

# U.C.L.A. Law Review

## On Palestine, the Preciousness of Life, and Courage

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In 1979, while your father, with a large typewriter in tow, was on a train through Turkey (Erzurum to be exact), you were born in Los Angeles. After he crossed the border on a bus and arrived in Iran, you and your mother flew to Tehran. A few bleak years later, your baby brother was born, the political repression of a new regime intensified, and your mother was trapped by a two-year travel ban. From Iran, amidst a war, your father brought your brother to the United States for emergency heart surgery. After five critical, early years in Iran, you and your mother returned to California to reunify with your family. It was the mid-eighties and your immigrant mother—a survivor made of steel, saffron, and all the plants she resuscitates—was already a feminist.

As a student at Tehran University in the seventies, under the Shah's regime of suppressed political speech, your mother drew swans dripping in crude oil, a coded critique of empire and exploitation. The Shah's campus version of secret police didn't understand the defiance in the swan's wings, but when the art exhibit in the basement buzzed with the very students resisting a repressive monarchy, they shut it down. Time after time, the world is smaller than you think.

They named you Bahar, which means spring, and in the early eighties, you lived in a house on Meydoon Fatemi. This was when, just as the regime's soldiers barged in, your father, thinking quickly and acting quietly, pushed the protest flyers behind the bookcase. The truth is—had he delayed for a split second, when the regime raided your childhood home, your parents may have been executed. Your parents zigzagged back and forth across the earth, in the name of education, revolution, and family reunification (in that order), with essentials including books, diapers, and a handmade plate (wedding present) to hang on the wall. Eventually, you emerged in roller skates under the California sun.

You think about your parents, how they pushed back against the abuses of multiple regimes, in the name of freedom, human rights, and democracy—before they married, as young parents of small children, as immigrants and citizens. Claire comes to mind too, when you think of spaciousness, fresh baked rhubarb cakes without eggs, and adhering to your human rights values, because this is what she would do, in any context, under any conditions, regardless of convenience or popularity. But today, in this world, in 2024, with the scorched bodies of deeply loved people in Rafah, what do these words (freedom, human rights, or democracy) even mean?

Your mother, who worked as a secretary at the law school of Tehran University, initially came to the United States to study at the University of

California, Los Angeles (UCLA), which she didn't pursue—much to her own regret. Back then, in the early seventies, with long brown hair and a red bandanna, the leftist in her head had persuaded her that a graduate degree was too bourgeois.

A decade, two children, and a strengthened feminist lens later,<sup>1</sup> throughout your childhood, your mother dragged you to Dodd Hall at UCLA. During the International Women's Day programs she co-organized, you made too much noise, played with chalk in unlocked classrooms, and reluctantly befriended the other bored kids of the diaspora. In between lectures about the status of women and the fate of political prisoners in Iran, there were tea breaks with dry chickpea and rice flour cookies. At a young age, you had an old soul. When you didn't feel like playing tag or pretending to be carefree, you sat beside the samovar by the doors, waiting for your mother.<sup>2</sup>

As a child, you watched people in jean jackets on television, sitting atop the broken-down Berlin wall, smiling, dangling their legs, holding chunks of it in their hands.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes you watched the Flintstones, sometimes the Jetsons, caught between the past, present, and future—worlds apart. Sometimes you felt that lump in your throat when you tried to swallow, the one that would appear when you remembered racing down the stairs into a dark bomb shelter during a war where everyone lost—but that is another story.

Decades later, fast forward to your first day teaching at UCLA. You passed the doors of Dodd Hall in slow motion, like a sun-kissed polaroid capturing all the light from your awkward childhood and the fate of a people in the jaws of tyranny. This was the summer of 2021. A year after George Floyd's murder galvanized global generations for Black Lives Matter<sup>4</sup> and before Jina Mahsa Amini's murder fueled the Woman Life Freedom movement.

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1. Your mother's feminist lens developed directly because of her experiences in Iran.
  2. In elementary school your grandmother—who taught first grade in Iran for decades—brought back the textbooks and taught you to read with words like water, bread, baba. This meant, in an elementary way, you could read the signs on storefronts in Palestine.
  3. One day, the apartheid wall will also crumble. You, your children, or your children's children might watch it live.
  4. The mural of George Floyd is now on the apartheid wall that runs through Bethlehem. See Yumna Patel, *Meet the Artist Who Painted the George Floyd Mural on the Separation Wall*, MONDOWEISS (June 11, 2020), <https://mondoweiss.net/2020/06/meet-the-artist-who-painted-the-george-floyd-mural-on-the-separation-wall> [<https://perma.cc/CBR2-NJYK>].

When *Time Magazine* called Iranian women heroes of the year,<sup>5</sup> you watched women in Iran making world news, climbing on top of cars, rebelliously dancing in the street, risking their lives for basic freedoms. In a roller coaster of hope and horror, the protests ensued in mass arrests, tortured confessions, two-minute trials, and executions. Extrajudicial killings disguised as suspicious accidents in Iran's metro or off the top of tall Tehran buildings.<sup>6</sup> Later you learn that Narges Mohammadi, who has dedicated her entire life to the struggle for women's human rights, wins the Nobel Prize from prison<sup>7</sup> during Gaza's genocide. When you tune into a soundbite from the black-tie ceremony, as the occupation pulverizes Gaza, you wonder about the global outcry for the women of Palestine. Where is that to be seen?

For most of your lifetime, your mother couldn't return to Iran, not without a real risk of being detained, arrested, or imprisoned upon her arrival at Mehrabad International Airport for speaking out on women's human rights. In contrast to Tehran, where women were not even allowed in stadiums until the end of 2023,<sup>8</sup> in Ramallah, your mother admired the banners of the national women's soccer team. You took her to Hebron. This was before the occupation installed an artificial intelligence machine gun on a checkpoint in the city.<sup>9</sup> She walked along the storefronts, past Palestinian shopkeepers surviving occupation, under a net of trash from settlers on the second floor: banana peels, plastic wraps, empty soda bottles. The point is,

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5. Azadeh Moaveni, *2022 Heroes of the Year: Women of Iran*, TIME (Dec. 8, 2022, 1:00 PM), <https://time.com/heroes-of-the-year-2022-women-of-iran/> [<https://perma.cc/HZN5-5A5M>].
  6. Examples include the tragic deaths of Nika Shakarami and Armita Geravand. See Jon Gambrell, *An Iranian Teenager Injured on Tehran Metro While Not Wearing a Headscarf Has Died, State Media Say*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Oct. 28, 2023, 10:40 AM), <https://apnews.com/article/iran-protests-injured-teen-armita-geravand-dies-16c4f49e15dd774121e7498f34bd6622> [<https://perma.cc/UPZ6-STPC>]. See also Gianluca Mezzofiore, Katie Polglase & Adam Pourahmadi, *What Really Happened to Nika Shakarami? Witnesses to Her Final Hours Cast Doubt on Iran's Story*, CNN WORLD (Oct. 27, 2022, 10:22 AM), <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/27/middleeast/iran-nika-shakarami-investigation-intl-cmd/index.html> [<https://perma.cc/B7AP-EAZJ>].
  7. Press Release, Nobel Prize Outreach, Nobel Peace Prize 2023 (Oct. 6, 2023), <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2023/10/press-peaceprize2023.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/6M94-KEHZ>].
  8. John Duerden, *Iranian Women Allowed Into Football Stadiums But Journey Is Far From Over*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 25, 2024, 5:49 AM), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/jan/25/1350iranian-women-allowed-into-football-stadiums-but-journey-is-far-from-over> [<https://perma.cc/ZE4X-JKT5>].
  9. *Israel Sets Up AI-Controlled Machine Gun in Occupied Hebron*, MIDDLE E. MONITOR (Sept. 27, 2022, 4:08 PM), <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220927-israel-sets-up-ai-controlled-machine-gun-in-occupied-hebron> [<https://perma.cc/DY9N-2V66>].

she came to visit you in Palestine—a place denied, even in death, to Palestine’s refugees, those with the deepest roots who wish to be buried beside their families.

From the Nakba until today, there have been around 28,000 days of displacement, settler colonial brutality, and human rights violations against the Palestinian people. You can sound the alarm. You can analyze it under international laws. You can call this a genocide—but, as Aseil’s mother would say, *habibtī*, tell me . . . who is listening?

When will it end? What does it take? There should be a third question here, but you are not yourself these days. The death toll continues to rise. Entire blocks are bombed into bones, rubble, and dust. A small hand, a distant voice, a familiar cry, and a charred pink tricycle that survived. You open Instagram and suddenly see a beautiful group of small children with curly, straight, and wavy hair smiling into the camera from Gaza, running playfully past the lens, tents in the distance behind them, saying, “We are still here.”

To say this is a bottomless and incomprehensible scale of grief is stating the obvious. For weeks you avoid this essay. With each revision, the genocide enters a new month with new horrors: murdered children,<sup>10</sup> erased blood lines,<sup>11</sup> an autistic boy named Muhammed Bhar mauled by an Israeli military dog while they made his mother watch.<sup>12</sup> You see the death toll rise, from twenty to thirty, to forty thousand,<sup>13</sup> but do you comprehend what this (as in scholasticide, forced famine, mass graves, and the bombing of refugees, even in tents) means? Noura Erakat reiterates that by day 366, “42,000 Palestinians—that we know of—have been killed, including over 20,000 children buried, disappeared, and detained . . . [but that the true death toll]

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10. Press Release, United Nations Off. of the High Comm’r for Hum. Rts, Onslaught of Violence Against Women and Children in Gaza Unacceptable: UN Experts (May 6, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/onslaught-violence-against-women-and-children-gaza-unacceptable-un-experts> [https://perma.cc/VZW2-LG48].
  11. Mohammed Hussein, Mohammed Haddad, & Konstantinos Antonopoulos, *Know Their Names: Palestinian Families Killed in Israeli Attacks on Gaza*, AL JAZEERA (Oct. 8, 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/10/8/know-their-names-palestinian-families-killed-in-israeli-attacks-on-gaza> [https://perma.cc/8KSM-DUWP].
  12. See Maroosha Muzaffar, *Gaza Man With Down’s Syndrome Mauled by Israeli Attack Dog, and Left to Die, Family Says*, THE INDEPENDENT (July 17, 2024, 1:22 PM), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-war-palestinians-dog-attack-b2581144.html> [https://perma.cc/Z54L-SQS8].
  13. At the time of writing, over 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed by the Israeli military since the October 7th attacks. See Julia Frankel, *With Gaza’s Death Toll Over 40,000, Here’s the Conflict by Numbers*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Aug. 15, 2024, 9:46 AM), <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-gaza-war-palestinians-statistics-40000-7ebec13101f6d08fe10cedbf5e172dde> [https://perma.cc/3RT2-WECV].

will be as high as 335,500 by the end of the year.”<sup>14</sup> On the preciousness of life, Jewish Voice for Peace describes that, “[E]very person is an entire world, and every death is a world extinguished.”<sup>15</sup>

It has been months since you started writing. Teaching students to zealously fight for pretrial release and push against mass incarceration requires actively embracing the preciousness of all life.<sup>16</sup> You remind yourself of Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s wisdom: “Abolition is about presence, not absence. It [is] about building life-affirming institutions.”<sup>17</sup>

Is law school—or the university at large—a life-affirming institution or a death-perpetuating place? What makes it so?? Divestment from occupation, apartheid, and genocide? Telling the truth despite the dishonest brokers? Holding those that cause harm accountable? Eliminating systems of punishment premised on poverty, sexism, and white supremacy? Support for scholars amidst Gaza’s scholasticide?<sup>18</sup> Respecting freedom of speech, association, and assembly?<sup>19</sup> Protecting the right to protest?<sup>20</sup> Ending mass incarceration? Heeding the call for cops off campus? Investing instead in health care, healing, and housing for all?<sup>21</sup>

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14. Noura Erakat, *Nothing Will Ever Be the Same Again*, THE NATION (Oct. 7, 2024), <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/one-year-protesting-to-stop-genocide/> [<https://perma.cc/8K2G-VWRL>].
  15. *The Wire: Every Life Is Precious*, JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE, <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2024/09/03/all-life-is-precious/> [<https://perma.cc/GY7H-3GGA>].
  16. Teaching students about public defense is one way of training emerging lawyers to defend human rights. To meaningfully defend human rights, there must be no reservations or double standards. Otherwise, it is just a performance.
  17. See *Abolition*, NW. UNIV. LIBRS.: RSCH. GUIDES (Oct. 2, 2023, 1:42 PM), <https://libguides.northwestern.edu/abolition> [<https://perma.cc/U994-XDUU>] (attributing the quote to Ruth Wilson Gilmore).
  18. See Press Release, United Nations Off. of the High Comm’r for Hum. Rts., UN Experts Deeply Concerned Over ‘Scholasticide’ in Gaza (Apr. 18, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza> [<https://perma.cc/UGT9-MY7L>].
  19. See *Freedom of Expression Also Under Fire in Gaza War, Rights Experts Say*, UN NEWS: HUM. RTS. (Oct. 18, 2024), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155881> [<https://perma.cc/V6RG-MY3D>].
  20. Gina Romero, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of assembly and association, warned that “the brutal repression of the university-based protest movement is a profound threat to democratic systems and institutions.” *Rights Expert Urges Universities to Respect Pro-Palestinian Protests*, UN NEWS: HUM. RTS. (Oct. 4, 2024), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155376> [<https://perma.cc/FG2W-LVKK>].
  21. The Los Angeles Police Department’s response to UCLA student demonstrations, from April 30, 2024 to May 3, 2024, cost Los Angeles \$583,084.00, according to Kenneth Mejia, the Los Angeles City Controller. See Kenneth Mejia (@lacontroller), *Total Hours & Cost of LAPD Response to UCLA Demonstrations*, INSTAGRAM (May 28, 2024), [https://www.instagram.com/lacontroller/p/C7iWBg0Nc0R/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/lacontroller/p/C7iWBg0Nc0R/?img_index=1) [<https://>].

On the first day of UCLA's liberated zone, you took your father. He of course ("of course" being his favorite phrase) insisted on taking forever to find free parking. In the cool California morning, students had tents and signs for a free Palestine and a Gaza without genocide. There were masks and hand sanitizer, fresh coffee, breakfast foods, and the fluttering feeling of hope mixed with excitement from what is beautiful in this world. Ruth Wilson Gilmore says that "where life is precious, life is precious."<sup>22</sup> This applies everywhere, at all times. The legitimate demands of UCLA's human rights defenders (such as protesters in solidarity with Palestine) are rooted in affirming this preciousness of life.

By day four, the encampment had expanded because hope is contagious. You waited in line to get in, wore a wristband, and passed by a library of books in the corner. People offered you pizza and tacos. In the center of the liberated zone, you watched a mass training on de-escalation. You saw legal observers in neon green hats. Inside the camp was a diverse student-led utopia. Outside the safety of the liberated zone, there was a jumbotron, a counterprotest, and a culture of impunity.

Then after that, so much more happened, not least of which includes self-proclaimed Zionists releasing swollen mice into the encampment, blasting loud music in the middle of the night while students tried to sleep, and an armed vigilante mob in Halloween masks attacking anti-genocide students.<sup>23</sup> In their own words, the Palestine Solidarity Encampment wrote, "The life-threatening assault we faced tonight is nothing less than a horrifying, despicable, act of terror. For over seven hours, [Z]ionist aggressors hurled gas canisters, sprayed pepper spray and threw fireworks and bricks into our encampment."<sup>24</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley explains:

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- perma.cc/XWA5-EFCB].
22. Virtual Interview by Juan González and Amy Goodman, Democracy Now!, with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Professor & Geographer, City Univ. of N.Y. (May 5, 2020), [https://www.democracynow.org/2020/5/5/ruth\\_wilson\\_gilmore\\_abolition\\_coronavirus](https://www.democracynow.org/2020/5/5/ruth_wilson_gilmore_abolition_coronavirus) [https://perma.cc/F6GX-MJQN].
  23. UCLA Faculty for Justice in Palestine, *Op-ed: Faculty Stands With Pro-Palestine Protesters, Demands Full Amnesty for All Arrested*, DAILY BRUIN (May 2, 2024, 9:06 PM), <https://dailybruin.com/2024/05/02/op-ed-faculty-stands-with-pro-palestine-protesters-demands-full-amnesty-for-all-arrested> [https://perma.cc/8VDU-BRNL]. See also Neil Bedi et. al., *How Counterprotesters at U.C.L.A. Provoked Violence, Unchecked for Hours*, N.Y. TIMES (May 3, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/03/us/ucla-protests-encampment-violence.html> [https://perma.cc/7FJE-KN5E].
  24. Press Release, Students for Just. in Palestine at UCLA & Palestinian Youth Movement, Palestine Solidarity Encampment Press Release via Instagram (Apr. 30, 2024), [https://www.instagram.com/sjpatucla/p/C6bDyoiL\\_AA/](https://www.instagram.com/sjpatucla/p/C6bDyoiL_AA/) [https://perma.cc/JGC5-UPUZ].

White nationalists and neo-Nazis joined forces with Zionists (including some saying they were Israelis) to attack UCLA's Palestine Solidarity Encampment, whose residents included a large number of Jewish students . . . . Using metal pipes, wooden planks, fists, knives, bricks, noise, chemical weapons, and incendiary fireworks, the mob sent at least twenty-five students to the hospital for broken bones, head trauma, and severe lacerations . . . . The following day, only students and faculty defending the encampment were arrested.<sup>25</sup>

As Faculty for Justice in Palestine points out, however, "To stand up against genocide and apartheid is something for which these students should be commended, not punished."<sup>26</sup>

By late Spring, in London, you reconnect with a friend named Freedom. You have missed her more than words can say. When you were in Palestine, she took you in, made *maklouba* in a steaming kitchen, and treated you like family. She has survived the intifada and tells you she has a real sense of hope from the Palestine solidarity protests. Coming from her, this means something.

By trade you learned to cross-examine police, represent people robbed of systemic power, and routinely question the government's claims. But neither the law, nor lawyering alone, is equal to justice. Maintaining even the optics of the status quo, at this point, as Saree Makidisi explains, requires "handcuffs, rubber bullets, and the threat of disciplinary action, police arrest, or worse."<sup>27</sup> The case for abolition is all around us, while too many individuals and institutions, well versed in the law, lack the moral courage of students protesting across college campuses. These students—human rights defenders—face police brutality, academic punishment, and criminalization of their courage.

It is suddenly, supposedly, summer. You look at your phone and see a message about an online university for Gaza, but in the world of human rights, you feel you have nothing to teach the people of Gaza. You ask the love of your life if he can teach a college-level physical education course online. He nods as he is driving (he is always driving), reminds you to focus on what it is

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25. Robin D.G. Kelly, *UCLA's Unholy Alliance*, BOSTON REV. (May 18, 2024), <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/uclas-unholy-alliance> [<https://perma.cc/A7DT-TF2H>].

26. See UCLA Faculty for Justice in Palestine, *supra* note 23.

27. Saree Makidisi, *How Israel Lost America*, L.A. REV. OF BOOKS (July 12, 2024), <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/how-israel-lost-america/> [<https://perma.cc/5RJP-AMZD>].

you can do, and continues to look out into the gray rainy street below the barren balconies of Swiss buildings.

During your time as a volunteer lawyer, you went to Ofer military court, a site of countless human rights abuses, not least of which include indefinite detention, separate entrances of apartheid, and Palestinian families languishing in the sun, waiting to catch a glimpse of their captive loved ones. On behalf of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees, confined in a colonial system of international crimes and administrative atrocities, you sifted through Addameer's<sup>28</sup> numerous affidavits of torture, terror, and interrogations.

You went to Al Khalil (also known as Hebron) nearly every week, to meet with law students or go to court with colleagues who fed you slow-cooked stuffed lamb necks. You will never forget a field of grapes, where a blindfolded Palestinian boy was kidnapped by occupation soldiers in a military truck.<sup>29</sup> Or Ahmad Manasra,<sup>30</sup> a grieving child with an injured head, laying in a pool of his own blood after a car ran him over. The night his interrogation video was leaked, you raced from Al Bireh to meet your friend named Freedom on Al Irsal Street.<sup>31</sup> Then there is the girl—one of tens of thousands grieving in Gaza—howling with unconsolable sorrow that she knows her mother by the hair on her head.<sup>32</sup>

Children, like the ones who did not eat before they were killed. And mothers, like the one who wailed:

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28. "ADDAMEER (Arabic for conscience) Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association is a Palestinian non-governmental, civil institution that works to support Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli and Palestinian prisons." *Our Work*, ADDAMEER, <https://www.addameer.org/about/our-work> [<https://perma.cc/SNG5-HVB5>].
  29. "Each year approximately 500–700 Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years old, are detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. The most common charge is stone throwing." *Number of Palestinian Children (12–17) in Israeli Military Detention*, DEF. FOR CHILD. INT'L, [https://www.dci-palestine.org/number\\_of\\_palestinian\\_children\\_12\\_17\\_in\\_israeli\\_military\\_detention](https://www.dci-palestine.org/number_of_palestinian_children_12_17_in_israeli_military_detention) (last visited Nov. 5, 2024).
  30. *Israel/OPT: After Nearly Two Years in Solitary Confinement, Ahmad Manasra Too Ill to Attend His Hearing*, AMNESTY INT'L (Sept. 21, 2023), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/israel-opt-after-nearly-2-years-in-solitary-confinement-ahmad-manasra-too-ill-to-attend-his-hearing> [<https://perma.cc/VD36-U2UU>].
  31. The Inst. for Middle E. Understanding, *Ahmed Manasra Interrogation*, YOUTUBE (Nov. 10, 2015), <https://youtu.be/95PAhmof0OQ?si=OHoxLV—508WZQZt>. See also *Israel/OPT: Palestinian Prisoner Arrested as a Child, Ahmad Manasra, Still in Prison, Despite Worsening Mental Health*, AMNESTY INT'L (June 17, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/israel-opt-palestinian-prisoner-arrested-as-a-child-ahmad-manasra-still-in-prison-despite-worsening-mental-health> [<https://perma.cc/93S2-ELWC>].
  32. Al Jazeera Eng., "She Is My Mother, I Know Her From Her Hair.", FACEBOOK (Jan. 8, 2024), <https://www.facebook.com/reel/310075148410466>.

My child has vanished. He died between my arms.

Where are the kids? Someone tell me please.

Enough people, enough, enough oppression.

We are defenseless people.

The kids died hungry. They didn't eat.

I swear, my children died hungry, they didn't eat.<sup>33</sup>

The men too, paraded and exposed in the winter in their underwear.<sup>34</sup> Later, summer reports reveal the unthinkable.

On a weeknight, reporting from Gaza under genocide, the brave Wizard Bisan tells the world that she is still alive. An influencer's list of the best Los Angeles restaurants flashes on your social media feed, an advertisement for machine washable shoes, and a post listing the Original Villages of Gaza's Refugees.<sup>35</sup> You peer at it closely, after the K's, before the M's, you see Lifta. Seasons have changed, how is it that this is still happening? The death toll of today grows tomorrow.

Nadim, the love of your life, buys you a bag that says *BOOKS not BOMBS*. You belong in bookstores—where ideas, imaginations, and all of the stories, down each aisle and across each page, behold a world of possibilities. And yet, where are the words that will change things? If language is the key to lawyering—you struggle to finish this sentence, because there is no shortage of credible reports, compelling writings, or powerfully narrated evidence on this genocide.

You are curled up on the couch, the news is flickering from the palm of your hand. Hospitals without fuel, amputations without anesthesia, children without limbs, parents without children, and babies without chunks of their bodies. That was months ago. Now, the situation is even more dire. You write this in January and when you revise in March, the unimaginable actualizes. Bags of flour are covered in blood.<sup>36</sup> In May you read about refugees in Rafah,

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33. MintPress News, "The Kids Died Hungry. They Didn't Eat," YOUTUBE (Oct. 12, 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9OLVSyPgeo>.

34. Abeer Salman, *Images From Gaza Show Israeli Soldiers Detaining Dozens of Men Stripped to Underwear*, CNN (Dec. 9, 2023, 1:07 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/07/middleeast/gaza-israeli-soldiers-detained-men-intl/index.html> [<https://perma.cc/ZW8D-2NYY>].

35. *Original Villages of Gaza's Refugees*, VISUALIZING PALESTINE (Dec. 2023), <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/gaza-villages> [<https://perma.cc/R3TC-EUJY>].

36. Simon Speakman Cordall, Mohammed R. Mhawish & Mat Nashed, *When Israeli Soldiers Shot at Hungry Palestinians*, AL JAZEERA (Mar. 5, 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/3/5/the-blood-was-everywhere-inside-israels-flour-massacre-in-gaza> [<https://perma.cc/K7VD-YLLG>].

bombed nonstop. Compelled by a cause bigger than your own precious life—you must ask, if not name, expose, and embolden, what is it that words will do? How is it that your law degree will save you, if you cannot even speak the truth?

Edwidge Danticat tells us that “to create dangerously . . . is also to create fearlessly, boldly embracing the public and private terrors that would silence us, then bravely moving forward even when it feels as though we are chasing or being chased by ghosts . . .”<sup>37</sup> Words matter when journalists in Gaza are systematically targeted and killed, including Hamza Dahdouh, the son of the journalist Wael Dahdouh.<sup>38</sup> Or when, in the West Bank of Palestine, the occupation army shot Shireen Abu Akleh in the head.<sup>39</sup> Dareen Tatour was sentenced for penning a poem.<sup>40</sup> Regardless of the consequences and conditions manufactured to keep people complacent and complicit, the courageous continue to “create dangerously” from Gaza and around the world.

From the world of your own teaching, organizing, and advocacy, what does it mean to “create dangerously”? To produce a pedagogy of courage? To write a life-affirming curriculum? To radically support students in fighting for the preciousness of life? To be guided by artists and abolitionists? These are the questions that call your name, seeping into your days and nights.

On a Friday, your friend whose name means many things took you from Ramallah to her apartment near Damascus Gate, past the baker that sells *Ka’ak al Quds* and the women that sell *jarjeer* in the Old City of Jerusalem. At the metal detector in Qalandiya, you saw an old man in a three-piece suit, wisps of gray hair falling on his forehead. His jacket is already on his arm. The soldiers in boots order him to take off his shoes. He is forced to shuffle around

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37. EDWIDGE DANTICAT, *CREATE DANGEROUSLY: THE IMMIGRANT ARTIST AT WORK* 148 (2011).

38. *Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War*, COMM. TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (Mar. 27, 2024, 3:00 AM), <https://cpj.org/2024/03/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/#:~:text=As%20of%20March%2017%2C%202024,and%201%2C200%20deaths%20in%20Israel> [<https://perma.cc/884Y-MD6H>]; *One Year and Climbing: Israel Responsible for Record Journalist Death Toll*, COMM. TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (Oct. 23, 2024), <https://cpj.org/2024/10/one-year-and-climbing-israel-responsible-for-record-journalist-death-toll/> [<https://perma.cc/G6MD-E44Q>].

39. Kaamil Ahmed, Lydia McMullan, Elena Morresi, Gary Blight & Harry Fischer, *The Killing of Shireen Abu Akleh: What One Morning in the West Bank Reveals About the Occupation*, THE GUARDIAN (Mar. 21, 2023, 6:05 AM), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2023/mar/21/the-killing-of-shireen-abu-akleh-what-one-morning-in-the-west-bank-reveals-about-the-occupation> [<https://perma.cc/83N4-FZMN>].

40. Kevin Williamson, *Dareen Tatour: A Palestinian Poet’s Journey From Prison to Exile Then Back to the West Bank*, SCOTTISH POETRY LIBR. (Dec. 22, 2023), <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/2023/12/dareen-tatour-a-palestinian-poets-journey-from-prison-to-exile-then-back-to-the-west-bank> [<https://perma.cc/H7AA-LVJL>].

in his clean dress socks on the dirty checkpoint floor. Next, his belt and the watch on his wrist, maybe an heirloom, or a gift from a grandchild. By force, he reluctantly removes it. With one hand, he is holding up his slacks. Everyone in line around that metal detector is holding their breath. Then, the soldiers point to his wedding ring. The air is thick with tension. They point to his wedding ring again. They say it louder. No, with a simple nod of his head: he refuses. For a moment, that refusal, from the old man to the IDF, shifted the power dynamic like a victory. Daily life under occupation.

You flashback to fifteen years ago when, with defiance, it felt good to watch Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al Zaidi throw a shoe at George W. Bush.<sup>41</sup> Or when, in response to the late Madeleine Albright (University of California, Berkeley's commencement speaker for the year 2000), University Medalist Fadia Rafeedie, a daughter of Palestinians, remarked during her graduation speech:

Because Secretary Albright didn't even mention Iraq, and . . . .  
sometimes NOT saying things . . . is actually lying about them.

. . . I was going to remind her and I was going to remind you that . . .

The reporter was describing that a million children were dying [died] due to the sanctions that this country was imposing on the people of Iraq. And [the reporter] told [Albright], listen, "that's more . . . children than have died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Do you think the price is worth it?" [Albright] looked into the camera and she said, "[T]he price is worth it."

And I was going to tell her, "[D]o you really think the price is worth it?!" Since that time, 3 times that number of people have died in Iraq.<sup>42</sup>

You drive down the California coast, past a military training site near San Diego: empty structures that eerily resemble homes that the U.S. invades across the world. Your friends in Palestine brought up Fadia Rafeedie. Two decades later, you tune into a Christmas speech on empire. Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac avows:

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41. Richard Hall, *The Iraqi Journalist Who Threw His Shoes at George W. Bush is Still Not Ready to Forgive*, THE INDEPENDENT (Mar. 20, 2023, 5:12 PM), <https://www.independent.co.uk/world/iraq-war-anniversary-bush-shoe-journalist-b2304479.html> [<https://perma.cc/F2D7-GDYD>].

42. Fadia Rafeedie, Univ. Medalist, Commencement Speech at University of California, Berkeley (May 10, 2000) (some alterations in original), [https://newsarchive.berkeley.edu/news/features/2000/05/11\\_fadia.html](https://newsarchive.berkeley.edu/news/features/2000/05/11_fadia.html) [<https://perma.cc/CZ5E-6TH5>].

We will be [okay]. Despite the immense blow we have endured, we, the Palestinians, will recover. We will rise. We will stand up again from the midst of destruction, as we have always done as Palestinians, although this is by far maybe the biggest blow we have received in a long time. But we will be [okay].

But for those who are complicit, I feel sorry for you. Will you ever recover from this? Your charity and your words of shock after the genocide won't make a difference. And I know these words of shock are coming. And I know people will give generously for charity. But your words won't make a difference. Words of regret won't suffice for you. And let me say it: [w]e will not accept your apology after the genocide. What has been done has been done. I want you to look at the mirror and ask, "Where was I when Gaza was going through a genocide?"<sup>43</sup>

Before the genocide, when you were based out of Palestine, in those early days, it was hard not to feel down—a healthy reaction to directly witnessing the trauma and violence of occupation and apartheid. At Farashe yoga, upstairs from the four lions of Al Manara, you inhaled, exhaled, and stretched the muscles that made you whole.<sup>44</sup> This helped you stay present. Like when you ran with Right to Movement, in sweats on weeknights around the statue of Nelson Mandela, past cafes full of conversations, friendships, and cappuccinos.

Mornings were for the *akhbar* and local news was world news. Everyone tuned in to the radio, in yellow cabs and minivan taxis, or a colleague's car on drives to Jenin and Hebron. Followed by Fayrouz. A roadside stop for a strong cup of coffee. Fresh green almonds. Spring breaking open. With Freedom and her sister, mornings were *zaatar*, *labne*, and avocados, too.

On the way back to Ramallah from Nablus, you sat in a crowded taxi for hours, behind a trail of indefinitely stalled Palestinian license plates; disrespected and disrupted lives on the roadways of apartheid. Daily life under occupation. From inside the minivan, you learn that at the checkpoint,

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43. Amy Goodman & Munther Isaac, *Christ Under the Rubble*, DEMOCRACY NOW (Dec. 23, 2023), [https://www.democracynow.org/2023/12/26/christ\\_in\\_the\\_rubble\\_christmas\\_sermon](https://www.democracynow.org/2023/12/26/christ_in_the_rubble_christmas_sermon) [<https://perma.cc/5WTB-SCTD>].

44. In downtown Ramallah, there is a place called Al Manara. It is the center of town and it is a popular roundabout, full of cars, families, taxis, kids walking home from school with juice in their hands, stores, parents, and the Farashe Yoga studio is upstairs at one of the buildings in Al Manara. There are four lions facing outwards at the roundabout. Those are the lions of Al Manara. See *Al Manarah*, RAMALLAH TOURIST INFO. CTR., <https://visitramallah.ramallah.ps/en/article/8/Al-Manara> [<https://perma.cc/H54K-TALA>].

the IDF had shot a girl in the head. Your friend who made melt in your mouth *maftoul* called to see if you are okay—to tell you that if you turn around, you can stay with her family.

What you love most about Palestine: the people.

In Palestine, the status of the world around you—the all-encompassing extent of the occupation—was worse than you had imagined. Families are separated by an apartheid wall, armed checkpoints, and colonial violence. Thousands of Palestinian political prisoners are kidnapped from their lives by the occupation, tortured, and held hostage in Israeli jails and prisons.<sup>45</sup> People cannot even collect rainwater without the occupation's approval.<sup>46</sup>

For years while under siege, Gaza was called an open air prison. Yet, even in the West Bank, there is colonial control in every direction. Even postal packages for Ramallah are screened by the IDF. They didn't allow your friend's beloved mother, bedridden by breast cancer in the last weeks of her life, to receive vitamins sent by mail. Daily life under occupation.

From segregation to settlements, when you first arrived in Palestine, from what you learned in SJP, you expected the apartheid—but up close, in person, the occupation was worse than you anticipated. At the same time, in contrast to the death and destruction unleashed by the colonial regime; classrooms, markets, universities, living rooms, and ice cream parlors (like on Rukab Street) were bustling with life.

From the desk of the less serious, you also saw Ramallah as the world's perfectly threaded, arched eyebrow capital. Reality was so much; not least of which included love, generosity, and friends who laughed, cried, and celebrated life with you. You shared skinny skewers of kabob in Ramallah Tah Tah, swapped stories in secret gardens, and danced at the best dressed weddings. Together, you sipped hot glass cups of herbal tea late at night during a brazen winter.

That winter, en route to a training at a checkpoint, the IDF motioned the car to pull over. You sat frozen in the front passenger seat, you couldn't move because an occupation soldier held her gun to your head, and the other,

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45. See B'TSELEM, WELCOME TO HELL: THE ISRAELI PRISON SYSTEM AS A NETWORK OF TORTURE CAMPS 6 (2024), [https://hamoked.org/files/2024/1666600\\_eng.pdf](https://hamoked.org/files/2024/1666600_eng.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/S9BF-Q2W3>] (“In early July 2024, there were 9,623 Palestinians incarcerated in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, 4,781 of whom were detained without trial, without being presented with the allegations against them, and without access to the right to defend themselves.”).

46. See *The Occupation of Water*, AMNESTY INT'L (Nov. 29, 2017), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water> [<https://perma.cc/7J32-RZVS>].

pointed his U.S. funded weapon at your colleague's face. They searched the trunk: trial training materials in Arabic. Daily life under occupation.

Driving back and forth across the West Bank to meet with colleagues and students every week—you saw so much, not least of which include flocks of sheep, an old man with a typewriter on a table in front of the Jenin courthouse, red flowers dotting green hills. You also saw spirals of black smoke, armed settlers making their way towards the office in Al Bireh while the smell of teargas saturated Ramallah's air.

You were there, on that road, when lawyers in their long black robes from court, with files in their hands, gathered in protest and were tear gassed by the Israeli military.<sup>47</sup> On another day, in the span of a single afternoon, you saw Palestinians in the metal cages of Qalandiya checkpoint while the world was on fire and across the apartheid wall, Israelis dancing on the beach. You sat on a rooftop for tea, as a tank approached the entrance of the refugee camp; little boys with courage larger than life, throwing stones at the military killing machine. Most of all, you encountered unparalleled warmth, generosity, and moral clarity—in a place where the preciousness of life is palpable. You came back home with cherished memories, ceramic water jugs, and a map from one of your students.

Your father, a retired engineer who barely passed English 100, has always been fluent in the power of truth. He walks with you in the cool California night. He is a man who likes to contextualize, especially in response to the first world problems of your Los Angeles life. For years, when the United States bombed Iraq, he would remind you of your privileged life, to be grateful you are not in Baghdad. Hospitals in Gaza have become mass graves. Grieving, exhausted doctors and nurses, surrounded by white shrouds, have plead with the rest of the world to take immediate action. Your father advises you to be grateful that you have a home, clean water, and access to the news. You actively fight the urge to feel powerless—and organizing is your antidote. The SoCal sun has set and you pick up the pace, down a hill, in a country that incarcerates more people than anywhere else in the world. Probing your moral compass, your father asks if you know how

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47. The Associated Press circulated a striking photo from that day, of a Palestinian lawyer kicking away an IDF tear gas canister. *See Photo of Palestinian Lawyer Kicking Tear Gas Canister Lights Up Internet*, CBC NEWS (Nov. 2, 2015, 10:28 PM), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/trending/palestinian-lawyer-kicks-gas-canister-1.3300915> [<https://perma.cc/8HS9-6T3R>].

many hundreds of people are in Iran's Evin prison.<sup>48</sup> Before you can answer, he recenters the conversation back to Gaza.

There is a genocide in Gaza. The morning light splashes through the curtains in California. There is a genocide in Gaza. In the garden, a hummingbird visits the white roses your grandmother loved. There is a genocide in Gaza. The smell of coffee fills the room. There is a genocide in Gaza. Children are dropped off and all the school bells ring. There is a genocide in Gaza.

After one year of this apocalypse, naming it a genocide is not enough. In asking all of us to not give in to despair, Noura Erakat writes, "[W]e must turn to Palestinians for our greatest guidance and inspiration . . . who every time have risen like a phoenix . . . . A genocide has threatened to erase Palestine, but it has ensured that Palestine now lives in each one of us, immortal."<sup>49</sup> You continue to cling to life.

You call your friends at ten P.M. across the world. You ask how they are holding up and they tell you they are most concerned about Gaza, fearing the West Bank is next. This is before Israel bombs Lebanon too. They say: keep posting, sharing, speaking up.

On another call, with a friend named after small, sweet-smelling white flowers, the question becomes, what future? And this too, is even more reason to reject, resist, and disrupt the genocide, the broader context of dehumanization, and all the systems which make it possible. None of this is inevitable. What is it that you will do?

End the occupation. Abolish apartheid. Free Palestine.

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48. See Bahar Mirhosseini, *Women Are Leading the Resistance Against Executions in Iran*, THE NATION (Oct. 24, 2024), <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/iranian-women-resistance-executions/> [<https://perma.cc/T8P8-Q2ZA>].

49. Erakat, *supra* note 14.