli human rights violations and mobilizing for the

activists like Angela Davis and Marc Lamont Hill. The hashtags #BringAhmadHome and #BringThemAllHome were widely used on Twitter and Facebook.

Seth Rogen Speaks Out against Israel

Seth Rogen is not a big name in Palestine studies, but this quarter, the Canadian comic actor of *Knocked Up* fame made a big splash by declaring, on the popular podcast *WTF with Marc Maron*, that “as a Jew,” he was “fed a huge amount of lies about Israel [his] entire life.” Host Marc Maron, a fellow Jew, agreed.

“They never tell you that, ‘Oh by the way, there were people there,’” Rogen said of his primary Zionist education. “They make it seem like it was just sitting there with the ... doors open.”

“Ours for the taking,” Maron chimed in.

The reaction to this *WTF* episode, which aired on 27 July, was swift and—in contrast with the tone of the podcast—quite serious. It included the usual Twitter battles (with some calling Rogen a hero and others dubbing him an anti-Semite), but also broad news coverage (in the *Washington Post*, *Mondoweiss*, *Haaretz*, and many others), as well as censure from former member of the Knesset and current chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Isaac Herzog, who took the unusual measure of calling Rogen’s mother.

Indeed, both Maron and Rogen gave a nod to the firestorm that this comedy podcast would provoke, asserting multiple times: “We’re afraid of Jews”—both a jocular statement and one reflecting the increasingly widespread fear of speaking out against Israel.

While some notable figures among Palestinians, like Yousef Munayyer, voiced support for Rogen’s criticism of Israel, not everyone found his comic banter profound. Many have asked the legitimate question *who cares?* After all, Palestinians and their allies have been saying this for decades. As pro-Palestinian scholar Steven Salaita pointed out in a tweet (liked by almost four thousand fellow Twitter users), Rogen doesn’t even mention Palestinians in his chat with Maron. That notwithstanding, it’s pretty obvious who “them” is when Maron claims that Israelis “don’t even care if [Jews] are religious. All they want to know is ‘Do you believe we can kill them? Do you think they deserve a country or can we kill them?’”

In the face of so much backlash—and some gentle coercion from Herzog—Rogen gave *Haaretz* a follow-up interview in which he explained that his remarks had been taken out of context, but he stopped short of walking back his initial position on Israeli propaganda. He added that he had “actually listened back to” the podcast and that it was really “a very common conversation.”



U.S. scholar Steven Salaita is dubious of Seth Rogen’s commitment to a pro-Palestinian stance. (28 July, Twitter)

And that is exactly why it matters, Hadas Their argued in a 29 July article for *Jacobin* magazine. Rogen's very common conversation "signal[s] a broader shift among young [North] American Jews against Israel's oppression of the Palestinians." It matters exactly *because* Rogen isn't a human rights advocate or a political pundit. He's just a goofy actor who probably doesn't know much more about Palestine than the average Westerner, but he knows enough to be able to say *this doesn't make sense, this is really, really wrong*.



U.S. Jewish journalist Ben Geier tweets his support for Seth Rogen's criticism of Israel. (28 July, Twitter)

@cyberfashionweek

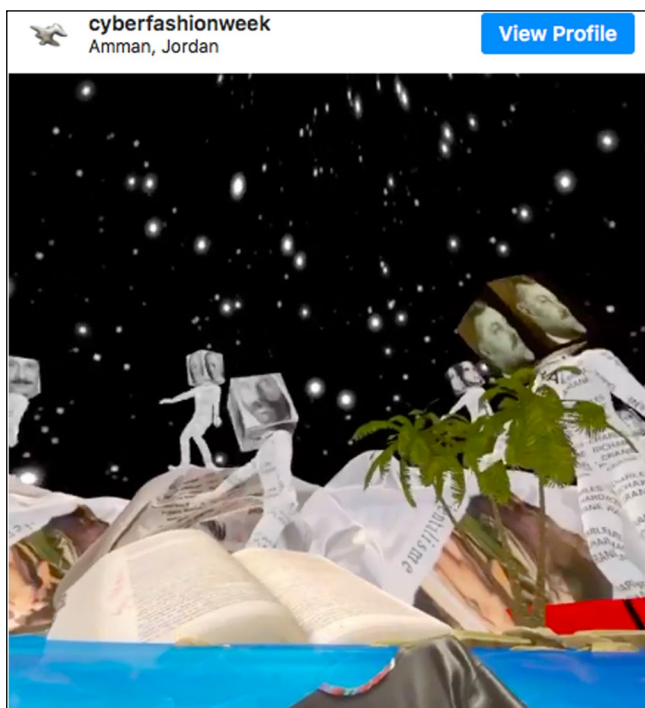


A still from a runway video on the label's website. (trashyclothing.shop/runway)

East Jerusalem. It's a "satirical, campy, political, and queer RTW [ready-to-wear] Palestinian fashion brand that breaks stereotypes" about the Middle East. A quick scroll through the website's offerings turns up neon barbed wire hoop earrings, an "occupation wall" necklace on a thick chain, and T-shirts emblazoned with the popular "anti-whitewashing and pink-washing club" slogan. Tulle, mesh, and corsets abound.

Milan, Paris, London, New York—these are the epicenters of the world of haute couture, where luxury fashion houses parade their new seasonal lines. But none of that concerns Palestinian fashion designer Shukri Lawrence, founder of Trashy Clothing (styled tRASHY). The mission of his brand is "to reclaim the Arab and Palestinian identity and reclaim what is considered different, cheap, and trashy in modern culture," according to the label's website, trashyclothing.shop.

Lawrence founded Trashy Clothing in 2017 in occupied



A still from a Cyber Fashion Week video by the Jordanian label Elvaux. (27 May, Instagram)

Trashy Clothing was slated to show its fall collection in Iceland in March, but the runway show, and Lawrence's scheduled flight, were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With Lawrence and co-creative director Omar Braika stuck in Amman for the foreseeable future, and the rest of the four-person Trashy team still in Palestine, they hatched a fast plan to take the show virtual. And thus, Cyber Fashion Week was born.

The virtual event, which ran from 26–31 May, assembled designers from all over the globe: labels based in Hong Kong, Tehran, New York, and Reykjavik, among others. Cyber Fashion Week was streamed from the Instagram account @cyber-fashionweek and showcased

two designers and one musician on each of the event's six days. One performance by Palestinian singer-songwriter Maysa Daw, who is also the newest member of the famed Palestinian hip-hop group DAM, garnered nearly two thousand views.

The flexibility of a virtual platform allowed labels to tell stories and engage design in unbound(ed) ways. Christina Tadros, the creator of the Jordanian label Elvaux collaborated with her sister, a virtual reality artist, to create a trippy video that scrutinizes the Western gaze on the Arab world. Trashy Clothing used 3-D scanning technology to allow the label's fans to import their own body scans as models in Trashy's virtual runway.

"We see fashion as a storytelling experience, not only garment



A still from Trashy Clothing's Cyber Fashion Week virtual "runway." (26 May, Instagram)

creation,” Lawrence told *The National*. Media outlets clearly agreed, because the event attracted coverage from *Vogue*, *Mille*, *Vice*, and *Boy!*, among others, nurturing the hope among Trashy’s founders that Cyber Fashion Week might expand into a seasonal trio of performances, showcasing a growing number of labels in the near future.

True to fashion week form, the event closed out with a wild (virtual) after-party featuring a DJ set curated by the Muscovite protest punks Pussy Riot. Dress code for the pandemic-era event: “bedsheet couture.”