



Voices of Youth

Young Gazan Writers Reflect on the Theme “What You Didn't Know about Gaza”



The Beauty of Darkness

By Asmaa Elkhaldi

During the last ten years, many events have happened in this tiny spot of land, bringing occupied Palestine to the attention of people around the world. These ten years have been the toughest on Gazans, at least for this Gazan. I was ten years old when the Israeli blockade was imposed, and then things like electricity shortages became something we began to take for granted. I don't remember the last time we had a full day of electricity; I guess that would have been when I was nine. I was fond of lights; I really feared the dark then, but not now. These ten years have shown me the beauty of darkness, or at least that's the way I choose to see it. There is serenity, calmness, and peace in the darkness, and there are tender breezes that I wouldn't have recognized if I hadn't sat helplessly in the dark due to the shortage. Have you ever walked on a road by the light of the moon? Isn't that romantic? So is listening to the waves of Gaza's sea, good company, the enticing smell of grilled corn, and the beauty of the moonlight. That is all I need to make me go to sleep smiling. I believe that happiness comes from within.



Musakhan

By Kholoud Rabah

In Palestinian cuisine, there is one traditional dish I like the most: *musakhan*. It's easy to make, and the peasants in old Palestinian villages used to prepare it to celebrate the olive harvest. It is known as the national dish of Palestine. Since I was a child, *musakhan* has been my favorite food. This dish is simple to prepare and typically starts with *tabun* – a flatbread cooked in a stone oven – on which spiced chicken pieces are placed. The bread and chicken are then topped with sautéed onions, sumac, and olive oil. The combination is finally roasted in the oven until the bread crisps and glistens golden brown. It is eaten with one's hands and served with soup and salad. It's delicious and is loved by the Gazans.



We Cherish Fridays

By Rana Shubair

The people of Gaza cherish Fridays for a number of reasons. For many families, it's the only day on which they gather around the dinner table together. In the evening, they go to the beach or to visit relatives. Friday is a religious celebration as well, and you can't help but feel the blessed atmosphere that encompasses the city. I love it!



Gaza Is Creative

By Basman Derawi

Creativity is richer and more real when it comes from a dark and deep place, and Gaza is the best example. It suffers from a blockade, wars, poverty, and pain, but these only serve to bring out another side. Gaza also has music, painting, poetry, and black comedy. Even when issues like no electricity plague us, we create our own energy using car batteries.



Families and Love
By Doaa Mohaisen

Family plays a significant role in our lives as Gazans. Our family is usually a source of love, support, and protection, but most families also impose lots of restrictions. For instance, unlike in other parts of the world where the children leave the house once they are 18, in Gaza, you continue to live with your family until you get married. And even then, you never live too far away. Gazan marriage rituals are usually very traditional. The mother of a young man visits the house of a young woman whom she considers suitable and tells her and her family about her son, his physical description, his job, etc. If the young woman agrees – and sometimes her family forces her to agree if they are very conservative – the young man then visits her. If he thinks she is suitable, then they agree on a dowry (a sum of money for the bride’s family) and get engaged. I, however, would prefer to fall in love and get married outside Gaza.



Gaza Is Beautiful
By Haneen Al-Holy

Several days ago, my mind was really exhausted and I could barely do the routine things that all people do – for example, attend lectures. One of my friends said to me, “You look beautiful today.” I silently gazed at her, shocked. I had been feeling like I was about to commit suicide! She was smiling as she stood in front of me, and of course I needed to thank her. Clearly, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. For me and without exaggeration, I can say that Gaza is all about beauty; even its suffering is beautiful. You all know about the 2014 war and how 2,140 Gazans were brutally killed. But have you heard about the 5,300 newborn babies? You often hear about the “low-quality education” in Gaza, but you never hear that there are 712 schools and that 50.4 percent of the students are females. I hope that this has changed some of your stereotypical thinking.



We Are Humans Just Like You
By Anas Jnena

I want the world to know that Gaza is all about life – just like any other city in the world. I want the world to know that Gaza is not the devastated, dusty, moldy place that is too often shown on the news. I want the world to know that Palestinians are neither victims nor heroes.

I want the world to know that when a Palestinian mother ululates over her son’s death, it does not mean that she’s heartlessly celebrating; rather, it’s an often-unsuccessful attempt to persuade herself and her other children that she will endure the pain no matter what, that she will not let the grief engulf her, that she won’t give up. But if you want to know the truth, look carefully into her eyes and see what they speak; or, if you have enough guts, stand at her window at night to hear the heart-wrenching moans and sighs.

I want the world to know that when Palestinian kids throw stones at Israeli soldiers sent to enforce the occupation, it doesn’t mean that we teach our children hatred or that we advocate violence. Rather, it’s our only way of showing them that we will resist and defend ourselves, that we won’t be defeatists. Instead of questioning Palestinians’ intentions, these critics should first look at what Israel has contributed to achieving peace and justice: expanding settlements, a ten-year siege, closed borders, eight hours of electricity a day, three wars...

I also want the world to know that there’s really nothing that can stop us from falling in love, that we play Adam Lambert’s “Another Lonely Night” when we get dumped, Justin Timberlake’s “What Goes Around Comes Around” when we are cheated on, and Adele’s “Hello” when we sorely miss somebody.

I want the world to know that Palestine has writers, artists, thinkers, and, most importantly, lovers. I want the world to know that we are humans just like you.

In 2015, We Are Not Numbers was launched as a storytelling project that pairs developing Palestinian writers (mostly from Gaza and Lebanon), who write in English, with international mentors to tell the human stories behind the numbers in the news. It is hosted in Gaza by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor. The writers above are all writers with the project. To find more stories, please visit WeAreNotNumbers.org.

