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Flowers for Palestine From Holy City to Holy City

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Abstract

We are a Black femme-led multidisciplinary group of artists, activists, community members, and most importantly human beings who are committed to creative resistance in solidarity with Palestine. As Black people based in the greater Charleston South Carolina area, we are connected to the legacy of resilience and resistance in the Lowcountry. Our inspiration stems from a feminist, armed resistance group, the Chrysanthemum Flowers, established pre-Nakba in 1933. Emboldened by these eco-radical ancestors, we aimed to create a larger-than-life sized public flower installation to express continued solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement. This paper documents the nine months preceding our proposed installation which included collaboration with various community groups to lead arts workshops, film-screenings, book discussions, and teach-ins about the intersections of Black and Palestinian liberation, how to build collective power, and several ways to stand with Palestine and other oppressed peoples around the world. This paper outlines our organizing process including: 1) show of solidarity, 2) relationship-building, and 3) sustainable, ongoing practice. Ultimately, we are guided by the Combahee River Collective Statement which calls for action on both local and global issues to strive for coalition building with women of color and persons in the Global South.



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“The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World, and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression.” (excerpt from The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977)

Introduction: Why Ongoing Nakba?

The ongoing Israel-Palestine “conflict” resurfaced within international news headlines on October 7, 2023. The terminology “conflict” typically infers tension between two equal and opposing factions.¹ Unfortunately, “conflict” further obscures the reality of settler colonial violence and occupation by basically dismissing any resistance to such oppression (Khalidi, 2020). This most recent iteration of war is widely described as Hamas-led groups attacking Israeli forces, infiltrating from Gaza (Nassar, 2013). A socio-historical context is essential given this framing and that Israel, alongside other mainly western imperial powers (Said, 1978), label Hamas as a terrorist group.

“Hamas” can be loosely translated as Islamic Resistance Movement from an Arabic acronym (Hawaleshka, 2023). Western media’s Hamas portrayal relies on an understanding of the political group’s initial platform established during the First Intifada or uprising against Israeli occupation (Hawaleshka, 2023; Hroub, 2006). According to Khaled Hroub (2006), a leading expert on Hamas, there has been an evolution since its establishment in the late 1980s. In 2006, Hroub indicated that Hamas’ contemporary discourse “emphasize[s] social justice, social welfare allocations, care for the poor, and programs to reduce unemployment” (p. 23). It is crucial to note that at least 70% of Gaza’s population consists of Palestinians who are intergenerational refugees of the Nakba or forced displacement of Palestinians from historic Palestine² (Nassar, 2013; SNCC, 1967; UNRWA, 2021; Vijay, 2023).

¹ See *Journal of Conflict Studies* and *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*.

² Mandatory Palestine was a hallmark development from the League of Nations or United Nations precursor (United Nations, n.d.). Founded in 1920, the League of Nations was the first intergovernmental organization established to “promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security” (United Nations Geneva, n.d.). Preserving world peace was of utmost significance especially following World War I. This global scale combat’s magnitude entails one of the deadliest and most expensive wars in history ushered by technological innovation. World War I is also marked by a shift in European colonialism and emergence of the United States as a superpower (Hindley, 2017). The Balfour Declaration, issued on November 2, 1917, supported “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” (Al Tahhan, 2018; United Nations, n.d.). This statement, issued by the British government during World War I, outlined a mandate system after the disbandment of the Ottoman Empire.

Nazi Germany orchestrated the Holocaust which devastatingly plagued World War II (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.a). The Holocaust horrifically resulted in the systematic genocide of six million European Jews, Romani people, queer folks, and anyone deemed a political agitator (USHMM, n.d.b). Large scale Jewish immigration undoubtedly occurred to escape Nazi persecution. Primary relocation destinations included the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, throughout Latin America, and Mandatory Palestine (Broek, n.d.; DellaPergola, 2023; Kramer & Tong, 2024; Library of Congress, n.d.). How can a homeland be created for an oppressed people without infringing on the local Indigenous population(s)? In other words, who has ancestral stewardship rights to land?

What is often referred to as the Arab Israeli War of 1948, for Palestinians, was and continues to be ongoing (cultural, national, existential) Nakba (Abdou, 2024; Eghbariah, 2024). The rise of Zionist nationalism alongside the British Mandate proposed a partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states (Khalidi, 2020). Such a mandate system represents settler colonialism and occupation by transferring rule from one power to another at the expense of

Nakba, translating to catastrophe in Arabic, encompasses the mass forced displacement and dispossession of more than 750,000 Palestinians from 1947-1949 (over 80% of the population) during the creation of the settler colonial nation state of Israel in May 1948 (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). It is imperative for us to rethink current Western media portrayals about the notion of “conflict” and perceived terrorism given this concise yet crucial historical overview (Said, 1978). We can, moreover, benefit from familiarizing ourselves with the International Criminal Court’s jurisdiction in dire situations where genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes are committed (ICC, n.d.; ICJ, 2024; ICJ, 2024a; ICJ 2024b). Oppressed groups from different parts of the world can identify with being disenfranchised in society. The inquiry question guiding this study is: what does it mean to uplift Palestinian people’s humanity through creative expression as global acts of solidarity based in the Lowcountry?

Creative Resistance: Art Activism and Global Solidarity

This paper documents art-based, community organizing efforts of Flowers for Palestine. We are a Black led femme multidisciplinary group of artists, activists, community members, and most importantly human beings committed to creative resistance in solidarity with Palestine. As Black people based in the greater Charleston South Carolina area, we are connected to the legacy of resilience and resistance in the Lowcountry (Cunneff, 2022; Gullah Geechee Corridor, n.d.; Kovacs, 2022; Library of Congress, n.d., Sutherland, 2018). Commitment to our own liberation aligns with the Palestinian liberation; we cannot truly have one without the other (Flowers for Palestine, 2024).

Our activism follows a robust tradition of Lowcountry resistance against U.S. empire. To better understand such a rich and fertile context, I provide a brief historical background which undergirds our site. Charleston is the oldest and largest city in South Carolina (Charleston, SC gov., n.d.). More importantly, this port city served as an important hub within the larger TransAtlantic slave trade (Explore Charleston, n.d.; South Carolina Ports, n.d.). Captive Africans were intentionally coveted and pursued because of specialized knowledge regarding crop cultivation in West Africa’s rice-growing region (Fields-Black, 2008; Gullah Geechee Corridor, n.d.; Littlefield, 1991). The institution of slavery is not the sole narrative about Black history; rather it chronicles a white supremacist system designed for subjugation.

Charleston, as a result, was once the primary single-entry point for enslaved Africans in U.S. history (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.; Lowcountry Digital Library, n.d.). This numerical value correlates with the Gadsden’s Wharf complex which was the nation’s largest dock area (Preservation Society of Charleston, n.d.). Simply stated, the majority of African Americans (those who are descendants of captive Africans) in this country likely have a direct ancestor who was human trafficked through Charleston. Today, this area is the now site of the International African American Museum (IAAM, n.d.). African descended people’s skilled labor in ornamental iron work, historic

Indigenous Palestinian Arabs (Pappé, 2006; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2014). A direct ramification involved successive waves of European Zionist migration to Palestine well before, during, and after World War II. Hatred against Jews undeniably spans two millennia. Antisemitism was clearly an influential force bolstering mass Jewish exodus of Europe (Anti-Defamation League, 2020). To be clear, Zionism and antisemitism are not identical. There should be no assumption that all Jewish people are Zionists. Simultaneously, a Zionist is anyone (worldwide) who supports the sociopolitical approach undergirding Israel’s nationalist ideology and settler colonial violence to occupy Palestine.

architecture, coastal agriculture, and food production continue to shape Charleston's picturesque landscape and prosperous tourism industry.

Flowers for Palestine seeks to make connections to ongoing Lowcountry activism as a stance of solidarity. We are inspired by a feminist, armed resistance group established pre-Nakba in 1933 (Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2023). This group, Zahrat al-Uqhawan or The Chrysanthemum Flowers, adopted the name of the native wildflower to symbolize the beauty of nature and freedom that the Palestinians seek (Alsaafin, 2014; Koutteineh, 2023; Lavalette, 2024; Meher, n.d.; Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2023). Emboldened by these eco-radical ancestors, we originally set out to create a larger-than-life sized public flower installation to express continued solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement on the steps of the Charleston City Council building. Our envisioned installation was anticipated to be made up of 20,000+ flowers (fresh chrysanthemums, or mums for short, others handmade of paper, and palmetto fronds—a material of cultural significance to the Lowcountry area) featuring the names of the Palestinian martyrs killed since October 7, 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2023). Our intention was to disrupt the tranquility of the quiet, clean tourist area of the city to bring attention and keep pressure on this crucial moment in history: demanding an immediate ceasefire and end to occupation in Palestine.

The focus of Flowers for Palestine was process and not product. We came together as a small collective of artists during November 2023 to discuss public art action steps in response to October 7, 2023. Our goal was to uplift Palestinian voices by engaging the arts. We specifically desired to offer new perspectives and ways of being in relationship with each other via cultural organizing. According to Benavente & Richardson (2011), activists with the Arts and Democracy Project, cultural organizing “exists at the intersection of art and activism. It is a fluid and dynamic practice that is understood and expressed in a variety of ways, reflecting the unique cultural, artistic, organizational, and community context of its practitioners.” Flowers for Palestine meet frequently to dream big about the possibilities of activism (art + activism) as a vehicle for collective power and social transformation.

Our journey did not lead to our initial goal of the massive public flower installation. During the nine months (January-September 2024) preceding our envisioned installation, we facilitated art workshops, film-screenings, book discussions, and informal teach-ins about the intersections of Black and Palestinian liberation, how to build collective power, and several ways to stand with Palestine and other oppressed peoples around the world. This paper records our organizing process which included: 1) show of solidarity, 2) relationship-building, and 3) sustainable, ongoing practice. We are ultimately guided by the Combahee River Collective's (1977) manifesto which calls for action on both local and global issues to strive for coalition building with women of color and persons in the Global South.

Holy City Connections: Charleston and Lowcountry Resistance

Charleston, South Carolina has a rich historical legacy which continues to permeate the surrounding area today. Local Charleston-based sources highlight how the “holy city” moniker is attributed to a longstanding practice of religious tolerance and diversity in addition to a signature church steeple skyline (Butler, 2024; Greene, 2024; Ivey, n.d., Lowcountry Walking Tours, 2019). The city was established as Charlestowne in 1670 and after English King Charles II (Coker et al., 2020). It is important to recognize Indigenous people who are the original stewards given this land is settled. Flowers of Palestine acknowledges the ancestral homelands and unceded territory of numerous Cusabo tribes who lived in the Lowcountry (Native Land map, n.d). Modern Cusabo people

include the Edisto Natchez-Kusso, descendants of the Kusso family, and the Wassamasaw Tribe of Varnertown Indians, descendants of the Edisto and Etiwan (South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs, n.d.). Yet the only federally recognized tribe in South Carolina are the Catawba people (Catawba Indian Nation, n.d.).

We also honor the rich heritage of Gullah Geechee people's distinctive culture with deep African retentions stemming from the isolated island and coastal plantations during the enslavement period. Charleston is located squarely within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor which spans North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (Gullah Geechee Corridor, n.d.). Such unique cultural preservation is instrumentally linked to our storytelling which advocates for Palestinian liberation.

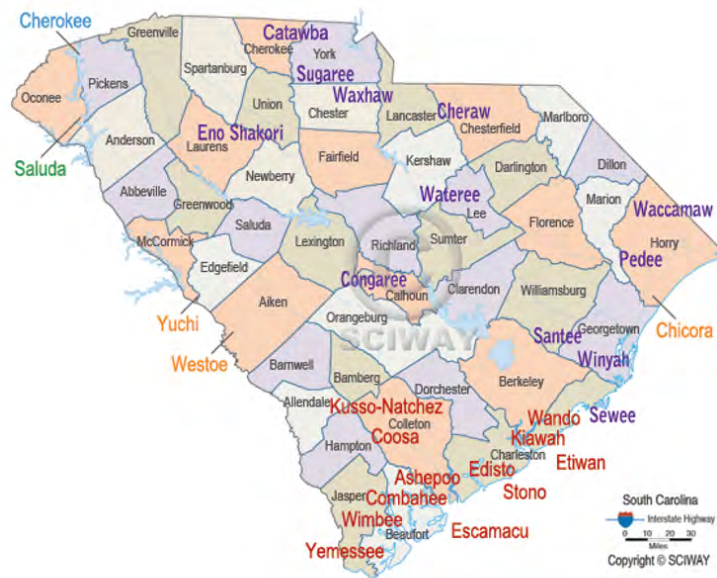


Figure 1. Indigenous Peoples in present-day South Carolina. Source: <https://native-land.ca/listings/territories/westo>



Figure 2. Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor map (highlighted in green). Source: <https://gullahgeecheecorridor.org/>

Gullah Geechee roots are at the crux of Lowcountry life. The Lowcountry is the low-lying coastal region including sand dunes and marshes along South Carolina barrier islands, shoreland, and nearby areas (Gullah Geechee Corridor, n.d.). Although this region is commonly associated with slave-based agriculture wealth from cash crops such as rice and indigo, the Lowcountry has always been a site of resistance. For example, the 1739 Stono Rebellion represents the largest slave insurrection in British North America during the colonial era. This revolt, prior to the American Revolution, demonstrates how enslaved people pursued liberation by heading to St. Augustine to claim freedom in Spanish-controlled Florida (Slave Dwelling Project, 2022). Stono Rebellion resulted in tightened control over enslaved people such as various Negro Acts which prevented captive Africans from assembling in groups, growing their own food, earning money, or learning to read or write (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.; Zinn Education Project, n.d.). The 1803 Igbo Landing involves an oral history passed down through generations to highlight a mass “suicide” or captive Igbo people who chose death by drowning over enslavement near but not yet reaching the Georgia coast (Georgia Historical Society, n.d.; NMAAHC, n.d.). In other words, captured Africans practiced an act of self-determined freedom by walking into “da wata” or as the Igbo saying, “the water brought us here, the water will take us away” (Mendenhall, 2022; Momodu, 2016).

Like the Stono Rebellion, Denmark Vesey dreamt of a life beyond enslavement. In 1822, he purchased his freedom with a lottery earning but also desired to emancipate his family too. Vesey co-founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, one of the largest Black churches in the country and oldest AME church in the southeastern region (Kovacs, 2022; Lowcountry Digital Library, 2013). Today this church is now Emanuel AME. The commonly referred to Mother Emanuel was site of a tragic, white supremacist shooting on June 17, 2015 (Elliott, 2018; Civil Rights Trail,

n.d.). In other words, Vesey's trailblazing endeavor with the AME church accentuates how the site was already culturally significant prior to the contemporary "Emanuel 9" context.

Vesey and several other co-conspirators were martyred for planning what would be a rebellion to free Black people in the Charleston area. This organized plan was inspired by the Haitian Rebellion, or the largest and most successful slave revolt in history. As historian Carol Anderson (2016) asserts, white rage escalates every time African Americans make advances towards full participation in U.S. democracy. The aftermath of Vesey's plotted rebellion included the burning of Black churches, stricter Black codes, and increased tactical, military presence from The Citadel (Powers, 2022). Harriet Tubman, known as an Underground Railroad abolitionist, became the first woman to lead a major military operation in the United States. The Combahee Ferry Raid in 1863 helped to rescue more than 700 enslaved people during the Civil War (NMAAHCb, n.d.; Leichner, 2012).

Approximately 114 years later, the Combahee River Collective, a group of radical Black feminists, outlines a political manifesto inspired by and harkening back to Tubman's revolutionary actions (Combahee River Collective, 1977).



Figures 3 & 4. The author at Harriet Tubman Memorial Statue in Beaufort, SC.

Black people in the Lowcountry region continued an activist trajectory beyond the antebellum or pre-Civil War period marked by a plantation economy. For example, the Avery Normal Institute, 1865-1954, served as a hub for Charleston's African American community with training students for professional careers and leadership roles (Drago et al., 2006). This school's primary purpose was to be a private "normal" or teacher school for Black Charlestonians (Avery Institute, n.d.; Lowcountry Digital Library, n.d.). The City of Charleston School Board decided close the Avery Normal Institute months prior to the historic *Brown* decision. Despite Avery closing, the institution had abundant influence during the Civil Rights Movement.

Averyvites, or those who graduated from Avery, were advocates at the forefront of creating progressive change in Charleston and beyond (Brown, 2024; Drago et al., 2006). One such example is Septima Poinsette Clark who was a pioneer in grassroots citizenship education (Clark, 1990; Jenkins, 2024). She went on to conduct summer workshops at the Highlander Folk School and served on the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's staff (SNCC Digital, n.d.). Clark's citizenship school model functioned as a blueprint for "not only to register to vote, but also to obtain empowering literacy skills, knowledge about legal rights, and information on how to manage property and finances" (Lowcountry Digital Library, n.d.). In other words, Septima Clark's local grassroots organizing acumen was crucial to galvanizing communities within the larger Civil Rights Movement.

Beyond citizenship schools, Charleston continued to be a significant beacon in the quest for freedom regarding Black people. Another example includes the 1969 Hospital Workers Strike (Momodu, 2024; Preservation Society, n.d.) in which a myriad of low paid healthcare employees withheld labor for "more than one hundred days during the spring and summer of 1969, demonstrations, mass arrests, and a military occupation brought the city of Charleston to a standstill" (Lowcountry Digital Library, n.d.). Such a magnificent protest garnered support from notable activists and leaders including: 1) Coretta Scott King a year after her husband's, Martin Luther King Jr., assassination, 2) Latino organizer, Cesar Chavez, who heralded the now United Farm Workers of America, and 3) then United Auto Workers president, Walter Reuther, who was a white ally. Furthermore, the infamous "We Shall Overcome" song was birthed from a workers' walkout at the Cigar Factory in downtown Charleston (Green Book of SC, n.d.; Historical Marker Database, 2013; Lowcountry Digital Library, n.d.; Wright, 2024).

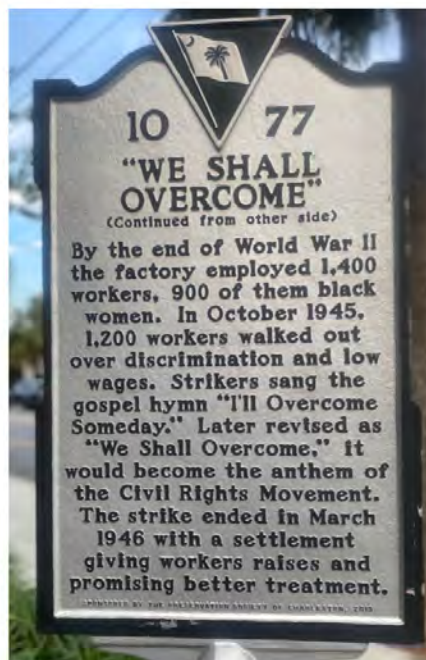


Figure 5. "We Shall Overcome" historical marker, Charleston, SC.

As demonstrated throughout the numerous provided examples, the Lowcountry region is indeed a pivotal site of Black resistance for nearly 400 years. Flowers for Palestine builds on this robust movement building legacy to connect our struggle with Palestinian liberation. The enduring historical significance of Jerusalem as a sacred site for the world's three major monotheistic

religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—undoubtedly reverences Palestine as a holy land (Seligsonk, 2014). We, Flowers for Palestine, relish in the dual “holy city” affiliation as a conduit for cultural organizing and social transformation.

Flowering Liberation: Black and Palestinian Solidarity

Giving someone their flowers is an important feature in the Black community. In consonance with a curatorial statement from the Black Oak Society (2022), the phrase’s meaning indicates “the decision to honor, thanks, and recognize those special to you while they are alive to experience your appreciation.” Evoking the literal connotation and symbolic gestures, Flowers of Palestine elevates resilience strategies of Black and Palestinian liberation. There is an intertwined genealogy of Black and Arab solidarity given the same systems of white supremacy and western imperialism. We are motivated to speak truth to power regarding similar struggles with limited healthcare access, being targeted by police, hate crimes, and much more.

For us, giving flowers embodies following the footsteps of Zahrat al-Uqhawan, an armed, feminist resistance group. The Chrysanthemum Flowers, existed before the Nakba or violent expulsion of Palestinian Arabs before the Israeli nation-state, was established in 1933 (Alsaafin, 2014; Koutteineh, 2023; Lavalette, 2024; Meher, n.d.; Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2023). Flowers for Palestine aims to be proactive in imagining a free Palestine while simultaneously advocating for Lowcountry resistance since “we [B]lack people possibly face the same fate here in the United States” (SNCC, 1967). To do so, we cherish the flower as a symbol of endurance and resilience to highlight a generative bloom despite atrocious conditions. Our cultural organizing actions envision a future beyond an oppressive reality. Flowers for Palestine venerates Black and Palestinian lives by engaging the arts as a vehicle for social change.

Black and Palestinian solidarity is not a new phenomenon. The Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was rooted in racial pride and economic empowerment towards self-determined freedom. This liberation movement was engulfed in cultural organizing and creating Afrocentric political institutions for educational purposes. Given the emphasis on Black humanity, the notion of political freedom extended outside of the United States. For example, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (1967) Middle East Crisis Statement on Palestine vehemently proclaimed:

we do not see how the Jewish refugees and survivors could ever use this tragedy as an excuse to imitate their Nazi oppressors—to take over Palestine, to commit some of the same atrocities against the native Arab inhabitants, and to completely dispossess the Arabs of their homes, land and livelihood. (p.1)

This quote illustrates how a mostly Black college student lead organization understood how settler colonial tactics (leading to Nakba and continued repercussions) motivated by Zionism are designed to decimate Indigenous Palestinian Arabs’ ancestral, stewardship connection to land. Likewise, in the book *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color*, Fischbach (2018) analyzes the role of Black Power Movement activists who “saw themselves and the Palestinians as kindred peoples of color waging a revolution against a global system of oppression” (p 3). These political leaders understood how the plight of Black Americans linked to struggles with those on the African continent and adjacent Middle Eastern countries. Such an assertion underscores a theme of internationalism in a vision for self-determined freedom.

It is worthwhile to note there was discord among leaders for Black empowerment about whether to promote Arab solidarity or not. According to Kumanyika and Noble (2024) Israeli public relations personnel intentionally targeted Black liberation activists during the 1960s. The primary ploy was exploiting the spiritual symbolism of the Old Testament's Exodus narrative as Black Christian Zionism. Furthermore, it is documented how there was ideological divergence at the 1967 National Conference for New Politics in Chicago. Some convention leaders, although not all, adopted a similar viewpoint as the Organization of African Unity's platform which explicitly championed for:

- The Israeli government to be condemned for her expansionist policy and forceful occupation of sovereign territory of another state.
- Measures be taken to alleviate the suffering and improve the position of the Palestinian people in Israel.
- The NBPC should also resolve to support the struggle of Palestine for self-determination.
- The NBPC concurs also with the UN Position that Israel rescind and desist from all practice affecting the demographics structure or physical character of occupied Arab territories and the right of their inhabitants (Fischbach, 2018, p. 105).

These principles clearly delineate how a pro-Palestinian position was embraced by a powerful ethos even if a large quantity were not in unison on this political agenda. Another instance of Black solidarity with Palestinians is a 1970 *New York Times* advertisement entitled "An Appeal by Black Americans Against United States Support of Zionist Government of Israel." This announcement, sponsored by the Committee of Black Americans for Truth about the Middle East or COBATAME, is written as a treatise denouncing previously published Zionist endorsements which appeared in the same exact newspaper. 50+ self-identified Black signatories boldly declared their support for Palestinians while challenging white settler states. The three concluding, thought-provoking sentences read as follows:

WE DEMAND THAT ALL MILITARY AID OR ASSISTANCE OF ANY KIND TO ISRAEL MUST STOP. IMPERIALISM AND ZIONISM MUST AND WILL GET OUT OF THE MIDDLE EAST. WE CALL FOR AFRO-AMERICAN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION AND TO REGAIN ALL OF THEIR STOLEN LAND (COBATAME, 1970).

The all-caps font accentuates the urgency of this petition. Such an appeal is purposefully driven by coalition building goals. Moreover, the advertisement includes a "clip and return to" section which requests the sender's name and mailing address. This portion also includes checkbox options to 1) make contributions for the committee's work, 2) purchase a "truth kit" about the Middle East, and 3) express desire for a speaker to facilitate a lecture or debate. Freedom fighting, not beholden to settler colonial borders, is an apparent outcome of Black and Palestinian solidarity.

There is a resurgence in Black camaraderie with Palestinians who are still living under Zionist occupation. This contemporary movement consists of building on existing strategies but also incorporates an online element. Social media's advent essentially creates an uncharted realm for activism. Various social media platforms permit the opportunity to communicate in expansive ways beyond traditional text. Modern communication tools are used to "amplify voices, instantaneously spread information, and increase collaboration across diverse groups of people" (Maryville

University, 2019; Ohio State University, n.d.). In other words, technological innovation begets national and global conversations in multimodal ways.

Such a digital movement emphasizes the interconnectedness with Zionist occupation of Palestine and endemic police brutality against Black people in the United States. For example, Black Twitter gave prominence to Palestinian insight about combating colonial military presence and tactics during the Mike Brown protests in Ferguson, Missouri during 2014 (Alfred, 2014; Bailey, 2015; Marques, 2024). There is an unfortunate yet striking similarity with police using teargas and harassing anyone trying to broadcast on the ground coverage. An Electronic Intifada blog post expresses unequivocal Palestinian solidarity with Black people in the United States:

We recognize the disregard for black bodies and black life endemic to the supremacist system that rules the land with wanton brutality. Your struggles through the ages have been inspiration to us as we fight our own battles for basic human dignities. We continue to find inspiration and strength from your struggles through the ages and your revolutionary leaders, like Malcom X, Huey Newton, Kwane Ture, Angela Davis, Fred Hampton, Bobby Seale, and others (Baker, 2014).

Likewise, the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights (n.d.) articulates support for Black people in the United States. For example, there is a photo of a graffiti or street art mural uniting the two colonial struggles. Capitalized, spray-painted words say “FROM FERGUSON TO PALESTINE—RESISTANCE IS NOT A CRIME END RACISM NOW! ♥STL-PSC.”



Figure 6. Apartheid wall in Palestine.

The deliberate green, red, and black lettering exemplifies the correlation between the Palestinian and Pan-African flag colors. This pro-Palestinian advocacy organization also indicates how “connections between the dehumanization Palestinians experience under Israeli apartheid and that experienced by Black and Brown communities targeted by US institutional racism and discrimination targeting became clearer than ever” (US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, n.d.). Furthermore, Black for Palestine (2015) is a national network of Black activists who link domestic fights against injustice to the global Palestinian struggle. This collective campaigns for Palestinian sovereignty, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, and ultimately embraces an intersectional framework for organizing against oppression worldwide. Black and Palestinian solidarity continues to reach new borderless heights despite settler colonialism which renders both groups as “disposable others” (Baker, 2014; US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, n.d.).

An Art Based Methodological Approach to Black and Palestinian Solidarity

Art serves as a powerful tool for liberation movements. Flowers for Palestine adheres to Black Radicalism. The Black Radical tradition can be understood as a “collection of cultural, intellectual, action-oriented labor aimed at disrupting social, political, economic, and cultural norms originating in anticolonial and antislavery efforts” (Robinson, 2000). These principles guide cultural organizing endeavors in multiple ways to create more equitable outcomes for Black people now and in the future. Black activists, cultural workers, and intellectuals such as Angela Davis, James Baldwin, and June Jordan bespeak of the intricate conditions which thread together Black and Palestinian liberation (Baldwin, 1979; Davis, 2016; Durie, 2024; Johnson & Lubin, 2017; Jordan, 1982; Maglorie, 2024; Sailba, 2016). Cultural organizers, therefore, can adopt various forms of creative practices to embody self-determined liberation. Flowers for Palestine utilizes our collective imagination to envision a world that values the Black and Palestine humanity. We are firmly rooted in arts-based activist approaches.

Art-based research is a qualitative research method which does not have a set format or standard. Broadly, arts-based research (ABR) consists of interdisciplinary, proactive, and socio-political elements of combating societal injustices (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Rolling, 2013). Like other qualitative inquiry methods, ABR is a way of decoding or interpreting to understand patterns of data. ABR, however, places great emphasis on experiential-based knowledge “to enhance human information-recalling and refining the cargoes of meaning our collected data carries in tow” (Rolling, 2013, p. 44). Flowers for Palestine utilizes ABR as a flexible mode of inquiry to facilitate how people in Charleston are make meaning of Israel’s continued occupation and genocide of Palestine, its destructive impact on Palestinian social life, and connections to US empire specifically in the Lowcountry. In other words, we concentrate on the power of art and hone creative inquiry to challenge common sense notions for transgressing the boundaries of what is considered possible (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013).

Flowers for Palestine did not claim to have all the answers about cultural organizing and Palestinian solidarity. Our continued creative resistance actions required us to resist a status quo power role since “we aren’t here to learn what we already know” (Tompkins, 2016). Put differently, Flowers for Palestine practiced vulnerability to admit that we do not know it all while embracing willingness to learn anew. According to Leavy (2015), ABR can be incorporated at any phase during the research process including “data generation, analysis, interpretation, and (re)presentation” in addition to potential engagement with public media and scholarship (p. 20).

Therefore, ABR is an important practice that Flowers for Palestine embraces to support us in conveying the depth of our emotions and the urgency of our cause. We harness art to confront, process, and collectively grieve the injustices which plague our world by extending Black activists’ provocations against Zionism while uplifting Palestinian’s people resilience.

Flowers for Palestine hosted several community-based events during the 2024 calendar year. Over the course of nine months, we proposed teach-ins, youth/community art events, film screenings, farm days, and rallies all advocating for Palestine. Our specific goals can be summarized as follows: 1) growing chrysanthemums from seed to bloom, 2) art, earth-work, and political education sessions, and 3) flower installation and public event. The initial convening included six dream meetings consisting of eight to ten Black artists in the greater Charleston area. We discussed previous creative experiences while sharing how we could potentially develop social programming to center Black and Palestinian liberation. There was a wide range of backgrounds in terms of cultural

organizing, public arts installations, and being involved in activist circles. Capacity was a major factor impacting how folks could show up and commit to the work. Our planning sessions eventually narrowed down from eight to three primary people. The following includes brief biographical information about each of Flowers for Palestine's three steering committee members: Tiffany Octavia Harris, Brittney "Blue" Washington, and LeeAnn C. Morrisette.

Tiffany is a Southern Black Native girl, from a working-class background with invisible disabilities, who identifies as a storyteller, filmmaker, photographer, and shapeshifter from Southside Atlanta, Georgia. She also is an Assistant Professor of Educational and Social Foundations and affiliated faculty in the Women's and Gender Studies Program as well as Environmental and Sustainability Studies program at the College of Charleston. Her interdisciplinary scholarship intertwines autoethnography, culturally relevant pedagogy, and Black Girlhood + Feminist studies fused into teacher education. As a decolonial feminist scholar, Tiffany conceives of pedagogy to be interactions when teaching and learning transpires including but not limited to activist, ancestral, metaphysical, familial, liberatory, and spatial elements. Indigeneity and the U.S. South become primary analytics through her autoethnographic journey.

Tiffany's background is rooted in her experiences as a former social studies teacher in Atlanta Public Schools, but also as a homegirl with Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), an intergenerational, art-based collective celebrating Black girlhood. Her creative craft draws on ethnodrama performances, DIY photography curation, gardening and hiking as traditional ecological knowledge, experimental filmmaking, and poetry. Tiffany is a certified interpretative guide through the National Association for Interpretation. Moreover, she has collaborated in multiple poetry engagements as a: 1) Blackout poetry facilitator for a university's Black History Month celebration event, 2) creative guest speaker for "Poetry in Libra" hosted by La Estación Gallery, 3) a featured poem published in *Surge: The Lowcountry Climate Magazine*, and 4) a special guest speaker at an open mic in Cork, Ireland. Given Tiffany's academic position, she the author of this paper, however by no means is this storytelling singular in nature.

Brittney is a Black woman, queer artist, and working-class mother from the U.S. Southeast. Brittney, whose artist name is Blue (they/she), searches for alternative ways to think, live, and carve out the kind of life they want. Their orientation is rooted in Black feminist ancestors, elders, and contemporaries all supporting Blue to understand that the reality they/we seek is one they/we must create. World-building requires an interdisciplinary practice; Blue blends elements of art therapy, cultural organizing, and visual artistry to instigate change. Curating anti-oppression workshops is as much a part of their artistic practice as painting. During facilitation, they lean on womanist, queer understandings of systems, change, and healing to advance liberatory thought and action. As a painter, Blue places the Black femme form and mundanity of southern life at the center of the viewer's experience, subverting the single-story narrative of what The South is and who lives here. Instead, their work speaks: we are here, we are multitudes, we are essential to humanity's liberation. Blue seeks to engage in a perpetual tantra, moving toward and weaving together that which speaks to them mentally, spiritually, physically, and energetically. Their social arts practice is a portal to personal and collective healing from that which divorces us from our true selves and the liberated world that could [will] be.

Blue's multidisciplinary approaches to their work applies an understanding that 1) our most important responsibility is dismantling the power arrangements that maintain oppression; 2) everyone has different points of entry into politicization and social justice movements; and 3) art is a powerful portal to healing, imagination, and movement for that purpose. They use painting, illustration, and

filmmaking to uplift the experiences and perspectives of African Americans living in the US South. Blue's work decolonizes ideas of normality and invites radical empathy across difference. As a racial justice strategist and cultural organizer, Blue has facilitated internationally to illuminate the historical events that shape our current experiences of racialized poverty, trauma, and disconnection. They curate arts-based spaces where folks can be brave, vulnerable, and imaginative about how to shape a liberatory future. She also serves as a visual arts producer for social justice groups.

LeeAnn is a Black southern, multidisciplinary storyteller, cultural strategist, and registered yoga teacher based on unceded Cusabo land (Charleston, SC). She has created for Oxford American, the Cornucopia Institute, Good Food Jobs, Nonprofit Quarterly, the Stacey Abrams for Governor Campaign, Blavity, Black Girl in Om, Honey Pot Co, and most recently the National Black Food & Justice Alliance serving as the Director of Communications and Culture. Her work is a commitment to creating pathways through story and practice for Black people to reclaim for ourselves what it means to live well and free from the wounds of generational land-based trauma. She is currently in production of the short film, *The Revolutionary Nature of Making* which profiles an intergenerational collective of Black fiber artists and makers based in Georgia who are reimagining and redefining their relationship to the ritual of making. LeeAnn is a mother to a vivacious 5-year-old and is currently working to rematriate her family's heir's property on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina.

The steering committee's initial timeline was from January-May 2024. We intended for our life size flower art build to be installed by Nakba observance, May 15th. Guided by the symbolism of The Chrysanthemums Flowers feminist resistance group, we insisted on organizing around the Palestinian liberation struggle. We mapped out monthly activities around three primary strands: grow, learn, and build. Team Grow essentially served as the coordination group with communication and outreach. The main task for Team Grow was organizing farm and grow site coordinators in addition to fundraising. LeeAnn elected to be this committee's leader given her rich earthwork background. Team Learn was facilitated by Tiffany, aligning with her experience in the education field. Team Learn was supposed to lead political education events, host film screenings, and provide instructional guidance on any workshop needs. Team Build was responsible for constructing our art installation. This group, steered by dynamic Blue whose art therapy practice centers liberation, would coordinate any art-based events including build logistics, permitting, and community safety.

Our programming calendar forecasted monthly public offerings: one art workshop per month, weekly flower build events, bi-weekly grow check-ins and maintenance, one political education event or teach-in session per month accompanied by a small direct action, one to two film screenings per month, and one book club a month. Flowers of Palestine's vision was ambitious to imagine a world in which Black and Palestinian liberation are indeed possible. Our activism's strength is the connection between the local and global: from holy city to holy city.

A Charleston Charge: Sowing Seeds for Revolutionary Change

On January 24, 2024, our opening event was an interest meeting at a local public library. Approximately 40 people signed up to attend this initial meeting. The steering committee prepared a slideshow presentation to share our ideas. We developed an agenda to outline our run of show for the evening.



Figure 7. Flowers for Palestine opening interest meeting flyer.

We did not know what to expect. Our vision was truly based in community participation. The organizing work could only be done through collective advocacy. We created a collective altar including personal keepsakes and pictures of Zahrat al-Uqhawan, our eco-radical ancestors from pre-Nakba the feminist group.



Figure 8. Collective altar from January 24, 2024 meeting of Flowers for Palestine.

Chairs were arranged in a circle around the altar. We placed a few items in each chair: post-it notes, a chrysanthemum, and a pen with scrap paper. The steering committee oriented everyone to the space and facilitated a grounding exercise. Each individual person introduced themselves by their sharing name, pronouns, community affiliation/organization, and a brief response to what brought them there that evening. The steering committee presented our visionary slides. Afterwards, there was a 10-minute journal activity for everyone to process initial feelings and thoughts about events in Palestine especially since October 7, 2023. We then split into breakout groups, during the opening

interest meeting, based on participants' interest: Team Grow, Team Learn, and Team Build. The steering committee facilitated prompts based on each group's desired outcomes.



Figure 9. Breakout brainstorming process from January 24, 2024 meeting of Flowers for Palestine

We also prioritized the top concerns and questions as follows: 1) Team Learn—what other events are already scheduled in the area, 2) Team Grow—how we are going to get seeds, and 3) Team (Art) Build—what are we building. From there, the steering committee shared our proposed roadmap for February. We ended the session with solidifying a second meeting date (by mid-February) for each breakout group.

Flowers for Palestine's next event, on February 3, 2024, was collaborative with an existing organization. We partnered with the Lowcountry Action Committee (LAC) for an Anti-Imperialist Art Build and Volunteer Meetup. LAC is a Black led grassroots organization dedicated to Black liberation through service, political education, and collective action in the Lowcountry (LAC, n.d.). Given our aligning interests, LAC cordially invited Flowers for Palestine to join this art infused initiative. The Anti-Imperialist Art Build was designed for participants to 1) learn more about the interconnectedness of global events, 2) create posters for upcoming actions, 3) write letters to political prisoners, and 4) learn about various ways to support LAC's task forces. Flowers for Palestine had a table dedicated to our art making with supplies generously donated by LAC.



Figure 10. Lowcountry Action Committee event flyer.

Our artistic practice for the day: writing out the names and corresponding ages of Palestinian martyrs. We also utilized this opportunity to network with like-minded community members to discuss overlapping programs and resources.



Figure 11. Flowers for Palestine table at Lowcountry Action Committee Anti-Imperialist Art Build event.

For Valentine's Day, we decided to do a social media campaign: "Will You Free My Palestine?". Flowers for Palestine garnered the loving momentum of the holiday on February 14, 2024, as a plea to city and state legislators. We created Valentine's Day themed digital flyers with hearts and chrysanthemums as well as provided a sample script for folks to post including key information about increased air strikes and displacement in Palestine.

Our strategy was to appeal to the moral senses of Charleston City Council members regarding food, water, medicine, and shelter shortages. This social media campaign included questions such as: Who can live like this? How many more lives must be lost? We ultimately encouraged community members to contact their respective lawmakers to demand a permanent ceasefire using hashtags as follows: #WillYouFreePalestine, #EndGenocideCHS, and #Flowers4Palestine.



Figure 12. Valentine's Day social media campaign.

On February 22, 2024, we hosted a *Battle of Algiers* (1966) film screening (Pontecorvo, 2014). This event's location was not publicized beyond registrants to protect our contacts from unwanted attention. Flowers for Palestine co-emceed the film screening's discussion with a LAC member and well-known community photographer, Joshua Parks. We opened the event with a welcome and brief overview about our cultural organizing inspiration. From there, we paused for moments of silence to honor Palestinian martyrs. Each of audience member was provided a martyr's name, cloth to write out the name and age, and a coloring sheet created by Blue (Figure 13).

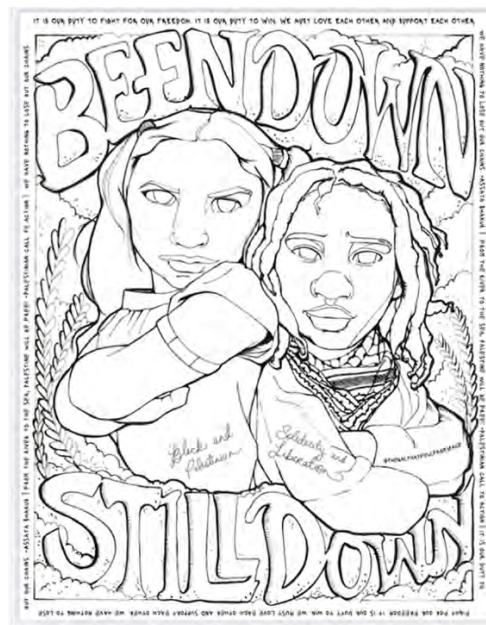


Figure 13. "Been Down, Still Down: Black and Palestinian Solidarity and Liberation" coloring sheet, created by Organizer 2.

A quote about decolonization from Franz Fanon's, *Wretched of the Earth* was read to situate the context of the 1966 film:

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters beings, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The "thing" colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation. (p. 2)

After the screening, there was 45 min. discussion focusing on themes such as technology, real-time occupation, connection to homeland, and mindset of the colonizer/occupier.

On February 24, 2024, we hosted a virtual book talk. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, written by Angela Davis (2016), was the book examined. The small, but mighty, group virtual of under 10 participants discussed how the book highlights commonalities between different global movements. We watched a short *Democracy Now* (2016) video clip on Angela Davis' reflections about writing the book. The notion of physical scapegoats was a major theme. We unpacked the parallels between Palestinians and Black people in the U.S. regarding being easily identifiable and who is othered. Imprisonment was another major theme. The group made connections between policing, prison, and surveillance.

Interestingly, Davis (2016) makes an explicit reference to Charleston, SC linked with the struggle for justice in Ferguson, MO following Mike Brown's police shooting in 2014. She effectively calls attention to an incident of police brutality which resulted in the fatality. Walter Scott Jr. was an unarmed 50-year-old Charleston Black man who tragically died because of a traffic stop. This high-profile incident was all caught on video in 2015, after year Mike Brown was killed. Davis also sheds lights on President Obama's eulogy which commemorated Reverend Clementa Pinckney who was assassinated in the racially motivated terrorist mass shooting at Mother Emanuel AME on June 17, 2015. Our main takeaways were how a social class system is reinforced on an international scale and how might we evoke empathy as an access point to liberation movements.

Subsequently, that same afternoon, some Flowers for Palestine members attended a Black History Month celebration hosted by the Charleston Black Lives Matter chapter. This community building event held at a local park featured live music, visual arts, fashion, and more. Organizers representing different community organizations were encouraged to give speeches, disseminate Afrocentric political education, and perform poetry readings. Flowers of Palestine's steering committee was invited as guest speakers. Beyond providing a brief overview about our cultural organizing vision, we engaged audience members in an artmaking session. Our guided prompt for creative expression: write a love letter to a future free Palestine. A select number of love letters to a future Free Palestine created during the Black History Month Celebration event were later posted on the Flowers for Palestine social media page.



Figure 14. Charleston Black Lives Matter (Independent Chapter) even flyer.



Figure 15. Creative expression prompt at Charleston Black Lives Matter (Independent Chapter) event.



Figure 16-20. Creative expression prompt Charleston Black Lives Matter (Independent Chapter) event and examples of "Love Letters to a Future Free Palestine" from social media campaign.

As we transitioned into March 2024, we planned four events: a film screening, a grow event, an art making workshop, and a book club discussion.



Figure 21. Flowers for Palestine, March 2024 programming.

March was an important month marking the beginning of Ramadan (March 10-April 9, 2024). Our programming declared an escalation in violence, starvation, and restrictions on the few remaining physical holy sites, institutions of higher learning, as well as archives, libraries, and museums (Librarians with Palestine, 2024). Flowers for Palestine acknowledged how the United States was pushing for a temporary ceasefire at the time, yet complicit in supplying weapons to an apartheid state. The *Tale of Three Jewels* film screening was made available by the Palestinian Film Institute (PFI, n.d.).



Figure 22. Film screening event flyer.

This 1994 film, the first to be shot entirely from the Gaza Strip, depicts a twelve-year-old Palestinian child who experiences adventure and love during the first Intifada. The twenty-five plus person audience divided into three small breakout clusters (facilitated by each steering committee member) to discuss initial film reactions before reporting back to the whole group.

For the Grow! Kick-off Event on March 17, 2024, we invited community members to participate in the growing process.



Figure 23. *Grown Flowers Solidarity, spring event flyer.*

Numerous seeds were planted with the intention that each flower bloom was to honor a Palestinian life who had been martyred since October 7, 2023. The steering committee distributed the first round of seeds (to be supplemented by handmade flowers) for the proposed community art build. Our optimism was the grow process, from seed to bloom, would offer an intentional space for meditation about and reverence for Palestinian life towards liberation from occupation and genocide.



Figures 23 & 24. *Grown Flowers Solidarity event.*

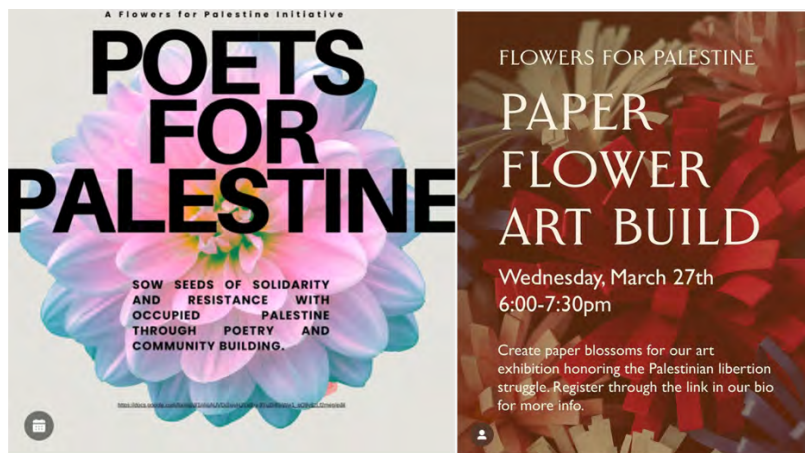
The first Paper Flower Art Build workshop, on March 27, 2024, became yet another community building activity. We utilized this session as an opportunity to create paper blossoms and continue writing out the martyrs' names to be incorporated into our larger art exhibition.



Figure 25 & 26. Paper flower making event flyer and flower making session.

Our virtual book club discussion on *Let this Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care* (2023) was postponed due to the steering committee's minimal bandwidth.

Our cultural organizing momentum shifted by the end of March 2024. The steering committee recognized our limited capacity with weekly planning meetings and hosting frequent programs. We absolutely enjoyed doing so, yet racial capitalistic logics generally dictated our time otherwise. We anticipated additional leaders would organically emerge (cite Gramsci) within the sub-teams: grow, learn, and build. Flowers for Palestine's grand vision necessitated community participation towards collective advocacy. Two artists from our organization began to take more initiative with event planning. For example, Poets for Palestine developed as a writing workshop series to celebrate the power of poetry by centering Palestinian experiences spearheaded by artist Ana Rucker. Additional paper flower art build sessions emerged after the initial one.



Figures 27 & 28. Poetry and paper flower making event flyers.

Three total art-making sessions were facilitated by, Ester Araujo, an artist who graciously demonstrated different methods for creating paper blossoms. The artist's strength was creating a social media reel with a step-by-step process on how to make a paper chrysanthemum (add cite). The steering committee hosted a third film screening also made possible by the Palestinian Film Institute (PFI, n.d.). *Fertile Memory* blends together documentary and narrative elements to deliver complex insight into two Palestinian women's struggles transcending the oppressive politics that have torn apart their homes and lives.



Figure 29. Film screening even flyer.

On May 15, 2024, we hosted Seeds of Revolution: A Nakba Commemoration in partnership with Free Palestine Charleston. This evening event marked the 76th observance of the 1948 Nakba.



Figure 30. 76th Nakba Commemoration flyer.

Together we paid tribute to the Palestinian lives taken, displaced, and forever changed through ceremony and radical imagining. Registered participants met at a public library. As a group, we walked roughly 10 min. to the International African American Museum. The steering committee shared a brief history about Black people in Charleston while making connections with oppression and genocide in Palestine. A participant volunteered to read the *A Prayer for Palestine* poem aloud.

We collectively sang hymnals such *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* and *We Shall Overcome*. Once we returned to library, there was fellowship and refreshments.



Figure 31. Culturally relevant food served during the Nakba commemoration event.

Free Palestine Charleston organizers evoked Arab lived experiences to help the group better understand the plight of Palestinian life. Such storytelling consisted of sharing Palestinian and Lebanese family histories and reading screenshots from handwritten letters recounting Nakba displacement memories. The closing activity included people engaging with and responding to the following prompt: What does a Charleston look like that center the wellbeing of the most marginalized among us?

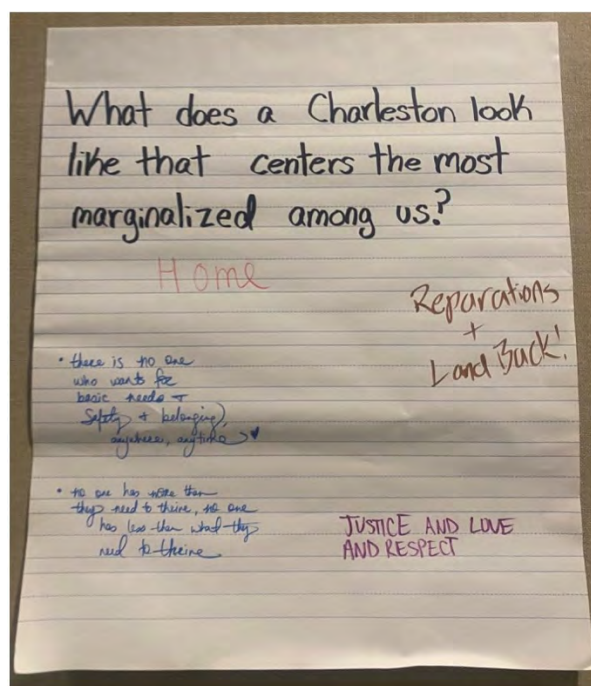


Figure 32. Nakba commemoration closing co-constructed knowledge activity.

Most people who attended the Nakba Commemoration event expressed gratitude for the opportunity process a range of emotions, mainly grief, regarding Palestinian social life.

On Sunday June 9, 2024, we hosted From Charleston to Palestine: An Art Show in Solidarity with Palestine. This community-based art show offered a profound journey through wide array of locally curated pieces that captured the complexities of struggle and resilience connecting the Lowcountry to Palestine, hence holy city to holy city. We had refreshments in the venue's lobby area. There was also a mini showcase of artwork created during previous Flowers for Palestine events before entering the main gallery. Once the audience arrived at the main gallery, there was a flower altar including pictures of Zahrat al-Uqhawan and several flowers donated from a local farm, Dragon Fly Creek Farm.



Figures 33 & 34. Art show flyer and gallery entrance.

Beginning on the left wall, the exhibition opened with intense works depicting the horror and destruction in Gaza (intentionally not pictured at artists' request). As the audience continued through the gallery space, the exhibition transitioned into a space filled with art reflecting raw emotions of rage, anger, frustration, and collective grief. Such sentiment included protest signs and photos from local rallies to amplify the collective outcry and resistance against oppression.

The exhibition's tone shifted as audience members advanced towards the back wall. This portion of the gallery consisted of community-created paper flowers and leaves symbolizing both loss and the radical nature of rebirth; rebirthing a Palestine that is free.



Figures 35, 36 & 37. Images from Charleston to Palestine art show.

This segment invited viewers to reflect deeply on what has been lost and the enduring process of liberation. The exhibition then transitioned into a space of hope, featuring pieces which echoed flower imagery to embody resilience and reimagining. Final artworks, located on the right wall, highlighted an enduring spirit and unwavering determination for a liberated future for Palestine and oppressed peoples everywhere. With over 100 From Charleston to Palestine art show attendees, we raised over \$3,700 for a family (with Charleston connections) in Gaza who is currently trying to evacuate and seek medical support.



Figure 38. Handmade paper chrysanthemum flowers and leaves include Palestinian martyr's names, displayed at the From Charleston to Palestine Art Show.

On Saturday July 20, 2024, Flowers for Palestine engaged in a Hands on the Land Earthwork Day. This event was intended to be community restoration after some disputes within Charleston organizing circles. Our earthwork event fatefully coincided with the identical date which begins the sci-fi novel, *Parable of the Sower* written by Octavia Butler. We gathered as a small group at a local community Black owned farm space, Fresh Future Farms, to deepen our connection with the land and one another. This community building physical activity invited us to rethink “what we accomplished” in the past eight months. Earthwork also allowed us the opportunity to (re)imagine our relationship to the land we live on and our practice of liberation with oppressed peoples everywhere.



Figures 39 & 40. Hands on the Land event.

Flowers for Palestine’s cumulative program for the 2024 calendar year was a kite making and flying event. We were contacted by a local queer serving organization while the steering committee was planning for the larger kite event. We Are Family (WAF) is South Carolina’s oldest nonprofit that provides life-affirming and life-saving programs for LGBTQ+ young people that have a lasting and measurable impact, with a focus on those who are BIPOC and/low income (WAF, n.d.). A WAF program leader attended our recent art show and requested we facilitate a workshop for a Leadership Camp. Flowers for Palestine gladly accepted the opportunity to interact with queer youth in South Carolina. We decided to pilot our kitemaking idea as a primary creative activity for WAF. On Friday September 13, 2024, we spearheaded a session about art as resistance by centering intersectional social justice issues. Specifically, we focused on the relationship between how queer liberation is connected to Palestinian liberation. Our slides included prominent Palestinian symbols of resistance such as the Handala, Keffiyeh, and Watermelon. We ultimately encouraged each the WAF Leadership Camp participant to design a kite based on relevant sociopolitical issues towards advocacy and movement building.

Painting the Sky: From Holy City to Holy City was hosted on Sunday September 22, 2024. On this fateful date or Autumnal Equinox, we facilitated a commemorative gathering to uplift the people of Palestine. We invited community members to join us with building kites as a solidarity symbol. The high flying kites signified resilience and unyielding spirits of those facing brutal occupation and genocide. Our intention was to collectively send our love and hope into skies. Profound inspiration stemmed from the “If I Must Die” poem by Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer who was martyred in an airstrike on December 6, 2023. We opened with food and fellowship. From there, we offered land acknowledgements, discussed local action items, and facilitated a kite making demonstration. Everyone, gradually and organically, began to fly their kites in air. We circled up to

1) group read of Alareer's poem, 2) reflect about cultural organizing, and 3) chant Assata Shakur's infamous quote: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lost but our chains."



Figure 41. *Painting the Sky* kite event flyer.

Holy City to Holy City Activism: A Discussion of Lessons Learned

"The reason why the South is so repressive is because it's the most radical place in North America." (Robin D.G. Kelly on *Left of Black*, 2022).

Flowers for Palestine established a goal to create a community art build as creative resistance in solidarity with Palestine. We were committed to highlighting the similarities between the horrific, ongoing Palestinian displacement and dispossession as deeply intertwined connections with Black people experiences in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. We centered Arab and Black solidarity to honor humanity despite white supremacy and western imperialism. Our purpose was to emphasize the legacy of resilience and resistance in the Lowcountry by building on Zahrat al-Uqhawan or The Chrysanthemum Flowers. This pre-Nakba feminist, armed resistance group served as our eco-radical ancestors who embrace native wildflowers' endurance as a freedom symbol. We, a Black femme-led multidisciplinary group of artists, activists, and community members, engaged cultural organizing as a collective tool for social transformation.

Our initial goal was to grow 20,000+ chrysanthemums to represent the lives of martyred Palestinians. Unfortunately, the demand for flowers burgeoningly increased given how occupation of and genocide in Gaza continues to annihilate the Indigenous Palestinian population. Flowers for Palestine took delight in the dual holy city moniker for both Charleston and Palestine. This paradoxical nickname emphasizes how both sites play a major role in cultural memory related to religious connotation. We applied such historical processes and ongoing sociopolitical contexts as a generative framework to undergird our cultural organizing endeavors. Our insistence on a public art installation was conceived to contain mums (representing a wildflower native to Palestine) and palmetto fronds (a key feature in Lowcountry geography and artisanal material). Flowers for Palestine

identifies three primary lessons learned during our nine-month activism process: 1) show of solidarity, 2) relationship-building, and 3) sustainable, ongoing practice.

Solidarity was a crucial to Flowers for Palestine organizers' activism decision-making. We sought to provide a dedicated space for Lowcountry residents to discuss reactions and process grief related to the occupation of and genocide in Gaza. Building the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), our cultural organizing deliberately linked the Lowcountry struggle to continued Palestinian displacement and dispossession. For example, events like the art show included scannable QR codes for participants to access a transnational Go Fund Me page supporting a family in Gaza with Charleston connections. Simultaneously, we alerted exhibition spectators about a police-related incident negatively impacting Gullah Geechee teenagers selling palmetto roses in front of a local Walmart (Buck, 2024; Cota, 2024; Phillips, 2024; Radebaugh, 2024). Another way Flowers for Palestine integrated the two holy cities into our programming consisted of having chrysanthemums and palmetto frond roses laid out at each event. Our "giving flowers" represents both ornamental and symbolic significance of Black and Palestinian resistance to withstand the test of time despite oppressive social conditions. A third instance of solidarity towards sovereign nations included a steadfast statement regarding Indigenous land acknowledgements at various Flowers for Palestine events. Recalling Lowcountry ancestral stewards compelled us to imagine environment interactions and land relations differently than the status quo. Such stewardship proclamations reminded Flowers for Palestine about the importance of envisioning Palestinian freedom from occupation and genocide.

Relationship building was a key outgrowth of our collective activism and artmaking practices. Every event invited us to learn more about one another as humans with a variety of interests. Flowers for Palestine intentionally served food at all programming to develop such comradeship. Food functioned as a common denominator for social bonding among participants regardless of background and positionality. We often incorporated Middle Eastern dishes into our events such as imported Palestinian dates and Arab cuisine from a local restaurant, Istanbul Shish Kabob. Our objective with providing small meals and refreshments was to facilitate discussions between attendees and offer a sense of fulfillment towards receiving pivotal messages about Palestinian humanity and liberation. Beyond nourishment, Flowers for Palestine aimed for community agreements to collectively negotiate our direct actions and dream sessions. The core steering committee (Tiffany, Brittney, and LeeAnn) outlined community agreements given our intended collective commitment as a Black femme led coalition. We requested everyone respect boundaries (spatial, bodily, and verbal) with the intent not tolerating expressions of discrimination, prejudice, or social inequality. The overarching point was to consistently center Black and Brown perspectives in our activism. As a steering committee, we desired to honor Black and Brown leadership by prioritizing how such brilliant contributions may be rendered invisible otherwise. Allies were welcome but encouraged to respect Black and Brown people without question or need for explanation. Flowers for Palestine invited everyone to think before speaking and requested allyship be shown through material support (in-kind and cash donations) for programming. At the cumulating Painting the Sky event, we reflected on cultivating community and relationality in genuine ways. Blue posed a series of questions to all attendees as action items: 1) can I be reliable? 2) offer a ride? 3) what do you need, friendship? 4) how have I grown in the past year with community relationships in Charleston? 5) what do we need to keep showing up for ourselves and bodies? 6) how are we living out intentions set during pandemic times? Our cultural organizing goal was to foster relationship building through creative community practices inspired by Palestinian liberation towards continued acts of vulnerability.

Sustainability as an ongoing practice was Flowers for Palestine's primary intention with all activism actions. We wanted to be thoughtful with carefully curating events to uplift Palestinian perspectives regarding occupation and resilience. Our process consisted of experiential knowledge by learning more from each other through community activism and artmaking practices. We persistently had a diverse group of participants at each event. Our community members transcended typically imposed or designated boundaries. Although we relished in the legacy of Black Lowcountry resistance, Flowers for Palestine programming composed of a multiracial/ethnic people, interfaith (different religious and spiritual) practices, and an array of socioeconomic statuses. Our activism concentrated on gleanings from nature. The chrysanthemum flowers grow process meant actual tending seeds to bloom. However, planting also served as a metaphor about Flowers for Palestine's cultural organizing approach in the Lowcountry. We intentionally aimed for practices of distributed leadership/governance, collaborative decision making, and resource sharing as a Black femme led collective. The steering committee dreamed in massive ways. Our proposed art-build was to develop larger-than-life sized public flower installation to express continued solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement. This aspiration heavily depended on community participation to achieve our vision. However, collective advocacy did not render our initial vision. Active involvement and consistent attendance in some ways shifted our expectations about which direct actions were most relevant and feasible. The steering committee envisioned collective advocacy but also leaned toward being pragmatic given our own limited capacity.

Racial capitalistic logics greatly impacted how Flowers for Palestine could navigate cultural organizing and holistic wellbeing. We, as the steering committee, embraced Tricia Hersey's (2022/2024) framework about the liberating power of naps and rest as a radical tool for community healing. Honoring this racial and social justice lens, we shifted our expectations to focus on how much what was accomplished in terms of programming to uplift Palestinian life. The Hands on the Land event was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on how people in Charleston, SC (from all walks of life) sustained community building during the 2024 calendar year with Palestinian liberation as our organizing tool. This event allowed us to experience a tangible interconnectedness: remembering ancestral stewardship of sustenance farming. As we hauled weeds away from thriving crops, we were compelled to reflect on how Palestinians have been restricted to eat meager rations of grass and scraped flour due to ongoing occupation and genocide. Likewise, our cumulating kite making event offered a celestial reverberation. The picturesque skyline aligned with exactly timing everyone's kites took flight. Such a clear horizon at the Painting the Sky event symbolized the endless possibilities of a future Free Palestine.

Concluding Thoughts: Continued Reflections and Momentum

Flowers for Palestine came together after October 7, 2023. We, as individual creatives based in Charleston, SC, assembled out of frustration and grief from witnessing the continued occupation of and genocide in primarily Gaza but unfortunately on all Palestinian land. The steering committee emerged as organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1991) willing to undertake cultural organizing connected to a legacy of Lowcountry resistance. Tiffany, Blue, and LeeAnn convened on several occasions to audaciously imagine a world in which Black and Palestinian liberation are indeed possible. We intentionally embodied creative expression and the Black Radical Tradition to guide our activism process. Flowers for Palestine envisioned a larger-than-life sized public flower installation to express continued solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement. Our impetus, the Chrysanthemum Flowers—pre-Nakba armed resistance group. Emboldened by these eco-radical ancestors, we curated artistic programming as a tool for social transformation.

Our activism focused on the connection between the local and global: from holy city to holy city. Flowers for Palestine deliberately venerated the intersections of Black and Palestinian liberation. Our Black femme led collective epitomizes the radical potential of southern Black cultural organizing (Harris, 2024; Left of Black, 2022; McTighe et al., 2024). The ongoing legacy of Lowcountry resistance against chattel slavery, Jim Crow disenfranchisement, and contemporary disparities is a conspicuous objection to white supremacy and western imperialism. Such opposition also links to innovative mobilizing throughout the Global South. We are connected, as humans, by the land without imposed borders, who advocate for the dismantling oppressive conditions worldwide. Our actions, no matter how grandiose or minuscule, are essentially grains which soil the foundations of revolutionary change.

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