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**To cite this article:** Lama Z. Khouri (2024) Gaza's Broken Lullaby: Genocidal Unchilding and the Impossibility of Mothering, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 25:3, 178-187, DOI: [10.1080/15240657.2024.2379204](https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2024.2379204)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2024.2379204>



Published online: 30 Sep 2024.



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# Gaza's Broken Lullaby: Genocidal Unchilding and the Impossibility of Mothering

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## ABSTRACT

This article describes the devastating impact of the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the strategies used to dismantle the social and familial structures of Palestinian people, particularly targeting women and children. It sheds light on the severe conditions and the complex layers of violence that affect these mothers, who struggle to provide a semblance of normalcy and safety for their children amidst such adversity. The focus on women and children is a deliberate tactic by the settler colonial project to ensure there is no future for the Palestinian nation. By disrupting the ability to mother and nurture, the settler colonial forces aim to erase the continuity and resilience of the Palestinian identity, culture, and community, essentially targeting the very reproduction of the nation itself.

## The Law of Fear

The killer looks at the specter of the dead man, Not into his eyes, without regret. He says to those around him: don't blame me, I killed because I am afraid, and I will kill again because I am afraid." . . . Let us then turn our attention to comforting the frightened man.

. . .

When they went down the road of sympathizing with the killer, some foreign tourists passing by asked them: "What crime has the child committed?" They answered, "He will grow to terrorize the son of the terrified." "And the woman, what is her crime?" They say, "She will give birth to a memory." (Darwish, 2008)

## Articulating the Inexpressible: Reflections on Writing Amidst a Genocide

In the poignant words of Mahmoud Darwish, the above poem captures what many of us, Palestinians and other Arabs, feel. Darwish masterfully illustrates a chilling narrative. Grotesquely justified by our killers, children and women are killed by claiming that we are terrorizing. This dialogue between oppressors and bystanders reveals a devastating logic: children grow up to challenge the status quo, and women are guilty of preserving memories that could fuel resistance. Although many are unsubstantiated, such accusations are tragically effective, used to rationalize the ongoing murder, torture, and annihilation of our people. When these accusations are countered, and rationalizations exposed, the responses, in turn, tend to deflect to topics like Hamas. These are not just distractions, but part of a broader dehumanization process—a kind of moral gymnastics used to legitimize what is essentially a live-streamed genocide. It's crucial to understand this to grasp the relentless current of dehumanization that not only justifies but sustains these atrocities.

In the shadow of a gaze that brands you a terrorist—your values, beliefs, and intentions scrutinized before your lips part—how do you anchor yourself in the roles of mother, nurturer, and weaver of dreams? Under this heavy mantle—where your world is contorted and sculpted into a tormenting labyrinth; where the bloom of your thoughts are stifled; and where the birth of your ideas that might foster your growth, and that of your kin and cherished ones, are repressed or censored—how do you create a sanctuary? If your every breath is shadowed by surveillance, your every move steeped in suspicion, how do you craft a cradle of safety for your children, for those you hold dear, for those who seek your solace? How do you bear their burdens, digest their despair, when your own tomorrows are questions unspoken: Will my home stand when dawn breaks? Will the next explosion steal the air from our lungs? Will death claim me on the ‘morrow? And amid this storm, how do you quench the thirst, the ceaseless hunger, the cries of your children gnawed by relentless pangs?

This article originated from the concepts and visions offered by the journal’s editors. Their thoughts—the safe harbor they created, and the dignity they accorded to Palestine—moved me profoundly. The editors have given me freedom in this space to express my thoughts and guide you, the reader, through my world. It’s a challenging task, yet I am compelled to share that this essay is a deeply personal narrative from a Palestinian woman, mother, analyst, and human being. I am always motivated by, and survive on, the immense love for my people—an unwavering desire to foster healing, nurture resilience, and cease the relentless cycles of injustice and violence.

I have struggled to begin this article, finding it difficult to articulate an unfathomable situation with atrocities that defy description, atrocities none of us on this planet have witnessed in such detail and certainty. I often find it challenging to write about such emotionally charged topics in an intellectual and disciplined manner. I am tasked with expressing the inexpressible and asserting not only my right to exist but the rights of my people. In the psychoanalytic spaces I have encountered over the past 20 years, I often feel silenced and gaslit. Despite this, engaging in dialogue requires me to think, and communicate, in a register that is somewhat detached from the raw emotions of trauma, tears, and rage intertwined with the topic at hand. It feels as though I must set the stage, defend a thesis, or present an incontrovertible case about the injustices faced by Palestinians, as if to *permit* myself to proclaim that the atrocities against my people constitute genocide; that the colonial settler state is robbing lives, land, and hopes; and that anyone who is not outraged by this mass slaughter is complicit.

This challenge profoundly deepens when I delve into the lives of Palestinian mothers, mirroring their struggles through the lens of my own motherhood. In all corners of our occupied land, the very essence of nurturing is jeopardized. Mothers are compelled to shield their children from dangers, rather than freely cultivate their growth. They have to watch their children wither from starvation, grabbed by soldiers and imprisoned. They wonder daily what the next minute will look like. In turn, I often wonder how many times my heart can break? Seemingly endlessly.

Each Palestinian mother is a story of holding a quiet scream against the theft of normalcy, dignity, and value as a human being. Their existing endurance becomes a rebellion against a life where mothering is an act of resistance and resilience. As I write this article, I am constantly reminded of the power of motherhood as both a source of profound strength and a profound site of vulnerability.

Every sentence I write carries the weight of sacred responsibility to honor the Palestinian collective plight. I must enshrine the harsh realities of our daily battles and the grave atrocities inflicted upon us. Each word serves as testimony and a resolute step on the strenuous march toward liberation.

Today, I write under the shadow of the Rafah bombing, haunted by the images that have circulated over the past 8 months: a man in tears holding the lifeless, headless body of a child as the rest of the camp burns; a boy weeping next to his mother’s dead body; a man driving a truck filled with his family’s corpses.

Finally managing to write this article and submitting it for review, I felt graced by a transformative experience of a rare editorial encounter: my words remained untouched, and my right to speak unquestioned. I felt I was offered a space to immortalize my people and declare in a psychoanalytic journal the reality of genocide. Our meeting via Zoom, on a Friday morning, brought the depth of the impact of watching the genocide, unacknowledged by many, to the surface—a genocide of children

who could be my children, mothers who could be me, and people who are from your gene pool. Unusual for me, it has been difficult to cry in these eight long months—all the suppressed sobs I have choked back since last fall. Perhaps this is the fierce pride of a Palestinian, vowing we will prevail, or perhaps it is a denial of living in a place like New York, where many dismiss the ongoing atrocities—and often applaud the United States government’s military aid to the Zionist entity, justifying their brutality with hollow phrases like “it’s complicated,” “but Hamas,” or the chilling “this is war” (Middle East Monitor, 2024).

Confronting the editors’ warm, supportive presence on my screen, their silent words penetrated deeply, flooding me with a sense of affirmation and the solemn acknowledgment of my people’s dignity. It felt like an ethereal encounter within the psychoanalytic sphere. Their gazes, unvoiced, radiated an honest witnessing, acknowledgment, and comprehension: “Yes, your people have been enduring a genocide for decades; yes, the lives of Palestinian children, mothers, and fathers are invaluable—they matter, you matter, and this acknowledgment is our commitment to helping preserve Palestine’s history, and to acknowledge Palestinian mothers, the meaning of their lives and their role in carrying, birthing and sustaining a nation.” Such encounters are so rare that I am compelled to acknowledge the Director of the Institute of Expressive Analysis (IEA), Gail Elkin-Scott, and to thank her here for always having my back in my role as the Director of Diversity Inclusion, Belonging, and Anti-Racism at IEA. In the fall of 2023, I wrote to the Institute’s community, acknowledging the unfolding war on Gaza and the pain this could bring to many of us of any race or identification, and Gail affirmed my message and refused to accept the silencing of my voice.

I am grateful to the *Journal of Studies in Gender and Sexuality* for providing a space to discuss Palestine and recognizing the genocide of its people. As a Palestinian woman, mother, and analyst, I appreciate the opportunity to articulate the unfathomable and metabolize the indigestible.

## **Palestine: The Current Moment**

Many Palestinians and our supporters are cautious when referring to the events of October 7th, because it is often portrayed as if the bloodshed in Palestine started on that day. While no Palestinian I know would condone the war crimes alleged to have occurred that day, it is important to consider these events within the broader history of oppression, dispossession, and betrayal. Judith Butler’s recent statement captures my sentiments:

I think it is more honest and historically accurate to say that the uprising of October 7th was an act of armed resistance. It is not a terrorist attack, nor an anti-Semitic act. It was an attack against Israelis, and while I did not agree with the attack, it’s crucial to acknowledge that the violence Palestinians have faced spans decades. This uprising was a response to subjugation and a violent state apparatus. Whether one supports Hamas or not, we should at least recognize this as armed resistance, opening the floor to debate its morality and strategic validity. (Butler, 2024)

To begin to understand the developments of the past 8 months, it’s essential to consider two concepts that frame the genocidal policies of the Zionist state. These policies encompass not only the act of killing, but also render living conditions unbearable. The first concept, necropolitics, was introduced by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe in 2003. It explores the use of social and political power to dictate who may live and who must die (2003). Within the context of Gaza, necropolitics also affects birth rates—as evinced by a 300% increase in miscarriages over the past 8 months (Bajec, 2024)—impacting the quality of life, and dictating the circumstances of death and burial. Consider the cruel intent behind the fragmentary missiles designed to mutilate (Abu Sitta, 2023), or the fact that bodies of martyrs are returned with their organs harvested (Al Mayadeen, 2023). The visuals are harrowing: parents are forced to write their living children’s names on their bodies, if they are dismembered, to identify them (Alsaafin & Amer, 2023); others carry fragments of their children in body bags (Clash Report, 2023). Many remain buried under rubble, unreachable for recovery because the settler colonial state denies them the necessary fuel and machinery to

excavate the remains of Gaza's loved ones (Middle East Eye Staff, 2024; Shurafa & Magdi, 2023). In places like Gaza and also Janine, the air is thick with the stench of decay (Abu Toha, 2023). These are constant, brutal reminders of the settler-colonial state's power and malevolence, aimed not only at killing but at shattering spirits and resolve.

Mbembe emphasizes racism as a key driver behind necropolitics, highlighting the systematic devaluation of racialized individuals. This devaluation is manifest in the rhetoric and policies of the Zionist state and its leaders. For example, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has derogatorily referred to Palestinians as "human animals" (Karanth, 2024), while Israeli President Isaac Herzog has stated, "there are no innocent civilians in Gaza" (The Wire Staff, 2023). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has exacerbated this narrative, comparing Palestinians to Amalekites, describing the genocide in Gaza as a struggle between the "children of light and children of darkness" (Israel National News, 2023; Leonard, 2023).

### ***For the Zionists, We Are God's Unchosen People***

Not only are Palestinian people unchosen, mothers are unmothered and children are unchilded. (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019). The concept of unchilding, as proposed by Shalhoub-Kevorkian, delves into the necropolitical dynamics that systematically strip the rights of Palestinian children, evicting them from the realm of childhood for political objectives. This process is underpinned by a machinery of violence, racism, sexism, and classism, particularly within the framework of the Zionist settler-colonial project. This project manipulates international narratives along with the lives and environments of Palestinian children from their earliest existence to their demise. Exploiting children as targets and instruments, the State of Israel ultimately strives to suppress the emergence of future Palestinian generations. The concept of unchilding is a concept *par excellence* that invites examination of the political and ethical questions of 'children that count,' and of the unending, mundane moments of dispossession (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019, 2020).

### **The Longstanding Genocidal Agenda of Zionist Settler Colonialism**

The genocidal aims of the Zionist settler colonial state did not begin 8 months ago, nor even 76 years ago. These aims can be traced back to the first Zionist Congress of 1897. Since then, the Zionist agenda has pursued the annihilation, either in part or in whole, of our people. The phrase "a land with no people for a people with no land" clearly signals this intent of annihilation and genocide, or perhaps they thought that the Palestinians living on the land were not people (Farmer et al., 2021).

The settler-colonial state has aimed to annihilate the Palestinians for over a century. They have attempted to erase the past by rewriting history and committing memoricide (Al-Jazeera, 2008; Masalha, 2015). In Gaza and throughout Palestine, they make the present unbearable, seeking to crush the spirit, life, and livability of the population. Consider the ordinary aspects of daily life that, in places like New York, we take for granted, such as going to work, having a safe place to sleep, clean water, food on the table, and knowing that law and civil rights exist to protect you—none of these are assured in Palestine. Imagine being Palestinian and spending endless hours at the Qalandia checkpoint—uncertain when, or if, you will reach your destination, surrounded by a wall that isolates you from your loved ones and livelihood. Palestinians are barred from walking on streets that belonged to their ancestors. It is inhumane for a child to witness their parents humiliated at gunpoint, to be denied the right to harvest your olives, to live in constant fear of home demolition, or to wonder if they will be able to hug their children at the end of the day (Jabr & Berger, 2016, 2017, 2021).

In the last 8 months, Palestinians within the 1948 borders, now known as Israel, have faced unprecedented gagging policies enforced by Israeli authorities. These policies reflect a zero-tolerance stance promoted by the Minister of National Security, vilifying our people in Israel. Numerous officials, particularly Ben-Gvir, have made racist statements and shaped Israeli public

opinion to brace for the “Arab monsters and their violent reactions to the Gaza war” (Kaya, 2024, p. 1).

## Unchilding and Unmothering Palestine—Foreclosing the Future

Annihilation of the Palestinian people in the future is achieved by targeting women and children, which brings me to the topic of this issue of the journal: the impossibility of mothering.

Drawing on Winnicott’s ideas,<sup>2</sup> a good-enough mother needs a “holding environment” so she can nurture and provide for her children. The state’s duty should be to provide a “holding environment” that nurtures all its citizens rather than perpetuating violence and dehumanization. There is a fundamental contradiction, therefore, between settler-colonialism and the concept of mothering as we understand it. Instead of being the guarantor of conditions that sustain family life, the state is driven by the delusional belief that maintaining those conditions for “us” necessitates destroying them for the indigenous people. “Our” future demands that they cannot have a future; for our children to be children, theirs must be deprived of their childhood. This mindset is exemplified by Israel’s Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked’s Facebook post, in 2015, which described Palestinian children as “little snakes” to justify the mass punishment (Tharoor, 2015).

The Palestinian Feminist Collective describes the atrocities in Gaza as “reproductive genocide” due to the deliberate targeting of Palestinian reproductive capacities through ongoing military violence, systemic oppression, and denial of essential resources. They cite the enforcement of unlivable conditions, mass displacement, and the destruction of health infrastructure as evidence. The impact on women includes increased rates of miscarriage, maternal mortality, and psychological trauma. They argue that these actions are part of a broader strategy to diminish the Palestinian population and undermine their ability to sustain their community and resist occupation (Palestinian Feminist Collective, n.d.). An illustration of the foregoing is a Press Release by the International Rescue Committee (2024), which states: “Pregnant women in Gaza face hunger, Israeli bombardment, displacement and the constant threat of death or illness from injuries, infections or disease. Many women have had to give birth without any form of medical aid and there are credible reports of women forced to undergo C-sections without anesthesia” (International Rescue Committee, 2024).

Furthermore, according to a report on April 16, 2024 by UN Women, 10,000 Palestinian women in Gaza have been killed, including approximately 6,000 mothers, resulting in 19,000 orphaned children. Among those who survived the Israeli bombardments and ground operations, women have been displaced and widowed. Over a million Palestinian women and girls in Gaza are experiencing severe hunger—with minimal access to food, safe drinking water, functioning toilets, or running water. All these privations pose life-threatening risks. Clean water is particularly vital for breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women, due to their increased daily water and caloric needs. It is also crucial for women and girls to maintain menstrual hygiene with dignity and safety. Many women have resorted to taking medication to delay or stop their periods despite the potential side effects (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2024). The UN Women report states, “This devastating differentiated impact continues to make the war on Gaza also a war on women” (UN Women, 2024).

The situation of pregnant women in the rest of Palestine is also dire. Pregnant women often give birth at checkpoints, leading to many infant deaths. The convoluted permit system and checkpoint security infrastructure have a gender dimension that is often overlooked. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s work highlights the severe impact of surveillance and restrictions on pregnant and birthing women (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015). She vividly describes how checkpoints contribute to creating a “social geography of horror” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015, p. 1195), characterized by “violence against the birthing journey: multifaceted and systemic forms of aggression and control exercised by the Israeli settler colonial state over Palestinian women, particularly in the context of pregnancy and childbirth.” Exposure to tear gas, delays at military

<sup>2</sup>I am grateful to Martin Kemp for illuminating the connection between the “good-enough” mother and “good-enough” state.

checkpoints, and physical strain from navigating militarized spaces can lead to miscarriages, premature births, and other health complications. According to a United Nations report from March 2019, 69 Palestinian pregnant women gave birth at Israeli checkpoints. A 2005 report from the World Health Organization (WHO) cited statistics from the Palestinian Ministry of Health that 61 women gave birth at checkpoints between 2000 and 2004, and 36 of their babies died (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019). It is not that pregnant women in labor leave their homes too late, it is that they are kept for hours needlessly at a checkpoint (Powell, 2011).

The necropolitical strategies of unmothering and deparenting are designed to dismantle social support systems, separate families, and fragment communities. These tactics not only disrupt relationships of love and sexuality but also aim to obstruct the reproduction of future generations. They achieve this through the violation of personal space and constant surveillance, as well as through a residency system and complex procedures that result in families living apart.

Not only are Palestinian bodies cut to pieces by fragmentary missile—and scattered throughout Gaza—but children are also orphaned, and parents are left without resources. Unable to provide for their families, they feel impotent with nothing to turn to for support in comforting their children. An example of this predicament is illustrated in the following example: Mohammad Al-Nabahin, a father of four children, told the *Washington Post*, “The feeling of helplessness kills mothers and fathers.” He described the shame that seeped through him as his son Ahmed spoke. “I have nothing more than my arm to hide them from death,” he said. His daughter Tala asked for presents when she turned 10 in December, but the family could barely afford the day’s meal (Loveluck & Harb, 2024).

The dismantling of Palestinian families’ support networks—and the obliteration of their futures through bombings schools, assassinating educators, and destroying homes—is meant to make the attainment of a successful future nearly impossible. There is no clean water in Gaza, and children are dying of forced starvation. In Gaza today, the IOF has destroyed nine in every 10 schools and has claimed the lives of 95 professors and 261 teachers. It has damaged 60% of educational facilities, while 13 public libraries lie in ruins (Ashing, 2024). This has been described as “scholasticide.”

In the rest of Palestine, the Zionist state systematically targets Palestinian fatherhood and family structures under Israeli occupation. Otman (2020) explains that this process of “unfathering” involves the targeted imprisonment, exile, and killing of Palestinian fathers, which undermines parental authority and presence. This process not only disrupts the family unit but also aims to destabilize the social fabric and community resilience, contributing to the broader goals of control and subjugation by the occupying forces.

## Genocidal Unchilding

Genocidal unmothering feeds into genocidal unchilding: In the last 8 months, the strategy of unchilding and unmothering in Gaza has reached genocidal levels: 19,000 children are orphaned due to the killing of their caregivers, over 14,000 have been killed, and 10 children every day lose a limb (Loveluck & Harb, 2024). However, even before October 2023, the ongoing war on Gaza has had a profound impact on the mental health of Palestinian children. Constant exposure to violence, displacement, and extreme trauma has led to widespread anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and behavioral issues among the youth—what Rita Giacaman eloquently describes as “wounds inside” (Giacaman, 2017, p. 357). 54% of Palestinian boys and 46.5% of girls aged 6 to 12 already exhibited emotional and behavioral issues. Even before the escalation, a 2022 study by Save the Children found that 80% of children displayed signs of mental distress, with two-thirds engaging in self-harm and half considering suicide. Since birth, these children have faced an Israeli siege and blockade, living in poverty and constant fear (ACAPS, 2024). The Gaza Strip, labeled by UNICEF as the most perilous place for children globally, presents dire conditions where bereavement and lack of food, water, and medication are daily struggles UNICEF (2024). Additionally, the destruction of



infrastructure has exacerbated the lack of safe spaces—with school closures and playgrounds in ruins—further contributing to the mental health crisis.

For years, Palestinian children have been often deliberately targeted. Chris Hedges (2001) states:

Children have been shot in other conflicts I have covered—death squads gunned them down in El Salvador and Guatemala, mothers with infants were lined up and massacred in Algeria, and Serb snipers put children in their sights and watched them crumple onto the pavement in Sarajevo—but I have never before watched soldiers entice children like mice into a trap and murder them for sport (p. 64).

## Gaza's Broken Lullaby

I share the above information, but there is a lot more to the impact of settler-colonialism on mothers and their ability to be mothers. I have been remembering lullabies I sang to my daughter Bianca and my son Paolo, and my grandmother and mother sang to me—lullabies about love, tenderness, and an undying promise of protection. “Let’s sleep, let’s sleep. I’ll catch a pigeon for you. Don’t be afraid pigeons, we’ll gently lull Bianca to sleep. The plum is under the apricot tree and every time the wind blows, it brings Paolo an apricot.” The settler-colonial state has shattered the lullaby: words promising protection, safety, and abundance are now empty and confusing for children—children who repeatedly ask their parents questions they cannot answer: when will I go back to school? Will my [amputated] hands grow back again (Barghouti, 2024)? Will [my friend] Mohammad come back to life? And the most heart-wrenching words are from a girl who was just taken out of the rubble of her home: “Is this a dream or for real?”

We have exhausted every word, every adjective, and every image to describe Gaza—a situation none of us ever witnessed before. But how can I convey the profound sorrow and torment of a mother who hears her children’s cries of hunger, or watches her daughter become a skeletal shadow of herself—her gaze empty, her hair gone? How can I describe the incredible pain of a father who, clutching his wounded son and waving a white flag, cradles the same boy minutes later—now lifeless, felled by a sniper’s bullet? What is it like to be a mother and have your children snatched from their home in the middle of the night? Yet, we must talk about the unspeakable and incomprehensible. We must hope that our commitment to love and the fight for justice might bring a better future for women, children, and men in Gaza—and the rest of the world.

## The Steadfast Mother: Defiance and Hope in Gaza's Ruins

In the heart of Rafah and throughout Gaza, mothers face the unbearable tragedy of witnessing their children engulfed by fear, hunger, and despair—a stark portrait of the torment of a mother powerless to end the suffering. This relentless tableau of atrocities and the ongoing genocide cast a shadow over the intrinsic duty of a mother to protect and nurture, transforming it into an exercise of sheer resilience and defiance.

The Palestinian Sumud, which is rooted in steadfastness and perseverance, is not merely about survival; it’s an emphatic refusal. It’s the rejection of defeat, of dehumanization, of the obliteration of identity and existence. It’s embodied by mothers like the one in Rafah, who, in the face of crippling blockades, innovates to provide the simplest necessities, such as establishing a diaper factory amidst ruins. It’s embodied by young Lama Abu Gamous, a 9-year-old turned journalist who refuses to let the world ignore or forget the plight of her people. Lama’s voice is a piercing reminder of the agency and urgency of the Palestinian struggle, echoing across borders and through the hearts of global citizens.

This narrative of Sumud and resistance is interwoven with Ather Zia’s concept of “affective solidarity,” where emotional and moral support transcends geographical and cultural barriers, uniting hundreds of thousands across the globe (Zia, 2020). These multitudes take to the streets, their chants and signs in hand, not merely as acts of protest but as profound engagements of solidarity. They stand together, a testament to the global recognition of Palestinian pain and the universal demand for justice.



Thus, as we reflect on the harrowing experiences of these mothers and children, we also witness a world increasingly bound by a collective conscience. This global solidarity rekindles hope and fosters a powerful sense of community and shared humanity, insisting that even in the darkest moments, the spirit of resistance and the dream of peace will persist. Through this shared struggle, the world is reminded that while the geography of oppression is specific, the geography of empathy and action knows no bounds.

I started with a poem from Mahmoud Darwish and I would like to end with one. This is a poem called *To My Mother*. For me, this poem is not only about my mother but also about my land, my people, my ancestors, and the love that is so abundant in Palestine. It is about the tenderness we Palestinians feel and the space Palestine, the mother of all lands, holds in our hearts.

## To My Mother

By Mahmoud Darwish  
Translated by A. Z. Foreman

Dearly I yearn for my mother's bread,  
My mother's coffee,  
Mother's brushing touch.  
Childhood is raised in me,  
Day upon day in me.  
And I so cherish life  
Because if I died  
My mother's tears would shame me.

Set me, if I return one day,  
As a shawl on your eyelashes, let your hand  
Spread grass out over my bones,  
Christened by your immaculate footsteps  
Fasten us with a lock of hair,  
With thread strung from the back of your dress.  
I could become a god,  
A god is what I'd be  
If I but touch your heart's deep breadth.

Set me, if ever I return,  
In your oven as fuel to help you cook,  
On your roof as a clothesline stretched in your hands.  
Weak without your daily prayers,  
I can no longer stand.

I am old  
Give me back the stars of childhood  
That I may chart the homeward quest  
Back with the migrant birds,  
Back to your awaiting nest

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Lynne Layton, Martin Kemp, Ros Petchesky, Nader Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and Lara Sheehi for taking the time to read the text and comment on it.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest are reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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