



PALESTINIAN GIRLS' RESISTANCE

Towards Our Liberation

“I’m against the occupation. I’m against settlements, I’m against anything that has to do with injustice. Anything that has to do with inequality. I believe that everyone should be equal, everyone should have justice, peace, and equality. That’s what I am fighting for. I’m fighting for my freedom as a girl and for my freedom as a Palestinian.”

- Janna, Palestinian storyteller

Palestinian Girls’ Resistance: Towards Our Liberation is a declaration curated with the experiences, wisdom, pain, dreams, and power of the Palestinian activists whose stories are documented in this publication:

Noor, Janna, Aisha, Sandie, Mariam, and Hafsa.

Some of the storytellers are identified by an alias name as a precautionary safety measure.

This publication is part of the *Towards Our Liberation* initiative.

To learn more, visit www.TowardsOurLiberation.org.

Palestinian Girls’ Resistance: Towards Our Liberation, 2024.

Words by Noor, Janna, Aisha, Sandie, Mariam, and Hafsa.

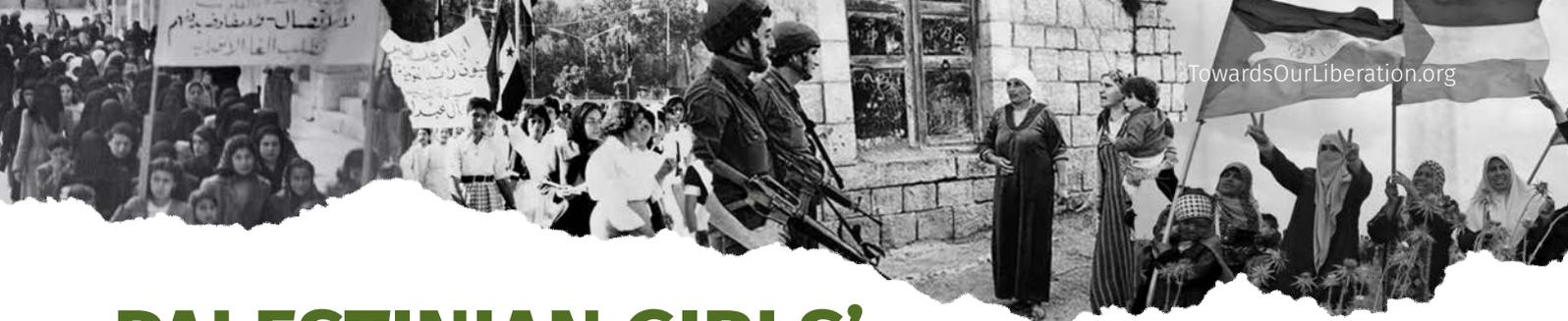
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PALESTINIAN GIRLS' RESISTANCE

Since time immemorial, girls have been pushing back – in their homes, families, countries, and across the globe. They have pushed back against the everyday oppressions that are so often synonymous with girlhood, and against the forces that define and form the nature of that oppression. Girls resist marriage, violence, fight to stay in school, push back against how others name them, and shame them, and seek to separate them from the platforms and resources that are their right. They fight to take up space, access space, and re-shape systems. ***Girls resist because to resist is to live, breathe, and be in the world as a girl.***

Girls living under occupation, civil war and armed conflict, dictatorship, displacement, restrictive environments and repressive regimes resist with an unimaginable level of bravery and courage in the face of constant violence and threats to their lives. They simultaneously care for family and community, respond to emergencies, spark movements, and lead widespread change. Yet, throughout history, their stories have been ignored, erased, and pushed aside.

This is the painful reality for Palestinian girls, who have experienced the brutal impacts of occupation for over seven decades, and [have also been the bedrock of resistance and organising, resisting oppression, providing safe houses, and finding any means possible to keep people in their communities safe.](#) And under the genocidal attacks by the Israeli occupation forces, girls and young activists have been providing vital emergency support for their families, supporting evacuations, and [documenting the crimes committed against them and their communities.](#) Yet these stories, and so many more remain intentionally ignored or obscured.

While occupation and collective violence impacts everyone in a community, girls play a particularly threatening role to an oppressor because they represent possibilities, the future, and liberation. Therefore, there is a deliberate attempt to erase

their stories—along with their identity, history, and collective memory—that weaves together the continuous fabric of the past, present, and future. *Palestinian Girls' Resistance: Towards Our Liberation* is a publication that counters and resists this erasure, bringing light to the resistance stories of six Palestinian activists.

These stories were originally collected in 2019 as a part of the [Stories of Girls' Resistance](#), a global feminist storytelling initiative dedicated to shifting narratives by documenting a true recount of history grounded in the role of girls' resistance across social movements and geographies. The Stories of Girls' Resistance is a collection of over 150 stories from more than 90 countries around the world, in which each storyteller shares details of their girlhood, their allies and mentors, their resistance and hopes for the future, their dreams, and their friendships. It is important to note all storytellers were asked the same questions - none of which were about occupation. And yet in these six stories, the occupation is omnipresent throughout each of their stories, from the youngest storyteller at 13 to the oldest in her late 50's at the time the stories were collected, painting a clear picture of how occupation permeates every aspect of their lives: socially, politically, and economically. ***The stories in this collection are stories of survival, of nourishment and growth, of solidarity, and of dreams for freedom and liberation. Documenting these stories and amplifying them is critical in ensuring we keep alive their collective memory and centre their lives.***

In the first section, you will read a summary of each individual story, based on interviews documented in 2019. We then close by loosely weaving threads of the stories together to highlight what they collectively tell us about the lives of girls in Palestine. There is so much more that could be said and so many more connections that could be made - but stories are evidence and the truth lives within each of these stories.

JANUARY



JANNA

“ I believe I’m a person who is fighting for her right as a woman, fighting for her right as a girl, as a Palestinian, and I’m trying to include all of that in my resistance, in my activism. Because I believe we need to literally be free of everything and try to make our lives better.”

Living Under Occupation

My name is Janna and I am 13 years old. I became a journalist when I was 7 years old and I saw that there weren’t enough journalists covering the events happening in our village of Nabi Saleh.¹ I was born during the Israeli occupation. Demonstrations started when I was 3 years old, in 2009.

My cousin was martyred² when I was 4 years old and my uncle was martyred when I was 5 years old. Years passed and I thought about how I could express my feelings about everything that was happening around me to the world. I saw my friend’s blood on the street, my uncle’s blood in the mountains.

I wanted my voice as a young Palestinian girl living under occupation to reach the world.

To be forced to be older than my age is good because I can understand what is happening to me and what is happening in the world. I can send my message in a way that will affect other people. But it’s also bad because I am a child and I need to live my childhood. I feel pressured because of this occupation and therefore, I cannot live my childhood.

We are hoping the next generations will not have to live the childhood that we’re living right now: getting arrested at age 11 or being killed. Children are killed in front of us, they are traumatised, and we are not living like a child is supposed to live. That’s what we’re fighting for.

From Fear to Resistance

As a child, I was always afraid. Every Friday, there were weekly demonstrations and sometimes I would hold my mom’s hand and go with her. But, I was the most scared person ever, so scared that you might find me either in the bathroom or under my bed or under the table. Then one Friday my friend was killed right in front of me. The following Friday was my first time facing an Israeli soldier. I started screaming at them and telling them: “Why did you kill my friend? He was my friend and I miss him a lot.” That is when I broke this wall of fear, because I realised this is not the normal situation for any child. I was traumatised and couldn’t sleep. One year my uncle was killed in front of me and that made it even worse. You know, since then my mom and everyone would try to work on our mental health, because we were traumatised.

1. Nabi Saleh is a village in Palestine that has faced multiple invasions and violence by Israeli occupation forces. In 2023 alone, several children have been reportedly shot by Israeli forces, as documented by major news agencies.
2. Palestinians use the term martyr to describe anyone who has been killed by the Israeli occupation forces.



“ I believe that every single resistance is tied to every other act of resistance in some way. If we’re fighting social problems, we are also fighting political problems. I’m fighting a lot of social problems - patriarchy, inequality, and gender inequality.”

After that day, I would question, why are we living like this? Why aren’t we living in the normal situation that a child is supposed to be living in? Around 7 years old, I saw that my aunt and uncle were journalists and realised this would be an effective way to send a message. And, when I’m holding a camera, it would protect me as a person. I thought about how this could be a way for me to resist occupation and an effective way to send my message through videos. I was 7 and going to the demonstrations to report. After 2 months my mom found the reports on her phone and started posting them.

In Front of a Camera, Sharing The Truth

My first report was a weekly Friday demonstration. The soldiers were in front of us and we were on the main street singing. I took my mother’s phone and started recording myself. I was talking about what was happening in front of me, sharing my feelings when the soldiers were shooting. After my mom posted that report, we saw a lot of people sharing them and people who were saying - we can feel and know what you are feeling.

After that, I started reporting on a daily basis. Going to my school and finding a checkpoint, I would take my mom’s phone and start reporting. Any night raid, day raid or whatever, I would document it and send my message through the recording.

Fighting for my Freedom

I’m a person who is fighting for her right as a woman, fighting for her right as a girl, as a Palestinian, and I’m trying to include all of that in my resistance, in my activism. I believe we need to be free of everything

and try to make our lives better. I believe that came out of my mother being such a very strong person. My grandma had four children and then her husband was arrested for many years. My mom is an activist, she goes to demonstrations and she’s also the director of the women’s department and ministry of social development. Seeing all these strong people around me made me into a strong person wanting to fight for our rights.

I believe that every single resistance is tied to every other act of resistance in some way. If we’re fighting social problems, we are also fighting political problems. I’m fighting a lot of social problems - patriarchy, inequality, and gender inequality. I’m a feminist. I’m against occupation. I’m against settlements, I’m against anything that has to do with injustice. Anything that has to do with inequality. I believe that everyone should be equal, everyone should have justice, peace, and equality. That’s what I am fighting for. I’m fighting for my freedom as a girl and for my freedom as a Palestinian.

Hope Keeps me Going

I believe this generation is very educated about what’s happening, especially because of social media. It motivates me to continue what I’m doing because people are going to be next to me. Just even seeing the positive comments on my reporting gives me the energy to continue because people are really listening to what I’m saying. It fuels me to think of how we would live without occupation in a free Palestine. In a normal life as people, as humans, as Palestinians living as any other person is supposed to live, gives me this energy to continue what I’m doing.

“ Living in Palestine, we’re never in a safe place. I’m always worried about the people that I love or myself.”

I believe that we can resist in a lot of different ways - dancing, singing, playing, anything. The goal is serving your community or serving your homeland. I am passionate about filming and reporting and sending my message because my camera is my weapon that can protect me and send a message of truth to the world.

Occupation and Violence

This occupation is the number one thing that makes me angry. I want to live a normal childhood. The occupation, colonisation, and capitalism makes me angry. Especially for us as Palestinians, because you see how people are actually brainwashed. They don’t even believe in the right of existence for us as Palestinians and that makes me angry because it’s our land and we’re supposed to live here.

I was on a speaking tour in the United States and I had a speech with Marc Lamont-Hill. Suddenly out of nowhere this Zionist³ group came in and tried to hit us and they started screaming, holding those posters that said - “Free Israel” and a lot of very bad and racist things.

One of the things that makes me afraid is waking up on the side of gas canisters bumping near my window. Or an Israeli soldier raiding my house and having weapons on my head and attacking, threatening, intimidating, telling me to wake up, or that he is going to shoot me. I’m very afraid to lose anyone that I love because they

get arrested or killed. Living in Palestine, we’re never in a safe place. I’m always worried about the people that I love or myself.

Palestinian Pride, Palestinian Resistance

I have never been ashamed of my identity as a Palestinian and I’m very proud of it.

On the speaking tour, I spoke at the UN and congress, teaching them about Palestine. I spoke to Betty McCollum to advocate for her bill - *no way to treat a child*, which basically just calls for the ending of the US military aid for the Israeli military that detains Palestinian children. I was advocating for that bill and calling representatives to vote for her because it was something that was very important for us Palestinian children.

Resistance is not only political. You can resist in your school for anything, you can resist for any right that’s not provided for you. You can basically resist anything. Resistance is life, living in this type of society. I believe that fighting for yourself is fighting for all women. I’ve been raised on activism and on resistance, on standing up for my rights, standing up for everything. Every single day, I’m learning something new about the world. Learning something new to resist. Because we’ve got to change to achieve justice, peace, love, equality.

3. Zionism: “Historically, Zionism was a settler colonial political ideology and movement that emerged in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century with the aim of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine at a time when over 90% of the population was not Jewish. Today, the term Zionism describes a spectrum of political ideologies that have in common the support for the continued existence of the present-day State of Israel as a Jewish state.” As Jewish Voices for Peace describes: “Palestinian dispossession and occupation are by design. Zionism has meant profound trauma for generations, systematically separating Palestinians from their homes, land, and each other. Zionism, in practice, has resulted in massacres of Palestinian people, ancient villages and olive groves destroyed, families who live just a mile away from each other separated by checkpoints and walls, and children holding onto the keys of the homes from which their grandparents were forcibly exiled. In this context, a Zionist group is a group that follows Zionism.”

We're trying to not only fight for us, we're trying to fight against other occupations around the world. All the colonisation around the world, and all of the children who are suffering. **I couldn't fight for Palestine if I was alone. We all need to unite and put hand to hand to free Palestine. To make this world one of peace, love, equality and justice, we all have to work for it.**

Childhood, Freedom and Solidarity

Freedom itself. Just having freedom to be a child. Whenever I would go out with my friends to play soccer on the street, soldiers would come and raid the village and shoot gas canisters at us. We're not allowed to live a normal life, to have freedom. That's what was missing in our whole entire life - no freedom, justice, equality, no childhood.

I have met a lot of important women activists, for example Graca Mache, Rashida Tlaib, Betty McCollum and a lot of other important women that have inspired and made me want to continue and fight for my cause. What gives me hope is just thinking of freedom. Thinking of how we would live in a free Palestine with no occupation, no checkpoints, no killing, and no arrests. This gives me hope to continue.

Liberation in Palestine is going to the sea. I've only been once and I was only 7 years old. I can see the sea from the roof of my house. It is only 30 minutes from my house but I've only been to the sea once because of the apartheid wall, because of the checkpoints. ●

“*Liberation would be to go into my school without a checkpoint, to wake up without seeing the settlement, to have land and to not wake up to the sound of gas canisters. Just having freedom to do whatever I want, as a child, without anything standing in my way.*”

Everything is possible. Nothing is impossible.”





HAFFESA

HAFSA⁴

“*What gave me strength to continue my resistance is my sisters in prison, who used to tell me that they trust me and they believe in my ability to change and to resist. I feel so sad that I left them in the prison and I wish they were with me now... My family's support and space given to me was the main reason behind my resistance, and it gave me more confidence.*”

Settlements, Restrictions and Occupation

My childhood was affected by the reality of the occupation. From a very early age, the first thing I experienced was the checkpoints, settlements, restrictions, and occupation. On our way home, to Ramallah, I passed by two settlements and two checkpoints. When I was very young I played with my cousins and neighbour kids - a game called Soldiers and Arabs, where we would split into two groups, one attacking Palestinians and the other defending the land. The girls used to play the role of paramedic or help the boys when they got arrested by soldiers. My role was either a paramedic or a journalist.

Once we were playing together and the Israeli soldiers invaded the village. We were all scared and escaped to my uncle's house where we hid in the closet. The soldiers followed us and opened the closet so we all fell on the floor. We were about 10 kids, and my cousin started crying and asking the soldier not to kill us. This experience is unforgettable for me.

My father was detained several times when I was a child. I used to go with my mother to visit him and we were only allowed to see my father behind the fence. I remember how I used to touch his finger through the fence.

Generational Trauma, Survival, and Resistance

My story with resistance against occupation started when I was 7 years old. My grandmother lived with us and I used to sleep in her room because I was scared of bombs and bullets and it didn't have a window from the street. When I was 8 years old, my mother was shot while participating in a protest. I started going to the protests and watching other protesters, and then I started participating in each protest to call for an end to the occupation.

After being shot, my mother couldn't walk for 2 years. During that time I was responsible for the housework and preparing food for my brothers. I was used to this from an early age because of how frequently both of my parents were detained. My education was negatively impacted; I didn't want to go to school and leave my mother alone.

My grandmother used to tell me how the Israeli soldiers invaded our house and destroyed everything. She told me about her daughter who was killed by the soldiers and about my father being tortured in prison.⁵ They announced his death and had posters for him as a martyr everywhere in the village, and released him on the same day of his sister's funeral.

4. Name has been changed to Hafsa for their safety and security.

5. Since 1976, the United Nations reports that over 1 million Palestinians have been arrested by Israeli forces, which includes human rights defenders and activists.



At the age of 10, my cousin was killed by Israeli soldiers and died in front of me. My uncle was shot by the Israeli soldiers when he was helping a child who was arrested - trying to help the kid and take him from soldiers during a protest. They shot him and left him to bleed to death. My mother filmed her brother bleeding to death.

After the killing of all these people and witnessing all of that brutality of soldiers I started to get rid of the fear that was controlling me in my early childhood. I broke the wall of my fear, started wearing hatta⁶ and going out to the street in the middle of the shooting and clashes. I remember catching the bombs thrown by soldiers, and throwing them back again.

I had the strength to keep fighting and resisting the occupation with other girls around me including my mother, aunts, cousins and friends. My mother has been a great example for me and my father taught me how to control my fears. He taught me how to show only my strength in front of my enemy. When I got older I started to be more aware of the fact that this is not only about physical fight, it's also an ideological, political, and religious cause.

Police Violence and Impunity

The first time I directly confronted soldiers was when they arrested my 15 year old brother. I was 10 years old and my mother used to work with a human rights organisation as a journalist documenting violations of human rights. I saw my brother being arrested on her camera. I ran to the Israeli soldiers and started fighting them, asking them to leave my brother. I remember one of the journalists asked me "why are you fighting Jewish?" and I answered "I'm not fighting Jewish, but I'm fighting Zionism." I was aware of what I was doing even at the age of 10, as I used to hear a lot of things about the Palestinian struggle and suffering from my family members.

At the age of 16, I took the Tawjihi [the Secondary Education Certificate Examination] and I decided not to go to protests because I wanted to succeed in my school. However, I sometimes went out and threw stones at soldiers who were attacking people. Soldiers came to my house and wanted to search our house. I tried to stop them and I slapped a soldier. He didn't react because people were filming; he was afraid of doing something in front of the camera. ***That's why documentation is really important, to elevate our voices and to advocate for our cause worldwide.***

Israeli journalists started publishing my video slapping the soldier and using it against me. A few days after that incident, soldiers conducted a night raid on our house. I didn't realise that they were coming to arrest me. The soldiers called my name so I went to get my jacket and shoes. A woman soldier came to my room and prevented me from wearing my jacket, then she pulled my hair and grabbed me outside the house and put me in the military vehicle.

“ ***After the killing of all these people and witnessing all of that brutality of soldiers I started to get rid of the fear that was controlling me in my early childhood.***”

6. Hatta, also known as a Keffiyeh, is a traditional Palestinian scarf that symbolises resistance and liberation.

On my way to the police station soldiers were pulling my hair and making fun of me. When we arrived, they put me in a very small room, handcuffed, without allowing me to use the bathroom or drink from 4 am until 12 noon. I had a 3 hour interrogation where investigators cursed me and verbally abused me. Then I had four other interrogations that lasted for 6-7 hours.

During the interrogation all I said was “I have the right to remain silent” and asked to call a lawyer. My other family members had told me about their arrests so I had some knowledge. I asked them to bring my mother to the police station and after a while they brought her in but then interrogated her. She refused to sign the papers and was arrested; I saw her from a distance and she waved to me with her cuffed hands. They took me to a prison, where they put me with other young girls: one was 16 years old, arrested at the age of 14 and sentenced for 10 years, another was 15 years old and arrested at the age of 13. The women soldiers searched me naked, and then I went to the room with the girls. We started talking to each other and they asked me about what was happening outside the prison, about the newest songs, clothes... one said she liked my jeans and she wanted to have one as they are not allowed to wear jeans in the prison. Then soldiers called me and took me in a vehicle with other criminal prisoners. I remember them harassing me and saying bad words and sexual overtones. The chains were hitting me all the time, and this took us 4 hours.

The soldiers threatened to hurt my family and then arrested them because I didn't confess. I felt stressed and responsible. A few days later they arrested my cousin and brought her to my cell. I stayed in this prison for 8 months, and during that period studied for my exam. On the same day I had the science exam, I learned that my cousin was killed by Israeli soldiers and I had to appear in court. During the hearing, the judge wanted me to apologise for what I did. I told the judge “how can I apologise to the people who just killed my cousin and arrested my brother and shot my mother and...”, then they took me out of the court. I went back to the cell and tried to study.

Hope and Power

I have an Instagram account, through which I receive positive messages from girls from different countries, telling me that I inspired them, and I raised their awareness about the Palestinian cause. What gave me strength to continue my resistance is my sisters in prison, who used to tell me that they trust me and they believe in my ability to change and to resist. I feel so sad that I left them in the prison and I wish they were with me now. ●

“ I hope to use my degree in law to defend the rights of Palestinians in the international courts. I believe that the time has come to give young people the lead and give them the opportunity to take political positions.”





NOOR⁷

“ I describe myself as a resilient olive tree in this land with strength, dignity and courage. I consider myself stronger than anyone else and stronger than any man.”

Fleeing Occupation and Violence

My name is Noor. I am 23 years old and in my third year of Journalism at Birzeit University. I live in Deir ‘Ammar Refugee Camp with my father and mother, where I was born and raised.

Living in a refugee camp, and studying in a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school played a big role in me marrying young. My main goal as an adolescent girl was to get married and live outside the refugee camp because there was no freedom in the camps. I got married at the age of 17.

I met the man I married at 15 and he proposed to me at the age of 17. I wanted to marry him to travel to the US so that I will be free from all the restrictions imposed on me, including the restriction of movement. At that time, it was the second intifada⁸ and there was closure and invasions by Israeli soldiers and we had to stay alone in the refugee camp without our father. I was scared that soldiers would come to our home and no one would protect us. This made me feel that I did not live my childhood and I wanted to escape from it all. I wanted to find a place that is free of violence, problems and shouting. Back then, I thought that marriage was the start of achieving my dreams: travelling, learning another language, continuing my education in a well-known university, living in a nice place, having freedom, and choosing for myself.

Two days after my wedding I travelled to Jordan with my husband and stayed there for one week. At that time, I realised that my whole life has changed. Now I’m married, I left my family, and will be living in the US. The second day of our wedding we were in Amman, and that is the first time I experienced verbal and physical violence from my husband.

Finding Myself

A few years into marriage, I ended up feeling that I’m nothing. Not really married, not educated, not working, having no family, and isolated. During that time, a friend supported me and convinced me that my life is worth living and made me believe that I can change my life. I regained my self-confidence and my feeling of depression started to change. I decided that I want to get divorced because I wanted to end my suffering and pursue my dreams. I started studying Journalism because I want to be an influencer, and now I’m in my third year.

I’m not shy of sharing my story because I want other girls to learn from me. Many people tell me that I’m strong and some girls consider me to be a role model and many of my professors often tell me that they are proud of me. I love community work and I completed 400 hours of it since I started studying. I want to continue my education because I want my daughter to be proud of me when she gets older.

7. Name has been changed to Noor for their safety and security.

8. Intifada is a word that means “shaking off.” It is used to refer to resistance and uprising against oppression.

“ I wish that we will live in a peaceful world free of wars, because wars are the root cause of what girls face. I also wish that girls can choose to love, and that they would not be oppressed for choosing for themselves.”

Resilient Olive Tree

Now, I describe myself as a resilient olive tree in this land with strength, dignity and courage. I consider myself stronger than anyone else and stronger than any man. However, as a girl, I felt that I had no control or space. I didn't have the courage and strength like today.

Part of my girlhood was living in the intifada. During this time I was threatened all the time by bombing, invasions, and night raids. I was around 7 years old and the greatest challenge during this time for girls was seeing other children be killed. I still remember the scene of a killing that made me scared and intimidated all of the time. This made me want to be a journalist and a film producer. I want to produce a film about a girl who lives in a refugee camp and is strong and can resist. I also want to advocate for the rights of Palestinians, especially women who live under occupation while also being under a patriarchal society.

To me, resistance is responding to suffering by showing strength and resistance. It is my life in the refugee camp and in a conservative environment. It is continuing my education and being away from my daughter. It's going through checkpoints. Every day, I witness resistance in people who live under occupation and its measures on Palestinians.

My resistance started as spontaneous, but observing all the social issues, especially stereotypes against girls and early marriage, made me realise that my resistance needs to be organised. I started joining groups of activists and participating in activism events.

I'm currently part of the journalists' syndicates, and I'm involved in activism to support prisoners, especially journalists. Women need to be more aware of the social movements and be part of them. Women need to know more about their rights, their roles in leading social change and elevating the voices of people.

I also use social media to influence others. I have an Instagram account which I consider as a platform to convey my messages to other girls. My cousin told me that I am the only reason why she wants to continue her education. I try not to write on Instagram when I feel depressed, because what I want to spread is positive energy and hope.

Hope for the Future

People resist to live! Life is short and we shouldn't give up. We resist for liberation and freedom, and we resist to reach our goals and overcome our challenges.

My hope for the future is that girls will be able to choose for themselves - around marriage, education, and other aspects of their lives. I hope girls will have safety and enough space to express themselves, to have a proper environment, and to be able to go out to places they like, and wear what they like. ●



MARRIAM



MARIAM⁹

“*...the main cause I am defending is women’s rights, gender equality. I think this issue is not only an issue in Palestine, it’s worldwide. As women we are all connected to each other, we share causes, we share problems, we share experiences as women. This brings us together - demanding our rights, fighting for our liberation, social liberation, fighting to have our spaces, to participate, to be involved in public life. It’s worldwide, it’s not only in Palestine. Our struggle is shared in one way or another. The contexts are different but our main cause, our main goal is shared freedom and justice. All women in the world can work with collectively, show solidarity with each other, support each other. They can elevate the voices of each other. I believe that yes, collective work doesn’t only include the national level but also the international level - wider.”*

Occupation

I am 28 years old. I live in a village near Ramallah, where I was raised.

The big moment of my life as a girl in Palestine was the Second Intifada. We used to spend most of our time in front of the TV watching people die, watching people get injured, watching the bombings, and watching children get killed in protests and clashes. It was really hard, and we couldn’t sleep. We were crying all the time.

My older sister was very scared and used to have panic attacks because of fear. It was a really, really hard time. I was 10 years old when it started in 2000 and in 2006, the war in Gaza was disastrous. It affected everything in our lives - like my father losing his job. Then in 2008, he had to travel to the US and stayed for a long time to get his residency because he had no other choice. My mother had

to sell her wedding ring and her earrings to buy him a ticket. That was our last resort because we couldn’t afford the food we needed or anything we needed for school. It’s all interrelated. The political situation had a greater impact - and an impact on our social life. It’s why our family chose for us to get married.

Losing the Ability to Dream

It affected all my beliefs and it’s still here with me. When I was really young, 5 or 6 years old, I could imagine a peaceful world where children would have their spaces, and for their dream to come true. It was that easy for me to imagine, to build my dreams. I could imagine myself being an ambassador for something. My imagination didn’t have any limitations. That changed after I started seeing people get killed, when soldiers came with their vehicles and invaded the village, they banned everyone from moving outside their houses.

9. Name has been changed to Mariam for their safety and security.

“ **Resistance is trying to change others around you in a million different ways, but it’s your efforts to change something because you believe it must be changed.**”

One time, I was caught after curfew.¹⁰ My mother sent me to buy diapers for my brother. She thought that because I was a very young girl I wouldn’t be caught - or if I was, they wouldn’t do anything to me. I was caught by a soldier on my way to the shop and he pointed a gun to my head and was screaming in my face. I dropped everything I was holding, and I put both my hands on my head. I started screaming and crying and telling him ‘no, please don’t kill me.’ I was around ten years old.

My body was shaking. Maybe for three days I couldn’t hold anything in my hand. That is when I realised that even though I was a child, I could be killed at any time. There’s no safety, no security. Seeing kids killed by Israeli soldiers made me realise that there’s no justice in the world. We’re not protected, we don’t have security, we don’t have safety, and we cannot dream. When I used to dream of something, I would then think about being killed and then I stopped and thought ‘why am I doing this?’ I stopped dreaming because I might get killed at any time. Sometimes, I used to think like this and start crying because it felt like there was no future in this country. That changed my life.

Resistance

Resistance is not accepting what you are told to do, choosing for yourself and not allowing anyone else to choose for you. Resistance is saying no to the things you reject, that you think don’t make sense. Resistance is speaking up. And, because I didn’t have the space, the safety, and I needed to speak up and express myself, it wasn’t in my comfort zone.

Resistance is trying to change others around you in a million different ways, but it’s your efforts to change something because you believe it must be changed.

For example, even if my sister was not able to change, she used to resist a lot about not wanting to get married. During the rise of the Intifada, seeing people resist to defend their lands, to defend their kids - this is the concept of resistance that grew inside me. Resistance is to defend your rights, to say no to injustice. To have your own space.

I was questioning what was going on in Palestine and why we Palestinians have to go through all of these massacres. Why do we have to go through all these challenges, all this insecurity? Why do we have to go through war? And I was asking - no, it’s not fair, the world is unfair.

Believing in Change

This gave me courage to resist people around me, like when some people talk about girls and boys, from an early age and I would break all the silence and the fear I used to have. I’d start to argue with people - no, you’re wrong because this and this and this. I started to convince people that it’s based on nothing true, that it’s about stereotypes and violence and sexism. I used to also defend my sister when they wanted to have her get married.

10. Throughout decades, Israel occupation forces have utilised mandated curfews as a mechanism to exert further control, oppress, and abuse Palestinians.

“ **Solidarity means putting yourself in other people’s situation, feeling them, and giving them all the support you can give to defend their rights and to stand with them, to speak up, to elevate their voices.**”

From an early age, I believed that I had the internal power to change my life and the lives of others. I feel that strength, maybe the conflict I was raised in and all the challenges around me gave me an understanding that I’m the only one who can save my life. I’m the only one who can change my life.

Resistance wasn’t only about one incident, it was about my daily life and other girls’ lives around me.

My resistance has evolved with me, this feeling or need to rebel. It evolved with me throughout my life, day by day, incident by incident. It wasn’t a sudden thing that happened to me and I said no.

My resistance today is stronger, more evolved like a greater power. Because of the challenges I went through and my experiences. It made me believe that yes, I’m here now. When I go back to the memories from when I was a little kid and then I got married while I was still a kid. Seeing where I am now and what things I change in my life, what things I change in other people’s lives, it gives me power to keep resisting and stand with all girls who are going through similar experiences. It made me believe that working with others gives me greater power. I’ve realised that I need to be powerful to be able to empower other girls. I wanted to be a role model for other girls and prove to them that nothing is impossible. Change doesn’t happen suddenly, it’s a process.

In college, I started organising in big groups or movements with like-minded peers and I’d spend time with critical thinkers and people who are also rejecting things and wanting to make change. I

found out that there are a lot of people who share the same ideas as me and I began to work with them because this would make me stronger. I am now involved in many justice movements- human rights and women’s rights. I have been involved in different movements demanding legal reforms and demanding justice through women’s access to justice and ending violence against women.

Solidarity and Sisterhood

Solidarity means putting yourself in other people’s situation, feeling them, and giving them all the support you can give to defend their rights and to stand with them, to speak up, to elevate their voices.

My solidarity is with women who have gone through gender-based violence. Defending their rights, standing for their rights, doing advocacy campaigns to show solidarity and to mobilise other people to stand with her. First by raising people’s awareness about what’s going on. A big percentage of people still don’t believe that women suffer from gender-based violence and in reality, it’s in everyday life for most women.

It’s important to me that the international community knows what it feels to be a Palestinian woman and what experiences we have to go through only because of where we live and because we are women. Having solidarity from other people, not only Palestinians, but people from different nationalities is important. Having feedback from girls I have helped by breaking that wall of fear gives me a lot of strength.

Gender equality is not only an issue in Palestine, it's worldwide. As women we are all connected to each other, we share causes, we share problems, we share experiences. This brings us together, demanding our rights, fighting for our liberation, social liberation, fighting to have our spaces, to participate, to be involved in public life. This brings us together, our struggle is shared in one way or another. The contexts are different but our main cause, our main goal is shared.

All women in the world can work with each other, show solidarity with each other, and can support each other. They can elevate the voices of each other. Collective work does not only include the national level but also international level. I believe more now in sisterhood and solidarity with others. When women have solidarity with each other, they can do a lot. Unity of women is something that is a great power that can change the lives of women all over the world.

Two days ago, I received a message from a girl who lives in my village. She shared that she is thankful to me because in the times where she feels tired and that she can't do more, she just remembers me and how I've been through the same thing as her, and that she needs to keep going. This is the power of solidarity. When I see girls at a younger age and they tell me, you're a role model for me, it gives me confidence. Giving girls the confidence and the belief they need in themselves fuels me. I'm creating change every day. I'm changing other girls' lives, other women's lives.

Imagining the World I want to See

In the future, I hope women live in a world that is free of discrimination, free of violence, and where they are heard. Women will be representing their countries and engaged in politics and in economic, political, and public life. Women will be leading countries. My hope that my kids will not go through the same issues and stigmas I went through. ●

“ I hope the next generation will be greater advocates for equality and realise from an earlier age that work has to be done to change the world, to make it a better place to live in. My hope is that the social system and political system will be more supportive, and people will be more aware that they can defend their rights and that they have the tools they need to defend them.”



SAVING MIDDLE



משרד הבריאות
מחלקת רישום הלידה
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF A BIRTH
N 40170



SANDIE

“Resistance is who I am, it’s about everything I experienced and how I evolved by default. It’s something that I believe in both concept and practice. Since the moment I became aware of life and death, people and relationships, and everything in between, I experienced injustice. I can see the power imbalance in the society where men are dominating almost everything and telling women what to wear, what to do, what to believe, etc. Besides this patriarchal oppression, I also experience colonial oppression, which perpetuates the patriarchy further. Ultimately, experiencing both kinds of oppression on a systematic level from a very early age has developed my understanding that resistance is part of what I am.”

The place I call home has been a question for me since I became aware of life. As Palestinians, girls, young women, students, or anything else throughout our lives, we’ve been asked this question at school, at camps, and other places. I heard many people say it’s where they belong, it’s where they are comfortable, and where their family is. To tell you the truth, I don’t feel like I’m ready enough to define what home is. I know for a fact that Palestine is where I feel the happiest, but not the safest. It’s the place I enjoy the most, where all my beautiful memories and loved ones are, although life in Palestine is full of contradictions. As a child, my mother was my home. She passed away when I was 14. Life was very ordinary for me as a girl. I grew up in an average working-class family where both my parents had an interest in human rights and the politics of Palestine to a very normal extent to the life of any Palestinian. Neither of them was a member of any political party or ever imprisoned, and they didn’t hold revolutionary politics for liberation. But the social is always political and that’s when things became slightly too confusing for us - me and my siblings as children.

I used to go to school and in the evenings, do my homework. On the weekends, we had extracurricular activities like sports, music, drama and theatre. This

nurtured my love for culture and arts. And it was quite sudden when I stopped doing all of this. One day I felt like I stopped being a girl because I felt too much responsibility was being thrown at me, not voluntarily.

What’s best about being me is that I don’t belong anywhere, and I belong everywhere. I feel that I’m a little bit of everything. That’s liberating because it’s important that you feel a sense of belonging to a certain group, but it’s even more liberating if you see that you have too much in common with everyone in the sense that you don’t need to be just one shade of colour.

My ultimate wish in life is for Palestine to be free. Over the past few years, I have always hoped to start my initiative, that was at the top of my list of dreams. But because we are talking about being born and raised and active in Palestine, I think it would be more important that I formulate my dream to include a free Palestine as well, because unless Palestine is free, everything we do and dream of will continue to be overwhelming, in light of the settler colonial, apartheid, racist, military apparatus controlling every aspect of our lives. With the constant killing, mass arrest, displacement, surveillance, and bombing, it would be very unfair or unrealistically,

“After all of this, I can't tell you that I remained a girl. Although I am so much fun, and I am very young in spirit, I'm not sure if I fully experienced girlhood or adolescence.”

and certainly not durable to keep thinking on the personal individual level only, because the dreams and hopes would never be fully achieved unless there's a sustaining environment that can maintain our dreams. At least a sense of peace. It can be in the sense of the absence of war but beyond it as well.

I had a very normal childhood until my mother was diagnosed with cancer when I was 13. It happened very quickly - she was hospitalised for a normal surgery, then she didn't get better and kept getting worse, and by the time we realised it was cancer, it was late. Her family did not want to take no for an answer so they moved her to the States to get treatment. When my mother got back two months later, she was unable to talk or hear or see things clearly. My youngest sister was 6 then and became more of my daughter than my sister. That was already too much for us to handle. Her illness broke the dynamics of our family, and then she passed away.

Her death coincided with the second Intifada. This was agonising because, during the time that my mother was sent home for her last days with us, there was “the curfew.” It was 2002. There was the apartheid wall, and there were curfews and invasions. We were not politically aware that violations from the occupation could mount to this level. We were not prepared. I was barely 14 and suddenly, there were tanks in the streets and soldiers in our home refusing to leave and asking us what school we go to and if we wanted to play ball with them; very absurd questions. I remember that one night, the bombing started, and we had to look for the safest spots in our house. It was a very small corridor, so we put blankets on the floor and slept on the floor, eight people in one small, tiny corridor because it was the safest - away from windows and exposed

areas. We used to sleep and wake up to gunfire. One day, we saw an Italian journalist being shot. That was surreal because my siblings and the children in our neighbourhood were all looking through the windows, and we could not understand what was happening. There was a dead man shot in the chest and blood all around him. Women started to clean the streets to wash his blood with water scented with lavender. My memories of the violence back then are sometimes foggy, but I know whatever we went through at that time and the residue of those days that continue to traumatise and trigger me have transformed who I was and the perspective I hold about almost everything.

One day we were having a ballet class, and the next day we could not leave the house. There were certain hours we were allowed to leave home, which was only for people to get food and basic supplies. After a few hour window, we were asked to go back home and no one was supposed to go out in the street. Also, the streets were always full of tanks. One day, I was with my aunt getting the groceries and the curfew ended without notice. It was supposed to be for three hours and after the second hour, for no specific reason, they announced that we needed to get back home. I was literally a few metres away from home, but the tank was in front of me and there was no way in hell that I would cross the street to get home. So I laid down on the floor in a very tiny alley and I could not cry - I was afraid to cry because I knew that I could not fall apart at this moment. I needed to pull myself together. I needed to stay strong; I needed to hold my breath until I had a chance to get home. **After all of this, I can't tell you that I remained a girl. Although I am so much fun, and I am very young in spirit, I'm not sure if I fully experienced girlhood or adolescence.**



My mother was the most influential person in my life as a girl because she gave me all of my values and principles. She instilled them into my understanding and my system of beliefs and mindset before I realised it. My dad was also my most faithful supporter and ally because he is a feminist. He never told me that there are things I can or cannot do. He never said you are not allowed to ride the bicycle or you are not allowed to laugh loudly. He would support whatever I did. When I started working to support my family after my mother's passing, my dad was not against it. My parents were different from other parents. Our own experiences shape what we think and believe, and because my dad was engaged in politics and my mom in human rights, the nature of their experiences and the kind of work they did influenced how they thought. My mother's pursuit of purpose beyond the self is also something I inherited from her, and that has been integral to my quest to find belonging, fulfilment, and political commitment.

Coming into Resistance

It is very hard to define resistance. Resistance is who I am, it's about everything I experienced and how I evolved by default. It's something that I believe in both concept and practice. Since the moment I became aware of life and death, people and relationships, and everything in between, I experienced injustice. I can see the power imbalance in the society where men are dominating almost everything and telling women what to wear, what to do, what to believe, etc. Besides this patriarchal oppression, I also experience colonial oppression, which perpetuates the patriarchy further. Ultimately, experiencing both kinds of oppression on a systematic level from a very early age has developed my understanding that resistance is part of what I am. I naturally started doing this without knowing that it is called resistance, and it started to grow and move from one place to another, taking different structured forms. It became a little bit collective.

My first most traumatising encounters with patriarchy and colonisation were during the times of my mother's passing and the second Intifada. Almost a decade later, other significant assaults on Palestinians in Gaza, during the 2012 and 2014, further influenced my resistance journey. This, of course, doesn't mean that there was ever peace or safety between these big milestones. On the contrary, the occupation has never spared a moment without committing crimes against humanity in all possible ways. I could see the imbalance of power on different levels. I was hopeless but at the same time, I wanted to do something. Experiencing firsthand the atrocities, war crimes, and systematic oppression in the West Bank, and secondhand in Gaza, Jerusalem and occupied 48 has always been painful. As a Palestinian, I think most people feel this way. Yet we always choose to carry hope and each other as a prerequisite to live a life of dignity despite the reality of violence. Apartheid is dominating every aspect of our lives. Even people from South Africa declared that apartheid in Palestine is ten times worse. If I need to just go to the south of Ramallah, which is no more than fifteen minutes away, it can take up to one and a half hours of driving because of the checkpoints, the closure in routings and the segregation in which routes are allowed for Israelis versus Palestinians. With the occupation penetrating every aspect of our daily life - I cannot even describe what life looks like for political prisoners, especially women and children prisoners who are treated with violence, humiliation, and constant dehumanisation. Everything the colonial apparatus puts in place is designed to explicitly displace us from our land, annihilate our existence and heritage, but also obliterate our right to exercise our resistance - when we resist, the least we do is kill the arrogance and audacity of the occupation to dehumanise us and control our present and future, while also tainting the narrative around our past and history.

“ **What we are doing as people is linked to our basic need and right to survive the violence of settlement expansion, land and resources theft, mass incarceration, and killing in its variety of shapes.**”

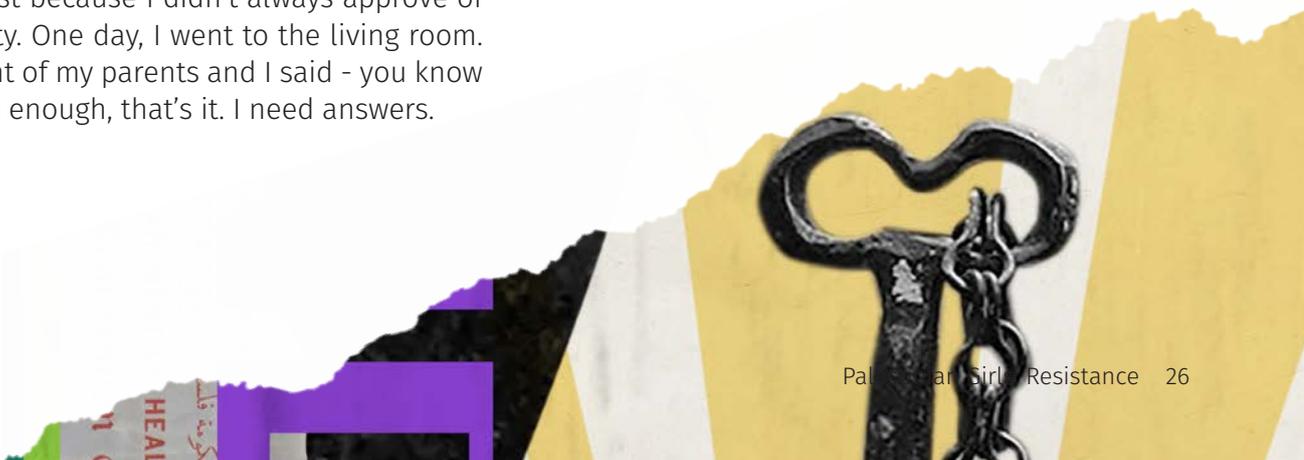
The occupation is not an act of a moment, it is the result of decades of exploitation, extraction, and erasure. The Zionist project aims at replacing the Indigenous nation of Palestinians with another nation based on Jewish supremacy, another identity, culture, language, and homes. **What we are doing as people is linked to our basic need and right to survive the violence of settlement expansion, land and resources theft, mass incarceration, and killing in its variety of shapes.** We defend our own narrative, we reclaim our right to put it out in the world in our voices, and we refuse that our sense of resistance is hijacked and delegitimised by Western theories and frameworks. I refuse that they dictate how and when we fight against oppression and the tyranny of the oppressor. I also refuse that they provide a manual for what they consider a legitimate resistance, calling anything outside their white spectrum as demonised, barbaric, terrorist, or else. We have trusted international law for many years, or at least hoped it would bring justice to Palestinians, only to realise its role has been lobbied and undermined. We don't trust mechanisms of international justice because we bore witness, over and over again, to its double standards and the profitability of crises and wars that the imperial powers behind it enjoy. My understanding of resistance today is a slightly different to that when I was a girl.

My first act of resistance was when I said no to something, which got me grounded. At the time, I argued about everything that didn't convince me, I always needed answers to questions especially when I wanted to understand why I was not allowed to do certain things. My whole family used to say I'm rebellious- just because I didn't always approve of adult authority. One day, I went to the living room. I stood in front of my parents and I said - you know what, I've had enough, that's it. I need answers.

Politically, my first act of resistance was going to a demonstration. I was 15 and I went without telling anyone. There was so much gas and I couldn't breathe. I was afraid when I went back home that if I said so, I would be blamed and told I shouldn't have gone and put myself in danger. At that age, a lot was happening in Palestine. But, I wasn't fully aware of the name of things, why they happen, how we can resist them, etc. Especially that the colonial establishment was going above and beyond to keep Palestinians geo-politically fragmented. I only managed to understand it all when I grew up and started to read and listen to the news with a critical and analytical perspective. Being around people was key for my activist identity to form and sustain.

Solidarity

During my girlhood, I had some peers who were not my friends, they were barely acquaintances, but then I found that I have shared values with them. I met them through different activities, especially at a cultural level, and then I found that we politically have so much in common, that our feminism has so much in common and that we could talk and discuss things for hours. That brought joy to my life and was a breeze amid all of the chaos that was happening. They were my allies because I was able to talk to people about what really mattered to me, and we were able to organise together through a shared purpose.



“**At first, my resistance was spontaneous and in many ways imposed on me. It’s not that I started doing things because I wanted to but because I found myself in front of a tank and because I found myself with three siblings and social norms that don’t support women and girls.**”

At first, my resistance was spontaneous and in many ways imposed on me. It’s not that I started doing things because I wanted to but because I found myself in front of a tank and because I found myself with three siblings and social norms that don’t support women and girls. I have been fighting since I was 15 to earn a living and go to university, to help my sister do her homework and then wake up at 5 in the morning to make sandwiches for the kids to go to school. I was a mother, I was a father, and I was everything in between. This transformed me. My resistance continued to grow with me, it became my characteristics as an individual and I started to define myself by the form of resistance that I could carry with me. Then it became part of who I am - an indispensable part and it’s something that I cannot compromise now.

My resistance sustained because I started reading about politics and liberation both in Palestine and across the globe, connecting with people, joining different groups, and this led me to believe that I cannot be doing this on my own. As much as it’s part of me and how I define myself, it’s also draining and exhausting. A person needs a sense of belonging to a group and a community so they can carry on with their autonomy and continue to nourish and evolve as people. That’s when I started to think that I needed to talk about this and I needed to be part of a larger group that maintains a historical conscience about the status of resistance. Because everything that I started doing when I was a girl under resistance was in reaction to a specific action. And then I learned when I grew up that for my resistance to be maintained and sustained it needs to fit into a frame where a collective resistance and a collective memory and a collective narrative come all together to fight extremism of colonial oppression and patriarchy.

As a woman, growing up made me realise that social repression only got worse. The intersection of capitalism and patriarchy still plays out in every aspect of our education, health, access to opportunities, workplace, etc. It became even more obvious to me

that this injustice is systematic and structured to maintain the status quo. I’m thinking about the killing on the background of honour, for example. And the exclusion of young women from political decision-making positions, income inequalities and inequalities throughout the workplace. The fragility and lack of a legal system in Palestine that perpetuates violence against women. Class and patriarchy have always guarded colonialism and capitalism.

In 2017, I was at the Human Rights Council advocating for women’s rights in Gaza and demanding the end of the blockade. There was the president of an Israeli government-backed NGO that is tracking what every single human rights or women’s rights organisation is doing in Palestine. The president was at this meeting and recorded a video of my speech and then he approached me and asked which panel I would be a speaker on and I told him. He made a very stupid comment during the panel and everyone in the room started speaking at once, and it was chaotic. He started screaming at me and the audience was people that were coming from different nationalities and represented different parts of the international civil society and government community. Nobody stopped him from screaming. I looked for security officers, but there were none. This was an example of how systematic attacks and pushbacks can have a different face on a more systematic level. The more your resistance takes different forms of collectivity and political clarity, the more we expect to receive pushback and aggression.

I’m grateful for being part of multiple coalitions and feminist groups. It allows an opportunity to better understand what systems of oppression impact people in other corners of the globe, how these systems play out in their lives, how feminist activists have been resisting, and what we can learn from each other. What can work against us the most is that we fail to learn from each other’s struggles and therefore remain disconnected in the ways the systems of oppression are trying to keep us fragmented.

When we talk about the transnational sense of relatedness, collectiveness, belonging and autonomy we're talking about solidarity. When I think about internal solidarity in Palestine, for example, we as activists have so many times shown solidarity with the prisoners and the people of Gaza during oppression and wars. But again - to be politically correct, I think there are too many times when we apply the word "solidarity" in a sense that is not really appropriate and adequate. Sometimes I feel that when you say - I'm in solidarity with a group of people or a name, that you are distancing yourself from this group because if you actually feel that you are a part of the group, you don't feel solidarity with yourself. I am a big supporter of solidarity actions and movements, I hold this question. If we talk about a global justice movement and solidarity and us being the last occupied people, I think we can learn from different struggles in the liberation experience. We study South Africa and how we can understand their experiences and apply their lessons to our own experiences. If you only self-immure in your own oppression, you will never be able to see beyond it and how it is impacted or impacts other kinds of struggles around the world.

On a personal level, my activism has inspired people who know me closely. For example, one of my cousins is interested in learning more about how we, as political feminists, challenge the patriarchy and demand redress on the legislative line. But at the same time, she is always fond of how I speak about our resistance, our struggle, our aspiration for freedom and liberation from the occupation. I would like to think that I inspire other people to look at things with critique and political clarity, to be less afraid of resistance and activism, and to help them understand that it is an intrinsic right, and this is a

very lawful and legitimate right. Because I can tell you that some people are afraid of politics, they are afraid of being activists, they are afraid of exploring the means of their resistance. It's easier that we just choose not to talk about it and live with the status quo and just get through the day, buying into what the system sells and giving in to the privilege of normalising tyranny.

To Achieve a Decent, Justice-based, and Durable Safety and Freedom, the Occupation Must End

Israel must be held accountable for their crimes against humanity, and Palestinians need to be offered reparations.

My hope is to get some rest, at least for a while. My hope is that this all will end. That we are free. Although the occupation is very entrenched in every aspect of our lives, I know it will end one day. I just believe it with my whole heart. When we are free, we will also be able to address internal issues and achieve freedom.

The settler colonial project must end. It will end. This is my ultimate hope in life, to live in peace. **A durable, just peace. Many generations have never known what life looks and feels like beyond the realities of genocide, oppression, and violence.** Personally, I hope my generation and the ones before us find the space to heal and recover, and preserve our collective memory. We will continue to hold with compassion and pride the wisdom and resilience of our ancestors and find our way through. ●

“ *A durable, just peace. Many generations have never known what life looks and feels like beyond the realities of genocide, oppression, and violence.* ”





AISHA¹¹

“*Solidarity eliminates geographical boundaries; it encapsulates the essence of humanity. When I stand in solidarity with women in Venezuela or Yemen, I affirm our shared humanity, and women feel they are not alone. This solidarity provides us with a source of strength.*”

The Occupation of My Homeland

When I was a teenager, my homeland represented a time when my direction in life was towards independence. Homeland was the land of Palestine, the circle of safety in this land, the air, the sea, the beauty, the orange trees. I grew up in a small village called Inab. It is not far from the sea, just seven minutes away by car. The homeland represents where the people live with love, respect, and human rights. Homeland is the stories that my grandfather shared with us, stories from Haifa, from Yaffa, the sea in Palestine. The land that has four seasons, the land that has equality and love and a country where all religions live.

All of this was tied to Palestine’s history before the Israeli Zionist occupation. Today it’s about the people who come together, united by their shared respect for human rights and equality. Art, geography, and history all make up a painting that represents my identity as a free woman, my identity as a woman looking to make her dream of complete freedom for all come true.

As a girl, I was revolutionary. I played like a boy. I played sports, I played with boys, football, Jews and Palestinians, and would play with toy guns, all of this reflected the reality we existed in as Palestinians after the Nakba and the 1967 war. They called me

the boy Hassan or the revolutionary girl. I entered adolescence, some would call me intelligent and others would consider me a dangerous girl that should be married off. Despite that, I continued to look for freedom and tried to practise it at every stage.

When I was young it made me happy to walk in the farmland in the morning and smell the orange trees. My friends and I would eat lemons and salt and run and chase the sunlight. I felt very happy showing off my knowledge in school because I had read books that were beyond our age about women in Islam. This gave me a reputation at school as a leader. I was happy when I wrote the first “The Wall” magazine when I was 14 years old at school. I was happy to visit my brother, he was detained for the first time after many months and was tortured. I felt happy when my mom kicked out the first family that tried to come to ask for me to marry their son when I was 13 years old, she told them: “I don’t have girls for marriage, I have girls to pursue their education.”

I experienced happiness that was tied to nature, the sunrise that brought a new day, the hawks in the mountains, the almond trees, our house, and stealing a cucumber from our neighbour’s garden. They were innocent sources of happiness and childhood freedoms. After I hit puberty, my childhood ended. It built a division between my childhood dreams and my new reality.

11.Name has been changed to Aisha for their safety and security.

“ *The trees dried up and the scent of the orange blossom disappeared and the voices of the Palestinians drowned with them. This really saddened me.*”

What made me angry was the discrimination I faced from my family at home based on my gender. My brother could stay out late, but I couldn't, so I'd ask why. My brother was allowed to participate in extracurricular activities after school and I had to be home right after classes ended. He was able to develop these extra skills and even receive tutoring for subjects outside the curriculum. I had to secretly participate in the theatre club at school and was discovered by my family when they broadcast our performance on TV.

I was angry when the Israeli soldiers exported Palestinian water and closed the channels from reaching our villages, and prevented the digging of new wells. The wells that sourced the orange trees near our house dried up and I watched the orange trees die in front of me. Water became very expensive. When you dry up a well, to the farmers, it is like killing one of their family members, their son. ***The trees dried up and the scent of the orange blossom disappeared and the voices of the Palestinians drowned with them.*** This really saddened me.

Losing My Childhood

My girlhood ended when I was 14 years old. At that time, many things happened. My dad worked in another city and I had more freedom to hang out with friends after school and participate in afterschool activities. My teachers liked me because I was a good student and active around the school. I enjoyed staying late at the library reading about history, freedom and politics. I played sports, I liked theatre and I acted in a play about human rights.

I was afraid of the consequences of the occupation, things that might harm my safety or security, of being searched, being stopped, and experiencing violence. I was afraid of rape because that was the worst thing in our society, and I always heard bad stories. What if a man touched you, you might get pregnant. My friends and I were warned against walking in the farmlands, and to stay away from men in the nearby refugee camp. Fear was present. At the same time, there were no rights for women to talk about rape, so nobody could solve this problem or any incident that may have come up. People covered these stories up.

I was afraid of being arrested by Israeli soldiers. Once, they took me and interrogated me because I wrote The Wall magazine. I was scared that I would be imprisoned, and that my family would keep me from going back to school out of fear. One day Israeli soldiers took me and my family and all the neighbours. They put us in buses and we saw many bodies on the street. They kept us for 48 hours on vacant farmland near the city of Nablus and returned us back to our homes. I will never forget that day, I was really scared. All the adults around me were crying and screaming. It was the same fear of 1967. After 40 years, I read an article about this that said they were meant to uproot us and complete this forced evacuation, but he refused to follow orders, he was an Israeli general and ended up defecting. That's why we were able to go back home. It was so scary, my father wasn't with us, he was working in Jerusalem. We were afraid we would never be able to go back home and that we would be forced to live in camps.





“ ***I still feel like I am the same girl with the same energy and depth to my dreams which I still seek, and that is to realise, to taste freedom in every moment: in the way I express myself and in the way I resist.***”

When I was an adolescent, my energy was occupied with learning. I started acting in the theatre, I read literature from all over the world. Our neighbours had relatives from Yafa and they'd read the Ittihad newspaper to us. I used to read books and poems by Mahmud Darwish, Emili Tuma. This made my teenage years pass with less pain.

I was part of a student movement which also added to my experience. ***I still feel like I am the same girl with the same energy and depth to my dreams which I still seek, and that is to realise, to taste freedom in every moment: in the way I express myself and in the way I resist.*** I am still a girl even if I'm 60 years old, a girl who wishes for freedom, one who is happy to hear the birds singing, poetry, and children smiling, and empathises with others' sadness. This is exhausting for my body physically, but mentally, it is a positive.

Finding Support and Solidarity in an Intergenerational Group of Girls and Women

During the teenage years, friends were sacred. Keeping secrets that we couldn't discuss in front of our parents or elders. There was a space of freedom and peace and warmth, a feeling that you weren't alone. Even if you grew up in a household with ten family members it doesn't mean you'd feel safe or at peace or that you had any space to be. With friends, that space exists, you share experiences, you learn from one another, you share plots and tactics, you have an understanding, and you find acceptance. We could talk about our feelings. If I liked a boy, even

if in fantasy, there would be no way to tell anyone, not my teachers or my mother. The only person or people I could tell were my friends. Back then, we didn't have cell phones. I remember I helped one friend when she wanted to see her boyfriend, I walked behind them because if anybody saw them they'd think she was talking to me and not him. That was one of our tactics.

My mom always supported me, she pushed me to study. She was also there for my siblings. She protected me from early marriage, if she hadn't I wouldn't have been able to complete my studies or go to university. None would have been a reality.

My grandmother also supported me. She was strong and beautiful, a widow from a young age. Each of my grandmother's friends was a storyteller, they'd come together and talk about their feelings, their experiences, their dreams. Their stories were so detailed, many of them about things they witnessed. They talked about the homeland with sorrow and tears then they'd change to fictional stories. This painted a picture for me of women: women were smarter than men, women were wiser, women were patient, women were creative, women were more capable than men; if they were pleasant and asked for something with a good word or two they could accomplish anything. For me, I saw women participate in farming in our village, women used to dance in all the parties, weddings and events. Women were free to be present in these events with men. I always wondered if I could ever be so strong. They loved to laugh and joke and share stories, being with them was like watching a movie.

“ *As a Palestinian occupied woman, my resistance is tied to gaining my freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom to wear what I want, freedom to political expression, freedom to my own life choices.*”

Resistance is Tied to a Fundamental Right for Freedom

As a Palestinian occupied woman, my resistance is tied to gaining my freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom to wear what I want, freedom to political expression, freedom to my own life choices. The result of our traditional family units, patriarchy, religion influence, all of these things push you to strive for freedom, to be yourself, to pursue freedom as something you can attain as readily as oxygen. This is very difficult for a girl, a teenager to be faced by the challenges of occupation, of patriarchy, you find yourself asking the question: “to be or not to be”. So you are forced to fight, so that you can be or you either die slowly. If you don’t fight in this space you are vulnerable to depression, sadness, suicidal thoughts, all of these things would hurt you in this environment unless you insist on fighting for your freedom.

My first act of resistance was when I told my grandfather that I refused to wear a veil. I also resisted when my family saw that I was in a play at school on the tv and my mom wanted me to leave the theatre group.

I resisted Israeli soldiers. A soldier pushed me away from the gate when we were visiting the prison. I don’t know where I found the courage but I stepped toward the gate. They threw tear gas at us and I refused to budge. Everyone else ran away. It made me sick but I had refused to move.

When I finished high school, my dad registered me at the institute (college) instead of university. I felt that this was a huge discrimination because my brothers went to university. My father was a simple man, a farmer and he convinced my mother. I told him I didn’t want to go, I cried, I stopped eating. My dad ignored me. Then he took me to the students’ dorms, it was like he put me in prison. At the dorms, no one can go outside without permission from the administration. I was 18 years old, I had a dream to be free and I wanted to help women and work on supporting women’s rights and freedoms. I stayed two days and I talked with the manager and told him I lost my ID and they couldn’t keep me there in case the authorities came to take a roll call. I packed all my things and took a taxi home. I cried and refused to be treated differently than my brothers. My mother stood by me and said if it’s a financial issue, she will sell her gold and register for me. My dad said I needed to get married and my mother refused and I screamed: I hate men! I hate men! I want to study! I want to go to university and finish my studies! My mother took me to the registrar at the University of Jordan. I don’t know how she sold her gold but I was able to go to university, I was still a girl, 18 years old.

My mom of course worried that I might face interrogation or intimidation or threats against me. Both my parents were worried but they also became proud because I was doing so well at school, I was a leader. I volunteered my time to various causes, and I was in the theatre group. The thing that impacted me the most was reading the revolutionary feminist works of Nawal Al-Sadaawi, Salwa Hajab and Fatma Al Magnisi, these thought leaders were closed off from so many people, it was hard for many of my generation to access their work.

“ **Solidarity cancels geographical borders, it strengthens humanity and makes women feel that they are not alone.**”

Solidarity and Forming our Collective Resistance

It was necessary to organise collectively. For example, once we discovered that there was no quota in place to ensure women’s political representation in 2002/2003 we had to form a national effort made up of women’s groups (educational, political, social) to put pressure on the government to change the law. Based on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, there has to be international, national, state and community efforts to ensure that women’s participation is present at all levels of decision-making.

Solidarity cancels geographical borders, it strengthens humanity and makes women feel that they are not alone.

The time period that my generation grew up in, there was a revolutionary spirit and so many examples of women and movements around us that encouraged us to push and demand freedom. So much was happening around the world that it felt like we were all working in solidarity with each other. My campus engagements involved advocating for women’s rights and building a revolutionary movement spanning various social and economic levels. I collaborated with women of all ages, engaging in numerous activities that significantly influenced the first Intifada, with thousands of women participating.

Solidarity is a crucial value in achieving justice, as it entails standing for the victory of the victim. Those who demonstrate solidarity do not merely offer sympathy to the oppressed side; rather, they

embody conviction, uphold values, and recognise their responsibility towards justice. Practising solidarity not only deepens my own humanity but also supports the humanity of others. Solidarity eliminates geographical boundaries; it encapsulates the essence of humanity. When I stand in solidarity with women in Venezuela or Yemen, I affirm our shared humanity, and women feel they are not alone. This solidarity provides us with a source of strength.

Our Collective Dream for Freedom

I believe in the right of freedom, of dignity, of equality. I am still running behind my dream. I learned a lot from women’s experiences, from girls, teenagers and women working in various sectors. Every small organisation, every community group, every workers union, every students union in high schools and universities, every one of these initiatives produce leaders. The biggest achievement is reviving the trust in organising and leaving behind the culture of individualism that is the propaganda of neoliberalism. The return of collective work for liberation is so important. This occupation is racist, it’s patriarchal, and it is oppressive. I am still dreaming and working for the freedom of women around the world and women in Palestine.

During the protests of the first Intifada, my leg was injured. I had to go into hiding even though I feared I might bleed to death. It was very scary because the house and the neighbourhood was being watched. You couldn’t even make a phone call. The use of dogs to search us was scary. There were so many instances of fear and horror. But we had to persist, for our dreams, our collective dream for freedom. That’s what kept us going, it’s light and warmth.

Prison was always a big threat, it was scary. That you might be tortured. When I was interrogated at 13 years old, it was a huge disaster for my father. They even advised my father that I should be married off because I was so strong. The patriarchy in this case helps further the goals of occupation.

As a girl I would tell myself that I was lucky because I had so many sources of support, poetry from Mahmud Darwish, novels from Tolstoy, and Brecht, and Nawal Al Saadawi. I have support from my family, wise women in my family who helped me face barriers. And that there is a freedom movement in my country, a movement of women against the occupation, against discrimination against enslavement. I felt lucky because I can dream and keep pursuing my dream.

I believe the resistance against Israel is how to get freedom, justice, equality and prosperity. In 1976, we started an organisation focused on education because most women were married at 13 or 14 years old. Most of them didn't finish school. We decided to open a school for these women in the afternoons to teach them because we can't get our freedom without education. We prepared a speech on a topic every week and we talked about the Israeli occupation then we opened many charitable societies and built revolutionary movements. In the summer I worked in the cigarette factory. Every month we arranged women's marches against the Israeli aggression after the settlements in 1976. I am always looking for freedom to see all people happy. When I was 14 years old at a rally in March, I was beaten in my leg and couldn't get treatment because I could be caught and imprisoned if they found out. It was a very painful and sad time. A group of Israeli men came to my village and dried up all the wells. ●

“ What I want and what every Palestinian woman wants is her right to freedom as any human being that has been struggling for over 70 years. We need solidarity and support from all over the world, and we demand that all the government agencies and international organisations hold Israel accountable for its crimes during the occupation. Palestinian people have the right to self-determination.”





GIRLS LIVING UNDER OCCUPATION

As these stories expose, daily life for Palestinians living under occupation is oppressive and bleak: simple daily tasks are made difficult by hundreds of road blocks, check points and Israeli-only roads. [A physical wall spanning 700 km in length and built on Palestinian lands further marks this separation, ripping families apart, farmers from their farmland and resources, further shattering the Palestinian economy.](#) ***These stories clearly demonstrate how living under occupation impacts every aspect of life, underpins every decision made, is woven into how children play, what they fear, and what they dream about.***

“My childhood was affected by the reality of the occupation. From a very early age, the first thing I experienced was the Israeli checkpoints, settlements, restrictions, and occupation. On our way home, to Ramallah, I passed by two settlements and two checkpoints. When I was very young I played with my cousins and neighbour kids - a game called Soldiers and Arabs, where we would split into two groups, one attacking Palestinians and the other defending the land. The girls used to play the role of paramedic or help the boys when they got arrested by soldiers. My role was either a paramedic or a journalist.” – Hafsa

“Freedom itself. Just having freedom to be a child. Whenever I would go out with my friends to play soccer on the street, soldiers would come and raid the village and shoot gas canisters at us. We’re not allowed to live a normal life, to have freedom. That’s what was missing in our whole entire life - no freedom, justice, equality, no childhood.” – Janna

“Seeing other kids getting killed. I still remember the scene of killing Mohammad Dorra and that made me scared and intimidated all the time.” – Noor

“My cousin was martyred when I was 4 years old and my uncle was martyred when I was 5 years old. Years passed and I thought about how I could express my feelings about everything that was happening around me to the world. I saw my friend’s blood on the street, my uncle’s blood in the mountains. I wanted my voice as a young Palestinian girl living under occupation to reach the world.” – Janna

Because of the unique moment in their lives- their age, gender, and other identities in addition to being Palestinian- girls suffer distinct and devastating impacts of occupation and conflict. Their stories highlight the constant fear and threat to their lives and their bodies, death of loved ones, trauma and the loss of safety and childhood. Girls experience the dual oppressions of occupation and patriarchy. As Aisha, one of the storytellers from this collection, expressed: “patriarchy in many ways helps further the goals of occupation”.

“Prison was always a big threat, it was scary. That you might be tortured. When I was interrogated at 13 years old, it was a huge disaster for my father. They even advised my father that I should be married off because I was so strong. The patriarchy in this case helps further the goals of occupation.” – Aisha

“It’s all interrelated. The political situation had a greater impact - and an impact on our social life. It’s why our family chose for us to get married.” – Mariam

“Living in a refugee camp, and studying in a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school played a big role in me marrying young. My main goal as an adolescent girl was to get married and live outside the refugee camp because there was no freedom in the camps. I got married at the age of 17.” – Noor



GIRLS' RESISTANCE TO OCCUPATION

Girls are envisioning freedom for Palestinians and girls and women all over the world and fighting for it every day.

At the age of 7, Janna recognised the lack of accurate representation and reporting on the situation in Palestine and so started recording, becoming the youngest journalist in the world. At age 10, after witnessing the murder of her cousin and uncle, Hafsa, started protesting in the streets, at times catching bombs and throwing them back at the soldiers. At age 16, she spent 8 months in jail for defending her home. Girls are taking immense risks and are resisting in the face of backlash and extreme danger. They stand up to soldiers, they fight back, they refuse to accept that the conditions they are living under are acceptable for children, or anyone. **Carrying burdens they should not have to, girls grieve the loss of their own childhoods while working to ensure children of future generations are able to enjoy theirs.**

“My story with resistance against occupation started when I was 7 years old. My grandmother lived with us and I used to sleep in her room because I was scared of bombs and bullets and it didn't have a window from the street. When I was 8 years old, my mother was shot while participating in a protest. I started going to the protests and watching other protesters, and then I started participating in each protest to call for an end to occupation.” – Hafsa

“I want to be a journalist and film producer. I want to produce a film on a girl who lives in a refugee camp and is strong and can resist. I also want to advocate for the rights of Palestinians, especially women who live under occupation under patriarchal society.” – Noor

“I believe that we can resist in a lot of different ways - dancing, singing, playing, anything. The goal is serving your community or serving your homeland. I am passionate about filming and reporting and sending my message because my camera is my weapon that can protect me and send a message of truth to the world.” – Janna



SOLIDARITY AS A RESISTANCE STRATEGY

“Not speaking, not acting is solidifying a narrative of oppression”
 ~ Anonymous quote from Palestinian activists at a conversation held in 2023

Transnational solidarity with the Palestinian resistance for self-determination and freedom has taken on various forms and has steadily expanded over the course of decades.. Social connections, friendships, and acts of solidarity are indispensable for all individuals, particularly for communities who endure unrelenting oppression, isolation, erasure, and systemic violence. For girls, solidarity provides respite, connections, and hope and it is often at the centre of their organising strategies. Relationships ignite girls’ resistance, often fostering essential connections that help them gain a deeper understanding of the social structures impacting their lives. This understanding, in turn, enables them to weave connections and collectively challenge the systems that contribute to their oppression.

In a world that dismisses the suffering of victims of violence and oppression, assigning blame and burdening girls with the shame of their experiences, profound solidarity and the community found in friendships counteract the severity of these systems. All while creating opportunities to join efforts toward the pathway to liberation.

“During my girlhood, I had some peers who were not my friends, they were barely acquaintances, but then I found that I have shared values with them. I met them through different activities, especially at a cultural level, and then I found that we politically have so much in common, that our feminism has so much in common and that we could talk and discuss things for hours. That brought joy to my life and was a breeze amid all of the chaos that was happening. They were my allies because I was able to talk to people about what really mattered to me, and we were able to organise together through a shared purpose.” – Sandie

“The time period that my generation grew up in, there was a revolutionary spirit and so many examples of women and movements around us that encouraged us to push and demand freedom. So much was happening around the world that it felt like we were all working in solidarity with each other.” – Aisha

“As women we are all connected to each other, we share causes, we share problems, we share experiences. This brings us together - demanding our rights, fighting for our liberation, social liberation, fighting to have our spaces, to participate, to be involved in public life also. It’s worldwide, it’s not only in Palestine. Our struggle is shared in one way or another. The contexts are different but our main cause, our main goal is shared-freedom and justice. All women in the world can work collectively, show solidarity with each other, and support each other. They can elevate the voices of each other. I believe that yes, collective work doesn’t only include the national level but also the international level - wider.” – Mariam



TOWARDS OUR LIBERATION, WHEN YOUR LIBERATION IS MY LIBERATION

While resistance is palpable in every facet of *Palestinian girls' lives*, we must earnestly *question why such a reality persists. We must hold ourselves accountable by not just listening to their stories but bearing witness to these injustices so that they transcend the confines of silence. This requires deep solidarity, creativity, humility, and action.* Their experiences, strategies, and dreams are intrinsically connected to our collective liberation.

Palestinian girls not only resist in the past and present, they are dreaming and creating a new future grounded in freedom and liberation. A future in which they will no longer have to fight, no longer experience trauma and pain, and no longer fear they will be arrested or killed on a daily basis. A future they can be, live, and dream, and where resistance will no longer be a prerequisite for daily existence.

“Unless Palestine is free, everything we do and dream of will continue to be overwhelming, in light of the settler colonial, apartheid, racist, military apparatus controlling every aspect of our lives. With the constant killing, mass arrest, displacement, surveillance, and bombing, it would be very unfair or unrealistic, and certainly not durable to be thinking on the personal individual level only, because the dreams and hopes would never be fully achieved unless there’s a sustaining environment that can maintain our dreams.” – Sandie

“I believe I’m a person who is fighting for her right as a woman, fighting for her right as a girl, as a Palestinian, and I’m trying to include all of that in my resistance, in my activism. Because I believe we need to literally be free of everything and try to make our lives better.” – Janna

“As a Palestinian occupied woman, my resistance is tied to gaining my freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom to wear what you want, freedom to political expression, freedom to your own life choices.” – Aisha

“Liberation in Palestine is going to the sea. I’ve only been once and I was only 7 years old. I can see the sea from the roof of my house. It is only 30 minutes from my house but I’ve only been to the sea once because of the apartheid wall, because of the checkpoints. Liberation would be to go into my school without a checkpoint, to wake up without seeing the settlement, to have land and to not wake up to the sound of gas canisters. Just having freedom to do whatever I want, as a child, without anything standing in my way. Everything is possible. Nothing is impossible.” – Janna

PALESTINIAN GIRLS' RESISTANCE

Towards Our Liberation

This publication is a declaration curated with the experiences, wisdom, pain, dreams, and power of the Palestinian girls' resistance. It is part of the [Towards Our Liberation](#) initiative.

*"We are generations that have not given up on liberation,
and thus won't be the first.*

It is our spiritual and political commitment.

*It is the promise of our ancestors,
and we are resolute not to break.*

We are strong,

That's the Palestinian soul.

Palestine we will all return,

Palestine we will all heal,

Palestine we will all be free."

– Palestinian Young Feminist activist

