The Role of Community-Building and Cross-Racial Solidarity in the U.S. Student-Led Encampments for Palestinian Liberation

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I. Abstract

After October of 2023, college students in the United States created Palestinian liberation encampments to protest the retaliatory military actions of Israel toward the Palestinians after the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel. Students have been demanding that "their universities disclose their investments in Israel and divest from entities, financial and cultural, that support the occupation of Palestine" (Arab Center, 2024); and they have classified Israel as a perpetuator of genocide. With the rise of these encampments, however, there has not been as much attention on whether students in the encampments prioritized the goal of strengthening community, by creating solidarity across racial categories, engaging in practices of mutual aid and care, and other forms of community-building. Many theorists of social movements insist on community-building as essential for movements to endure and achieve their goals in the long-term. In this paper, therefore, I draw from these insights to analyze community-building efforts in several University of California student encampments. I ask in what respects such community-building efforts were successful or flawed, focusing on the following three aspects: (1) whether organizers built strong communities that were antithetical to the structures they aim to change (2) whether the communities fostered inclusivity and solidarity across marginalized groups, and (3) whether the communities centered dismantling anti-Blackness in their philosophy and community organizing.

II. Introduction

Since 1948, Israel has maintained an occupation of the Palestinian territory after the British ended their control in the region. On October 7th, 2023, the militant group Hamas, based in Palestine's Gaza Strip, launched an attack in southern Israel and took over 200 hostages. Israel

retaliated against this attack by declaring war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, beginning an invasion and large-scale assault on Palestinian hospitals, apartment buildings, and public spaces under the guise of targeting Hamas. Since October 7th, the Gaza Ministry of Health has reported at least 50,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israel, and 110,000 wounded (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Students at universities in the United States began protesting the country's support of Israel's genocide as well as the conditions of apartheid in the West Bank and other parts of occupied Palestine, including setting up encampments as early as mid-October 2023 (Ulfelder 2024). Data collected by Harvard's Crowd Counting Consortium estimates that since October 7th, there have been more than 3,700 simultaneous days of protest activity at 525 different colleges, universities, schools, and district offices (Ulfelder 2024). Looking at the breakdown of types of protest, 44% of protests for Palestine were on-campus encampments. Stanford University had the longest running encampment, standing in White Plaza for over 120 days, ending mid-February 2024 (Ulfelder 2024).

There was a dramatic increase in on-campus university encampments in April 2024, gaining large media attention globally and by Palestinians themselves. This increase happened after April 17th, when Columbia University launched the 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment' on the campus's South Lawn. Columbia was joined and followed by 2,200 days of protests and encampments, with 1,639 of those protest days being encampments at U.S. campuses (Ulfelder 2024). Despite public rhetoric labeling the protests and encampments as violent, "only a few dozen of these thousands of protest days have seen property damage or injuries to police or counter-protestors" (Ulfelder 2024). Police arrested more than 3,600 participants in these protests, with many being injured by police or counter-protestors (Ulfelder 2024). The University

of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) saw the most arrests with 250; most of the arrests happened after an attack on the encampment by hundreds of counter-protestors (Ulfelder 2024).

At each of these encampments and protests, students demanded that their schools divest funds from weapons manufacturers supplying the Israeli military and from other financial ties that support the occupation, an end to the genocide in Gaza, and the liberation of Palestine (Ulfelder 2024). The student encampments created a communal space for these activists to not only protest, but to participate in activities, connect with each other and coexist in a smaller community. In order to determine what these encampments accomplished, this paper analyzes the encampments' community-building efforts and their impact on forms of solidarity within the organizing community, using the student encampment at UC Irvine as a primary case of study, and referencing community-building at UC Santa Barbara and UC Riverside. These three encampments serve as components to study as part of a movement for a ceasefire in Palestine as well as for broader Palestinian liberation, representing the different organizing representations and outcomes of the broader social movement.

Through the rest of the paper, I will discuss my methods for this research, review literature on social movements, community-building, and cross-racial solidarity. I will also review literature on anti-Blackness and its role in said community-building efforts in social movements, as well as its connection to zionism and apartheid in the context of United States internal and foreign oppressive structures. I will then discuss the interviews that I conducted with students who were involved in the UC encampments for Palestine and analyze the different forms of community-building, solidarity building, and strategies to combat anti-Blackness in the encampments.

III. Methodology and Sources

In order to properly analyze the success of the student encampments through these lenses, I conducted virtual interviews with students who were either organizers or participants at the U.S. Student-Led Palestinian Encampments from October of 2023 to June of 2024. The main case study used is the encampment at UC Irvine, which stood from April 29th to May 15th. Students who agreed to participate were chosen for a 1-1 1/2 hour interview over zoom about their experience in the encampment and the community-building process within the encampment. These interviews serve to build on existing social movement literature that I review, as well as media analysis of news sources and university communications that were released throughout the duration of the encampments.

I read through the interviews and identified the presence of different community-building and solidarity strategies, as well as the combat of anti-Blackness in the encampments using Taguette, a qualitative data analysis tool. I conducted a total of seven interviews with student organizers and participants in three different universities that hosted encampments for divestment; four students from UC Irvine, two from UC Santa Barbara, and one from UC Riverside. All of the participants are women from marginalized racial communities. One interviewee is part of the LGBTQ+ community, five of them are first generation, and three are part of a low-income household. The interviewees were all asked about their experience at the encampment from their perspective as an organizer or a participant. UC Santa Barbara's interviewees were organizers with SJP, but were not involved in their school's encampment, and were asked questions about their experiences as organizers and their opinions on the encampment.

To properly analyze the outside perspective of the encampment and compare the image to the inside relationships and picture of organizing, I conducted a media analysis of independent and mainstream news platforms to determine the narrative surrounding the encampments. This analysis involved analyzing different news sources—from both mainstream news outlets and smaller networks like university newspapers, as well as statements made by university administration and social media posts made from chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)—to identify media narratives compared to on the ground news and interviews with students.

The interviews provided an inside perspective on the structure of the encampment. In the process of analyzing the interviews, I selected multiple different aspects of community-building, cross-racial solidarity, and anti-Blackness attitudes and education that aligned with the literature review. I separated these elements into transactional and transformation metrics, as defined by Pastor, Ito, and Rosner: "Transactions involve the quantifiable markers both internal (e.g., how much funding, how many members, etc.) and external to the organization (e.g., voter turnout, policies passed, etc); Transformations, on the other hand, are the vital but sometimes "invisible" work. They show how people, organizations, and movements have been altered through collective efforts. Taking the transformation further, they can show how societal and political views have shifted or been impacted by movement building." (Pastor et. al, 2011, 13). These elements include community-building and inclusivity fostered within the encampment, solidarity and diverse representations of different marginalized groups' struggles, and attitudes and education surrounding the Black struggle. These elements were then analyzed and discussed in the context of the literature review and the media analysis to determine how these encampments

incorporated community-building, cross-racial solidarity, and combating anti-Blackness into their organizing strategy.

IV. Community Building and Social Movements

Scholars that study social movements highlight how such movements play a key role in advancing and obtaining political, social, and economic power for those under oppressive structures and institutions. Social movements can therefore serve as a means to organize independently of those institutions in order to advance a common goal or defend a popular interest. Social movements are often at the forefront of advancing human rights and protecting vulnerable populations, and examining past movements is key to understanding how current movements should operate. Determining what makes a successful social movement is hard to assess, however, because there are no universal definitions or frameworks for what makes a social movement successful. However, scholars and activists have articulated measures and strategies that can strengthen a movement and help its members contribute to social change.

To analyze these strategies, I examine the work of scholars including Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, and Rachel Rosner, who try to condense social movement success into variables. I also examine the work of Chicago activists Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes, scholar and professor Elizabeth Jordie Davies, and scholar and professor Claire Kim to discuss more qualitative factors that are necessary for movement-building, including how social movements need strong community and cross-racial solidarity to maintain power in their movement. Claire Kim, as well as Marilyn Grell-Brisk, dive into how solidarity formed within an organizing community has to acknowledge and center the role that anti-Blackness as a societal force plays not only in the movement's struggle, but also in other people's position in society. I connect this

to the work of Sarah Ihmoud, who discusses how anti-Blackness is inherent in zionism, and therefore influences strategies toward Pro-Palestinian protestors.

Manuel Pastor is a professor of Sociology and American Studies & Ethnicity, as well as the director of the Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California; his research focuses on the social and economic issues of low-income communities and the social movements that have worked to improve these issues (USC 2025). Pastor's work in social movements primes his attempt to create his own framework of measurable metrics of success in social movements in his report, "Transactions, Transformations, Translations," that he co-wrote with Jennifer Ito and Rachel Rosner. The report attempts to find these metrics for how to measure a movement's success, stating that finding measures is difficult because of the multiple objectives social movements want and can attain: "Movements must achieve depth and breath, must trigger broad social change and secure tangible policy winds, must challenge the base to every more dramatic action and create a sense of victory and forward movements" (Pastor 2011, 8). Determining a set of metrics can find the balance between these differing needs and help articulate what an organization wants to accomplish and the means they use to accomplish their goals.

Pastor, Ito, and Rosner's report aims to define the metrics balancing marches, large numbers, and winning campaigns with "the fundamental changes that a leader, organization, or community experiences through their involvement in organizing and advocacy" (Pastor 2011, 13). To achieve both sides of social movements, Pastor creates a framework of *transactions* and *transformations*. Transactions are quantitative metrics, which can include internal measures like funding and number of members, or external measures like voter turnout and policies passed (Pastor 2011, 13). Transformations are what Pastor calls the "invisible" work; transformations

show, “how people, organizations, and movements have been altered through the collective efforts” (Pastor 2011, 13). They measure how societal and political views have been impacted by a social movement, and measuring both transactions and transformations creates a broader picture on the success of a movement.

Pastor applies this framework to organizing, defining organizing as, “engaging, educating, and mobilizing individuals and communities to work toward a common purpose” (Pastor 2011, 14). Organizing is at the foundation of social movements because of its role in base building; a social movement is dependent on building relationships and trust through time and shared experiences. The transactional metrics of organizing, Pastor states, may include “the number of one-on-one meetings and house meetings with outcome metrics being membership levels and numbers of leaders developed” (Pastor 2011, 14). Pastor also considered transactions that are not collected as frequently, including percentage turnover and participation length, which can help measure transformation tactics. Organizing transformation measures can look like, “individual shifts in perspectives to see beyond one’s interests to effectively yielding enough power to influence public officials” (Pastor 2011, 14). Measuring these metrics requires tracking shifts in member’s worldviews and changes in public opinion. This is one of the methods and metrics that I use in determining the success of the student encampments; I analyze how the members’ worldviews and knowledge changed during and after their involvement in the student encampment, either as organizers or participants.

Within social movement organizing and structure, there is the necessity to form not only a base but a strong community amongst movement members. Community not only forms the base of the movement, but also helps create relationships, trust, and care that bring members together to strengthen the base of the movement. Two authors and activists who understand this

necessity are Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba, social activists based from Chicago, and authors of the book *Let This Radicalize You*. In their work, Hayes and Kaba focus on the reciprocal care and community building needed in a social movement, and how community is integral to effectively organize in a social movement and mobilize people into action. Hayes and Kaba discuss how capitalism is isolating, stating that, "Capitalism requires an ever-broadening disposable class of people in order to maintain itself, which in turn requires us to believe that there are people whose fates are not linked to our own: people who must be abandoned or eliminated" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 32). This structure requires different fear tactics and ideologies to maintain itself, creating an individualistic selfishness in the name of survival. This isolation acts to prevent those hurt by the system to stand up against the capitalists who benefit from cruelty like worker exploitation, racial and societal discrimination, and class oppression. Hayes and Kaba state that these capitalists turn our frustrations and attention away from them and to our neighbors; "Powerful actors must keep us convinced that it's the people around us—everyday folks whose struggles overlap with our own—who pose the greatest threat to our safety, well-being, and happiness" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 31). The encouragement to blame our disadvantaged neighbor for our own economic status creates a division that prevents us from realizing our struggle is the same. Forming community and relationships, rather than falling to this isolation, counteracts this rhetoric and division by interacting with our members and learning from them, effectively rejecting the idea that our neighbors are responsible for our issues. This emphasizes that every person and life is connected to one another, and that our struggles are intertwined. In a social movement that works to mobilize diverse people in organizations that aim to challenge institutions, this counteractive effort to de-isolate members of the community is essential in order to create a stronger community based in solidarity and community.

Mutual aid projects are also an essential part of this counteractive community-building. Hayes and Kaba reference Big Door Brigade, a mutual aid organization, to define mutual aid as, "'when people get together to meet each other's basic survival needs with a shared understanding that the systems we live under are not going to meet our needs'" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 28). Under a capitalist system that requires certain groups of people to suffer for the benefit of an elite class, the average individual in American society does not have their needs met by the government; the resulting lack of necessities is weaponized to keep capitalism functioning, trapping workers to their work for survival. Community can fill this gap of need for individuals. Community members can take care of each other when this system does not provide what we need; "people across history have largely turned to one another for comfort, sustenance, and protection in moments of crisis" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 32). Acknowledging this truth erodes the power held by the beneficiaries of oppression; "This is why mutual aid movements are routinely targeted and undermined by the U.S. government. Mutual aid projects are a manifestation of power that contradicts the state's primary narrative about what it is, who we are, and whose purpose it ultimately serves" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 32). Hayes and Kaba therefore frame mutual aid as a weapon against oppressive structures, stating, "The state sees communal care as an ideological threat" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 32). When organizers of a social movement participate in mutual aid and communal care, they are participating in active resistance against capitalism as well as providing care for people neglected. By caring for people through helping them meet their basic needs, organizers form a community of care that connects people to the movement, and creates a space for everyone impacted by U.S. oppression. The encampments embracing mutual aid through care of both student participants and community members, as well as other

oppressed groups and populations, strengthens these community relationships and makes a stronger movement.

Hayes and Kaba also focus on the importance of inspiring constructive behaviors for organizers, and encouraging leaders to invite people to envision themselves as part of a larger story; “we must embrace storytelling that centers support and inspiration not just fear” (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 29). Not only organizers but everyday activists often fall into a pattern of fear-mongering in hopes to inspire people to join a movement. Hayes and Kaba state that organizers have a responsibility of resisting this pattern; “What we offer as organizers is not simply alarming information, nor is it the guarantee of success in a particular campaign. We must offer people a new vision of how things could be and the opportunity to connect with the people, projects, and movements that can bring this vision to fruition” (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 30). These constructive behaviors also include proper education of current issues; “In addition to building relationships that foster collective power, interdependence, and care, we must educate people about alternative interventions that actually address the needs of people affected by violence, poverty, and climate collapse” (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 34). Inspiring members of a community with the notion that there are actions that can be done, partnered with accurate information about an issue, has the power to effectively mobilize and inspire members to stay with a community and fight in a social movement; the student organizers at the encampment need to make sure that there is a clear and effective strategy to getting demands met, and that they communicate said strategy to their base.

Creating community is not only a mode of creating relationships and a strong base for a movement, but also operates as a form of individual and collective liberation. Hayes and Kaba state, “When we are no longer ruled by a manufactured fear of one another, we experience a

form of liberation" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 33). By rejecting the narrative of U.S. capitalism and oppression and participating in mutual aid, constructive ideas, and community engagement, we, "Experience a kind of unshackling that allows us to begin the process of dismantling individualism—a violent ideology that has siloed us and stifled our collective potential" (Hayes & Kaba 2023, 33). The beginning of liberation for a marginalized group begins on both collective and a personal level.

It is not enough for organizers to create community through this anti-capitalist strategy of forming relationships across marginal divides. They need to create an inclusive space that serves as an antithetical body to different intersections of oppression in society. Someone who researches how to create this antithetical body is Elizabeth Jordie Davies, who talks about how to form cross-racial solidarity in social movements in her report, "Building and Brokering: Solidarity Processes in Multi-Racial Coalition." Capitalism is not the only oppressive structure that creates division and isolation. Structures like anti-Blackness, patriarchy, colonialism, and fascism form the structure of American society; Davies also articulates this divide by stating, "Differences like race, immigration history, class, gender, and sexuality are used as wedges to generate mistrust and maintain existing power structures" (Davies 2024, 1). The key to counter these wedges between the marginalized groups in these organizing communities is through creating solidaristic spaces, community-driven spaces that prioritize social cohesion and solidarity between these marginalized groups.

These solidaristic spaces can be nurtured within organizing spaces if the organizer places effort in creating them. Davies names three practices needed by organizers to create this solidaristic space: naming a power shifting politic and praxis, exchanging resources, and building intersectional solidarity. Davies states that organizers must, "name a political vision that shares

paradigms of power to bring partners from race/class subjugated communities to the table" (Davies 2024, 2). There must be a deliberate effort from organizers to, "redirect power to those on the margins within their organizations and in the larger political landscape" (Davies 2024, 2). The social movement must operate on the framework of including marginalized groups, and consciously work to include them in organizing. Davies also emphasizes similar sentiments as Hayes and Kaba, discussing the need to exchange resources as a method to, "Provide space for a flow of money, information, people power, and reciprocity" (Davies 2024, 2). Similar to Hayes and Kaba's ideas of mutual aid, creating an exchange of resources supports members in the movement across different essential needs and societal conditions, forming care and trust within the movement.

Davies' third practice is building intersectional solidarity: "Participants and conveners must recognize the diversity within racial groups and organize from an understanding that racial groups comprise coalitions across difference" (Davies 2024, 2). Racial solidarity requires creating a unified identity and finding a common struggle under oppressive structures, which can then construct reciprocity, care, and partnerships amongst social movement members. As organizers, there is a responsibility to, "build solidarity by honing a belief that, despite different backgrounds or identities, our fates are intertwined" (Davies 2024, 5).

In her report, Davies analyzes the effectiveness of one method of forming this intersectional solidarity: race-based caucus organizing, and the establishment of single-identity spaces in organizing in social movements. In the formation of social movements, hierarchies are often formed in organizing spaces that mimic hierarchies existing in society; Davies articulates that, "Power dynamics and racial hierarchies recreate themselves at the interpersonal and organizational levels, leading to mistrust, harm, and ultimately, rupture. It takes purpose and

intention to overcome these barriers" (Davies 2024, 4). Creating race-based caucuses empowers marginalized groups to have presence in their social movements. Davies discusses the power these caucasus can bring to social movements, explaining how, "Race-based caucuses have traditionally risen as a bottom-up demand from marginalized workers, activists, and organizers who feel that they lack power or a sense of safety in the broader organization or workplace" (Davies 2024, 6). These race-based caucuses are created in a multi-racial organizing space to be effective. Davies addresses the difficulty that comes with organizing in a multi-racial space: "Organizing in homogenous communities may seem easier in the short term, but siloed approaches to solving public problems leave organizations to formulate incomplete solutions and less likely to achieve their goals" (Davies 2024, 4). Similar to how social movements can mimic hierarchy and exclude marginalized communities, creating homogenous social movements prevents a common struggle or connection of issues across different marginalized identities. Only inclusivity and equitable power can create a solidaristic space for all members of a social movement. Davies' race-based caucuses serve as a means for different marginalized and oppressed groups within a social movement to be heard and given power, resisting the capitalist, hierarchical structure that might attempt to be established in a social movement. If a group does not address or give power to these marginalized groups, these members of the movement won't be bonded with the community with the same strength as other, more privileged members. Therefore, if a social movement doesn't attempt to educate and represent every oppressed group within its movement, their movement will be unsuccessful. Organizers must mobilize and build community and solidarity between these members in order to create an organization that is antithetical to all oppressive systems.

This type of solidarity is modeled in Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser's manifesto, "Feminism for the 99 Percent," discussing how a new movement of feminism redefines what a feminist issue is to be more inclusive of other struggles. Their manifesto imagines an anticapitalist feminist movement, imagining a, "just world whose wealth and natural resources are shared by all, and where equality and freedom are premises, not aspirations" (Arruzza 2019, 2). They describe the movement as, "feminism for the 99 percent," meaning a feminism that is anti capitalist and anti systemic, connecting with anti-racists, environmentalists, and labor and migrant rights activists (Arruzza 2019, 5). For Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, capitalism is the driving force behind all oppressive structures: "[capitalism is] the system that generates the boss, produces national borders, and manufactures the drones that guard them" (Arruzza 2019, 3). The solidarity used against oppressive structures unifies in its resistance to capitalism. It's not enough, however, to just acknowledge the connections between different types of oppression. Organizers and members of a social movement need to fully embody and inherit the issues of other groups as if they're their own struggle. Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser understand this in the context of feminism, stating, "we do not separate ourselves from battles against climate change or exploitation in the workplace; nor do we stand aloof from struggles against institutional racism and dispossession. Those struggles are our struggles, part and parcel of the struggle to dismantle capitalism, without which there can be no end to gender and sexual oppression" (Arruzza 2019, 54). Because oppression can operate through structures like capitalism, the struggle of feminism against gender oppression will never end unless capitalism ends. This dynamic is essential for organizers attempting to create communities that implement cross-racial solidarity among its organizing

members. If these oppressive systems are all connected, then the struggle of each member must be incorporated in the mission of the organizing body.

In order for a movement to be created with this type of solidarity that is antithetical to all oppressive systems, there must be an addressing of the underlying force that creates and serves as a basis for manufacturing different oppressions: anti-Blackness. Anti-Blackness is a structural concept, articulating the idea that society's collective and institutional lives are "organized around the phobic hatred and avoidance of Blackness" (Kim 2023). Anti-Blackness differs from the term "racism" by focusing on how Black people are actively positioned in opposition to white and nonwhite people; "anti-Blackness speaks to a specific, transhistorical, and structural position that Black people, Black being,and personhood are relegated to that leads to Black suffering, oppression, disposability, abjection, and death" (Grell-Brisk 2022). It is a social process of dehumanization, or making the Black person non-human, making all of society oriented toward the avoidance of Blackness. This process of becoming non-human is formed through social death, a concept explored by Orlando Patterson in the book *Slavery and Social Death*. He writes about how, "all human relationships are structured and defined by the relative power of the interacting persons" (Patterson 1982, 1), and how slavery creates a power dynamic of total social domination that socializes the slave as socially dead. Patterson analyzes the relationship created between the slave and the master within the institution of slavery, identifying the slave as an extension of the master rather than having any social existence; "the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he [becomes] a social nonperson" (Patterson 1982, 5). Slavery creates social death through the natal alienation, the wielding of gratuitous violence toward, and the general dishonor of the enslaved person (Patterson 1982). This dehumanization of the slave imprinted on the identity of Blackness, which creates a social

position for Black people that defines the social hierarchy; other people are positioned in society in relation to their identity as not Black.

Marilyn Grell-Brisk, a sociologist that specializes in global structural inequality, hierarchy, power, and Black studies, analyzes the Black Lives Matter movement and argues that the movement addresses anti-Blackness on a structural level: "the #BlackLivesMatter movement offers a prominent contemporary anti-systemic movement that seeks to address questions of inequality and structural racism especially around the issue of police brutality against Black people" (Grell-Brisk 2022). She used the movement as a method of introducing a new analytical framework to understand how central anti-Blackness is in structural systems. She illustrates a first, second, and third level analysis of world-systems where Blackness plays an essential role in global oppressive structures. As shown in Grell-Brisk's Figure 1, "Blackness exists so that non-Blackness exists" (Grell-Brisk 2022, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Multi-Level Analytical Framework to Understanding Structural Antiblackness

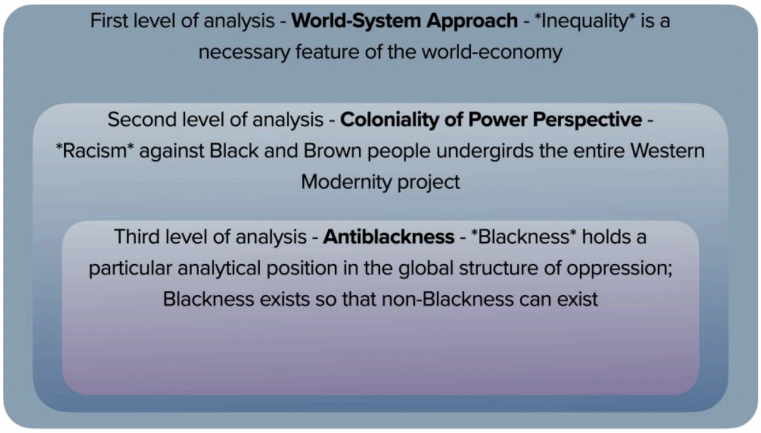


Figure 1. Grell-Brisk, *Critical World System Analysis*

Looking at anti-Blackness in a world-system structure reframes how inequality operates that impacts the Palestinian struggle: "A world-systems perspective allows us to understand that

inequality operates not only at the nation-state level but is constitutive of a broader, persistent system of exploitation at the world scale" (Grell-Brisk 2022). Anti-Blackness is embedded in an international system of exploitation and oppression that seeps into intersecting power structures, including the oppressions of other populations like the Palestinians; at the same time, anti-Blackness structures the social position of not only Black people, but other marginalized groups, framing these groups as not-white but also distinct from Blackness. Claire Kim, a professor of political science and Asian American studies at the University of California, Irvine, wrote *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World*, which directly addresses the unique experience of Asian Americans in relation to their relationship to Blackness. Kim talks about the relationship of Asian Americans to Blackness in the context of a discussion focused on white supremacy's effect on the racial group; Kim aims to recenter the conversation of Asian American social status in relation to Blackness. She discusses how, "nearness or farness from Blackness—not whiteness—is the overriding determinant of racial status, which means that the key categorical divide is not that between whites and everyone else, but that between Black people and everyone else" (Kim 2023). Anti-Blackness impacts the way Asian Americans socialize themselves in the racial order, often distancing themselves from Blackness in order to appeal to white supremacy and whiteness, acting in a way that is anti-Black. An example of this dynamic that Kim mentions is the role Asian Americans have played in the legal discussion on affirmative action, a policy that is meant to provide equitable access to education for Black students. Kim states that when Asian American scholars equate Asian American struggle to Black people, they, "abstract from history and disavow the ways in which Asian Americans are, on the whole, advantaged relative to Black people" (Kim 2023). By claiming that affirmative action is a form of "reverse discrimination," Kim states that these scholars empower

conservatives to attack the program in its entirety, hurting Black students for the benefit of Asian Americans. In this example, Asian American scholars and students appeal to white supremacy by exercising anti-Blackness for their own benefit, despite their own oppression under white supremacist systems. This places Asian Americans in a racial order that classifies them as not white, and therefore hurt by white supremacy, but not Black, meaning they benefit from their racial distance; "displacing the concept of white supremacy, the concept of anti-Blackness sees the degradation of Blackness, rather than the exaltation of whiteness, as the fulcrum of the racial order" (Kim 2023). While white supremacy places all people of color below the status of a white person, non-Black people of color benefit from the fact that they are not Black, and therefore can exercise anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism in their own life. In the context of solidarity organizing, this potential for anti-Blackness from people of color can hurt the Black activists within these spaces, preventing cross-racial solidarity and antithetical community organizing. Organizers have to recognize their role in perpetuating anti-Blackness in organizing spaces to not only protect the Black members of their organization, but also fully adopt the Black struggle into their movement.

V. Connecting Anti-Blackness and Zionism in the United States

The student organizers for Palestine need to recognize the anti-Blackness not only in interpersonal dynamics, but in the systemic oppressive structures of the United States and Israel. The practices Israel utilizes in its efforts to colonize and remove Indigenous Palestinians, as well as its mode of governance and control, is similar to the anti-Black logics and practices used in United States institutions.

The United Nations has found that Israel operates as an apartheid state. Apartheid, coming from the Afrikaan word for "apartness" and championed by South Africa's Nationalist

Party in 1948, was a legalized system of racial segregation (Britannica 2025). Israel has been accused of maintaining a legal system that segregates and suppresses Palestinians both in Gaza and the occupied West Bank territory. Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Palestine, stated that Israel has initiated a "deeply discriminatory dual legal and political system that privileges the 700,000 Israeli Jewish settlers living in the 300 illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank" (United Nations 2022). Palestinians encounter walls, checkpoints, and constant military presence and surveillance that prevents sovereignty for the Palestinian people; "three million Palestinians, who are without rights, [are] living under an oppressive rule of institutional discrimination" (United Nations 2022). Lynk also analyzes the conditions in Gaza, "described regularly as an 'open-air prison,' without adequate access to power, water or health, with a collapsing economy and with no ability to freely travel to the rest of Palestine or the outside world" (United Nations 2022). The Palestinian people both in Gaza and the West Bank are restricted in their movements and deprived of their rights as human beings based on their identity as Palestinians. Lynk concludes that, "a political regime which so intentionally and clearly prioritizes fundamental political, legal, and social rights to one group over another within the same geographic unit on the basis of one's racial-national-ethnic identity satisfies the international legal definition of apartheid" (United Nations 2022).

In establishing and maintaining this apartheid state, the Israeli state justifies its existence through zionism, an ideology that began to take form in the late 19th century, and increased after the genocide of Jewish people across Europe during the Holocaust. Zionism is understood by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as the, "movement for the self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel" (ADL 2016). The modern movement for Zionism emerged during the 20th century, because of anti-Jewish hate and

discrimination, advocating for the Jewish people to have their own nation-state to avoid persecution and maintain security (ADL 2016). Anti-zionists counter this sentiment, critiquing the actions of the Israeli government and arguing against its apartheid structure. Jewish Voice for Peace is a Jewish Palestinian solidarity organization that identifies itself as anti-zionist, stating that, "Zionism was a false and failed answer to the desperately real question many of our ancestors faced of how to protect Jewish lives from murderous antisemitism in Europe" (JVP 2025). This organization describes Zionism as a form of Jewish nationalism that promotes the belief that Jewish people should have a state of their own in Palestine, similar to a European settler colony (JVP 2025). Zionism has been interpreted in different strains of political, religious, and cultural zionism; political Zionism has led to the official establishment of Israel and the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 (JVP 2025). As anti-zionists, Jewish Voice for Peace critiques the ideology, stating, "Zionism, in practice, has resulted in massacres of Palestinian people, ancient villages and olive groves destroyed, families who live just a mile away from each other separated by checkpoints and walls, and children holding onto the keys of the homes from which their grandparents were forcibly exiled." (JVP 2025). The organization also states that in addition to its contribution to the oppression of the Palestinians, "Zionism, as a political ideology and as a movement, has always hierarchized Jews based on ethnicity and race, and has not equally benefited or been liberatory for all Jewish people in Israel" (JVP 2025). As a method of challenging Zionism, Jewish Voice for Peace holds the core value of organizing in racial justice and collective liberation. This value is central to their organizing efforts, as they state on their website:

> "We understand that racism shapes everything in the US, Israel and beyond. Racism dictates who lives and dies, who has the resources they need to survive, who has the

> power to govern, who faces the most violence, who has the freedom to stay in or move from their homes, whose stories are told and believed. As a diverse, multiracial, cross-class, intergenerational movement of Jews we also understand that white supremacy, homophobia, transphobia, patriarchy, colonialism, militarism, and capitalism are intertwined at the roots, and that we can't fully address any of them without addressing all of them. Our commitment to Palestinian liberation is fundamentally a commitment to fight against racism and for a world where everyone lives with dignity, power, love, community, beauty, and justice." (JVP 2025).

Zionism within U.S. institutions like the university has anti-Blackness interwoven in its efforts to suppress student protestors that speak out about Palestine. Dismantling anti-Blackness is therefore key in challenging the zionism in universities that controls divestment. Anti-Blackness is inherent in zionist ideology because of its colonial ancestry of the western world; Sarah Ihmoud discusses the structures of power that devalue Black people and Palestinians in "Born Palestinian: Born Black: Anti-Blackness and the Womb of Zionist Settler Colonialism." Ihmoud explains that, "Anti-Blackness is embedded in the spatial project of Zionist settler colonialism through its presence/absence in the gendered body politics of white settler nationalism. In turn, Zionist settler colonialism enacts erasure against native Palestinians (seeking to disappear them from the landscape), while, at the same time, energizing anti-Black racism in Israel" (Ihmoud 2021, 301). Zionism models itself after the western models of anti-Blackness, and has operated within its parameters since its conception: "[in] its alliance with global white supremacy, Zionism absorbed the anti-Black logics foundational to Enlightenment Europe." (Ihmoud 2021, 305). Anti-Blackness seeps through and operates in tandem with the existing oppressive structures in the United States, including zionism. Using outlets like police

response is using anti-Black institutions to wreak damage on other marginalized communities, and the outlets oppressive structures cannot function without. In order to advocate against the power structures in the United States, and by extension, Israel, student organizers need to connect and educate themselves about how their own anti-Blackness harms others and in turn how it harms their movement, to further understand how oppression operates. The struggle for Palestinian liberation cannot be separated from the struggle against anti-colonialism and anti-Blackness because it is all the same struggle. These fights must be adopted into the Palestinian movement by organizers to achieve this solidarity. Anti-Blackness is inherent in every oppressive system, and such systems cannot be dismantled without prioritizing the disrupting of anti-Blackness.

VI. History of Student Encampments and Apartheid

The state of Israel has been found to violate international law by the International Court of Justice, or the ICJ. When brought to the ICJ, the court accepted the job of, "ascertaining for itself whether Israel's policies and practices are in violation of the applicable rules and principles of international law" (International Court of Justice 2024) and is ruled to be occupying the Palestinian territories. Their decision reviewed the major actions of Israel since 1948, including the inadmissible actions taken by Israel during the Six-Day War, where "Israeli forces occupied all the territories of Palestine under British Mandate beyond the Green Line" (International Court of Justice 2024). The court also considered Israel's establishment of settlements in these occupied territories, and acknowledged the statehood of Palestine and its qualification for membership in the United Nations.

The International Court of Justice assessed the legislation and policies that Israel has enacted on the Palestinians in the West Bank. One of these policies was found in violation of the

Fourth Geneva Convention, which states, “the occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”; the court found that, “there is extensive evidence of Israel’s policy of providing incentives for the relocation of Israeli individuals and businesses into the West Bank, as well as for its industrial and agricultural development by settlers” (International Court of Justice 2024). The court also found evidence of Israel illegally annexing more territory in the West Bank, explaining how, “Israel’s construction of settlements is accompanied by specially designed civilian infrastructure in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which integrates the settlements into the territory of Israel” (International Court of Justice 2024). The ICJ considered Israel’s control over Palestinian natural resources, including restricting water to Palestinians and diverting natural resources from Palestine to Israeli citizens (International Court of Justice 2024). This control over Palestinian resources acts to forcibly displace the Palestinian population, in addition to the use of Israeli military forces to force Palestinians out against their will. The Palestinians under occupation have experienced violence from both settlers and the Israeli military. After considering the actions of Israel during its occupation of the West Bank, the court ruled that Israel’s actions as well as the Israeli settlements are in violation of international law (International Court of Justice 2024).

This understanding of zionism and what it means to be anti-zionist is the common one held by student protestors, and the solidarity exercised by the organization through this principle aligns with the solidarity work of Davies that I’m considering as a measure of social movement strength. Students in the encampments saw Israel’s actions as connected to political and socioeconomic issues existing not only in the United States but globally. The New York Times also conducted interviews with student protests across the country during the height of the student encampments in April and May of 2024. Students stated varying answers about how, “the

plight of Palestinians is a result of global power structures that thrive on bias and oppression" (Peters 2024), aligning with Jewish Voice for Peace's core value of racial justice and collective liberation. Students in the United States have protested in a similar manner for other international victims of these global power structures. For almost 50 years, South Africa maintained an apartheid state that garnered similar international attention as Israel's actions and history in Palestine. Through passing laws, the South African state legalized segregation between whites and nonwhite peoples, providing a legalized method of oppression and discrimination on a state level. The Popular Registration Act of 1950 categorized South African citizens into three categories: "bantu (blacks), coloureds (those of mixed race), and white" (Stanford 2025). This categorization of citizens sanctioned legally segregated housing areas, jobs, public facilities, transportation, education, healthcare, and social relations to maintain this discrimination and segregation against nonwhite citizens (Stanford 2025). The Group Areas Act of 1950 enforced this physical separation between races, as well as called for the removal of groups of people from areas designated to another group (South Africa 2016). This designation of area was established in the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, which enforced different racial groups to live in different areas; "only a small percentage of South Africa was left for Black people, who compromised the vast majority, to form their 'homelands'" (South Africa 2016). Black people inside of "white areas" were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in towns outside of these white areas.

These laws were passed under the guise of, "equal development and freedom of cultural expression," but similar to the segregation implemented in the United States under Jim Crow laws, equality under separation was impossible (South Africa 2016). Apartheid was not only a system that was legal in South Africa, but a social system that severely disadvantaged and

impoverished Black and nonwhite citizens to the point of destitution; the state was able to enforce the law, using, “a fearsome state apparatus to punish those who disagreed” (South Africa 2016). The apartheid state effectively subjugated Black and nonwhite citizens to the white minority, restricting them from political participation, economic freedom, and forcing them to labor for the white minority through low-paying jobs (Larson 2019), creating a strict and brutal racial hierarchy legalized and implemented on a national level.

The South African apartheid state prompted protest on an international level. In addition to global protest, students at American universities protested and built encampments to protest South Africa apartheid in the mid-1980s. Universities in the United States called for their institutions to divest from investments in South Africa; a large surge of the college protests were triggered by the Soweto uprising, where students and Black workers in South Africa took to the streets after South African police had opened fire on children who were demonstrating in the Soweto township (Manulak 2024). Western universities had formed student-led solidarity groups, “committed to removing any ties between their universities and white minority rule in southern Africa” (Manulak 2024). The student protests against South African apartheid parallel the student protests today against Israeli apartheid.

The Apartheid states of South Africa and Israel have one common ally, The United States. The United State's role in both issues is a key point in understanding the perspective of the student protests, because there needs to be an understanding of the systems that the student protestors are challenging to create an antithetical organizing community. In the context of the student protestors for Palestine, this requires an analysis of the university’s role in Israel’s genocide and apartheid. In response to the actions of Israel, students at colleges and universities have launched protests and on-campus encampments demanding that their schools divest from

weapons manufacturers and financial investments in Israel. These encampments have been met with militarization, police raids, suspensions and expulsions, and most recently, deportations of students. Zionism and Israel in U.S. universities are a highly sensitive and controversial subject that has been met with opposition and censorship: “As recently as the 1980s and into the early 1990s, efforts to publish on or speak critically about Zionism and its histories were frequently met with fierce opposition in institutions of higher education, academic advisors cautioned graduate students with Palestine-based projects of certain difficulties on the job market, and research funding for such projects was difficult to secure.” (Stein 2005, 2). By censoring anti-zionist sentiment, universities become agents of U.S. imperialist goals. As Israel’s strongest ally, the United States is highly invested in the existence of Israel in the Middle East; “the United States has provided Israel with indispensable diplomatic, economic, and military support totaling more than $115 billion since 1949” (Eisenstadt 2012). The U.S.’s position in the Middle East and its domination over the region depend on the presence of Israel; “U.S.-Israeli security cooperation dates back to heights of the Cold War, when the Jewish state came to be seen in Washington as a bulwark against Soviet influence in the Middle East and a counter to Arab nationalism” (Eisenstadt 2012). The student protestors of United States universities, therefore, are not only challenging their university, but the operation of the United States, dependent not only on zionism but other oppressive intersections that maintain it. Student protestors need to create an antithetical movement against zionism, they also need to organize against U.S. oppressive structures that are interwoven with the zionism apparent in the university, most importantly anti-Blackness. Rather than existing as a public resource for education and information, these universities are becoming more privately funded as government spending on education decreases. The University of California has invested $29.36 billion dollars in weapons

manufacturing, companies that support Israel, Blackrock, Blackstone, and other companies emphasized by students (UC Riverside 2024). The United States' investment in zionism and Israel's apartheid state manifests in its funding of public universities: "As recently as the 1980s and into the early 1990s, efforts to publish on or speak critically about Zionism and its histories were frequently met with fierce opposition in institutions of higher education" (Stein 2005, 2). Standing against the university means standing against U.S. imperialism; that experience creates a unique kind of solidarity. As institutions of culture and education, universities channel the motivations of the United States within their systems, meaning they're channeling racism, anti-Blackness, homophobia, and other oppressive structures into student's education. These students protesting their universities are protesting imperialism, capitalism, and forms of oppression, because their institutions channel these structures in their environment, and by creating coalitions and solidarity amongst each other, campus groups and marginalized identities have a larger base of support against oppressive institutional structures.

VII. Interviews and Discussion

The Gaza Solidarity Encampments received attention from the media when they began to form across the country. Media narratives varied, claiming that the protests were started by outside agitators, that the protests were violent and dangerous, and that the protests were filled with anti-semitic rhetoric. News sources often platform students who claim to feel unsafe because of the encampment's alleged antisemitism; NBC published an article where one professor claimed, "the vast majority of the Jewish community on campus believes the tent encampment — including Jews for Ceasefire — is antisemitic" (Rosenfield 2024).

This rhetoric was often present in responses from university administrations that loudly spoke out against their university's encampment. Former President of Columbia University Minouche Shafik, when asking for the police to clear students from occupying Hind's Hall, wrote a letter stating that, "while the group who broke into the building includes students, it is led by individuals who are not affiliated with the University. The individuals who have occupied Hamilton Hall have vandalized University property and are trespassing" (Shafik 4 New York 2024). The University of California, Irvine was an institution that disapproved of and loudly asked for the shut down of the student encampment. UC Irvine Chancellor Howard Gillman released multiple statements throughout the length of UC Irvine's encampment condemning the encampment as violating university rules, as well as conducted an interview with ADL Regional Director Peter Levi, discussing the rise in anti-semitism on college campuses and free speech on campuses (ADL 2024).

The coalition UCI Divest at the University of California, Irvine began and established their encampment on April 29th, 2024. The camp was created near Rowland Hall in the university's School of Physical Sciences Quad. By 7:00 a.m., the administration at UC Irvine barricaded protestors in, and UCI's Police Department, or UCIPD, arrived on the scene (Paxton 2024). New University, UC Irvine's student-run campus newspaper, reported that, "a fifth-year student and co-founder of UCI Divest, claimed that UCIPD made threats of arrest and blocked protesters from bringing supplies into the encampments" (Paxton 2024). Police presence continued throughout the first day of the protest, with police vehicles and the Orange County Sheriff's Department, or the OCSD, bus spotted at Lot 12B on campus, with "multiple OCSD deputies being spotted in riot gear" (Paxton 2024). The police were officially called to stand down later in the day by Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan, who stated, "I will not tolerate any

violations to our students' rights to peacefully assemble and protest" (Paxton 2024). By 3:00pm, the law enforcement was not seen in the lot.

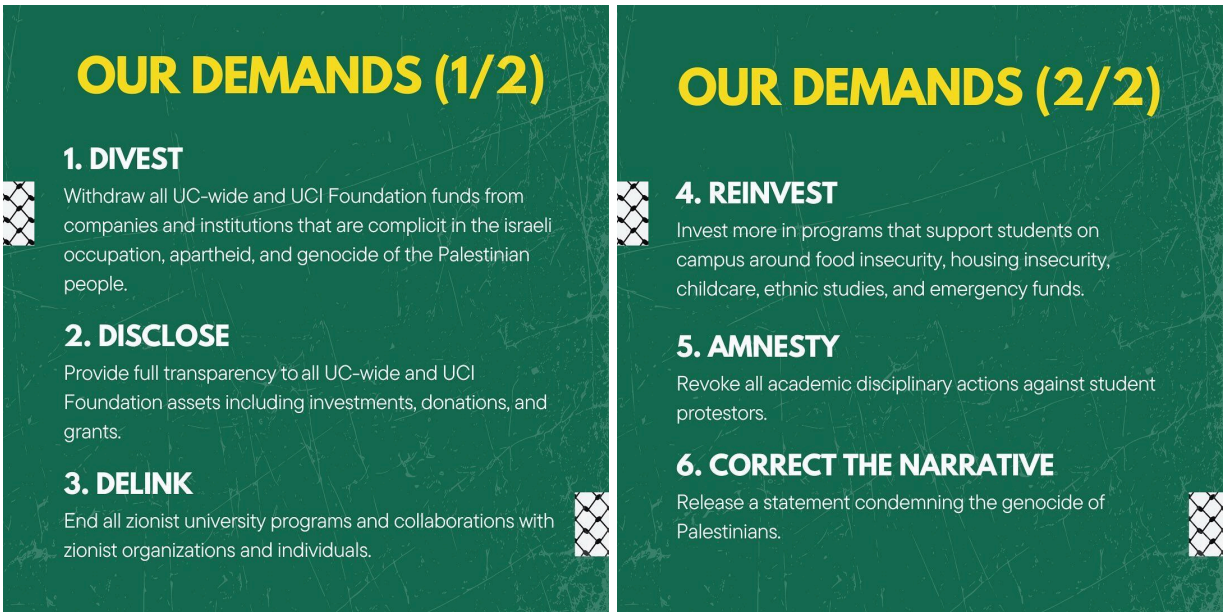
After setting up the encampment, student organizers had used the rest of the day to create a functioning community space; "protesters set up several tents, canopies, barricades, posters and supply tables as well as places to eat, rest and pray. Throughout the day, protesters organized rallies, prayers, art builds, speaker sessions, and more within and around the encampment barriers" (Paxton 2024). On the outside of the encampment, a banner (shown in Figure 1.1.) stating the protestors' demands was displayed, which was also posted on UCI Divest's instagram page.

Figure 1.1 Banner with Demands Made by UCI Divest, (New University, 2024)

The UCI Divest encampment announcement post reads, "Today, the people of UCI are joining encampments across the world to demand our universities end their complicity in the genocide of Palestinians. For Gaza, for Palestine, and for all peoples struggling against US

imperialism, we must take back our universities!" (@ucidivest, 2024). The organization listed their demands in this same post, pictured in Figures 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Demands Listed by UCI Divest on April 29th (@ucidivest, 2024)



One of the main demands that the organization focused on was for the UC system and UC Irvine specifically to divest from companies like, "BlackRock, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and other entities" (Paxton 2024). A student protestor at the encampment specified, "This also includes ending the UCI countering extremism funding, ending partnerships with the Henry Samueli School of Engineering with the Israeli initiative and things like that" (Paxton 2024). The same student also made it clear about rhetoric regarding anti-semitism in the encampment; "In terms of organizations like the ADL, they espouse some harmful rhetorics, such as conflating anti-semitism with anti-Zionism. That is not something that is true, or is it something that we endorse," referencing an event featuring the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Chancellor Howard Gillman (Paxton 2024).

UC Irvine Chancellor Howard Gillman had made multiple statements on the encampment since its launch, making clear his disapproval of the protest. The first statement, made on April 29th, stated that the encampment was unauthorized and set up by approximately 50 people, some campus members and others not, and that during the day, administrators witnessed, "protests [near Rowland Hall and Croul Hall] that are in violation of our policies that are designed to help ensure free expression on our campus" (Gillman 2024). Gillman claimed that administrators had reached out to students, stating, "We have reached out to the students in the existing illegal encampment and have made it clear to them that if they believe they need an 'encampment' space on campus to peacefully express their views, then we will work with them to find a space that is appropriate and non-disruptive" (Gillman 2024). Gillman ended the statement with the following:

> "I want to be clear that (a) we support the right of our community to protest, (b) we will stand against non-affiliates taking over university spaces where their activities threaten our core mission, and (c) we will work with all of our students if they believe it is important for them to have an encampment space that is effective and non-disruptive." (Gillman 2024).

Throughout all of the statements made and the negotiating process, Gillman described the encampment as a threat to public safety and unlawful, and causing a disruption to the operations and values of the university. This contrasts to the characterization provided by other observers of the encampment, as well as what the SJP chapter showed of the encampment. The Students for Justice in Palestine instagram page posted videos on their instagram showing the operations of the encampment, picturing students in tents reading, connecting with other students, and partaking in art activities (@ucidivest).

Gillman's involvement in negotiations often framed the student negotiators as unreasonable and irrational. On May 3rd, Gillman released another statement, stating that he and the administration were, "engaged in open discussions with student leaders," who were negotiating the encampments demands. Gillman claims that the university "presented a proposal to the protest organizers, addressing all of their initial demands," to which they were met with a counterproposal that "introduced a range of new requests which were not part of their initial demands" (Gillman 2024). Gillman stated that the demands of the students would, "violate fundamental principles of academic freedom and would require us to discriminate based on a person's nationality, which goes against our commitment to anti-discrimination and our principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion" (Gillman 2024). Student negotiators told a different story, announcing to the encampment, "'We met with them and we said that [administration's proposal] did not meet any of our demands at all and didn't even touch the basic surface level of their demands…So then today [May 2] we met with them again and we proposed our own draft agreement of what we wanted'" (Paxton 2024). The students had issued a counterproposal, explaining their demands in more detail. The original proposal had included, "meeting with protesters to discuss UCI Foundation's investments and funding, giving amnesty to disciplined students, and recognizing incidents of harassment submitted to the OEOD" (Paxton 2024).

The organizers at the UC Irvine encampment faced an issue when an alleged unhoused Black man managed to enter the encampment and was living in a tent. The organizers had reached out to a Palestinian lawyer and homeless advocate Dennis Kriz for advice on how to handle the situation. After a day of discussion of the options for what to do about the unhoused man, they were able to agree that because he hasn't violated any rules or misbehaved within the encampment, then they couldn't force him to leave (Kriz 2024). Kriz explains that these students

“did what our society was unable to do both during Covid and in the civil disturbances following the death of George Floyd – they did ultimately take this person in” (Kriz 2024).

Kriz’s account of how the organizers interacted with the unhoused man is not corroborated by the interviewees at UC Irvine. Participants at the encampment said that the organizers of the encampment were split on how to handle this situation. An organizer stated that there were multiple complaints about his behavior in the encampment, with alleged sexual harassment toward women who were staying there. Others in the encampment had said that as an encampment, organizers are co-opting houseless infrastructure and what houseless people go through (UCI 1-2-1). An organizer stated that organizers did try to contact organizations to help, but the man was arrested on May 10, 2024, charged with illegal camping (Santillan 2024).

An organizer of UC Irvine’s encampment states that looking back at the situation now, they should have handled the situation differently and with more care; “in hindsight, I think there could have been more of an effort made to incorporate him into the encampment. Like I don't think, at least from my memory, I don't think anybody ever made an effort to try to even engage him at the encampment” (UCI 1-1-1).

The interviewees’ recollections of the houseless Black man’s presence highlighted a lot of anti-Blackness within the encampment space. According to a participant at UC Irvine, they said that many Black students didn’t feel comfortable in the encampment, despite being very present in the beginning; “retroactively some students, some Black students from [a Black student organization] have said that they were really uncomfortable around SJP people because of how anti-Black they could be, you could see that through the way they treated [the houseless man]” (UCI 1-2-1). The participant recollected how when the man was present in the encampment, students were using the N-word to describe him; “It felt anti-Black; it wasn't just

like he was houseless and he was, you know, harassing students. It was deeper than that, and I think that was really obvious" (UCI 1-2-1).

When the interviewees from all the schools were asked about attitudes and education for the Black struggle, as well as the relationship with Black students, the responses ranged from discussing individual teach-ins, where organizers hosted educational events connecting the Black struggle to Palestine, to having Black students and organizations actively in organizing, to blatant anti-Blackness present, largely at UC Irvine. One of the participants from UC Irvine stated, "this is something that I think hurt me the most, because they were kind of using previous Black struggles as a way to kind of leverage their movement" (UCI 1-2-4). An organizer from UCSB shows a contrast to the attitudes at UC Irvine. The organizer said that Black students were central to the movement, and that they personally felt, "deeply influenced by Black-Palestinian solidarity and movements like Black Power and the Black Panthers and Black-Palestinian resistance" (UCSB 3-1-2). The organizer stated that solidarity amongst different struggles is important in organizing, explaining, "all of our actions and student movement in general is very heavily tied to collective liberation and collective struggle. So we knew that we cannot be a coalition or without representation and involvement and from a variety of different movements" (UCSB 3-1-2).

A commonality between UC Irvine and UC Santa Barbara is that Black students received the most backlash for their involvement in organizing. The organizer at UCSB stated that it was Black students leading a lot of events, and that, "It was Black students that were harassed and both physically and mentally harassed on campus" (UCSB 3-1-2). A participant at UC Irvine discussed how Black students were at the encampment showing their support and risking their safety as students, and that solidarity wasn't returned; "[Black student organization] was in full

support of the encampment, they were constantly fighting with us and for us. And, you know, a lot of them got doxxed. And I feel like people within the encampment, people within the main organization did nothing help them back in a way" (UCI 1-2-4). The difference between these two incidents is the attitude organizers took to address it; the UCSB organizer stated, "I think that's really what showed us like, yes, Palestinians are going to be the ones that are going to be hurt when you're, you know, waving the flag and doing something. But, you know, the first people are going to be Black students and that's the first people we need to protect and give voice to and give space to" (UCSB 3-1-2). UC Irvine organizers did not seem to extend this same care to Black students at their encampment as the organizers at UCSB.

On May 15th, UCI's Students for Justice in Palestine held a rally to honor the 76th anniversary of the Nakba, the event that commemorates when Israel first moved into the Palestinian territory in 1948 (@sjp.uci). During the rally, the student organizers expanded the encampment to block off and occupy the Physical Science Lecture Hall, renaming the building "Alex Odeh Hall" after a Palestinian human rights activist that was assassinated with a pipe bomb in Santa Ana, California in 1985 (ADC 2016). The barricading of the building triggered the university administration to call multiple different police departments to officially shut down the encampment. The campus wide alert system zotALERT had notified the campus that there was an ongoing "violent protest" occurring at Physical Sciences, and to avoid the area (Paxton 2024). A spokesperson from UC Irvine when asked described the protest as violent, but couldn't elaborate on what type of violence was present (Rodriguez 2024).

The encampment's ending was recalled differently amongst the interviewees. Interviewees involved in organizing stated that organizers had purposefully caused the raid, expanding the encampment knowing the police would be called to shut it down, and that the raid

was the intended outcome. However, participants that were interviewed were not aware of this strategy, and were under the impression that while the expansion was planned, no one was aware of what the rest of the day was going to look like. A trend that appeared in interviews was that while participants felt accepted and welcomed in a community of people with a common interest, participants were often treated as bodies for organizers, for either numbers at a protest, workers inside the encampment, or just as a resource for organizers to do actual organizing work. All of the participants at UC Irvine, while they were never explicitly asked to do so, all reported doing jobs such as clearing, helping in stations, and work that helped keep the encampment running. This alone is indicative of a functioning community. Having community members step up and rotate responsibilities for the community as a whole is important for sustaining the group. However, organizers were not often seen in these same roles. One of the participants stated, "I found even those smaller tasks I personally thought was beneficial because it's kind of one thing that's not having to be done by the organizers since you wanted, or I personally wanted them to focus on the negotiations" (UCI 1-2-3). One of the participants discusses this dynamic in the context of their treatment of Black students; "It felt very one way, it felt like we were just expecting people to kind of throw themselves on the line for the encampment and stuff like that and for SJP but never really provided that kind of relationship to help each other out in a way" (UCI 1-2-4). Knowledge of operations of organizing and events was also reported to be limited for participants at the encampment, which was accompanied with an understanding that there were safety concerns with sharing that information with people outside of trusted organizers.

The interviewees at UC Irvine stated that they felt that the encampment was a welcoming community space, and that they learned and grew as people while they were a part of the encampment. Community events and activities such as arts and crafts, libraries, educational

teach-ins, food and water, medical supplies, and other necessities were provided to participants. Participants and organizers both said that they learned the most from other people in the encampment, one of the participants explaining, “the camp was an educational site for a reason, we taught ourselves and we learned how to relate to each other and care for each other on a very different level from before. We modeled what it would be like to like actually not have these barriers, these systems of oppression that stop us from having these relations to each other” (UCI 1-2-1). The interviewees also mentioned that everyone’s needs were taken care of through providing food, water, medical supplies, sleeping items, and other necessities. This mutual care for members of the encampment mirrors Hayes and Kaba’s emphasis on mutual aid and reciprocal care in organizing. A recurring theme between all the interviews were that every person interviewed felt like they were a part of a community, but recognized that they were in a position where they already had connections; they acknowledged that if someone didn’t know anyone inside the walls of the encampment, it would have been difficult to feel included in the camp.

UC Riverside was the first UC to reach an agreement with student organizers, and the students’ encampment was shut down peacefully after negotiation. UC Riverside was one of the only UC schools to meet the demands of the student protestors. The administrators agreed to advise the Board of Trustees on moving UC Riverside’s 300 million endowment from UCOP, disclose their investments and endowments, and indefinitely suspended all study abroad programs with Israel (@sjpucr). The interviewee discussed how the encampment at UC Riverside also felt like a welcoming community space, and that there was always someone present that a participant could communicate with. The interviewee reported a diverse group of

students participating at the encampment, and that leaders of the encampment would circle around and check to make sure participants were okay and having their needs met.

UC Santa Barbara's chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) did not plan the encampment that was hosted at UCSB's campus. Organizers at UCSB's SJP stated that the encampment was planned by organizers that had split from the original organizing body, wanting to show solidarity with other university chapters that had set up encampments. Original SJP members did not think an encampment was necessary, since the chapter was already working on a divestment resolution. One of the organizers stated that from visiting the encampment, it seemed that, "they fostered an amazing community and everyone was there to care for each other" (UCSB 3-1-1). However, organizers didn't believe that an encampment was a good idea, stating, "They already were taking tangible steps into passing divestment, and they already had a plan in place. So they said that it would be a security risk, and also a waste of resources" (UCSB 3-1-1).

Using Pastor, Ito, and Rosner's transactions and transformations, the interviews show that on a transactional level—number of people in attendance, policies passed, or other quantifiable measures—the encampments saw less success. Of the schools that had encampments built by student protestors, very few agreed to negotiate and discuss their demands, and fewer made a commitment to divest their funds from companies associated with Israel. Most agreements made were only to consider or vote on a divestment plan; "few have actually moved to divest; some boards are still weighing the option while others have voted against it" (Moody 2024). The encampments at UC Irvine and UC Riverside did see a lot of success on a transformation level, seeing interpersonal growth in the organizers and participants of the encampment. Participants and organizers stated that they learned from other people within the built community, growing

academically and as activists. Since March of 2022, positive opinions of Israel have decreased. A poll conducted by Pew Research Center states that, "A slight majority of Americans (53%) now express a somewhat or very unfavorable opinion of Israel. This marks an 11-point increase in unfavorable views since March 2022" (Silver 2025). While the encampments can't be confirmed to be the reason for this decrease, the encampments existed and protested while public opinion and culture surrounding Israel changed, adding to a larger shift in how Americans view Palestine. The encampment not only impacted the members of the encampment, but added to a larger shift in public opinion.

VIII. Conclusion

When examining the community-building strategies of the encampment, there were consistent aspects that organizers did well, as well as could have done better. While the encampments all seemed to exercise community-building techniques that fostered a welcoming space, such as providing necessities and preparation for participants to be a part of the space, that each encampment seemed to falter in creating cross-racial solidarity and fully embracing the struggles of other marginalized groups, especially Black students.

UC Irvine's encampment's lack of solidarity-building, especially with the Black community, hindered the encampment because of its facilitation of inequity within the organizing space. The presence of a houseless Black man at the encampment provided a unique situation where anti-Blackness became highly present among members, sentiment that might not have been uncovered in another scenario. This anti-Blackness, along with a lack of incorporating the Black struggle into the organizing philosophy, shows a lack of solidarity with the Black struggle, contrasting organizer's efforts through teach-ins and Black students participating in the protest.

UC Santa Barbara did show a stronger solidarity with Black students in their interviews, but their organizational divide hindered community solidarity with an aligned set of goals and organizing principles. UC Riverside, while achieving their demands, did not explicitly show this solidarity within their organizing philosophy.

The lack of cross-racial solidarity is an organizing oversight that can be corrected in future organizing spaces. While organizations continue to organize for Palestine, as well as in other social movements, cross-racial solidarity can be implemented and can strengthen the movement by extending what a social movement fights for, by inheriting the struggles of all oppressed and marginalized communities within the movement's philosophy. While the encampments seemed to struggle in creating this solidarity, they utilized space to create community and build relationships that strengthened their movement and helped pressure the university to meet their demands. Even if divestment was not met at every university that had an encampment present, the encampments created a larger social demand for action in Palestine, that helped change public perceptions as well as changed members in the encampment, allowing them to grow as students, as activists, and as people.

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