

Against All Odds: Gaza's defiance, resistance and resilience in the time of genocide

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the extreme dehumanization, genocide and expulsion tactics used by the Zionist settler colonial entity to exterminate the Palestinian population cannot and will not succeed. The extreme violence used by the Zionist entity is and will continue to be countered by strong resistance, defiance and *sumud* until the liberation of Palestine. This kind of resistance is in line with the philosophical argument that Patrick Williams makes in his important essay, "Outlines of a Better World': Rerouting Postcolonialism," based on Theodor Adorno's concept of the "consummate negativity." Using several literary examples by Palestinian artists, such as Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Refaat Alareer and Lubna Ahmad Abu Dahrouj, this article examines how Gaza, with the solidarity of anti-Zionist/anti-colonial comrades from all over the world, fights back, resists and remains resilient against all odds.

Keywords

Gaza, Palestine, genocide, Zionist entity, *sumud*, Palestinian literature

Ghassan Kanafani, the great Palestinian writer, intellectual and activist who was assassinated by the Israeli Mossad on 8 July 1972 in a car bomb that killed him and his 17-year-old niece Lamis Najm, wrote this at the end of his short story entitled "Letter from Gaza" in 1956, only eight years after the establishment of the brutal Zionist settler colony in 1948 on the land of historic Palestine:

No, my friend, I won't come to Sacramento, and I've no regrets. No, and nor will I finish what we began together in childhood. This obscure feeling that you had as you left Gaza, this small feeling must grow into a giant deep within you. It must expand, you must seek it in order to find yourself, here among the ugly debris of defeat. (Kanafani 1999, 115)

Somehow, I always felt Kanafani's narrator in this short story is not only speaking to his friend, Mustafa, who is in Sacramento, California, but to all of us, to all of humanity. What is it that we must allow to grow into a giant deep, and what should Gaza teach us? Just a few lines down before Kanafani ends his now 68-year-old story, the narrator closes his letter from Gaza with words that ring even more true today: "I won't come to you. But you, return to us! Come back, to learn from Nadia's leg, amputated from the top of the thigh, what life is and what existence is worth" (115). Nadia's leg was amputated as a result of the vicious Israeli bombing

of Gaza almost 70 years ago when she threw her body over her younger brothers and sisters to protect them in Kanafani's story.

Decades later, as reality imitates literature and literature imitates reality, the terrorist Israeli occupation state continues its year-long genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza, and as of the writing of this article, in Lebanon as well. The Israeli occupation has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, mostly women and children, in addition to killing thousands more by using deliberate starvation tactics by blocking food, water and medicine from entering Gaza. This, of course, was the plan from the very beginning when the Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announced: "There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel, everything will be closed. We are fighting against human animals and will act accordingly" (Sharma 2024). In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Frantz Fanon discusses how colonizers employ "zoological terms" to dehumanize the native, creating a master-slave relationship that maintains control over the colonized individuals—primarily those who are brown or black—stripping them of their humanity. This dehumanization effectively reduces the colonized person to an animal, potentially making their total elimination an acceptable outcome (Fanon 1963, 42).

It is important to point out here that this Zionist settler colony's tactics of genocide, expulsion and memocide are nothing new; in fact, this was the only way the brutal Zionist settler colony could be established and that is by totally displacing the indigenous inhabitants of the land—the Palestinians, hoping that the Palestinians would simply disappear over time. The historians Walid Al Khalidi, Nur Masalha, Ilan Pappé and others have documented the countless massacres, destruction of homes, libraries, museums, schools, cemeteries, the use of biological warfare and other murderous tactics used by the Zionist settler colony in books such as Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (1992), Nur Masalha's *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (1992) and Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006). Thus, the existence of 'Israel' can only be maintained by the continued genocide and expulsion of the Palestinian people. However, the murderous Zionist settler colony and its supporters like to use political catchphrases, such as "voluntary migration," in the place of what is happening on the ground, which is the expulsion of the Palestinians in Gaza. In an article in *The Times of Israel* titled "Israel in Talks with Congo and Other Countries on Gaza 'Voluntary Migration' Plan," Shalom Yerushalmi states that the "voluntary migration" of the Palestinians is becoming the official policy of the Israeli government (2024).

The Israeli occupation state can make these extremist statements and act upon them with impunity because it is fully supported and equipped with the latest in technology, the most advanced and destructive weapons in the history of mankind and billions of dollars supplied

by the US, UK and EU. American made MK-84, 2,000-pound Israeli bombs are dropped on displaced Palestinians in their tents in Gaza, completely decimating the existence of both, the tents and the human bodies inside of them, to the point that the “22 people [who are] missing [are] assumed to be vaporized by the intensity of the blast” (Al Jazeera 2024). Palestinian bodies were *vaporized*, meaning there were no body parts to collect in plastic bags and bury as had been done a couple of months ago when hospitals would give the victim’s family a “70kg bag of flesh if the missing person was an adult and an 18kg bag if they were a child” to bury (Islamic Relief 2024). There was only vapor of what used to be human beings with hearts, hands, laughter and dreams. The Israeli occupation has been carrying out daily massacres in Gaza, sometimes tens of massacres every day for a year now. This particular massacre in Mawasi, Khan Yunis in Gaza, which had been designated as a “safe zone” by the Israeli occupation army, is where displaced Gazans in 20 tents were turned into vapor on the 9th of September 2024.

This brings us back to Kanafani’s questions from 68 years ago, “What is it that we must allow to grow into a giant deep, and what should Gaza teach us?” When does the continuing genocide in Gaza qualify as a holocaust? Will it qualify as a holocaust when 500,000 people are killed? One million? Or is it when all 2.3 million people in Gaza are killed? How deep is our humanity and what does being human mean? As of this writing, Gaza is dying, fighting back, resisting and dying as it lay in ruins as a result of intense bombing by the Israeli occupation army. In *Imagining Palestine*, I wrote: “the harder the killer tries, the more vivid become the imaginings of Palestine and the ‘return of the wandering soul as if nothing had happened’” (Hamdi 2022, 2). This is perhaps more evident today as we witness the iconic *sumud* (Arabic for steadfastness) of the Palestinian people in Gaza and its armed resistance. The greater the brutal settler colonial violence and oppression perpetrated by the Zionist entity, the stronger the resistance and defiance of the Palestinian people. This reality on the ground in Gaza is theoretically supported by Theodor Adorno’s concept of the “consummate negativity” as argued by Patrick Williams within the Palestinian context in his important essay, “‘Outlines of a Better World’: Rerouting Postcolonialism.” Quoting Adorno, Williams states that the “‘consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite’” (qtd. in Williams 2010, 93).

This continued bombing, which targeted residential buildings a few months ago is now targeting tents; it is targeting both the living and the dead. The lust for blood has become ingrained into the very fabric of Israeli society. This genocidal mentality is not restricted to the fanatical right wing that controls the current Israeli government and its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Posting on X on 29 January 2024, historian Zachary Foster states that according to recent polls:

95% of Jewish Israelis thought the Israeli military was using either the ‘appropriate’ amount of force or ‘too little’ force in Gaza [... and] 60% of Israeli Jews, according to Aqam Institute surveys, oppose allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza. 60% of Jewish Israelis believe all 2.2 million people in Gaza should die of dehydration and starvation. (Foster 2024)

With this kind of genocidal Israeli mentality, impunity and the unconditional support of western governments for this ongoing genocide, it is time for all of humanity to stand in solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine, resist the willful and ruthless killing of Palestinian children and learn the history of Palestine’s dispossession and cultural and ethnic cleansing. It is time for the world to listen to the stories of resistance and resilience coming out of Gaza, against all odds. Gaza is teaching the world “what life is” and “what existence is worth,” to quote Kanafani.

Commenting on the ongoing genocide in Gaza, Ilan Pappé argues that what is happening in Gaza now is even worse than the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine (Al Jazeera English 2024). Similarly, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security (2024) states, “[w]hat we see is a genocidal state that is completely out of control and supported by a Western world that is, in large measure, too racist and Islamophobic to care” (2024). The time has indeed come to make that small feeling that Kanafani wrote about grow into a giant deep. It is our collective humanity that we must look for in the ruins of Gaza. The Israeli settler colony has made Gaza unlivable, destroying most of its hospitals, universities, schools, residential areas and all institutions that enable life. The destruction of education facilities, teaching staff and students is called scholasticide. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education:

Israel’s genocidal military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 10,490 school and university students, and 16,700 more have been injured. More than 500 schoolteachers and university educators have also been killed. (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights 2024)

In addition to the ruthless genocide, the raw killing of people, the Israeli occupation is targeting education in the attempt to kill the future of the Palestinian people by destroying Gaza’s educational institutions and all their teachers and culture. Gaza’s most important universities, such as Al- Azhar University, the Islamic University of Gaza, the University of Palestine, Al-Isra University and Al-Quds Open University have been deliberately destroyed (Ibrahim 2024). All of this destruction and killing has not been condemned by the governments of the Global North.

One of these university professors and poets is the late Refaat Alareer, who was a professor of English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza. Alareer was deliberately targeted at his sister’s house in Gaza and killed along with his sister and brother and their children on 6 December 2023. The only weapon that this young professor wielded was his pen, and like Naji Al Ali, the great Palestinian artist who was assassinated in London for his

powerful artist's pencil, Alareer was targeted for his influential writings on the platform X and very impactful and sometimes emotional appearances in interviews during the ongoing Gaza genocide. Alareer well understood the aims behind the Zionist settler colony's mission in Gaza and the rest of occupied Palestine, as he explained to me in an interview for my book *Imagining Palestine*, which was published in 2022, before the beginning of this genocide. Intriguingly, Alareer was well aware that Israel was not only interested in destroying Palestinian armed resistance, but in exterminating the Palestinian people as a people. In 2022, Alareer explained that "Israel's continuous ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Palestinian people 'proves that it is not only armed Palestinian resistance that Israel is after. Israel is after the very existence of Palestinians'" (Hamdi 2022, 204). Like all the great anti-colonial thinkers such as Ghassan Kanafani, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, and Edward Said, Alareer believed in the legitimate armed resistance of the Palestinian people, a right stipulated by international humanitarian law (Cohen 2017), as he told me in 2022: "ALL means of resistance are legitimate and even moral" (Hamdi 2022, 204). Just a few days before he was deliberately targeted, Alareer wrote on X: "We could die this dawn. I wish I were a freedom fighter so I die fighting back those Israeli genocidal maniacs invading my neighborhood and city" (Alareer 2023).

Refaat (I will allow myself to use his first name here because Refaat was a friend) was specifically targeted for his defiant spirit; he taught his students hope, defiance and resilience against all odds. Alareer helped found the "We Are Not Numbers" project in 2015, which is a collective of young writers from Gaza that "aimed to document the lives of the Palestinian people under occupation, moving away from the statistical discourse that often reduces people's bitter experiences to mere numbers" (Aqra and Hamamra 2024, 8). Many of these young writers are students of Alareer, whom he taught to write poetry, tell their story and bear witness to the horror inflicted by the murderous Israeli entity. Alareer was acutely aware of the genocidal reality of the Israeli occupation, which he countered with hope and defiance as seen in the lines of his now-iconic poem, "If I Must Die": "If I must die,/you must live/to tell my story[...]/If I must die/let it bring hope/let it be a tale" (Alareer 2023). This poem by Alareer was written in 2011, but the fact that he pinned it on his X account on 1 November 2023 is indeed of great significance. Alareer must have known that he, in particular, as a thinker and scholar had a great impact on young people who represent future generations of Palestinians, a future that the Israeli occupation state hopes to extinguish. Refaat wanted very much to leave a hopeful voice and story to future generations of Palestinians, those who would see his kite of hope and continue the struggle until liberation. Alareer's student who later became his friend, Yousef M. Aljamal, calls Refaat "Gaza's storyteller," who on "[t]he very day he was killed [...]" told a close friend that if he survived the genocide in Gaza, he would dedicate his entire life to storytelling and narration" (2024, 123). Tragically, in Gaza, one does not die of old age, and in

very many cases, like in Refaat’s, death comes quickly—one does not have time to say goodbye to himself, “not even to his [own] flesh” (123).

Alareer encouraged and inspired his students to tell their story, a very important endeavor, because, as Edward Said pointed out in *The Politics of Dispossession*, “the interesting thing is that there seems to be nothing in the world which sustains the story; unless you go on telling it, it will just drop and disappear” (1995, 118). Alareer was very proud of his edited volume titled *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine* (2014). As Aljamal explains, this volume came into existence after the Zionist genocidal entity’s 2008-2009 assault on Gaza to keep the Palestinian collective memory and narrative alive, while at the same time providing a mechanism by which Gaza’s young writers can begin the healing process after the martyrdom of their families and friends (2024, 122). Taking her cue from her former teacher whom she respects very much, 23-year-old Lubna Ahmad Abu Dahrouj from Gaza told me that she is “here to witness and report” her reality, Gaza’s reality, which sadly now is “Under the Rubble,” (2024) the title of a poem that Abu Dahrouj published on the website “We Are Not Numbers”:

What if your house is bombed and you
are
buried alive under rubble?
[...]
You hear nothing except the
echoing sound of your rapid breathing.
Your desperate hands begin to fumble
around
find blood flowing like ink oozing from an
inkwell
Tick tock, tick tock
[...]
Your ears fail to detect any sound.
Tears mix with blood, fall from your eyes.
They close gently.
Tick tock, tick tock
The sun will not rise today,
nor will it set.
Tick tock,
Tick tock,
tick to

Genocide and the particular way that people are killed by the Zionist entity haunt the poems of Palestinians. While “Dr. Refaat,” as Abu Dahrouj calls her martyred professor,

imagined his own death coming in a split second (“who left in a blaze”), Lubna’s imagined demise is more of a slow, suffocating departure that a cruel, silent world turns away from as it goes about its business of living as Gaza dies. Lubna cannot forgive this world that seems to have lost its sense of humanity and its physical senses as well. This shameless world cannot see, hear and feel as the young poet’s “ears fail to detect any sound” (2024).

In another poem by Abu Dahrouj titled “In the Silence of Dawn” (2024), the budding poet turns her anger towards a world that watches in silence:

On the shattered mirror
I saw my blue sky raining missiles,
and a few insulting packages.

On the shattered mirror,
I saw you looking at me.

One day, you will be me.
And I will be you.
One day, you will gaze at the sky,
And see me in every swift
soaring high above you.

My soul will have ascended to heaven.
But my dreams will haunt you forever.

The skies of Gaza are “raining missiles” and a “few insulting packages.” Abu Dahrouj is here referencing two main aspects of the Gaza genocide, the unrelenting Zionist colonial entity’s bombing of Gaza, every day for a whole year now, first buildings and now tents, and the complicity of the world (here presumably emphasizing Arab states), which enables this genocide by dropping a “few insulting packages” of food or perhaps white shrouds or plastic bags in which to place human body parts. Abu Dahrouj warns her reader that one day “you will gaze at the sky” and see her in every cloud because by then, she would “have ascended to heaven,” but her dreams and the dreams of the millions of Palestinians who dared to dream of their freedom and return to their homeland “will haunt you forever.”

The ghosts of Gaza in their thousands, in their millions will haunt this world of inhumanity that has allowed a live-streamed genocide to continue while at the same time condemning anyone who dared to speak up for Palestine. While Western and Arab governments have supported genocide by supplying destructive weapons, fuel and food to the Zionist entity, Gaza remains defiant and resilient. Under total siege with no food, fuel, medicine or electricity, Gaza fights back against all odds. These words remind us of the words of the great Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay who wrote the early 20th-century poem “If We Must Die,”

which perhaps inspired Alareer to write “If I Must Die.” McKay’s words (1919) bring to mind Gaza’s iconic defiance and *sumud*:

O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Gaza’s defiance has awakened millions globally. Despite being under a complete land, air and sea siege, Gaza is indeed “pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back” in every capacity, using word, gun or sword. The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish once wrote in a piece he called “A war for war’s sake”: “From this day on, he who does not become Palestinian in his heart will never understand his true moral identity” (2002). Despite the siege and murderously mad bombing campaign by the Zionist entity, Gaza lives in *sumud*, and it will rise again and as Darwish writes in a poem called “Silence for Gaza” (2013), “it will continue to explode”:

Enemies might triumph over Gaza (the storming sea might triumph over an island. . .
they might chop down all its trees).
They might break its bones.
They might implant tanks on the insides of its children and women. They might throw it into
the sea, sand, or blood.
But it will not repeat lies and say “Yes” to invaders.
It will continue to explode.
It is neither death, nor suicide. It is Gaza’s way of declaring that it deserves to live.
It will continue to explode.

Gaza will never surrender. Like its children, poets, professors, students and martyrs, Gaza will continue to explode, and even in its death, there will be life, a story, a tale that will continue to be told. Hundreds of thousands of Gaza’s ghosts will live to haunt the silent millions. As Aqra and Hamamra state, “what colonial powers cannot achieve is control over the ghost of the colonized body... [because] [h]ere, the dead body of the Palestinian martyr is an active agent, feeding the possibility of its return to life” (2024, 9). The colonizer can kill the Palestinian body, tear it into pieces and vaporize it, but resistance is an idea, and ideas do not die. People around the world have responded to this brutal Israeli-perpetrated genocide in Gaza with massive protests, shouting collectively, as if in answer to Darwish’s invocation, “in our thousands, in our millions, we are all Palestinians” (2002).

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