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Decolonial Mediatic Artivist Engagement and the Palestinian Question

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Abstract The present chapter takes into account some cases of mediatic artivist engagement of unaffiliated citizens connected to the permission for the Palestinians to narrate (Said 1984). On the one hand, they are considered as forms of decolonial mediatic engagement in the face of the persisting colonial matrix of power (Quijano 1992), on the other hand, as linguistic forms and formulas conveying their subversive power in terms of aesthetic-political appeal in the context of postcolonial intellectual engagements in the public sphere.

Keywords Counter-publics. Artivist engagement. Palestine. Decoloniality. Border culture.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Palestinian Cyborature as Decolonial Border Culture. – 3 Mediatic Artivist Decolonial Narratives: DAM, Shadia Mansour, and the Middle East Eyes News Source as Case Studies. – 4 Concluding Remarks.

1 Introduction

Our paper will try to tackle some cases of mediatic artivist[1] engagement of unaffiliated citizens connected to the Palestinian question

Although this research was jointly conducted by both authors, Luigi Cazzato is responsible for Sections 1 and 2, while Annarita Taronna is responsible for Sections 3 and 4.

1 As widely defined by Paola Zaccaria (2014), artivism has been worked out by the chicano border artists who radicalize the concept of aesthetics, creating artistic works with a strong political and social impact.

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and diaspora, to the permission for the Palestinians to narrate (Said 1984) and their 'loci of enunciation'. Among others, hip-hop activist singers (e.g. British-born Palestinian Shadia Mansour, the Palestinian-Israeli historical group DAM, Palestinian activist Rafeef Ziadah, Palestinian-American rapper Ragtop and his band The Philistines), networks of artists and cultural workers and participatory journalists (e.g. Middle East Eye) will be considered as cases of popular resistance. They are taken into account, on the one hand, as forms of decolonial mediatic engagement in the age of mass mediation and mass migration in the face of the persisting colonial matrix of power (Quijano 1992), on the other hand, as linguistic forms and formulas conveying their subversive power in terms of aesthetic-political appeal.

More specifically, we will select and build a corpus of 'texts' from the artistic and mediatic production in order to assess whether and to what extent common thematic connectors relating to issues of struggle, resistance, collective consciousness and resilience may be identified and problematized in line with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power (1991) and Chantal Mouffe's definition of art as the embodiment of a political dimension (2001). Through these theoretical lenses, we will analyze the performative language of the 'texts' collected by focusing on their symbolic vocabulary, which may incorporate meaningful images, provoke collective emotions, evoke a feeling of struggle and togetherness and, therefore, produce counter-public discourses. Accordingly, the notion of counterpublics, as widely explored by Ponzanesi and Habed (2018), is central to understanding the way in which the texts under scrutiny are performed and circulated by artists, activists and writers in order to stake their claims and legitimate the impact of postcolonial intellectual engagements in the public sphere, thus providing a sense of active belonging and alternative political manifestation. Finally, the close analysis of language through these theoretical lenses will also attempt to show the extent to which the mediatic artivist narratives under discussion can be conceived of as a means of reaffirming Palestinian political existence and resistance. By contributing to the deconstruction of the hegemonic political-military order, the 'texts' in this corpus project an alternative political imagination which stands in direct opposition to Israel's otherwise dominant "cognitive imperialism" (Shapiro 2004; Alim 2020).

We will adopt the "decolonial option" perspective[2] (Mignolo, Escobar 2010) informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk 1995), along with Narrative Theory in section 3, since this will provide an eclectic theoretical framework that draws on politics, sociology, linguis-

2 Although we mainly adopt the decolonial perspective, we also rely on postcolonial tools. As to the debate between the decolonial and the postcolonial stances, see Cariello, Cazzato and Pèrcopo 2019; Colpani, Mascat, Smiet 2022.

tics and literary studies. For Narrative Theory, we will draw on Somers and Gibson (1994), as well as on Baker (2007). The types of narrative analyzed by these scholars seem to be typical of both the Palestinian narrative, which stresses that Palestinians are the displaced aboriginals who have been replaced by the Israelis, and the Israeli narrative, which maintains that Palestine is a "land without people for a people without land" and a "Promised Land" given to the Jews as "a contract between God and his own 'chosen people'" (Abdel Jawad 2006, 72). As we can safely infer, both narratives portray a complex relationship of amity and/or enmity, a dynamic which has dominated Palestinian and Israeli discourses since 1948, when the state of Israel was created.

2 Palestinian Cyborature as Decolonial Border Culture

Our main concern here is intellectual and artistic engagements in the age of mass mediation-cum-migration. We will start by considering the Gramscian concepts of 'popular culture' and the 'organic intellectual' as provided by the most contemporary critical readings (Ponzanesi 2021), then we will move on by putting these categories in the context of the Middle East and the Palestinian diaspora, seeing what issues they can raise in these geo-social dimensions. Finally, we will consider whether the category of 'colonial difference' is relevant for our examples of public mediatic creative engagement, arising from the Palestinian condition as a borderland of colonial modernity.

Even nowadays, half a century after the Birmingham School was born, the status of popular culture is often related to lower forms of art production. On the contrary, Stuart Hall, after Gramsci, famously sees popular culture as the site of the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. With reference to popular culture and the need to control it through 'reforms' or 'transformations', he maintains:

> Popular culture is neither, in a 'pure' sense, the popular traditions of resistance to these processes; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the *ground* on which the transformations are worked. (Hall 1981, 443; emphasis added)

Therefore, he goes on: "we should always start with the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably *inside* it" (443; emphasis added).

A propos of 'ground', we can speak after Gramsci, again, of a 'war of position' fought on the terrain of popular culture, which at the same time can be crucial for power control as well as for subaltern resistance to it. If this is so, the new forms of popular art arising in the context of the Palestinian question provide the milieu in which a new figure of organic intellectual has taken action, having "the responsi-

bility – as Hall would have it – of transmitting [ideas and knowledge] […] to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class" (Hall 1992, 281). It may be odd to speak of intellectuality here, but not so much if we remember that, for example, Chuck D, front man of the US hip-hop group Public Enemy, once called hip hop the "CNN for urban youth". Ironically, hip-hop culture, whose roots are African American, may instill an awareness among the Middle Eastern masses and thus provide resistance towards, and struggle against, Israeli colonial ideology, which has its origin in the Zionist project and the US as the major political and financial supporter of Israel.

In the Middle East, the question of popular culture is even more complex since the binarism high/low culture is complicated by a number of specific factors, which Stein and Swedemburg (2004) have identified in two hegemonic paradigms: the political/economic and the nationalist. According to the first, in a condition marked by land grabbing and mass repression, (the production and study of) popular music may be, at worst, ethically frivolous, and at best, simply irrelevant. As to the latter frame of mind, the controversy about popular culture is related to the issue of 'tradition *vs* modernity', where the latter term is inevitably associated with the exogenous arrival of cultural products and consumerist trends from the West and, consequently, with the history of colonialism. In short, hip hop is seen *only* as a vilified form of music coming from the dominant America, far from the national (refined or popular) Arab singing. More specifically, since the 2011 regional uprisings, Palestinian cultural productions have been fueled by the collective energy of protest, dissent and political reimagination, as artists have infused the public aesthetic with new symbols of pan-Palestinian identity and nationalism. Hence, as will be confirmed later, hip hop's merging of tradition and modernity is not a theoretical hypothesis but a practical engagement.

Perhaps Walter Mignolo's decolonial approach may help to disentangle these complications related to colonial history. He envisages and elaborates a decolonial epistemology, which he calls "border thinking":

> Border thinking is of the essence as we switch from imperial and territorial epistemology (e.g., global linear thinking) to an epistemology emerging from the places and bodies left out of the line (e.g., the anthropos, the Orientals, the Third World, etc.). (Mignolo 2011, 91-2)

In other words,

> border thinking becomes the necessary critical method for the political and ethical project of filling in the gaps and revealing the imperial complicity between the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality. (Mignolo 2007, 499)

Finally, border thinking is to take a step into the grammar of decolonization and into the exteriority of modernity.

Therefore, only if we take this step outside (the rhetoric of) modernity, can a cultural phenomenon like Arab hip hop be seen neither as inappropriate, or simply playful, nor as the Americanization of the local culture. Rather, it is a border cultural space, external to hegemonic modernity, that belongs to the circuit of 'colonial difference', which creates diverse but connected social and geographical borderlands, in the same way as Afro-American ghettoes and occupied territories in Palestine are connected and governed by the same logic of coloniality. As colonial borderlands, they can be both spaces of repression and, as Mignolo would have it, subaltern "loci of enunciation", whose existence is negated by hegemonic epistemology. A similarly ambivalent shift has been engendered by the spread of globalization, especially capitalism and consumption, a shift that has both produced a culture of loneliness – not merely one of isolation or solitude – and has fostered a yearning for forms of sociality for which the music industry aims to provide ready-made solutions (Gilroy 2011, 129).

Our aim is, then, to highlight these border spaces, in our case Arab (Brown) and Black, that spontaneously interconnect each other and disconnect from each national history, becoming global practices of decolonial thinking with meaningful political potential. This is not to claim that European settler colonialism and the Israeli version are the same, nor that Palestinians and American Blacks are the same. The key point is that both are subject to the coloniality of power and live within the border space established by their colonial ruler.

Hence, the importance of the political potential of popular culture that, on the one hand, delinks (Mignolo 2007) itself from national histories and, on the other, links itself to other common oppressive destinies. Being a song, a spoken poem or a web product, they are both works of art and cultural-political texts as the analysis of the corpus of the texts collected and examined in the next section will show. As a result, their liberation struggle is performed both through aesthetics and through politics, which are, as Caroline Rooney stresses as far as hip hop is concerned, the aesthetics and politics of orality (speaking) and aurality (listening). She claims that, to a certain extent,

> hip hop can be understood to be preoccupied in its own way with an ethics of listening: one that is critical of state corruption (as cassette sermons quite often are), serving to counter such with an emphasis on authenticity […] This is a matter of collectively practiced re-attunements achieved not merely through the recognition of the sincere or committed message but through the affective effects of sonic communication and live reception. (Rooney 2013, 34)

Tamer Nafar is the front man of DAM (Da Arab MC – Microphone Controller), an Israeli Palestinian rap crew, and this is how he puts it in an interview:

> When he [Tupac Shakur] was saying that it is a white man's world, this is what I see here […] They have this four hundred years of slavery, we have our occupation. They have the speeches of Malcolm X […] who got killed, and we have Naji al-Ali [creator of the popular cartoon figure Handala], who got assassinated. It is the big picture, and we just need this spot that you can see it. And get connected to this spot and then you can open your eyes and see *the whole picture*. (McDonald 2004, 245-6; emphasis added)

Hip hop is popular in Palestine and among the Palestinian diaspora, as well as in Europe and elsewhere, since it can combine two far and yet so close worlds, precisely belonging to the same whole 'figure in the carpet', to the same trope, the trope of blackness.[3] So much for the political content. As to the aesthetic content, Alex Lubin makes it clear that hip hop represents especially in Paul Gilroy's positioning of it in Black Atlantic culture, as the cross-fertilization of Afro-America and the Caribbean:

> Modes of trans-local and transnational engagement constituted by a pastiche of local sounds and beats produced over globalized corporate and commercial networks. In hip-hop the local is always and already formed by transnational migrations of sound. (Lubin 2013, 5-6)

In short, hip hop, along with its present-day use of digital media, may embody what Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (2012) calls "cyborature". Through this crasis between 'cyber' and 'orature' (oral learning), he refers to the new aesthetic reality, which is neither simply written nor simply oral, but both: a reality where modern Western culture and its coloniality can no longer impose a hierarchical divide between the written (the master) and the oral (the bondsman).[4]

In 2010, an international music event hosted by the UK hip-hop scene and fronted by DAM's Tamer Nafar was held in London by what has been labelled "The dream team of Arabic hip hop": Lyrical Al-

3 As regards this trope, i.e., Palestinianness as Blackness, see Solombrino (2017).

4 Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o does not underestimate the importance of the bondsman's orality: "from the freedom spirituals (negro spirituals) to hip hop, Afro-Caribbean and African-American orature has played a central role in the molding of modern culture in the Caribbean and America and its impact has been felt in global culture" (Wa Thiong'o 2012, 83).

liance.[5] The Arab artists came from North Africa, the Middle East, the US and the UK (including Shadia Mansour, a British-born Palestinian singer known as "the first lady of Arabic hip hop" – "The Kufiyeh is Arab" has garnered almost two million YouTube views). They introduced themselves in this way:

> Taking the legendary Mu'allaqāt poems – written at a time when the Arab region was the cultural and intellectual centre of the world – as a starting point, the artists will dig deep into the roots of their art form, developing new work together in a series of live sessions and workshops throughout the year. (Dash Arts)[6]

As we assumed before, modern Arab hip hop, if it is far from Palestinian folk music (what Nafar calls "wedding songs about olive trees or farming or goats"), paradoxically is not far from the ancient (sixth/eighth century) Bedouin orature. Lyrical Alliance crew's attempt is a double one. It connects two histories: Mu'allaqāt poems, with, as Mansour claims, the present circumstances of their contemporary identity. It connects two geographies or, as Nafar makes clear, "two cultures: Arabic and hip hop and some wicked ass beats". In this light, Palestinian hip hop does not happen to be a merely superstructural phenomenon to the material conditions of the Palestinians nor a mere appropriation of Black American musical aesthetics. It links Arab ghettoes here in the Middle East with Afro-American ghettoes there in the US: two comparative borderlands united by their shared experience of the coloniality of power.

This is but a sample of the new organic intellectuals in the age of mass mediation-cum-migration, intellectuals who, while aware of the commonality of the colonial link, try to delink from its logic through cyberorature. Finally, these transnational youth cultural phenomena may become an actual means of deterritorializing the nation-state frame of mind. Marta Cariello has shown how, besides the drive to return to their homeland, diasporic Palestinian writers (like Handal and Hammad), through polyglossia "expand and disseminate Palestinian identity through a specific and contemporary drive, which becomes a panethnic narrative of a transnational exilic condition" (Cariello 2013, 34).[7]

5 Lyrical Alliance Artists: DJ MK (UK), Rabah Donquishoot (Algeria), Shadia Mansour (UK-Palestine), Rayess Bek (Lebanon), Samm (Jordan), Tamer Nafar (Israel-Palestine), VJ Jana Saleh (Lebanon), feat. Talib Kweli (US).

6 `https://bit.ly/3VSAMUS`.

7 Admittedly, this is an awkward argument when it comes to the stateless condition of Palestine, and yet, as Abdullah Öcalan's democratic confederalism theory and practice shows (`http://ocalan-books.com/#/book/democratic-confederalism`), a post-national option is viable.

3 Mediatic Artivist Decolonial Narratives: DAM, Shadia Mansour, and the Middle East Eyes News Source as Case Studies

Drawing on the subversive potential of artivist aesthetics and public politics that has been examined in the previous section from a theoretical decolonial perspective, our attempt here is to apply the concept of performative language(s) to such forms of mediatic engagement as those embraced by Palestinian hip-hop activist singers, networks of artists and cultural workers, and participatory independent journalists. Specifically, we aim to investigate what hip hop and independent journalism share in terms of decolonial performativity within those "oppositional culture(s)" defined by Gilroy (1992) as a set of non-mainstream values, counter-hegemonic imaginaries and non-institutionalized agendas. To this end, we will discuss the extent to which both rap singers and independent journalists can resort to (re)active interventions, intermedial discursive practices and formations to effect aesthetic or socio-political change or express personal desires and aspirations by acting in public space(s). As unaffiliated cultural and social agents, they exercise their citizenship by creating a space of dissent, often becoming a target of oppressive regimes, in order to provide a set of alternative narratives and critiques that contrast violence by government policies and practices. Among them, the artivist productions by hip-hop activist singers Shadia Mansour and the historical group DAM, along with the Middle East Eye's participatory journalists, will be analyzed for the subversive performative power of their discourses.

For such an analysis, we have relied on two complementary theoretical frameworks based on Baker's narrative theory (2007) and van Dijk's (1995) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis with a focus on its related enunciation strategies. More specifically, by assuming narrative as our only means of making sense of the world and our relationship with the humans that inhabit it, Baker's socio-narrative theory distinguishes between four types of narrative: personal, public, conceptual and metanarrative. Personal narratives relate to people's accounts of everyday life, of their individual dilemmas, personal suffering, fear, joy and apprehension that appeal to our common humanity and make space for neglected or suppressed experiences, as in the Palestinian question. Personal narratives often overlap with public narratives, namely, shared stories elaborated by and circulated among small or large groups of individuals and constrained by the range of meaningful symbols and images that evoke collective emotions.

Additionally, Baker's narrative theory is also based on Somers and Gibson's (1994) four core features of selective appropriation, relationality, temporality and causal emplotment, all of which have important

implications for the textual construction of the personal and public narratives about the Palestinian question and diaspora. Selective appropriation is the decision process guided by evaluative criteria to include or exclude, and to background or foreground, any narrative element, including events, experienced by the narrator. Relationality refers to the identification of those individual elements (events, characters, linguistic items, layout, imagery, etc.) that derive or change their meaning from the overall narrative context and design within which they are configured. Relationality is also inextricably connected to temporality, which refers to the embeddedness of narratives in time and space. The whole narrative takes on significance thanks to the distinct pattern of causal emplotment, that is, the thematic texture and "loci of enunciation" (Mignolo 2011) which the narrator is responsible for and engaged with.

In order to understand the performative language of aesthetic and political discourses, we also resort to van Dijk's approach to CDA to examine how those artists and journalists compose their multimodal textualities in rhetorical terms, that is to say, what enunciation strategies are used, how they construct their identities as engaged narrators and how they strive to challenge dominant narratives. Crucially, the research analysis will take into account the following enunciation strategies: the use of 'I' facet for individual self-affirmation, which can contribute to reworking the way the narrator defines himself/herself and his/her 'loci of enunciation"; the use of 'we' facet for expressing collective affirmation, which refers to the society and its institutions in general, raises a criticism towards them and provides alternative scenarios from within; the shift from 'I' to 'you' facets for interpellation, by which the narrator unlocks new modes of existence and understanding of the social world (appealing to the audience who may identify with or confront it); the construction of 'us' *vs* 'them' through discourse structures that directly entail attitude schemata like negative evaluations of 'them' and positive ones of 'us'. As we will see later in this section, such enunciation strategies are built on specific pragmatic moves such as argumentation, rhetorical figures, evaluative lexical style, experienced storytelling, intentional emphasis on positive/negative actions and quoting credible witnesses, sources or experts.

Drawing on this range of critical tools, it is to be said that some case studies have been selected in order to reflect on all the discursive properties presented so far. The selection has been made on the basis of the heterogeneity of the texts collected for a small corpus consisting of multimodal and performative texts ranging from short docufilms to video and article interviews, from songs to manifestos, from

boycott petitions to blog posts. Despite the small size of the corpus[8] and the fact that only a selection of excerpts from those texts could be included in this study due to space constraints, we have attempted to cover a significant time span that stretches from 2001 to 2021. The main goal of the linguistic analysis of this corpus is to assess whether and to what extent common thematic connectors, narrative patterns and discursive properties related to the Palestinian question may be identified and problematized from a decolonial perspective.

The first case study is DAM, the Palestinian-Israeli historical group that chooses hip hop as a "defensive practice" (Bresheeth 2007, 144) for asserting a Palestinian cultural identity where such a history and existence is denied, as well as for resisting erasure, ongoing dispossession and occupation by Israel. Significantly, the group strategically and occasionally employs code switching in formulating their activist claims: according to their audience, they rap in Hebrew, Arabic and English, to transcend linguistic boundaries and to extend their influence beyond their immediate environment. In 2001 DAM released the song *Min Irhabi: Who's the Terrorist?*, which was downloaded over a million times, giving rise to their international exposure.[9] The politically charged song describes the military occupation that many Palestinians living in Israel face on a daily basis:

> Who's a terrorist? I'm a terrorist?
> How am I a terrorist while I live in my country?
> Who's a terrorist? You're a terrorist!
> You've taken everything I own while I'm living in my homeland.
>
> [Verse 1: Tamer Nafar]
>
> Killing us like you killed our ancestors
> Go to the law? Why bother, my enemy
> You're the witness, lawyer and judge
> Upon the judge, my end begins
> Your dream is that we grow fewer and moreover that we are a minority
> Your dream is that the minority become a majority in the graveyards

8 Specifically, the corpus consists of twenty-five multimodal texts that have been collected and saved for the future development of this research.

9 Those lyrics have offended some Israelis and prompted about two dozen protesters to push their way toward the stage here, yelling at Nafar and his fans and waving Israeli flags. Among them, Israeli Culture Minister Miri Regev, a former military censor, has publicly labelled the song as an act of violence and attempted to control artistic freedom.

Democracy? I swear you're Nazis
And now while my agony is so intense you call me the terrorist?

[Verse 2: Mahmoud Jreri]

Why terrorist? Because my blood isn't calm? It's boiling!
'Cause I hold my head high for my motherland
You killed my beloved, now I'm alone
My family driven out, but I will remain and shout
I'm not against peace, peace is against me.

The whole song proves to show an interplay and tension between personal and public narratives in the way that the rappers construct their thought-provoking narrative to respond to the Israeli violence against Palestinians. Indeed, the whole text shifts constantly from monoglossic to heteroglossic discourse, that is, from the 'I' subjective formulas to the 'you' enunciation strategies by which the rappers resort to the interpellation of the public to speak directly to an Israeli audience. From the very beginning, the performative power of the 'I' and 'you' relationship, which also seems to recall the oral process of the African-American call and response, addresses the dichotomy of 'terrorist' and 'victim' which was made particularly relevant in the wake of the Second Intifada. Specifically, in verse 2 the rappers provide an insight into the social, political and historical context of this song, making Somers and Gibson's categories (of selective appropriation, temporality, relationality and causal emplotment) particularly evident: the reference is to the massacre ("killed my loved ones" and "my family driven out") in the city of Al-Lydd that was occupied by Israeli Defence Forces in 1948 to make room for Jewish settlements, resulting in the current predominantly Jewish Israeli population. Historians have alleged that following the occupation, 426 men, women and children were killed by Israeli forces inside Dahmash mosque, while 750,000 Palestinians were uprooted from their land(s), displaced and expelled via force, now living as refugees in exile all over the world (Pappe 2006).

In DAM's verses, instead of accepting the notion that Palestinians are terrorists, the rappers' storytelling places this discourse under a historical lens and interrogates it by outlining the preconditions of settler colonization that they, as Palestinians, were born into. From the pragmatic point of view, their public counter-narrative is built on the semantic polarization and evaluation of the social relations that constitute colonizer ('you'/'my enemy') and colonized ('I'/'a minority'), debunking the dominant Zionist narrative according to which Palestine was the "land without a people for a people without a land" (Abdel Jawad 2006, 72). By reiterating the attitude schemata

in which the 'you' and 'I' relationship is topicalized throughout the song by asking "how am I the terrorist while I live in my country/you have taken everything I own", DAM critiques the racist, essentialist notion of "the Palestinian terrorist".

Such a decolonial move is linguistically performed by the presence of some distinctive thematic connectors, narrative patterns and discursive properties as those relating to occupation ('confinement', 'our land is disappearing', 'families driven out', 'you oppress'), cultural erasure ('destroy me', 'degrade us'), censorship ('you silence us'), struggle ('defend myself', 'we suppress our pain'), pain ('agony', 'anguish') and derogatory labelling ('terrorist', 'you're Nazis', 'a criminal') followed by a sequence of action verbs connoting the material reality of the colonizers' violent acts that 'have taken everything', 'killed our ancestors', 'let the kids throw stones', 'hit me and wept', 'buried our parents', 'killed my beloved', 'destroy me', 'erase my culture'. References to childhood ('the little kids throw stones', 'how many orphans you've created', 'orphaned children') as the most exposed and vulnerable victims of violence and conflict are also included in the song to contrast and refuse the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians.

The second case study we want to discuss here as a powerful testimony of artivist engagement is Shadia Mansour's song *Al Kufiya Arabiya*, released in 2011 and also known worldwide in its English translation as 'The Kufiya is Arab'. Shadia Mansour was born in London in 1985 but her parents are originally from Haifa and Nazareth. Influenced by Arabic performers such as Fairouz and Umm Kulthoum, she began her civic and public engagement by singing at Palestinian protest rallies as a child and became known in London's Palestinian community for performing classical Arab protest songs at an early age. Since she burst onto the hip-hop scene in 2003, she has also collaborated with activist artists like Palestinian hip-hop group DAM. In 2010 she joined the Iraqi rapper Lowkey and the American Jewish scholar Norman Finkelstein on his book tour to tell the truth about the Israeli military's attack on the Gaza Strip in 2009 (known in Israel as Operation Cast Lead and in Palestine as The Battle of al-Furqan), undertaking a cycle of performances of rap and spoken word poetry labelled Cultures of Resistance. This very label is likewise representative of the performative and symbolic creativity of Mansour's lyrics, along with the convergence of her music and her political activism that makes herself feel part of a 'musical intifada' against the occupation of Palestine, conservatism and oppression of women. Additionally, just as DAM has made its translingual choice when rapping in Hebrew, Arabic and English, so Mansour switches from English as her native language to Arabic, which represents a symbol of her heritage and a shared cultural communication to reach the Arabic-speaking world.

The political dimension of her music set in the interplay and tension between tradition and modernity is also embodied by her choice to perform in traditional Palestinian clothing. Here, the aim to preserve cultural identity against homogenization and the overt sexualization of women in hip hop can be read as Mansour's decolonial move toward participatory music activism, as strongly emerges from the song *Al Kufiya Arabiya* (The Kufiya is Arab).[10]

[Verse 1:]

Good morning, cousins.
Come and honor us with your presence.
What would you like us to offer you, Arab blood or tears from our eyes?
I believe that's how they hoped we would greet them. Look how they grew confused when they realized their mistake.
That's how we wear the kufiya, the black and white kufiya.
They began playing a long time ago by wearing it as a fashion accessory.
No matter how creative they become, no matter how they change its color, an Arab kufiya will remain Arab.
Our kufiya: they want it. Our culture: they want it.
Our dignity: they want it. Everything that's ours: they want it.
No, we won't be quiet for them. We won't permit them.
No, no. It suits me.
Thank you. The thing isn't theirs.

From the discourse analysis viewpoint, Mansour's song also blends personal and public narratives in the way she denounces cultural appropriation against the American-made blue-and-white colored Arab scarf with Stars of David on it. Following the narrative process of selective appropriation, Mansour's experiential storytelling draws on the construction of 'we'/'our' facets that relate to the collective consciousness ('that's how we were the kufyia') and to the affirmation of collective cultural identity ('our kufiya', 'our culture', 'our dignity', 'our heritage', 'our history'), reflecting the belief that the Israelis are occupying more than land. However, the thematic connectors of collective consciousness and identity are also constructed along the lines of temporality and relationality, which make the Israeli presence textually enunciated by the ongoing appeal to the 'they'/'their' facets ('they began playing', 'they want it', 'they mimic us', 'they're greedy for Jerusalem', 'the thing isn't theirs'). By re-echoing Mignolo (2011), the "Palestinian locus" of Mansour's enunciation shifts to the

10 The translation was provided by `https://allthelyrics.com/`.

personal 'I'/'my' facets in the second verse, which proves to be very dense from a pragmatic viewpoint. Here, the artist's self-affirmation is combined with a sequence of such rhetorical strategies as personification ('we're the civilization', 'the kufiya is my identity'), metaphor and similitude ('my tongue stabs like a knife', 'my words are letter', 'I'm like the kufiya'), and hyperbole ('my earthquake trembles uncontrollably'), all of them drawing on symbolic vocabulary that, on the one hand, serves to incorporate the historically meaningful image of the keffiyeh within the Palestinian imagination and identity in the face of ongoing struggle and, on the other hand, aims to debunk its urbanization and commodification due to imitation by the Israelis.

The last case study which is worth analyzing here is an article selected from the Middle East Eye, an independent digital news organisation covering stories from the Middle East and North Africa, as well as related content from beyond the region. It was founded in 2014 and was launched through a call[11] specifically addressed to "citizen journalists" (Baker, Blaagaard 2016), who are encouraged "to read between the lines and take stories one step further rather than simply follow the official narrative". Such a statement is a sign of the extent to which MEE's journalist production has been built on the aim, among others, of giving visibility to non-mainstream mediatic narratives with respect to the Palestinian question. To this end, we want to mention and briefly examine here an online article published in 2021 by Devin G. Atallah, Lana Andoni and Hana R. Masud, who have engaged decolonizing narrative and community-based participatory approaches to critical inquiry, primarily within long-term partnerships with communities in Palestine, among others. The article, entitled "Love Letters to Palestine: In Search of Decolonial justice",[12] proves to be a significant testimony to decolonial mediatic commitment, through which personal and public narratives are legitimized in the wake of a participatory and activist storytelling set, as follows:

> Palestine exists, and our existence is our resistance. We survive and work towards healing, in spite of the weapons of mass deconstruction that target our everyday lives with all the resources of colonialism, because we are – as activist Assata Shakur reminds us in her powerful autobiography – "weapons of mass construction". [[…]] Palestinians live under intolerable circumstances, with Israel enabled to perpetrate settler-colonial, racially supremacist violence. Standing against racism means standing against settler-

11 The whole call is available here: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/calling-all-citizen-journalists.

12 The article is available here: https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/palestine-love-letters-search-decolonial-justice.

> colonialism. It means standing with decolonisation – and where there is colonisation, there is also decolonisation. Where there are Palestinians, you can also find our *intifada* attitude, our dignity and our decolonial love, never too far away. Over the past several months, our decolonial love has been on full display in unparalleled ways. [...]
>
> All know we can come together to bridge our forced separations and renew our decolonial struggle. Palestine is not alone; the letters we received echo this decolonial love. We received dozens of love letters dedicated to Palestine from our families, friends and colleagues. [...] Colonisers tell us that Palestine is dead and buried, but we know otherwise, and we are moving towards more aliveness. Like our radical Black sisters and brothers, we Palestinians are time-travellers too. [...] To Israel, and to many European and Euro-American power brokers, we are easily invisibilised – killed, detained, deported, erased – not because we are weak, but because we are colonised. And in our colonial condition, we belong to all the peoples of colour of the world – especially those who have been unpeopled. [...] Rather, the required remedy is love and anti-racist resistance to colonisation. The medicine is decolonial justice, including concrete political action to end not only the deadly bombing raids, but the entire Israeli occupation of Palestine and the siege of Gaza.

From a discourse analysis viewpoint, the authors' voices and experience is projected onto the collective value of the 'we'/'our' facets that coincide with Palestine, Palestinians and their '*intifada* attitude'. The power of such identifications is also reinforced by the use of a pragmatic strategy typical of the language of journalism, that is, to quote credible witnesses in the article ("activist Assata Shakur", "psychiatrist Yasser Abu Jamei", "Adrienne Maree Brown"), thereby making the narrative itself more reliable and participatory. As for argumentation, the article also envisages a sort of decolonial thinking which can help to disentangle the distorted narratives produced by the colonizer as elicited by the statement "Colonisers tell us that Palestine is dead and buried", as well as emphasized by the repetition of the historicized and emplotted adjective 'decolonial' associated with such thematic connectors as 'struggle', 'love' and 'injustice'.

Therefore, the lines through which the journalists most reflect their decolonial claims are the ones recalling the power of colonial domination ("To Israel, and to many European and Euro-American power brokers"), the effects of the pan-coloniality of knowledge ("we are easily invisibilised – killed, detained, deported, erased"), as well as of epistemic racism ("and in our colonial condition, we belong to all the peoples of colour of the world") that has implemented the political-cum-intellectual logic of coloniality. According to the par-

ticipatory journalists' viewpoint, a decolonial narrative approach is what emerges from the reading of "dozens of love letters dedicated to Palestine from their families, friends and colleagues" as a way to practice what Mignolo describes as "epistemic disobedience" against the oppressive way of knowing and imagining (Mignolo 2009, 159).

4 Concluding remarks

This study has attempted to discuss the extent to which unaffiliated citizens endeavor to give themselves a voice and thus produce counter-discourses and counter-publics (border culture), thanks to the powerful role of such mediatic artivist engagement practices (cyborature) as hip hop and independent journalism. Among them, the impact of public discourse and dissent exerted by such practices with respect to popular resistance during the First Intifada has reminded us that collective singing and dancing, along with participatory newstories, during that period opened performative spaces for the integration of new communities, bodies and ideologies by contemplating new directions and new possibilities in the national movement. Giving voice to the subaltern experience of dispossession by performing (in) public spaces has also brought to the fore the issue of the role of those discursive practices through which unaffiliated citizens express themselves and the question of how hip-hop artists and independent journalists interact with and construct public spaces as activist actors. In a time when the public and social activism spheres are discursively interlinked, the politicization of performance in terms of artivist engagement of/by such groups does not come as a surprise.

Accordingly, our contribution has also focused on the public artivist value of such "experience movements" (McDonald 2004) enabled by cyborature through which performing citizens have posed new issues of solidarity, authenticity, autonomy and accessibility by enacting participatory decolonial and diasporic politics. Throughout the analysis of our case studies, we have investigated those linguistic tropes, thematic connectors and discursive properties that make the mediatic artivist narratives created by DAM, Shadia Mansour and the Middle East Eye news source emblematic testimonies of postcolonial publics and engagement, thus conveying the subversive power of their discourses in terms of aesthetic-political appeal. As a result, we have identified and problematized issues of resistance, collective consciousness, resilience, self-determination and decolonization as common thematic connectors featuring their artistic and journalistic production as a site of a border culture, i.e., a site of teaching, learning and shaping alternative understandings of the Palestinian question, while struggling for liberation.

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