Solidarity, Entanglement, and Memory: Recollections from Amsterdam's Uprising

Clara Ricci Curbastro Ruiz de Arcaute[1*]

[1]RMA Gender Studies

[*]Corresponding author. Email: clarariccicurb@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay examines *Between Palestine and us*¸ a collective archival project produced by activists in Amsterdam following the May 2024 university encampments in solidarity with Palestine. This work situates the book within a broader debate on the role of archives, power, and difference, arguing that *Between Palestine and us* exemplifies a recalcitrant form of archiving that challenges hegemonic narratives of institutionalized memory. Drawing on Jaques Derrida's reflection on the archive as a site of political power, and on Denise Ferreira da Silva's reconceptualization of difference as *entanglement* rather than *separability*, the analysis explores the ways in which the book resists dominant historical accounts. The book stands out for the assembly of testimonies, images, artistic works, and reflections that document both the events of the student uprisings and their emotional, political, and ethical aftermath. By doing so, it reclaims history-making as a bottom-up, participatory practice and exposes the limitation of institutional archives that marginalize dissenting voices. This work argues that this form of archiving constitutes an act of resistance in a political context characterized by rising authoritarianism and repression of solidarity for Palestine. Ultimately, *Between Palestine and us* is presented as an archive of entanglement and intentional solidarity, thus preserving not only memory, but also the possibility for future collective action and transformation.

Keywords

Palestine, Activism, Solidarity, Archive, Entanglement

Introduction

> "Solidarity is contagious. When Columbia University students organized an encampment protesting the genocide in Gaza in 2024, they kickstarted what was soon to be called the global student Intifada. [...] A year later, as the genocide persists, the West's complicity remains unwavering and the Palestine solidarity movement worldwide has been met with an intensifying backlash. With fascism now rampant, we're living through a moment in history where deranged state violence is threatening to breach all boundaries to destruction and repression. The annihilation of Gaza, with impunity, has made life everywhere less safe, more conditional, more threatened. Though our situation is incomparable, the stakes are personal

> nonetheless: if we're not fascism's first victims, we may well be its last. And so, in this moment of danger, we must still look for ways to bring intentional solidarity into practice, as it remains, as it always was, our only recourse." (Between Palestine and us 2025, 1-2).

These are the words the student activist collective chose to start *Between Palestine and us*: a collection of testimonies, photos, art, and reflections from the student uprising in Amsterdam. This book aims to carry the collective and personal lived experiences of activists through time and space, possibly arriving at safer and more peaceful times. It becomes relevant to explore archives as the means for stories to travel through time, creating what we call *history*. It calls for questions on power, difference and legacies.

This essay aims at exploring the way in which concepts of *difference* and *archive* have travelled to make *Between Palestine and us*, arguing that the book is exemplary in problematizing notions of hegemonic difference as it aims to collect the experiences of collective entanglement and solidarity in a format that can survive and persist through time. The concept of *difference* becomes central and crucial when one's goal is to focus on the *relational* nature of memory, thus understanding it as *positioned* and possibly *contested* (Rigney 2016, p.66). Moreover, a focus on archival work becomes appropriate when contextualizing it in its use to analyze activist movements, their cultural production, and what will be remembered as *history* (Podolsky 2022, p. 711). In the following, I will first introduce the concepts of archiving and difference, followed by an analysis of their encounter in the book *Between Palestine and us.*

Archive, Difference, and Power

Concepts exist not merely as words, but rather as tools to understand the world around us, to bridge and connect others by facilitating communications. Concepts as tools for communication and analysis are never static, as they travel through continents, people, and disciplines they acquire new meanings, and applications. In the following, I wish to introduce one of many understandings of *archives* and *difference* as tools of analysis, as they will guide our understanding of the book from student activists in Amsterdam.

Derrida reflects on the notion of *archives* in relation to psychoanalysis: he draws connections between the primordial fear of death and the sense of finitude (Derrida 1995, p. 19). He describes a fever-like urge of organization, unification, and accumulation of "objective" knowledge, ultimately institutionalizing memory and history all together (ibid.). Moreover, he remarks how there is no political power without *control* over the archive: the interpretation of "truth" is externalized, and the selection-and thus exclusion-of specific sources is naturalized (ibid). Ultimately, following Derrida's reflections, it becomes possible to understand archives as the institutionalization of memory, the -physical and otherwise-place that dictates *what has happened*: archiving a source inevitably leads to another source being excluded, highlighting the inherent power of those who get to make this decision **and the disruptive power embedded in archiving and creating memory outside of institutional frameworks**.

Thinking about what knowledge and products survive the archival process inevitably leads us to ponder on *difference*, what it means in relation to social and historical dynamics, and ultimately, what implications it carries. Denise Ferreira da Silva reflects on mainstream understanding of difference: in her reflection she identifies difference as popularly related to *separability*, thus creating *and* sustaining a moral discourse that generates,

institutes, and isolates the *Other* (Ferreira da Silva 2016, p. 63). On the contrary, the author posits an understanding of difference that *does not* presuppose separability, determinacy, and sequentiality, but rather that *is* the expression of an elementary entanglement (idem, p. 63-65). She argues that when the social ideal reflects such entanglement, sociality becomes neither cause nor effect of relations involving separate existants (ibid.). Thinking of difference as *entanglement* shines a light on the inherent connections between people, countries, and histories: privileging this view thus allows us to view not just people, but conflicts worldwide as inherently connected, creating also the possibility of collective action in our social imaginary.

Between Palestine and us: reclaiming history, recalcitrant archival action

The previous section was aimed at establishing the conceptualization this essay will embrace on notions of *archiving* and *difference*. Drawing on the examples from *Between Palestine and us*, this section will first introduce the book and then explore the ways it problematizes notions of hegemonic difference by gathering the experiences of collective entanglement and solidarity in a format that can survive and persist through time.

What is this book about? What is this book *for*? Between Palestine and us is the product of collective work from activists and the Spookstad editorial collective to preserve the memory of the May 2024 student uprisings in Amsterdam. The collective explicitly chose to assemble the sources–speeches, screenshots, pictures, drawings, poetry, theatre–in a way that allows the materials to speak for themselves, without the intervention of the collective telling the reader *what* they should understand and *how* it should be interpreted (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 3). By gathering memories, accounts, and cultural production around the encampments *outside* of institutional frameworks, this book constitutes an active attempt to counter-memory making and by proxy an active act of resistance against set-in-stone, top-down narratives.

The content of the book is not merely aimed at recounting-some of- the events that shook Amsterdam–and the world–in May 2024, but also exploring the aftermath of the protests, their meaning, their reach, limitations, and the inextricably entangled experiences of *hope* and *defeat*, the necessity of resistance, and the distance between Palestine and us (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 4). Recollecting the memories of those presents is essential for those stories and voices to not be forgotten, as they could possibly inspire, inform, and guide future intervention. It holds particular value in the current political context in the Netherlands and beyond, where right-wing populism and fascist ideologies are on the rise and rather prevalent in global politics (Wolf 2024). Ultimately, any attempt to preserve memory beyond institutionalized boundaries constitutes an act of resistance, aimed at giving voice to those often marginalized by institutional memory.

Archiving the resistance

Recalling Derrida's words on archives, it is important to remember the inherent power dynamic to the archival process: from the power to choose to include/exclude artifacts and documents from a specific event, to the subsequent power of creating the *True Account* of what happened (Derrida 1995, p. 19). This dynamic is not only recognized, but also addressed in the work of the activists, who reflect on the inherently exclusive dimension of

archiving. They resolve this dilemma by framing incompleteness as inherent to such a project, leaving room for any number of additions, perspectives, interpretation and reflections (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 3).

The university has presented its own account on the events of the encampments, framing them as having created unsafe and hostile environments; moreover, the board claims openness of dialogue with students and their representatives on the matter (UvA 2024). While some of the property damage has also been documented by the collective–both from the protestors and the police–(Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 91;127), there is also plenty of evidence of (1) the effort to mindfully treat the occupied space (idem, p. 79) and (2) attempts to dialogue through institutional means that have been undermined and erased (CSR OV231010: 3§64-67 and FSR OV231128: 8).

With this reflection, this work wants to highlight not just the contrast between institutional and grassroot narrations, but also stress the way in which these are in conversation with each other, and arguably create a clearer picture *together* of *a* possible account. Moreover, it opens the possibility to *critically* engage with institutional narratives by providing *a* countermemory; without a plurality of accounts, the very possibility of dialogue and negotiation is undermined. In the context of monolithic and one-sided narrations being uplifted, the existence of a self-organized project for remembrance constitutes an act of resistance in its claim for *space* within the rather exclusionary discourse.

Recalling Derrida, it becomes natural to understand UvA's institutional account on the events that unfolded in May of 2024 as being informed by the interests of maintaining a stable image and a specific political positioning. On the other hand, observing the interventions captured in *Between Palestine and Us* can give one insight on the experiences of individuals, rather than an institution; we are allowed to witness glimpses of individual stories and emotions within a collective struggle.

Naturally, it is still unclear and therefore hard to assess what kind of impact this work may have in the future of the university and in the future of student movements, however, we already have records of the way in which student movements inspired each other, both across the years and across borders (Occupy the University! 2013). Archival work has already established, for instance, the way in which student protests sparked globally in the summer of 1968, a symptom of a global anti-Vietnam War movement (ibid.). Already at that time, the University of Amsterdam was protagonist of student protests and occupations, and the memories of those events are both carried in archives and oral history, highlighting the existence of *a* history that is as real as it is perhaps ignored in institutional accounts.

The strategies and dynamics of previous movements constitute a form of heritages for those who come after, both in terms of potential strategies but also in establishing that such attempts have existed and have had an impact (Occupy the University! 2013.). Lastly, documenting the repression of student movements both in the Netherlands and abroad further stresses the way in which they challenge, question, *and* disrupt the legitimacy of institutional and governmental power.

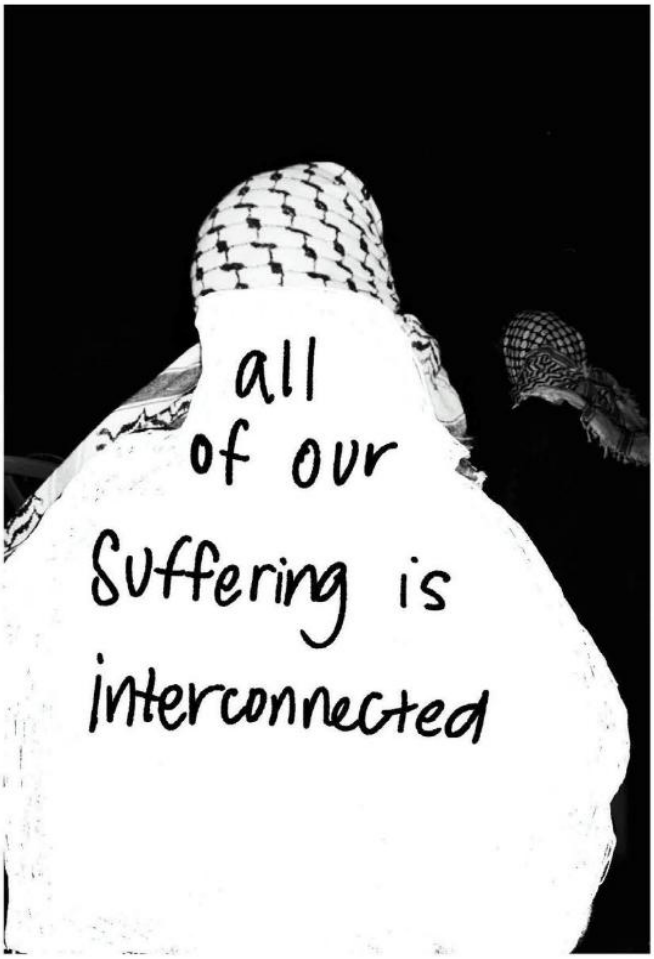
Ultimately, *Between Palestine and us* aims at documenting a clear statement: police repression exists because a free Palestine-and an advocacy for such a cause- threatens the very order that legitimizes institutional power and institutional violence (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 61). Leaving a mark, on paper and digitally, of the counter-narratives around Palestinian solidarity worldwide is urgent and necessary to stop the slaughter of the people in Gaza and, hopefully, to avoid these mistakes from occurring again. Lastly, documenting how the

resistance took place, its victories and its pitfalls, will prepare future readers if similar events unfortunately happen again. Documenting resistance means documenting the *possibility* for *transformation*.

Why? Solidarity and Entanglement

When thinking about the student encampments, and by proxy, when thinking about *Between Palestine and us* a crucial question arises: why? Why would someone do this and why would they document it? The answer lies in *intersubjectivity*: the concern that binds procedure with power and empowerment, with pedagogy and the transmitability of knowledge (**Bal 2002, p. 11**). The notion of intersubjectivity is yet another expression of the concept introduced by Ferreira da Silva: *entanglement*.

(**Illustration from *Between Palestine and us*, p.207**)



From the Netherlands, we are fundamentally entangled with the Palestinians regardless of the "differences" imposed by power structures such as (neo)colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, islamophobia, etc. We are tangled as our *choices* of consumption affect the economy of war that sustains the Palestinian genocide, our *universities* collaborate with institutions complicit in the occupation of Palestine, and our *governments* send weapons to the occupying forces (Albanese 2025, p. 6-9). Moreover, those same forces that aim to manufacture difference as inherently exclusionary, the forces that enable a televised genocide to take place as we watch it, are the same forces that oppress us in our homes. The threads that entangle us stretch out through borders and continents and, more akin to ropes, suffocate us.

Being connected to what the *status quo* wants us to perceive as *Other* brings forth one conclusion as expressed in the book: "Though our situation is incomparable, the stakes are personal nonetheless: if we're not fascism's first victims, we may well be its last. And so, in this moment of danger, we must still look for ways to bring intentional solidarity into practice, as it remains, as it always was, our only recourse." (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 2). All we have left as activists, as civil society, is each other, and the awareness of the threads that connect us.

Recalcitrant archiving

Between Palestine and us holds a distinctive position in the international landscape of documentation of the solidarity movement for Palestine. It becomes an example of archiving *against*–and *complementary* to–the institutional narrative of the events. It is subversive, *recalcitrant*, as it embraces the generative role of culture and cultural products in the critical understandings of the political power of historical formation. Building on Gramsci's work, one must understand that cultural hegemony has to be achieved *prior* to the realization of political power: this approach seeks in education and knowledge the means able to consistently challenge the *status quo* that is not an object to be possessed as information, but rather the inclination towards critical pedagogy and constant engagement (Chambers 2017, p. 107).

The work of activists involved showcases an intrinsic awareness of the entanglement with those suffering in Palestine, creating an archive that does not posit itself as complete and set in stone–as it would be incompatible with the nature of an archive–but rather as authentic, and never-ending. The book performed the very theory outlined in this work: it *materialized* entanglement by situating Amsterdam within global histories of colonialism, repression, and resistance while also *reclaiming* archival practice as a tool of solidarity rather than domination. It challenged hegemonic difference by demonstrating the relational, contested, and incomplete, always in the making nature of memory. Archival work not only preserves *what happened* in the past, but more importantly defines *what is thinkable* about the past, making this an attempt to expand these conditions, insisting that solidarity, once practiced and recorded, can travel across time.

Creating an alternative, *collective*, account of the events rather than advocating for objectivity, calls for a more productive lens: plurality. It sets a precedent for a kind of archival work that is aware of its *entanglement* with the outside world, is aware of the *power* of history and history-writing, and that can *exemplify* the many shades, shapes, and flavors of resistance, solidarity, and global movements.

The end of a journey?

This essay has explored concepts of archive and difference, and the way their journey meets in the book *Between Palestine and us*, a collective work from activists of the Amsterdam protests of 2024. This work posited that the book stands as exemplary as it challenges hegemonic notions of *difference* and history-making, thus constituting an intervention in the political dimension of memory. Ultimately, *Between Palestine and us* sets a precedent for bottom-up archival work, gathering the stories, feelings, and artistic productions of those that partook in the events that it aims to encapsulate to never be forgotten.

Through Derrida, this work highlighted that archives are not neutral repositories of facts, but rather sites where power dictates what becomes understood as *history*. Ferreira da Silva's contribution called us to rethink difference not as something that *separates*, but rather that *entangles:* a condition that questions and unsettles hegemonic binary divisions between "here" and "there", "us" and "them". *Between Palestine and us* operates in the intersection of these two concepts by refusing the institutional monopoly over *narrations* while also challenging the logic of *separability* that renders Palestinian suffering as distant or too abstract to grasp.

In the future I hope for the concepts of archive and entanglement to travel to happier, more peaceful times, allowing us to reflect on the implications of the existence of such a book and the way it preserved through time a recalcitrant telling of the history of Amsterdam and the global solidarity movement for Palestine carrying the memory of entanglement and the imagination of transformation.

Conflict of Interests

No conflict of interests to declare.

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