

# A Manifesto for Bread and Roses

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- **ABSTRACT:** In the midst of the mass displacement, dispossession and systematic killing of Palestinians in Gaza, this manifesto for “bread and roses” centralizes not only the rights of Palestinians in Gaza to life, safety, and security but also displaced people’s rights to joy, beauty, and happiness. At a time when Palestinians in Gaza are being massacred and openly deprived of aid, it is, precisely, Palestinians’ commitment to joy and beauty being projected and practiced by displaced and dispossessed Palestinians in Gaza, which provides the impetus for this manifesto. Created around and centering the words and lifeworlds of Palestinians in Gaza, this piece is offered as an inevitably partial but needed archive of this more-than-massacre and as an archive that stands for the future. Starting with roses pushes us to reimagine what meaningful responses to displacement could, and should, entail.
- **KEYWORDS:** basic needs, displacement and dispossession, future, Gaza, humanitarianism, insisting on living, joy, Palestinians

At a time when Palestinians’ very right to life is denied, it may not seem to be the right time to demand more-than-basic human rights and basic physical needs for displaced and dispossessed people. When the dehumanization of Palestinians sustained and propelled by discursive and political apparatuses that constitute Palestinians as “human animals” and as “ungrievable” threats seems to give the Israeli armed forces the right to kill and maim with impunity (see Butler 2023; Hammer and Hope 2024; McGreal 2023; Scahill and Grim 2024), is it right to posit the urgency of more humane responses that transcend the basic recognition of humanity? Is it the time to insist that Palestinians are bearers of the human right not only to life but also to so much more? Yes, and again yes, it is time to insist upon what feminists have historically manifested through the demand for “bread for all and roses too.”<sup>1</sup>

This manifesto for bread and roses seeks to make obvious, visible, audible, perceptible—as the roots of a manifesto must demand—not only the right to life, safety, and security for Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and the Palestinian refugee camps, as well as other peoples who have been marginalized, oppressed, and designated as less than human; but also the rights to joy, beauty, happiness, to the more-than-basic elements that make life worth living, as Palestinians in Gaza have repeatedly shown us in the midst of this ongoing genocidal violence.

While invariably denominated as less important in the hierarchy of needs institutionalized by the powers-that-be (those well-known “basic needs”: food,<sup>2</sup> water, clothing, shelter, and sleep, which must be met in a context of safety and security before more complex rights are imaginable), these are not mere frivolities or excesses—that which goes “beyond” or comes “after” the basic. Instead, if we start with demanding the right to roses now (the right to joy, to beauty, to happiness), rather than seeking to eventually reach those “excesses,” then we are forced to



address the structural violence, inequalities, and barriers that have essentially created a system that can only imagine the basic: starting with roses pushes us to reimagine what meaningful responses to displacement could, and should, entail.

At a time when Palestinians in Gaza are being massacred and openly deprived of aid, it is, precisely, Palestinians in Gaza's insistence on "bread for all and roses too," the commitment to joy, beauty, and happiness being projected and practiced daily by displaced and dispossessed Palestinians, which provides the impetus for this manifesto.<sup>3</sup> Written by a non-Palestinian who has witnessed Palestinians' insistence on the right to joy and beauty around the world, at a time when finding the energy or space to write is impossible for many Palestinians, this manifesto is specifically created around and seeks to center the words and worlds of Palestinians in Gaza, as an archive of this more-than-massacre, as an archive that stands for the future.

### *And Roses Too. . .*

Across social media, Palestinians in Gaza have insisted on documenting the genocidal crimes being perpetrated by the Israeli army with European and North American states' support, in addition to documenting joy, beauty, and the right to happiness:

My name is Nour al-Din Hajjaj, I am a Palestinian writer, I am 27 years old and I have many dreams.

I am not a number, and I do not consent to my death being passing news. Say, too, that I love life, happiness, freedom, children's laughter, the sea, coffee, writing, Fairouz, everything that is joyful—though these things will all disappear in the space of a moment.<sup>4</sup>

Nour was killed by an Israeli airstrike in December 2023, but his words continue to resonate across time and space. His final message before being killed included this dream:

I dream of planting flowers at all places where bombs were dropped.

It is for these loves and such dreams that we will remember Nour and all the people who have been killed, injured, and displaced in Gaza, to insist on this manifesto.

Roses are more than a dream for the future—"when the birds shall return," in Fadwa Tuqan's words<sup>5</sup>—but a practice and commitment for today and the future. To embrace the right to live, with bread and roses, today is to gather strength for the future, as articulated by the Palestinian journalist, Hind Khoudary, on 24 November 2023:

Today, I visited the sea, where I bared my feet to the waves.  
Laughter echoed as kids had their heads shampooed by their mom.  
Gazing at the sky, I inhaled deeply, gathering strength for the ongoing battle of reporting.<sup>6</sup>

The images of displaced Palestinian children, teenagers, adults playing and walking on the Gazan coastline by Deir al-Balah, as taken and shared by Palestinian photographer Ali Jadallah on 21 April 2024,<sup>7</sup> remind us of this individual, familial, and collective quest for happiness and joy in the midst of displacement, dispossession, intergenerational grief and trauma.

Away from the sea, as hospitals and patients were besieged and threatened—to become the site of mass graves—doctors and journalists alike confronted the superlatives of the violence and destruction of Palestinian people and infrastructure by creating and sharing music, their exhausted voices united and echoing around the world in defiance as they sang "We will stay here until the pain goes away."<sup>8</sup> The pain remains and expands, as do the echoes of their voices.

The music of an oud player “brings solace to displaced Palestinian children residing in tents in Rafah,”<sup>9</sup> while parents have sung loudly to overcome the sounds of death as, with their voices, smiles and embraces, families have sought to celebrate their children’s birthdays in the midst of systematic bombardment, insisting on children’s right to joy, love, and happiness; to be recognized as children; to not only survive but also enjoy their childhood:

A mom’s desperate attempt to celebrate her daughter’s birthday amid Israel’s assault

No cake, candles or balloons  
Barely enough water to make a few drinks.

You can hear the buzzing noise of a predator drone on top of their heads that can bomb them at any second! Yet she smiles!<sup>10</sup>

We hear Palestinian children’s laughter and witness their smiles as they play among the rubble: swinging between broken electricity cables, the “children of Gaza play despite the pain”;<sup>11</sup> running up the now-sloping roof and “sliding off the rubble of their homes during Eid”;<sup>12</sup> creating and sharing joy as they pull one another along in their makeshift toys;<sup>13</sup> as, together, they fly their kites.<sup>14</sup>

Insisting on the right to childhood, to play, to experience joy in such a context is a practice of resisting the “politics of unchilding” Palestinian children—the dual process of denying children’s rights and negating their very presence and existence as children—which the Palestinian-Armenian academic Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (detained and tortured by the Israeli security forces in April 2024 for her academic work<sup>15</sup>) has meticulously documented and vocally denounced (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2019).

As Palestinian women in Gaza have sought to bring joy to their children, they have, exhaustingly, worked to maintain a semblance of routine in their everyday resistance to displacement and dispossession, as embodied by Mahmoud @Awsaj\_Gaza’s mother:

My mother maintains her morning routine in the tent, with roses next to tea, sage, oil and olives, and the Qur’an. My mother takes *Khuzaa* [her place] with her as much as possible. *Habibti Yumma* [my darling mother].<sup>16</sup>

In a logo-ed tent, two red roses stand tall on the makeshift table full of the essentials of life and living.

They are not alone.

Palestinian journalist Abubaker Abed shares a photograph of himself in Deir al-Balah “watering and taking care of his yellow rose amid destruction, despair, and human losses.”<sup>17</sup>

Together, all of these practices sit together with acts of resisting the dehumanization of Palestinian men who have, through gendered and racialized Orientalist discourses and politics, been constituted as ungrievable threats (Palestinian Feminist Collective 2023; Al Helou et al. 2024; Gaza Group 2024); this resistance includes asserting and reasserting the tenderness, care, and love of Palestinian men, as captured and shared in the drawings of @Beqararkarke:

The man who played with a baby amid the rubble  
The man who smiled at a child even after losing his own  
The ambulance driver rushing to hospital with a baby in his arms . . .<sup>18</sup>

Sharing, as Palestinian journalists Shebah Younis and Hatem H. Rawagh did on their social media, not only the inconsolable tears and lamentations of intersecting relief and grief—of “a hero from the civil defense [*sic*] team [as he] breaks down into tears after rescuing a child from

under the rubble”;<sup>19</sup> of a “Palestinian paramedic breaking down in tears as he tries his best to cheer up a baby they’ve just rescued”<sup>20</sup>—but also the most loving of words uttered to comfort a child rescued from the rubble in Al-Bureij camp:

“Are you taking me to the cemetery?”

“No my dearest,” he says to her.

“You are alive, and as beautiful as the moon.”<sup>21</sup>

This is about more than “humanizing” the Palestinian face or promoting “empathy” with those enduring everyday life in displacement (as important as these are); it is about shifting the very way that we view and respond to displacement and the rights of people, including those who have been and continue to be subjected to genocidal violence.

It is to return to people’s right not only to exist and have their existence acknowledged and supported in dignity, but also to enjoy the right to joy, beauty, and happiness in the present and future: the right to enjoy both bread and roses.

Nour al-Din Hajjaj’s dream is being enacted daily. In the midst of the ongoing attacks, Yahya Bashir from Gaza<sup>22</sup> affirms:

I cleared the rubble from Israeli airstrikes, tilled the soil, and planted seeds. This is our home, our land. Everything will return more beautiful than before.

While Palestinians continue living and dying amid the carnage inflicted on them, they are manifesting, here and now, that there are many roots and routes to bread and roses. They teach us that these are intertwined, continually growing, and that surviving, in line with this manifesto, entails the insistence on life and living.

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## ■ NOTES

1. The socialist feminist slogan of the early-1910s, “Bread for all and roses too,” was historically associated with “the women in the West” in James Oppenheim’s eponymous poem *Bread and Roses* and charged both racially and geopolitically with white women in the United States. Nonetheless, as I am exploring in a longer version of this manifesto, the origins of “Bread and Roses” reportedly lie in the words of the Roman Greek philosopher Galen of Pergamon (born in present-day Bergama, Türkiye) and revolve around the human desire and impulse to share and enjoy in processes of togetherness and being together.
2. Of course, “bread” (and that which it stands for) is a necessity, especially as Palestinians continue to face mass starvation and famine, and yet Palestinians are both dehumanized through aid—including when food aid is expired and unfit for human consumption—and directly killed by aid—physically crushed by “humanitarian air-drops” plummeting upon Palestinians’ bodies on land or drowned when seeking to access packages dropped into the sea, or shot by Israeli forces, as in the Flour Massacre on 29 February 2024. The provision of aid not only accompanies, but enables, death. Bread alone is violence and a perpetuation of violence.

3. The insistence on joy and beauty expressed by Palestinians in Gaza has also been emphasized by those who stand in solidarity with them against displacement, dispossession and systematic killing, echoed throughout the solidarity protests around the world, as articulated clearly by the Columbia Students for Justice group long before Columbia University's violent suppression of the student encampments in solidarity with Gaza on its campus (see Editorial, this volume): "it's important to still take in Palestinian joy & art [*sic*]. we have to share the grisly images/statistics bc [*sic*] the mainstream media suppresses it, but the constant carnage reinforces a dehumanizing trauma porn & savior complex narrative. reminder: Palestinian existence IS resistance." (@ColumbiaSJP, 25 November 2023. <https://x.com/columbiasjp/status/1728203726383620335?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
4. Cited in Sheehan (2023).
5. In Alami and Nabil (2022).
6. Posted by Palestinian journalist Hind Khoudary (@Hind\_Gaza, 24 November 2023. [https://x.com/Hind\\_Gaza/status/1728049845439524968](https://x.com/Hind_Gaza/status/1728049845439524968)).
7. Posted by Palestinian photographer Ali Jadallah (@alijadallah66, 21 April 2024. <https://x.com/alijadallah66/status/1781747683700437202>).
8. See Palestinian cameraman Hamdan El-Dahdouh's video of journalists singing (@hamdaneldahdouh, 3 December 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C0Z8UW7rh0Z/?igsh=bzlmaWJ6N3FIM2Zn>), which was shared widely on social media (including by @Hebh\_Jamal, 3 December 2023. [https://x.com/hebh\\_jamal/status/1731428975157616929?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ](https://x.com/hebh_jamal/status/1731428975157616929?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ)) and a video of doctors singing while refusing to evacuate the Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Gaza (@MiddleEastMnt 26 October 2023. <https://x.com/middleeastmnt/status/1717524782755815757?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
9. Quds News Network (@QudsNen, 11 April 2024. <https://x.com/QudsNen/status/1778336106683019565>).
10. As posted by Gazan writer Muhammad Shehada (@muhammadshehad2, 3 November 2023. <https://x.com/muhammadshehad2/status/1720445158292910341?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
11. Video by Palestinian journalist Abdallah Alattar (@Abdallah\_Alattar1999, 20 April 2024. [https://www.instagram.com/reel/C5\\_AaYMM-r6/?igsh=bmNxOGRkOG5wb290](https://www.instagram.com/reel/C5_AaYMM-r6/?igsh=bmNxOGRkOG5wb290)).
12. Shared widely on social media (including by @TimesofGaza, 11 April 2024. <https://x.com/timesofgaza/status/1778216921692766525?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
13. Posted by Palestinian journalist Maha Hussaini (@MahaGaza, 18 January 2024. <https://x.com/mahagaza/status/1747914929280061822?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
14. Posted by Palestinian journalist Maha Hussaini (@MahaGaza, 21 April 2024. <https://x.com/mahagaza/status/1781955334489116774?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
15. See Butler et al. (2024).
16. Posted by Palestinian news producer Mahmoud (@Awsaj\_Gaza, 23 January 2024. [https://x.com/awsaj\\_gaza/status/1749781490685079752?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ](https://x.com/awsaj_gaza/status/1749781490685079752?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ)). Khuzaa is to the east of Khan Younis. My translation.
17. Posted by Palestinian journalist Abubaker Abed (@AbubakerAbedW, 23 April 2024. <https://x.com/abubakerabedw/status/1782827277706809432?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
18. Created and shared by @Beqararkarke (@Beqararkarke, 3 November 2023. <https://x.com/beqararkarke/status/1720421547184365728?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
19. Original video by Palestinian journalist Shehab Younis (@Shehab\_2001, 27 October 2023. [https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cy5\\_3ISrwdU/?igsh=d3V4OGd2d2FveGph](https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cy5_3ISrwdU/?igsh=d3V4OGd2d2FveGph)).
20. Original video by Palestinian journalist Hatem H. Rawagh (@hatem.h.rawagh, 28 October 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cy43LevNq-U/?igsh=c2pzM2xyM2gwNWp6>).
21. Original video filmed by Yousif Al-Sifi and widely shared on social media, including by Quds News Network (QudsNen, 2 November 2023. <https://x.com/qudsnen/status/1720093428606992888?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).
22. As shared by Gazan researcher Nour Naim (@NourNaim88, 21 March 2024. <https://x.com/nournaim88/status/1770757556102631890?s=46&t=9YFKghjUZ6FAXFN6nA3QPQ>).

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