[#BlackLivesMatter and the Question of Genocide in Palestine](http://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/%22%20%5Co%20%22#BlackLivesMatter and the Question of Genocide in Palestine)

November 1, 2016

By [Katherine Franke](http://nakbafiles.org/author/katherine-franke/)

The Nakba Files

http://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/

One of the distinctive strengths of the Black Lives Matter movement is its attention to solidarity with intersecting struggles of social movements. In late September 2016, for instance, Movement activists subjected themselves to arrest during non-violent demonstrations in North Dakota in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux and other native peoples who were protesting the desecration of sacred land by the Dakota Access Pipeline. In another act of cross-movement solidarity, in 2015 nearly 50 Black-led organizations signed a [statement](http://www.blackforpalestine.com/read-the-statement.html) in solidarity with Palestinians, proclaiming, “While we acknowledge that the apartheid configuration in Israel/Palestine is unique from the United States (and South Africa), we continue to see connections between the situation of Palestinians and Black people.” Last summer, activists from the Movement traveled to Palestine to better understand the ways in which Black people in the U.S. and Palestinians are engaged in similar struggles to combat police abuse, state surveillance, lack of investment in oppressed communities, inferior educational opportunities, limited access to clean water, inadequate health care – the list goes on. “Going through checkpoints, seeing rubber bullets, reminds us what our comrades and some of us experienced in Ferguson, [and] IDF soldiers totally remind me of the cops that brutalized [me],” Ash-Lee Henderson, a regional organizer for Project South, [told](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Black-Lives-Matter-activists-claim-Israel-a-brutal-occupying-force-463153) the [Jerusalem Post](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Black-Lives-Matter-activists-claim-Israel-a-brutal-occupying-force-463153) during the delegation’s visit to the West Bank.

In August, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) – a collective of more than 50 organizations – issued a [comprehensive policy platform](https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/), *A Vision for Black Lives*, in which they explicitly connected the struggle for racial justice in the U.S. to that waged by Palestinians. In the [Invest/Divest](https://policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest/) section of the platform, M4BL criticized the US government for providing military aid to Israel. “The US justifies and advances the global war on terror via its alliance with Israel and is complicit in the genocide taking place against the Palestinian people,” the platform says. “Israel is an apartheid state with over 50 laws on the books that sanction discrimination against the Palestinian people.”

The blowback from both liberal and conservative Zionist organizations was swift and searing. Critics of the Platform’s reference to Israel focused almost entirely on the word “genocide,” leaving unchallenged the description of Israel as an “apartheid state”[[1]](http://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1) (could this be taken as a concession that Israel is an apartheid state?). Liberal D.C.-based pro-Israel advocacy organization J Street [condemned](https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/palestinians-welcome-movement-black-lives-platform) the use of the term [genocide](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/genocide) as “outrageously incorrect and deeply offensive.” Substantial [pressure](http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/u-s-election-2016/1.735760) was exerted on M4BL’s allies to [distance](https://www.jcrcboston.org/jcrc-statement-regarding-black-lives-matter-platform/) themselves from the Platform and from M4BL altogether. Jewish Voice for Peace, not surprisingly, offered an [unqualified endorsement](https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/jvp4bl/) of the Movement for Black Lives platform.

Zionist [critics](http://blog.adl.org/greenblatt/eyes-on-the-prize-in-pursuit-of-racial-justice-stick-to-the-facts-and-avoid-the-fiction) of the Platform portrayed the use of the term “genocide” as somehow out of bounds, leaving the impression that M4BL had crossed a line in raising concerns about the human rights record of the state of Israel in such harsh terms. They [labeled](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/why-did-black-american-activists-start-caring-about-palestine/496088/) the Platform and its supporters anti-Semitic on account of the supposedly jaw-dropping audacity of the Platform’s authors to use the “g” word with respect to Israel. The intensity of the outrage directed at the M4BL Platform’s assertion that the treatment of Palestinians by Israel could be described as “a genocide” leaves the impression that this kind of charge had never been leveled before, or that no reasonable person (and thus only an anti-Semite) could frame Israel’s policies this way.

As an act of solidarity with the M4BL, the [Center for Constitutional Rights](https://ccrjustice.org/) published a short analysis of the history of the use of the term genocide in connection with Israel/Palestine, [*The Genocide of the Palestinian People: An International Law and Human Rights Perspective*](https://ccrjustice.org/genocide-palestinian-people-international-law-and-human-rights-perspective). The aim of this document was to illustrate that “there is a long history of human rights scholarship and legal analysis that supports the assertion. Prominent scholars of the international law crime of genocide and human rights authorities take the position that Israel’s policies toward the Palestinian people could constitute a form of genocide. Those policies range from the 1948 mass killing and displacement of Palestinians to a half-century of military occupation and, correspondingly, the discriminatory legal regime governing Palestinians, repeated military assaults on Gaza, and official Israeli statements expressly favoring the elimination of Palestinians.”

As I [explained](https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/why-israels-actions-can-be-called-genocide) in a podcast with the Electronic Intifada, the term “genocide” has particular relevance in this context: “Genocide can be applied to the destruction of a people or a national group as a viable group, and that can be both with their being driven from a land or the rendering of their language no longer legal, or just the destruction of their national identity.” Palestinians have claimed “that what the state of Israel has done is try to deny the very existence or presence of Palestinians in the area that was mandate Palestine before 1947.”

As the CCR paper further explains:

“… prominent Israeli politicians have publicly called for action against the Palestinian people that unequivocally meets the definition of genocide under the 1948 Convention. For instance, in February 2008, Matan Vilnai, Israel’s deputy defense minister, [declared](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/29/israelandthepalestinians1) that increasing tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip could bring on themselves what he called a *shoah*, or holocaust, “The more Qassam [rocket] fire intensifies and the rockets reach a longer range, they will bring upon themselves a bigger shoah because we will use all our might to defend ourselves.”

Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked [posted](https://electronicintifada.net/sites/default/files/styles/original_800w/public/2014-07/ayelet-shaked-facebook-post-30-june-2014-genocide.jpg?itok=k5yvVqQp&timestamp=1448949295) a statement on Facebook in June 2014 claiming that “the entire Palestinian people is the enemy” and called for the destruction of Palestine, “including its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure.” Her post also called for the killing of Palestinian mothers who give birth to “little snakes.”

In August 2014, Moshe Feiglin, then-deputy speaker of the Israeli Knesset and member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s ruling Likud Party, [called](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2715466/Israeli-official-calls-concentration-camps-Gaza-conquest-entire-Gaza-Strip-annihilation-fighting-forces-supporters.html) for the destruction of Palestinian life in Gaza and offered a detailed plan for shipping Palestinians living in Gaza across the world. Specifically, he envisioned a scenario where the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) would find areas on the Sinai border to establish “tent encampments…until relevant emigration destinations are determined.” He further suggested that the IDF would then “exterminate nests of resistance, in the event that any should remain.” He subsequently [wrote](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/15326#.VCLljPldXTo) in an op-ed, “After the IDF completes the ‘softening’ of the targets with its fire-power, the IDF will conquer the entire Gaza, using all the means necessary to minimize any harm to our soldiers, with no other considerations.” He continued, “Gaza is part of our Land and we will remain there forever. Liberation of parts of our land forever is the only thing that justifies endangering our soldiers in battle to capture land. Subsequent to the elimination of terror from Gaza, it will become part of sovereign Israel and will be populated by Jews. This will also serve to ease the housing crisis in Israel. The coastal train line will be extended, as soon as possible, to reach the entire length of Gaza.”

Arguably, the application of the term genocide to the Israeli/Palestinian context has new gained relevance as Israeli officials, such as Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, have [embraced and defended](https://soundcloud.com/intifada/ayelet-shaked-at-columbia-law-school) a proposal once advanced by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres in 1987,[[2]](http://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn2) whereby Israel would annex all of the land later identified as “Area C” in the Oslo Accords, where most Israeli settlements are located. Under this plan, Israel would grant citizenship to the roughly 90,000 Palestinians living in that territory but then grant Jordanian control over Palestinians remaining in Areas A and B, an area that almost all Israeli government officials, including Shaked, call “Judea and Samaria,” and not the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and certainly not Palestine. This plan would dissolve the Palestinian Authority and eliminate any land or nation that might be called Palestine – something that would undeniably destroy a people or a national group as a viable group.

*The Genocide of the Palestinian People: An International Law and Human Rights Perspective* is available [here](https://ccrjustice.org/genocide-palestinian-people-international-law-and-human-rights-perspective).

[[1]](http://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1) The Jewish Community Relations Council and T’ruah issued statements condemning the M4BL Platform’s use of the term “genocide” but made no mention of the description of Israel as an “apartheid state.” [*JCRC Statement Regarding Black Lives Matter Platform*](https://www.jcrcboston.org/jcrc-statement-regarding-black-lives-matter-platform/), August 3, 2016; [*T’ruah Statement on The Movement for Black Lives Platform*](http://truah.org/5-media/general/779-t-ruah-statement-on-black-lives-matter-platform.html), August 3, 2016.

[[2]](http://nakbafiles.org/2016/11/01/blacklivesmatter-and-the-question-of-genocide-in-palestine/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref2) Shimon Peres, Battling for Peace: A Memoir 297 (1995).