

All beautiful poetry is an act of resistance.

- Mahmoud Darwish
tr. Catherine Cobham

**Poems
from
and
for
Palestine
and
Lebanon**

October 2024

RESOURCES

Further Reading

<https://arablit.org/>
<https://mizna.org/mizna-news/mizna-the-palestine-issue/>
<https://thebaffler.com/logical-revolts/poems-from-palestine>
<https://jewishcurrents.org/category/poetry>
<https://arabfilminstitute.org/palestinian-voices/>
<https://www.nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/no-human-being-can-exist/>
<https://lithub.com/a-palestinian-meditation-in-a-time-of-annihilation/>
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-war-lebanon-trauma-watching-hollywood-movie-afar>
<https://rustedradishes.com>

Accounts to Follow (x / instagram)

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Donations

Palestinian Feminist Collective: <https://palestinianfeministcollective.org/>
Middle East Children's Alliance: <https://www.mecaforpeace.org/>
Palestine Children's Relief Fund: <https://www.pcrf.net/>
Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate via the IFJ Safety Fund. When submitting, make sure to write "PJS-2023" in the comment box: <https://www.ifj.org/safety-fund>

Direct Aid to Gaza

Follow and DM @malfofeh for instructions to donate through them to trusted organizations distributing funds on the ground, including Center for Women's Legal Research, Counseling and Protection, a feminist organization based in Gaza.

Follow @anthropologicalexchange for more info on direct donations, or contribute through their gofundme page: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-gz>

FADWA TUQAN was a Palestinian poet known for her representations of resistance to Israeli occupation in contemporary Arab poetry. Sometimes, she is referred to as the “Poet of Palestine.”

GHASSAN ZAQTAN is a Palestinian poet, novelist and editor. He is the author of a play, *The Narrow Sea*, the poetry collections *Like a Straw Bird It Follows Me* (2012) and *The Silence That Remains: Selected Poems* (2017), both translated by Fady Joudah and the novels *An Old Carriage with Curtains* (2011) and *Describing the Past* (1995).

REWA ZEINATI is an award-winning poet and naturalized U.S. citizen with Lebanese and Palestinian roots. She is the author of *Bullets & Orchids* (Corrupt Press, 2013) and founder and editor of Sukoon magazine. Her second poetry chapbook, *Difficult*, is forthcoming by Diode Editions in 2024. The poem included in this pamphlet in *We Call to the Eye & the Night: Love Poems by Writers of Arab Heritage*, edited by Hala Alyan and Zeina Hashem Beck and published by Persea Books, and was published on *The Margins*.

ISSAM ZINEH is author of *Unceded Land*, which was a 2021 Trio Award finalist and editors’ selection, and the chapbook *The Moment of Greatest Alienation* (Ethel, 2021). His most recent poems appear or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Pleiades*, *Guesthouse*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. Find him at www.issamzineh.com or on Twitter @izineh.

PHOBIA

Najwan Darwish
translated from Arabic by Kareem James Abu-Zeid

I'll be banished from the city
before night falls: They'll claim
I neglected to pay for the air
I'll be banished from the city
before the advent of evening: They'll claim
I paid no rent for the sun
Nor any fees for the clouds
I'll be banished from the city
Before the sun rises: They'll say
I gave night grief
And failed to lift my praises to the stars
I'll be banished from the city
Before I've even left the womb
Because all I did for seven months
Was write poems and wait to *be*
I'll be banished from being
Because I'm partial to the void
For my suspect ties to being
I'll be banished from both being and the void
Because I was born of becoming

I'll be banished

*This is the third version of a pamphlet made of poems shared
on social media in October and November 2023, and in September and
October 2024 in response to the Israeli government's assault on Gaza and Lebanon.*

Appeared in Nothing More to Lose (NYRB, 2014)

RUNNING ORDER

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

They call us now,
before they drop the bombs.
The phone rings
and someone who knows my first name
calls and says in perfect Arabic
“This is David.”
And in my stupor of sonic booms and glass-shattering symphonies
still smashing around in my head
I think, Do I know any Davids in Gaza?
They call us now to say
Run.
You have 58 seconds from the end of this message.
Your house is next.
They think of it as some kind of
war-time courtesy.
It doesn't matter that
there is nowhere to run to.
It means nothing that the borders are closed
and your papers are worthless
and mark you only for a life sentence
in this prison by the sea
and the alleyways are narrow
and there are more human lives
packed one against the other
more than any other place on earth
Just run.
We aren't trying to kill you.
It doesn't matter that
you can't call us back to tell us
the people we claim to want aren't in your house
that there's no one here
except you and your children
who were cheering for Argentina
sharing the last loaf of bread for this week
counting candles left in case the power goes out.
It doesn't matter that you have children.
You live in the wrong place
and now is your chance to run

NOOR HINDI is a Palestinian-American poet and reporter. Her debut collection of poems, *Dear God. Dear Bones. Dear Yellow.* was published by Haymarket Books in 2023. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry* magazine, *Hobart*, and *Jubilat*. Her essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Literary Hub*, and the *Adroit Journal*.

FADY JOUDAH is a Palestinian-American physician, poet, and translator. His collection of poetry, *The Earth in the Attic* (2008), won the 2007 Yale Series of Younger Poets competition. Joudah translated several collections of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's work in *The Butterfly's Burden* (2006), which won the Banipal prize from the UK and was a finalist for the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation.

KHALED JUMA is a Palestinian author, writer of children's books, and poet who lives in Gaza. He is currently Head of the Cultural Department in Palestine News and Information Agency and was previously Editor-in-Chief of *Roya Magazine* for seven years. Khaled's books have been published in Arabic, English and Dutch.

LENA KHALAF TUFFAHA is a poet, essayist, and translator. She is the author of three books of poetry, *Water & Salt* (Red Hen Press), *Kaan and Her Sisters* (Trio House Press, 2023), and *Something About Living*, forthcoming from University of Akron Press, 2024.

OMAR SAKR is a poet and writer born in Western Sydney to Lebanese and Turkish Muslim migrants. He is the acclaimed author of a novel, *Son of Sin* (Affirm Press, 2022) and three poetry collections, notably *The Lost Arabs* (University of Queensland Press, 2019), which won the 2020 Prime Minister's Literary Award. His newest collection is *Non-Essential Work* (UQP, 2023).

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE is an Arab American poet, editor, songwriter, and novelist. Born to a Palestinian father and an American mother, she began composing her first poetry at the age of six. In total, she has published or contributed to over 30 volumes of poetry.

LISA SUHAIR MAJAJ is a Palestinian-American poet who was born in Iowa and raised in Jordan. Educated at the American University of Beirut and the University of Michigan, Majaj currently resides in Cyprus. Her essays and poems have been published widely, and she is the author of *The Geographies of Light* (2008).

AHMAD ALMALLAH is a poet from Palestine. His poetry books include *Bitter English* (University of Chicago Press, 2019) and *Border Wisdom* (Winter Editions, 2023). His writing has appeared in *Jacket2*, *All Roads will lead You Home*, *Apiary*, *SAND*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Making Mirrors: Righting/Writing by Refugees*, *Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, and other places. He is currently Artist in Residence in Creative Writing at the University of Pennsylvania.

ZAINA ALSOUS is the author of the poetry collection *A Theory of Birds* (University of Arkansas Press, 2019). Her poetry, reviews, and essays have been published in *Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, the *New Inquiry*, *Adroit*, and elsewhere. She edits for *Scalawag Magazine*, a publication dedicated to unsettling dominant narratives of the southern United States.

HALA ALYAN is a clinical psychologist and the author of the novels *Salt Houses*, and *The Arsonists' City*, and four collections of poetry, most recently *The Twenty-Ninth Year*. Her work has been published by the *New Yorker*, the *Academy of American Poets*, *Lit Hub*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and *Guernica*.

NAJWAN DARWISH was born in Jerusalem in 1978. Since the publication of his first collection in 2000, his poetry has been translated into ten languages. He is the author of *Nothing More to Lose* (New York Review Books, 2014).

MOHAMMED EL-KURD is an internationally-touring poet and writer from Jerusalem, Palestine. His debut collection, *RIFQA*, was published in 2021 by Haymarket Books. His work has been featured in the *Guardian*, the *Nation*, *This Week In Palestine*, *Al-Jazeera English*, and other places. Mohammed graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design, where he created the multimedia poetry magazine *Radical Blankets*.

SUHEIR HAMMAD (Amman, Jordan, 1973) is a Palestinian-American poet. Her books include *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* (1996), *Drops of This Story* (1996), *ZaatarDiva* (2006), and *Breaking Poems* (2008). She has also performed in the Broadway play *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam*. Her work has been featured in various anthologies, magazines, plays, and films.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK is a Lebanese poet. She is the author of *O* (Penguin Books, 2022), *Louder than Hearts* (Bauhan Publishing, 2017), *To Live in Autumn* (The Backwaters Press, 2014) as well as two chapbooks: *3arabi Song* (Rattle, 2016) and *There Was and How Much There Was* (smith|doorstop, 2016). Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, and elsewhere.

to nowhere.
It doesn't matter
that 58 seconds isn't long enough
to find your wedding album
or your son's favorite blanket
or your daughter's almost completed college application
or your shoes
or to gather everyone in the house.
It doesn't matter what you had planned.
It doesn't matter who you are.
Prove you're human.
Prove you stand on two legs.
Run.

NATURALIZED

Hala Alyan

Can I pull the land from me like a cork?
I leak all over brunch. My father never learned to swim.
I've already said too much.
Look, the marigolds are coming in. Look, the cuties
are watching Vice again. Gloss and soundbites.
They like to understand. They like to play devil's advocate.
My father plays soccer. It's so hot in Gaza.
No place for a child's braid. Under
that hospital elevator. When this is over.
When this is over there is no over but quiet.
Coworkers will congratulate me on the ceasefire
and I will stretch my teeth into a country.
As though I don't take Al Jazeera to the bath.
As though I don't pray in broken Arabic.
It's okay. They like me. They like me in a museum.
They like me when I spit my father from my mouth.
There's a whistle. There's a missile fist-bumping the earth.
I draw a Pantene map on the shower curtain.
I break a Klonopin with my teeth and swim.
The newspaper says truce and C-Mart
is selling pomegranate seeds again. Dumb metaphor.
I've ruined the dinner party. I was given a life. Is it frivolous?
Sundays are tarot days. Tuesdays are for tacos.
There's a leak in the bathroom and I get it fixed
in thirty minutes flat. All that spare water.
All those numbers on the side of the screen.
Here's your math. Here's your hot take.
That number isn't a number.
That number is a first word, a nickname, a birthday song in June.
I shouldn't have to tell you that. Here's your testimony,
here's your beach vacation. Imagine:
I stop running when I'm tired. Imagine:
There's still the month of June. Tell me,
what op-ed will grant the dead their dying?
What editor? What red-line? What pocket?
What earth. What shake. What silence.

RASHA ABDULHADI is calling on you, dear reader, to join them in refusing and resisting the genocide of the Palestinian people. Wherever you are, whatever sand you can throw on the gears of genocide, do it now. If it's a handful, throw it. If it's a fingernail full, scrape it out and throw. Get in the way however you can. The elimination of the Palestinian people is not inevitable. We can refuse with our every breath and action. We must. @rashaab-dulhadi

GEORGE ABRAHAM (they/he/وہ) is a Palestinian American poet, performance artist, and writer from Jacksonville, FL. They are the author of *Birth-right* (Button Poetry, 2020). They are a board member for the Radius of Arab American Writers (RAWI), and Executive Editor of the journal Mizna. Their collaborations include co-editing a Palestinian poetry anthology with Noor Hindi (Haymarket Books, 2025), and a performance art project titled EVE with Fargo Tbakhi.

HIBA ABU NADA was a novelist, poet, and educator. Her novel *Oxygen is Not for the Dead* won the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2017. She wrote the poem included in this pamphlet on October 10, 2023. She was killed in her home in south Gaza by an Israeli raid on October 20, 2023. She was 32 years old.

MOSAB ABU TOHA is a Palestinian poet from Gaza. His debut poetry book, *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear*, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and won an American Book Award. His essay, "The View From My Window in Gaza," recently appeared in the *New Yorker*.

ZENA AGHA is a Palestinian-Iraqi writer, poet and multi-disciplinary artist from London. She is the author of *Objects from April and May* (Hajar Press, 2022). Zena's short film, "The Place that is Ours," co-directed with Dorothy Allen-Pickard, premiered on Nowness in November 2021 and was selected for the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival in 2022. Her writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Nation*, the *Margins*, *NPR*, *El País*, and elsewhere.

GHAYATH ALMADHOUN was born in Damascus, Syria as the child of a Palestinian father and a Syrian mother. He studied Arabic literature at Damascus University. In 2008 he emigrated to Sweden and became a Swedish citizen. He now lives in between Berlin & Stockholm. An English translation of his work, *Adrenaline*, was published by Action Books in 2017.

We, who are strewn about in fragments, whose flesh flies through the air like raindrops, offer our profound apologies to everyone in this civilized world, men, women and children, because we have unintentionally appeared in their peaceful homes without asking permission. We apologize for stamping our severed body parts into their snow-white memory, because we have violated the image of the normal, whole human being in their eyes, because we have had the impertinence to leap suddenly on to news bulletins and the pages of the internet and the press, naked except for our blood and charred remains. We apologize to all those who did not have the courage to look directly at our injuries for fear they would be too horrified, and to those unable to finish their evening meals after they had unexpectedly seen fresh images of us on television. We apologize for the suffering we caused to all who saw us like that, unembellished, with no attempt having been made to put us back together or reassemble our remains before we appeared on their screens. We also apologize to the Israeli soldiers who took the trouble to press the buttons in their aircraft and tanks to blow us to pieces, and we are sorry for how hideous we looked after they aimed their shells and bombs straight at our soft heads, and for the hours they are now going to spend in psychiatrists' clinics, trying to become human again, like they were before our transformation into repulsive body parts that pursue them whenever they try to sleep. We are the things you have seen on your screens and in the press, and if you made an effort to fit the pieces together, like a jigsaw, you would get a clear picture of us, so clear that you would be unable to do a thing.

[...]

Fady Joudah

Suheir Hammad

They did not mean to kill the children.
They meant to.
Too many kids got in the way
of precisely imprecise
one-ton bombs
dropped a thousand and one times
over the children's nights.
They will not forgive the children this sin.
They wanted to save them from future sins.
Or send them wrapped lifetimes
of reconstructive
surgical hours pro bono,
mental anguish to pass down
to their offspring.
Will the children have offspring?
This is what the bomb-droppers
did not know they wanted:
to see if others will be like them
after unquantifiable suffering.
They wanted to lead
their own study, but forgot
that not all suffering worships power
after survival. What childhood does
a destroyed childhood beget?
My parents showed me the way.

there is no outside anywhere
anymore just where we are and
what we do while we are here

Appeared in Jewish Currents

SAVAGE SONNET

Zeina Hashem Beck

We salvage ourselves. We savage ourselves.
Octobers mean grief, deep into our bones.
Can you spell worship? Do you mean warships?
Are family trees reddening? you ask.
When I say grief, I mean rage. I, mean strong.
I news-water my nightmares. I, blue song
who evaded at least two wars, can't sleep.
What do histories say to holy books?
That we remain silent, fear for our jobs
when hospitals are bombed? Do you believe
walls sever memories? & is God there?
This didn't begin with our people, no.
Ask any natives & they will tell you
the lands remember, even when tongues don't.

The lands remember, even when tongues don't.
Ask any natives & they will tell you
this didn't begin with our people. No
walls sever memories. & is God there
when hospitals are bombed? Do you believe
that we remain silent, fear for our jobs?
What do histories say to holy books
who evaded at least two wars? *Can't sleep.*
I news-water my nightmares. I blue-song
when I say grief. I mean rage. I mean strong,
our family trees. Reddening, you ask,
Can you spell worship? Do you mean warships?
Octobers mean grief. Deep into our bones,
we salvage ourselves. We. Savage. Ourselves.

Appeared on Lit Hub

I GRANT YOU REFUGE

Hiba Abu Nada
translated from Arabic by Huda Fakhreddine

1.
I grant you refuge
in invocation and prayer.
I bless the neighborhood and the minaret
to guard them
from the rocket
from the moment
it is a general's command
until it becomes
a raid.
I grant you and the little ones refuge,
the little ones who
change the rocket's course
before it lands
with their smiles.
2.
I grant you and the little ones refuge,
the little ones now asleep like chicks in a nest.
They don't walk in their sleep toward dreams.
They know death lurks outside the house.
Their mothers' tears are now doves
following them, trailing behind
every coffin.
3.
I grant the father refuge,
the little ones' father who holds the house upright
when it tilts after the bombs.
He implores the moment of death:
"Have mercy. Spare me a little while.
For their sake, I've learned to love my life.
Grant them a death
as beautiful as they are."

4.
I grant you refuge
from hurt and death,
refuge in the glory of our siege,
here in the belly of the whale.
Our streets exalt God with every bomb.
They pray for the mosques and the houses.
And every time the bombing begins in the North,
our supplications rise in the South.

5.
I grant you refuge
from hurt and suffering.
With words of sacred scripture
I shield the oranges from the sting of phosphorous
and the shades of cloud from the smog.
I grant you refuge in knowing
that the dust will clear,
and they who fell in love and died together
will one day laugh.

Appeared in Arab Lit Quarterly

I DON'T REMEMBER

Rewa Zeinati

if we kept any plants.

if we fussed over them
like new parents

worried that the water
wasn't enough or the sun.

i remember a single window
was all we needed of light

and when we moved again
a small wooden balcony looked out

to a pitch black ocean of grass
and the half-radiance of fireflies.

below us the trees lined
the street like checkpoints

and every year their leaves would steal
a little more color off our mouths/

our young hair/ and our hands
were young too/ we dreamed

of a garden and a two-story house/
we dreamed of children

or maybe we were told to/
we talked of returning to the old city

of mild winters/ curved sky and stray
cats was the way we remembered it/

imagined going back there to the same
flight of early stairs where we first met

to meet again/ or never meet.

CATASTROPHIC SONNET

Issam Zineh

“Remembering is an ethical act...”

—Aarushi Punia

[My grandfather still has his house key from 1948. He says he lives in the part of the village where the past doesn't kill you. He invites his neighbors in for fruit and mixed nuts and something cool then something hot. There is a belligerence of songbirds every square mile. He says, come see what I brought you from the market: cucumbers, local, pomegranates, zaatar. I see you've renounced your birthplace, which is of course your right. You will dream of male sunbirds feeding on nectar mid-air. When they come for you, they will ask about your love's name, her contours, her address. Where is it written that we're supposed to call? I misheard him talk of our rightful place at the top of the hill. My kids fell in love with imperialism last summer in London. They discovered legacy in the gardens. They woke to the logics of the enterprise. I miss the burgers at Johnny's].

Appeared in Lunch Ticket

LANGUAGING MEMORY

leena aboutaleb

You, we, I. Do you remember? He was your age now. Tall. The rifle. Four, then seven, then ten. Qalandia. Ramallah. September. Yarmouk. Kuwait. Can you say the name? Everyone wants futility. Let them languish and despair, disguising pride in cowardice. I am born in fugitive, the cover of eternity clothing me. If not this life, the next. If not us, the next. They will forget. I list massacres in my head by the decade. What has been stolen cannot be said. What do I know of theft? What do I know of loss? My lungs permanently damaged from the teargas. I am scared for my womb. April, the fear of motherhood. What was I supposed to tell him? Maryam called. Did they think one begets emptiness? Father of what? The strikes left on me like an infant suckling. My daughter will hold them as I have. Like her mother, she will grow into her mother. The banner of fire setting her aflame. The prison, the sound bombs, the stampedes. I grew with hands tracing the walls in search of radios, training paranoia. My mother's daughter. Her eyes and her will. I know the shape war leaves. I, too, played between the abandoned homes. Stuck my fingers through the bullet holes like a portal, a looking glass into the other side, imagining the width of despair as if I am not made of my mother's fractured hips and begotten memory. I still know the shape of the bunker. We spent twenty years not eating lentils afterwards. Would you give birth in Palestine? I can no longer wait. I remember forever now, embraced in the still death. How memory becomes tangible, genetics permanently altered. I speak like my father. How beautiful you are, habeebi. To'burni. I'll see you on the other side, our children naming the fruits.

Appeared on poetry.onl

YOUNGER THAN WAR

Mosab Abu Toha

On a starless night,
Tanks roll through dust, through eggplant fields.
Beds unmade, lightning in the sky, brother
jumps to the window to watch warplanes
flying through clouds of smoke
after air strikes. Warplanes that look like eagles
searching for a tree branch to perch on,
catch breath, but these metal eagles
are catching souls in a blood/bone soup bowl.
No need for radio.
We are the news.
Ants' ears hurt with each bullet
fired from wrathful machine guns.
Soldiers advance, burn books, some smoke
rolled sheets of yesterday's newspaper, just like they did
when they were kids. Our kids
hide in the basement, backs against concrete pillars,
heads between knees, parents silent.
Humid down there, and heat of burning bombs
adds up to the slow death
of survival.
In September 2000, after I had bought bread for dinner,
I saw a helicopter firing a rocket
into a tower as far from me as my frightful cries
when I heard concrete and glass fall from high.
Loaves of bread went stale.
I was still 7 at the time.
I was decades younger than war,
a few years older than bombs.

and the orchards you once exulted in.
No dreams can grow
in these vessels you gathered and kept.

But everything knows you will rise.

You have no siblings left,
only this desert you gained,
where you were thrown,
this desert fed by your endurance,
it advanced
in your silence.

The wall each time brings the past,
the wall in place of the road.

The wall seeps through rooms and windows,
enters bedrooms bearing the scream
that it throws on the lodgings and beds,
on the shrouds of boys and girls:
'you have no siblings left'
'now you are alone.'
But everything knows you will rise.

EVERYTHING YOU KNOW WILL RISE

Ghassan Zaqtan
translated by Samuel Wilder

Now you are alone
says the wall that comes at night,
there will be no knocks at the door
no pats on the shoulder,
the roads that led to your dreams
lie shattered, splayed
like corpses on the arid ground.

The paths you once crossed
without fear
to meet siblings and neighbors
when seasons were rough,
when life was hard and dry,
are clogged by stone,
unfulfillment, and dark intent.

The bridges that shined
in the memories of your fathers
fell in wadis that dried long ago.
Expect no one from there now.

But everything knows you will rise.

The time is gone
when far off dust
signalled comings and goings,
siblings on the road,
or a letter from your family.
The dust you see now
is the destruction of your houses
and the homes of your family there.
The smoke past the hill
is not caravans
or people returning,
it is the torching
of your uncles' fields

EVERY DAY

Omar Sakr

Every day I say a prayer for Palestine
And every day a dog runs away with it
Vanishing down an alley, tail wagging
To benefit who knows which wretch.
I tell myself it doesn't matter who receives
The gift of my kindness. Such lovely lies
We bestow upon ourselves. Sometimes
I am the dog feeling with a bastard's
Love clenched in my slaving jaw.
Sometimes I am the one curled at the end
Of an alley, blessed by the unexpected
Warmth of a snuffling mouth telling
Me I am not forgotten. Every day
I say a prayer for Palestine.

OH RASCAL CHILDREN OF GAZA

Khaled Juma

Oh rascal children of Gaza.
You who constantly disturbed me
with your screams under my window.
You who filled every morning
with rush and chaos.
You who broke my vase
and stole the lonely flower on my balcony.
Come back,
and scream as you want
and break all the vases.
Steal all the flowers.
Come back..
Just come back..

I want my words to spill blood and when I say
that once upon a time..
I want you to cringe
because this land has only one name—
and its people are only
its people
Call them what you may, that doesn't change a thing—they too disappear
and they too will reappear—

*

Once upon a time, Gaza,
there was no need for anyone to give you any
empty words, like this poem. Your only hope
is to look us straight in the eye, and say once more, that you were,
and are, once upon a time.

*

A POEM FOR GAZA, A POEM FOR PALESTINE

Ahmad Almallah

Gaza, the last thing you need is a poem. Don't say!
I have nothing else to give. A poem is a poem...what can it do? Don't say!
But simply be like a poem.
You were an open land, and
your sea was no sight
for blood. Yes, once upon a time,
you asked nothing
of the world,
and it gave you
nothing.
Gather our words and toss them into
the empty well.
Screams don't linger, but they do not
disappear—
They lodge themselves
beyond the ear,
and once they begin to haunt
they appear, they
reappear.

*

Corrupted by the attempt to apply logic
to the wound. We are all talk
no action!
We all know, that talk is talk
that's why no one
listens.
Reality wounds can't be mended by
thoughts. We all know—
Don't keep me in your prayers, and please
spare me the guilt.
Where can the eye rest on the sight –
screaming children?

*

WEDNESDAY

Mohammed El-Kurd

A man wailing is not a dancing bear
—Aimé Césaire

There's death in the eyes of this newborn.
I heard the baby complain about a treacherous defeat,
called it the same old catastrophe.
A storm in his ear says it's raging for silence.
Thunder erupts when he's shushed.
What a worsened scenario. He skipped ahead.
What do you do when your destiny is predetermined?

Life in this hospital laughs at us.
Long is the wait. Wild is the wind.
I ask if there's a wedding going on.
The nurse complained of the clouds.
If I were a stupid flower, I'd wither under the rain.
They asked her, What's wrong with the flower?
not What's wrong with the rain?

Appeared in RIFQA (Haymarket Books, 2021)

CONVERSATION

Lisa Suhair Majaj

What did you do while the children of Gaza
were dying?

I argued with their killers.

What did you say?

I said that the innocent deserve innocence.
That the sound of laughter is better than nightmares,
and briefer. That the cost of killing
may be higher than the price of dying.

Did they listen?

Do killers ever listen? They are deafened
by their weapons' drone and by the grate
of their own voices raging, denying.

Why were they angry?

They said that they needed to feel safe.

Safe from the children?

They said there are no children in Gaza,
only young combatants.

And the babies?

They said they are little snakes that will grow,
and it is better to kill them in their nests.

*And what of the teachers? The singers? The artists?
The fathers? The mothers?*

They said that all who live there are terrorists.
And as for the mothers, they said it is they
who bear the little snakes.

LONGING INSPIRED BY THE LAW OF GRAVITY

Fadwa Touqan

translated from Arabic by Chris Millis & Tania Tamari Nasir

Time's out and I'm home alone with the shadow I cast
Gone is the law of the universe, scattered by frivolous fate
Nothing to hold down my things
Nothing to weigh them to the floor
My possessions have flown, they belong to others
My chair, my cupboard, the revolving stool
Alone with the shadow I cast
No father, no mother
No brothers, no sisters to swell
The house full with laughter
Nothing but loneliness and grief
And the rubble of months, the years
Bend my back, slow my steps, blind me to the horizon
I miss the smell of coffee, the scent in the air
Its absence an ecstasy where I drown morning and night
Time's out and I'm home alone
With the shadow I cast
I miss the company of books
Their consolation through trouble and joy
I miss, how I miss my mother's ancient clock, family photos framed on the
wall
I miss my oud
For all its silent, severed strings
Time's out and I'm home alone
The curfew hurts
It hurts me, no it kills me, the killing of children near my home
I'm afraid of tomorrow
I'm afraid of the unknowable resources of fate
O God, don't let me be a burden, shunned by young and old
I wait to arrive where the land is silent, I'm waiting for death
Long has been my journey O God
Make the path short and the journey end

*Appeared in Words Without Borders; first published as
Wahsha: Moustalhama min Qanoon al Jathibiya in Al Karmel, 2002*

38 BILLION

Naomi Shihab Nye

It's hard to grasp very big numbers and distant concepts.
Like imagining what all our thoughts might have been
if we lived 300 years ago. Would they be centered
on a goat or six rocks piled together
or would they be wide as they are now?
In those long-ago days,
would people be meaner to one another
or nicer? I have no idea. But sometimes I wonder what
38 billion dollars could buy, instead of weapons aimed
against us and this is what comes to my mind:
Eggs. Pencils. Undershirts of very soft cotton.
Ribbons. Radios. Shining flashlights.
Handmade clay plates. Chocolates. Really soft pillows.
Baskets. Bracelets. Running shoes.

Appeared in The Tiny Journalist (BOA Editions, 2019)

Did your protestations do any good?

No. I lost my breath, I lost my words, I lost my heart.
But had I not argued, I would have lost my soul.

Did any children survive?

In body, yes. In spirit, it is not sure.

The children who lived, what will become of them?

Their eyes will sear holes in the night sky.
Remember this when you look at the stars:
that it is the burning eyes of Gaza's children
that hold your gaze.

Appeared in Baladi Magazine

THE WORKERS LOVE PALESTINE

Zaina Alsous

The week before the SUN announced hospice
my great-great-great-great-grandchild the harpist announced:

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

JOIN THE STRIKE FOR GUARANTEED LIGHT

The florists union in Caracas and the Algerian weavers presented joint
proposals

TOWARD ILLUMINATION THAT MULTIPLIES

Bare hills, lakes of salt sutured dim ruins

shadowless

of shipping yards and empires of memories of sarin

The children's council listened in wreaths of yellow iris,

patterned leaves designating each role

Did you know that within attunement to effort

the end of monument resides?

Then the harpist, my progeny, that fate I had so long evaded—

debt I owe to demographic warfare

and names sliced open, reborn in disfigured repetition—

sang three hundred years of returning

Language is merely the placeholder

for what the LAND has always known

Species being is an observation of MOM (preface)

Absent the wet painting of a razed village (sold)

This land is land

Land is land

LAND LAND

I AM COMING

HOME

ELEGY FOR RETURN #1

Zena Agha

Let me be clear about what I want.
I want to return, yes, but more. To
turn stones back. I read once about a
mosque being made into a bar. Now,
I'm not an iconoclast, but that did of-
fend. You hate when I talk about re-
turn but some things just have to be
spoken and anyway, my father is older
than you and while he never spoke it,
he was mighty pleased to see the lem-
on. I told you it's a kibbutz now. Off
route 90, near where Jesus fed five
thousand. And so, it is perfectly right
that my savage nose of a father was
born near Jesus and my grandmother
turned chairs into thrones.

Appeared in Jewish Currents

ars poetica in which every pronoun is a Free Palestine

George Abraham

& so it is written: the settlers will steal God's land & FREE PALESTINE
will curse the settlers with an inability to season FREE PALESTINE's food,

a sunburn the shape of the settler dictator's face on everyone who will claim
FREE PALESTINE's earth but not FREE PALESTINE's skin

soil-stained. there. FREE PALESTINE said it. no one really owns anything FREE
PALESTINE didn't unwrite to make it so—FREE PALESTINE's sea

israeli; FREE PALESTINE's sky *israeli* but not FREE PALESTINE's thunder—
the blame will always be FREE PALESTINE's & so this will be called an accurate

history; the expense of FREE PALESTINE's visibility, willed in bloodied cloth—
or paper—FREE PALESTINE's longest suicide: FREE PALESTINE will die

in jail & become *israeli*—FREE PALESTINE will die in protest & become
kite on fire—FREE PALESTINE will call Hamas fable of every

HEADLINE: israeli falafel so dry FREE PALESTINE could start an intifada with it
HEADLINE: israeli falafel so dry FREE PALESTINE could free Palestine with it

no, FREE PALESTINE will never give FREE PALESTINE's self a name
not rooted in upheaval—FREE PALESTINE, hyphenated by settler flag:

FREE PALESTINE hyphenated by settler pronouns: FREE PALESTINE will not
pledge allegiance to Arabic. or english. FREE PALESTINE will exist

in no language; FREE PALESTINE will write poems of olive tree & checkpoint
with no free Palestine to be found; FREE PALESTINE will name the violence

& never the resurrection, like FREE PALESTINE hasn't survived impossible
histories to get here. It is written: the blood will be on FREE PALESTINE's

hands—might as well paint FREE PALESTINE's nails while FREE PALESTINE's
at it—what? is this not what FREE PALESTINE expected? did FREE

PALESTINE not think FREE PALESTINE would have the last laugh all along?

FUCK YOUR LECTURE ON CRAFT, MY PEOPLE ARE DYING

Noor Hindi

Colonizers write about flowers.

I tell you about children throwing rocks at Israeli tanks
seconds before becoming daisies.

I want to be like those poets who care about the moon.
Palestinians don't see the moon from jail cells and prisons.

It's so beautiful, the moon.

They're so beautiful, the flowers.

I pick flowers for my dead father when I'm sad.

He watches Al Jazeera all day.

I wish Jessica would stop texting me Happy Ramadan.

I know I'm American because when I walk into a room something dies.

Metaphors about death are for poets who think ghosts care about sound.

When I die, I promise to haunt you forever.

One day, I'll write about the flowers like we own them.

Appeared in Poetry Magazine

INCOMPLETE LIST OF UNAUTHORIZED PALESTINIANS

Pending Review, Subject to Amendment*

Rasha Abdulhadi

palestinian pilots, flight attendants, & air traffic controllers
palestinian real estate agents & elementary school teachers
palestinian science fiction writers
palestinian professors of math and chemistry
palestinian journalists
palestinian baristas
palestinian taxi drivers
palestinian train conductors
palestinian ticket takers at the movie theatre
palestinian cashiers & car salesmen
palestinian appliance repairmen
palestinian lawyers
palestinian women comedians
palestinian drag queens and kings
palestinian editors, bank tellers, & engineers
palestinian astronauts & astrophysicists
palestinian bus drivers
palestinians who don't speak arabic or english
palestinians who speak german or spanish or french
palestinians with one non-palestinian parent
palestinians with one non-palestinian parent who isn't white
palestinians with one non-palestinian parent who is also indigenous
palestinians who are the children of any of those palestinians
palestinian children
palestinian civilians
palestinian non-combatants
palestinian innocents
palestinians on every continent except antarctica
palestinians in antarctica
palestinians on the moon, on the sea
palestinian fishermen past the blockade line
palestinian plumbers
palestinian veterinarians
palestinian trauma surgeons & trauma therapists
palestinian rescue workers & medics
palestinian web designers
palestinian photographers

palestinian climate scientists
palestinian toxicologists, ecologists, & graphic designers
palestinian pastry chefs & painters
palestinian contractors & carpenters, at least one of them famous
palestinian shepherds and farmers
palestinian tailors and fashion designers
palestinian wedding planners
palestinian equestrians
palestinian bodybuilders
palestinian kickboxers & filmmakers
palestinian historians & world champions
palestinian tunnel diggers
palestinian marching bands
palestinian flag makers & freedom fighters
palestinian revolutionaries & race car drivers
palestinian fútbol players and referees
palestinian catchers, pitchers, batters, umpires and outfielders
palestinian swimmers & distance runners
palestinian arborists, entomologists, & house mothers
palestinian nurses
palestinian blood donors
palestinian epidemiologists
palestinian researchers
palestinian publishers & copyeditors
palestinian knitters, quilters, & crocheters
palestinian sculptors
palestinian musicians
palestinian singers
palestinian barbers
palestinian wigmakers & hydrologists
palestinian environmentalists & make-up artists
palestinian mermaids
palestinian beekeepers & birdwatchers
palestinian adults, children, and elders

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