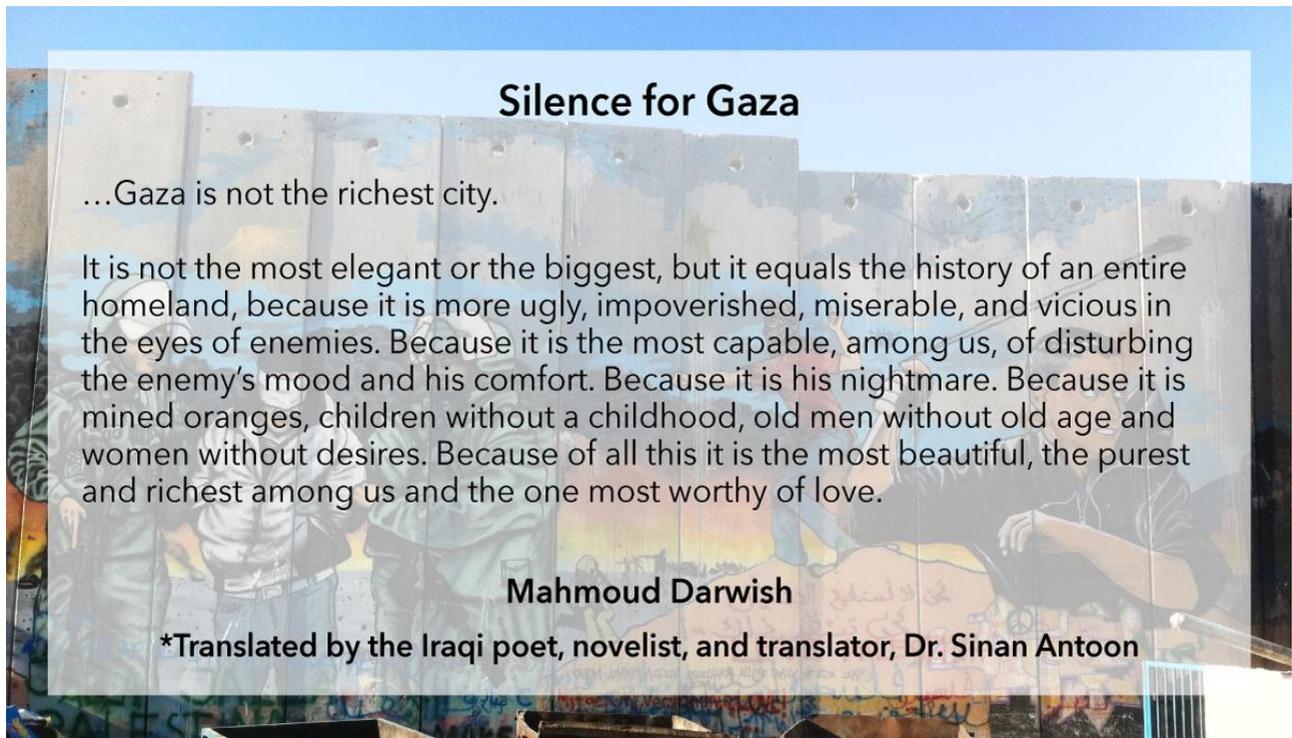




For activists and academics — and everyone in between



Stop the Silencing

The Gaza Crisis has once again brought us to the debate about what role if any can academics play in promoting justice. We, as the Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS), are dedicated to promoting a better understanding of women in the Middle East. Most of our work has been on academic scholarship. However, when events necessitate our involvement on issues linked to justice, we have stepped up and embraced causes that have resulted in the improvement of women's lives.

The Gaza Crisis once again highlights that unjust practices (both according to international law and common sense human rights values) continue to prevail. We, the Association for Middle East Women's Studies do not condone violence of any kind. We are appalled when groups target civilians wherever they may be—whether in Israel, Syria, Iraq or Gaza. We join all those who condemn such violence.

What we as an organization, however, find alarmingly objectionable is the continued and concerted efforts to “police” academic discourse

on Palestine. The killing of over 2000 citizens in Gaza (overwhelmingly children) is intolerable by all human standards. That members of the US Academy continue to be harassed if they express their outrage with such horrific acts, is cause for concern not only for academics but for all those who profess support for justice and peace.

We at AMEWS request a protected forum and voice to be able to discuss these issues in an open and honest manner without threat of intimidation or punishment. We are currently working with the Middle East Studies Association to grant us this basic right.

Amaney A. Jamal, Ph.D.
President, Association for Middle East Women's Studies

AMEWS Forum on Gaza and the Middle East

As readers can imagine, the very establishment over 30 years ago of an organization named the "Association for Middle East Women's Studies" (AMEWS) was a political act in and of itself. Over these years the organization has sometimes been very politically quiet, but at other times has been energized by events that were transpiring in the Middle East, especially (but not exclusively) as these relate to women. This is one of those times!

This July, the organization was energized and activated more than at any time in recent memory. It was related not only to the assault on Gaza by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), but also to events in Iraq and Syria and the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS or IS for Islamic State), both of which have had profound effects on civilians, including women and children. The AMEWS activity began when the newly resuscitated Human Rights Task Force (formerly the Human Rights Committee)—whose members include Nadjé Al-Ali, Margot Badran, Anita Fabos, Mary Ann Fay, Amaney Jamal, and myself and supported by a politically committed AMEWS Board of Directors-- issued two Open Letters on (1) the crisis in Gaza, ultimately calling not only for a cease-fire, but for an end to the embargo and occupation and (2) the ISIS atrocities in Iraq carried out against minority populations.

While the Israeli military was violently devastating Gaza and its civilians (and still is), AMEWS officers called on the full AMEWS membership to comment on Gaza. This may be the first official Forum of the AMEWS listserv. One of the goals of our letters and Forum activism was to rally the Middle East Studies Association itself. Then the Board, led by Nadjie Al-Ali, Amaney Jamal and myself, attempted to secure MESA panel space not only for a gendered discussion of Iraq, but also for space to discuss the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Despite the difficulties, in general, of doing activist work within academic and professional organizations, AMEWS members and officers have shown commitment to social and political justice in their Forum statements. Next year our plans are to continue to put pressure on MESA to create space for some of the more controversial issues—the “hot spot” issues-- and to gender them.

As a founding member of the U.S. Committee for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, my own position on BDS and what is happening to Gaza should be clear. Why BDS is so controversial among so many people in the U.S. is a puzzle to me because it is a non-violent mode of protest against discriminatory and violent Israeli government policies and actions. In other words, it is a non-violent strategy to combat a very violent state. How we can interpret the latest assault on Gaza as anything less than war crimes and crimes

against humanity is beyond my comprehension! It seems our role as educators and activists is to continue making the Israeli state’s actions visible to the public, to argue for justice for the dislocated Palestinians, and to shed light on the current atrocities being committed in the name of “self-defense”. If every country in the world committed such “self-defense” as the IDF is committing in Gaza, the world would destroy itself. Americans have a special responsibility: to convince the U.S. government to stop selling arms to Israel and to stop supporting the Israeli state with impunity. We have to act in any capacity that is available to us.

Sondra Hale, Ph.D.
Research Professor, Anthropology and Gender Studies, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Chair, Human Rights Task Force, AMEWS

GAZA

The violent destruction of peoples and their cultures is unfortunately not new, think of our own Native Americans. However the complicity of the US in this barbarous massacre, or “the slaughter of innocents” as Rabbi Siegman, former director of the American Jewish Congress, so aptly put it, in Gaza seems particularly horrendous. Partly it is due to US complicity as we protect the powerful oppressors through our high tech military gifts which we as tax payers pay for, often unknowingly to most Americans. The complicity is also seen in an election year as the US Congress and our President dare not criticize Israel.

As scholars and educators with expertise in gender and family issues, we are energized to speak out, break the silence as Gazans and other victimized peoples and refugees in Syria, Iraq and Palestine and other areas struggle physically and mentally for life, community and respect. We also need to support the brave doctors and educators who assist these families. In particular, the letters of Dr. Mona El-Farah, director of the ME Children’s Alliance in Gaza, who had 9 members of her family killed, reached my heart. Personally I was in Palestine/Israel in 1956 when I was 19, and later conducted research on the Syrian Turkish border, so my emotions are torn by the appalling events in all these areas. It is also greatly disturbing that another area of research and participation, the Arab immigrant community

in Dearborn Michigan, is now unfairly targeted by the National Security Agency.

A beam of optimism is the brave American and Israeli Jewish individuals and organizations as they confront those who misuse their former tragedy to commit another, and the Palestinian youth as they demonstrate in our cities and campuses. However we need to actively hold our Congress and our military responsible, while continuing to educate the populace.

Barbara C. Aswad, Ph.D.
Past President, The Middle East Studies Association (MESA)

Gaza and Its Aftermath

Going back to the status quo ante won't solve the problem, it will only defer it for another day. It will not stop the bloodshed, it will make it even worse the next time the cycle rolls over the people of Gaza and plagues the people of Israel. Gaza is an open wound and Band Aids won't help. There must be a plan after the aftermath that allows Gaza to breathe and heal. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, July 21.

On July 30, nine days after the Israeli assault on Gaza began, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) held a candlelight vigil in front of the White House. There were probably between 150-200 men, women and children in attendance on this perfect early-summer evening in Washington. As the light in the sky became dimmer, candles were lit and volunteers began reading the names of the dead and the missing. It was heart-wrenching to hear the names, particularly when the names included entire extended families -- mothers, fathers, grandparents, children and pregnant women. Many times the persons reading the names had a difficult time holding back their tears as did many of us upon hearing the names of so many, especially the children, gone before they had a chance to live. I am reminded of this poignant evening in front of the White House because of the intensity of the Israeli assault on the Gaza population and its duration. Standing across the

street from the White House with a flickering candle in my hand, I did not imagine then that the Israeli war on Gaza would last so long and destroy so much.

To write about the aftermath of the Israeli assault and its aftermath, I turned to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which is on-line and available to everyone. The statistics were compiled by OCHA between August 28 and September 4. The statistical evidence demonstrates that every sector of society and the economy was affected by the Israeli assault on the population and infrastructure of Gaza. OCHA called the scale of the damage "unprecedented since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967."

According to OCHA, there were 2,131 Palestinians killed, of whom 1,473 have been identified as civilians, including 501 children and 257 women. In contrast, OCHA identified 71 Israelis killed of whom 66 were soldiers and four were civilians. Also according to OCHA, 110,000 Palestinians were internally displaced and continue to live in shelters run by UNRWA (United National Relief and Works Agency) or with host families. There were 18,000 housing units destroyed or severely damaged leaving 108,000 persons homeless. Approximately 450,000 persons are unable to access municipal water.

In terms of infrastructure, the Gaza power plant remains inoperable. The majority of the Gaza

population has lost its productive assets including businesses and workshops damaged or completely destroyed. The Israeli assault forced farmers to abandon their lands and caused substantial direct damage to Gaza's 17,000 hectares of croplands and much of its agricultural infrastructure including greenhouses, irrigation systems, animal farms and fishing boats. For 50 days during the war, Palestinian fishermen were prohibited from fishing.

In addition to U.N. agencies like UNRWA and UNICEF, Gulf based donors have pledged \$125 million with most of the aid coming from Saudi Arabia. According to OCHA, the main priority for humanitarian agencies are repair, reconstruction and restoration of essential services to the affected communities "which effectively means the entire population of Gaza Strip".

Mary Ann Fay, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Honors Faculty, Graduate Faculty, History & Geography
Morgan State University

*The complete OCHA report with maps and photographs can be located at <http://www.ochaopt.org/>
 ***OXFAM** and **UNICEF** are accepting contributions for Gaza.

McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies presents

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Activism, Militancy
& the Arts
A series of events

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The Institute of Islamic Studies gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the State of Qatar for this event.
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Seek God's forgiveness when asking:

“Why the veil?”

To women of Ghaza

Ista'idhu bil-llahi min su'al "limadha l-hijab?"

Ila nissa'i Ghaza

They see us
Carrying...our sons, our daughters
Standing guard...over our victims, our martyrs
Waiting...at hospitals
Leaning over...the wounds of loved ones
And with crying eyes, all covered in black
Carrying pictures of our men
Imprisoned, missing, dead

And from the burning fires,
Running...
Hear the echo of our steps
Beyond the houses, the walls, the fences
We are watching, waiting,
Carrying our banners:

“Greetings to women around the world from
seized Ghaza”

On International Women's Day

We cover our mouths from the shock
Dressed in black
Walking down streets, alleyways in purgatory
Decorated by broken windows
By splintered stone and rock

Our screams, no one hears them
They don't see the desperation on our faces
They don't hear us beating our chests
They don't hear our cries
They don't see the bodies of our youth aligned,
covered in white
Drenched in blood red
They reject the meaning of pleas on holy days
They reject the site of our hands raised up to the
sky
They don't read about the blockades, the darkness
The destruction
The destitution, the fear
The tears
They don't see maps of blood on the faces of our
women and children
They don't see oceans of blood on the faces of our
men

Images
What used to be art and beauty!
Are now reminders of the missing, the captives,
the martyrs!
And we are hit
And we stay silent
And we stand together
Ready for death and for life
In our long dresses
Afghanis, Iraqis, Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians
In our long dresses
Our heads covered by the same white veils
In our long dresses

Let us draw the flags of our lost homeland colored
on our cheeks
Let us draw the flags of our lost homeland colored
on our cheeks
Let us draw the flags of our lost homeland colored
on our cheeks
And on our white veiled heads
For protection
And for strength
We are free mothers
Free women
And we ask you
Stop
Advocates of war and strife
Stop
Asking about the veil
Upon our heads, gleaming in white
Seek forgiveness from God when asking:
“Why the veil?”

Hosn Abboud, Ph.D.
**Author and lecturer on gender issues in Islam
and literature**

*Originally written in Arabic and translated by
Montaha Abboud.*

Protest is not Good Enough!

The surge of care, anger and protest sparked by the vicious and indiscriminate Israeli attacks on Gaza must now become a sustained engagement with the lives, livelihoods and rights of the people of Gaza. The women of Gaza who lost their lives, livelihoods and loved ones warrant the continued solidarity of feminists and fair observers everywhere.

Many are moved by scenes of suffering and incensed by wanton acts of violence. People come together to petition and protest when war begins and when injustices become too flagrant to fathom. When we watch on television the death of whole families and listen to screams and suffering on the hour on every news channel we, the watchers, do our best to overcome our impotence and to get involved from the safety of our seats. The summer war was partially shaped by this involvement! Israel was shocked as thousands of its own citizens voiced their worries about the loss of a moral compass and hundreds of thousands from all over the world expressed their outrage.

But now that the strikes have stopped, we the outraged must engage with the complexity of this conflict. We must recognize the difference that sustained action can make in delivering hope and challenging the structural injustices that have become the predicament of Palestinians living in cities, villages, camps and in the prison that is Gaza.

This conflict is riddled with uncomfortable details and contradictions. We should not shy away from these riddles but rather sustain an engagement and presence that transforms protest into participation and political influence. What do we learn from the suffering of our sisters in Gaza and what do we have to offer as women seeking to lift structural injustices that oppress men and women inside and outside Gaza? Academics are comfortable when they are imagining a perfect world of perfect rights and maximal welfare. This high bar is hard to realize and for some, even difficult to imagine. Certainly women mourning as they wade through the rubble or wonder how to live on need more than protest.

Can we learn from their suffering how to offer a way forward that is possible, just and sustainable?

Hania Sholkamy, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Anthropology,
American University of Cairo

“The Limits of Speaking on Catastrophe: Confessions of a Palestinian Teacher”

I am a Professor of English at Guilford College.

I am the Chair of the English Department.

I am a faculty member in the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program.

I am also a Palestinian.

More specifically, I am from Arab Al-Sawahreh.

My tribe is so big that its name, The Sawahreh Arabs, appears as a location on some maps of Palestine (and there are many of this relatively small country). We live on Jabal Al-Mukabber, one of the Mounts of Jerusalem – “the mount of he who calls out the greatness of god.”

I remember time spent there as a child – stone houses lining narrow dusty streets, doors unlocked, cool paved staircases leading to cool paved rooftops, dozens of little feet running through rooms and across roofs.

Now, a wall runs through it.

One part of my tribe has been divided from the other. Sometimes the same family is separated from itself.

From the house where I grew up in Amman, Jordan to Jabal Al-Mukabber in Palestine, it takes 45 minutes. *45 minutes* – less than it would take us

right now to get to Raleigh, or Durham, or Chapel Hill.

Did my grandmother know when she left with her two children because of the occupation that those 45 minutes would turn into 12 hours at King Hussein Bridge? Did she know that those 12 hours would turn into impossibility when, time after time, she applied for a visa at the Israeli embassy, and was denied, time after time? Did she know at 37 (almost my age now), that at 75, when she wanted to see her sisters, that those 45 minutes would turn into never and forever?

She died of cancer in a Jordanian hospital, having never returned.

My uncle was a Fida'i, a Palestinian Freedom Fighter. Exiled out of Jordan after Black September and, unable to go back to Palestine, he loitered in a large waiting room called the world – sometimes Pakistan, sometimes Saudi – until King Hussein finally “forgave” the Feda'yeen.

21 days ago, my relative Mohammed was killed in a hail of bullets in Jerusalem. The Israelis say he was going to ram his van into a busload of Jewish settlers; his family says he was just driving by and a spooked settler shot him.

So what do I say about Gaza on this small campus in Greensboro, North Carolina, 6,000 miles from Palestine?

At least, we do not have Anna Akhmatova's

problem.

Anna Akhmatova was a Russian poet whose husband had been killed and son had been imprisoned by Stalin's regime. Terrified of causing more harm to her son, but determined to live out the role of the poet as witness and as memory, she wrote a poem entitled *Requiem*. Here are some of the first lines of that poem:

In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror, I spent seventeen months waiting in line outside the prison in Leningrad. One day somebody in the crowd identified me... and asked me in a whisper... “Can you describe this?” And I said: “I can.” Then something like a tormented smile passed over what had once been her face.

Still afraid her poem would be discovered and her son punished even further, Akhmatova burned all of her poems, including *Requiem*, but not before she had her friends commit them to memory. There was no other way to preserve this witness. One of the friends remembers “going out late at night into the empty streets repeating a poem to herself over and over again, terrified she would forget a word or get something wrong.”

But we do not have Akhmatova's problem. We are all witness. The images of Gaza bombard us.

A friend of mine shows me on her iPhone happy pictures of her visit to Ramallah, Palestine, this summer, her kids playing in the gardens of grandparents. Her thumb slides softly over the

screen, and every once in a while, interspersed among the images of her smiling children, a mutilated corpse of a Palestinian child appears – images, no doubt, downloaded to her gallery through Facebook or What’s Up – thousands upon thousands of “likes” and “shares” and “posts.” Her thumb passes lightly over them; we don’t say a word about these images.

We are witness to so much. And not just in Gaza – in Iraq and Syria and Ferguson.

So what can I say about Gaza?

As an Arab woman, raised Muslim, I have often had to choose between competing selves. Sometimes, even small daily moments call for putting my Arabness ahead of my womanhood, or my womanhood before my Arabness or my Muslim identity ahead of both.

Always, however, I am a teacher. Teaching is my passion. It is my vocation. It is the place where my divided selves are salved – where I can reconcile being an Arab and being a woman. My nationalist self comes to terms with my feminist self because I can intellectualize this division and make it a teachable moment for my students.

So what can I say about Gaza?

I have nothing for you but my confession:

Today, it’s hard for me to be a teacher. Today, I am a divided being. My teaching self is at odds

with my Palestinian self. This is very problematic, even to me: I dwell in the life of the mind; intellect and theory are my daily bread. But I have seen dark glimpses of this and always tried to pretend it away. On the rare days I teach Palestinian literature, a deep nausea and melancholy settle in my body and soul in a way that is all but debilitating.

This is not a teaching moment for me except that it teaches me that perhaps there are limits to intellectualizing catastrophe. In the face of death, in the face of rivers of blood, in the face of hungry children and lifeless hospitals, sometimes horrified silence and righteous anger are what are called for.

And here, too, is my confession:

When I envisioned Guilford’s response to “Protective Edge,” it did not look like this discussion panel. I envisioned it like a clear line drawn in the sand, like that story a former professor of mine at Drew University told me about the Quaker board of Trustees of Bryn Mawr, who after the bombing of Cambodia, shut down the College and cancelled classes and told the students to go out in the world and work for peace.

And here, too, is my confession:

At this moment, I don’t want to take teach about Palestine so that others may take a stand; I want to take a stand that teaches others.

In planning this panel, as we struggled to create a safe space for our students, all I could think about was that large unsafe, deadly prison of besieged people. What blue shirted person¹ does a Palestinian child seek when they are not feeling safe? The U.N.'s?

The missiles find them there as well.

As we struggled to create possibilities for dialogue, opportunities for learning, potentialities for peace, all I could think about were the little strewn bodies of impossibility, the never would be's, the finality of death.

As we struggled to honor our students, all I could think about were those little bodies that drew their first breath in *Casts of Lead*, learned to read in the shadows of *Pillars of Clouds* and were finally silenced by a *Brother's Keeper* or the sharp blade of a *Protective Edge*.²

Who keeps and protects these children now?

On a daily basis, I walk into a classroom with very clear pedagogical goals in mind; chief among them is that my students should leave with more questions than answers.

So here, too, is my confession:

Today I want you to leave with more answers than questions –

- ❖ Palestinian lives are *not* disposable.
- ❖ Defending the self should not entail collective punishment of the other.
- ❖ No, Palestinian lives are *not* disposable.
- ❖ The Palestinian people are not their political organizations.
- ❖ And no, Palestinian lives are *not* disposable.
- ❖ Palestinian mothers and fathers want their children to live, and laugh and play and go to school. They don't want them to strap a bomb to their chests and shatter their parents' hearts instead.
- ❖ Again, Palestinian lives are *not* disposable.
- ❖ American tax dollars should go to feeding *our* hungry, not feeding missiles that brutally stop the hunger of besieged human beings 6,000 miles away.

Today I have to choose between being a Palestinian and a teacher. So I choose to be a Palestinian, but I hope you can see that by taking a clear stand, I can be both. Because I hope that intellect is not diametrically opposed to activism. That it need not distract us from action, nor be a soothing substitute for action. I hope we don't feel better about ourselves that we have come together on this hallowed ground, where Quakers have taken a clear stand against great inequities and risked great peril to their lives and property,³ and *talked things through*.

And even if this choice does mean that I have failed as a teacher – in my bones, I can live with myself as a Palestinian.

Diya Abdo, Ph.D.
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The original version of this essay was delivered as a talk on the panel “Perspectives on Gaza: Israel, Palestine and the Ghosts of Catastrophe” held on the campus of Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina on August 28, 2014.

It was first published on the Feminist Wire on September 11, 2014:
<http://thefeministwire.com/2014/09/limits-speaking-catastrophe-confessions-palestinian-teacher/>

Works Cited

¹ Audience members were encouraged to seek out Guilford College’s Conflict Resolution Resource Center volunteers in the blue shirts if they needed a private and safe space to express their feelings.

² The names of various Israeli offensives against Palestinians.

³ The woods of what is now Guilford College were part of The Underground Railroad.

Our appreciation goes to all the contributors who made this special issue on Gaza possible. Thanks are also due to Mohammad Husso for contributing to the design of this issue.

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Statement on Gaza

Gaza. At first, after I was asked to write a statement, I sat, staring blankly at the screen, trying to think of what I could say that is eloquent. Nothing, really. This was merely a statement to go on record. More than thirty years’ involvement in Palestinian issues (witnessing, activism, teaching and writing) had distilled my responses to the unrelenting, recurring massacres, land grabs, destruction, demonization, and wars down to deep cynicism, and visceral anger. All I could think was: it seems that there is NOTHING that will ever change the asymmetry of this conflict: in power, in resources, in controlling the narrative, and in suffering and death. How long is it going to take before there is *real* justice and change in this conflict? (This came after the announcement that Israel planned to appropriate 1000 more acres of Palestinian land.) But I realize that, as traumatic, barbaric, and heart-wrenching as these attacks are, I don’t despair when I think of Gazans. I’m continually amazed at the resilience, creativity, and intelligence that they continually display. The humor, courage and resilience that the “Rubble Bucket Challenge” demonstrated was brilliant. And actually, the narrative has changed enormously in the past thirty years, especially in the past 5-6 years. Of course it is as asymmetrical as the conflict itself, but there has been an important shift in the power dynamic, as illustrated by the panicked responses to Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), internal dissent among Israelis and Jews across the globe, and most importantly, the steady, unrelenting resistance of Palestinians to occupation and their own destruction.

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