

Introduction: Genocide and Resistance in Palestinian Poetry

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For the Palestinian people living in Gaza, the sustained violence initiated in October 2023 by the Israeli government, allegedly in retaliation for the Hamas attack, has been devastating. The widespread destruction has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and the decimation of numerous families. Material destruction, including the shelling of homes and attacks on schools, hospitals, and essential infrastructure, together with the Israeli blockade of international rescue interventions in the area, has led to one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent decades, with severe shortages of food, water, and medical supplies. Thousands of Palestinians have been displaced from their homes, and even after finding a precarious refuge, they are often forced to move on yet again or are directly shelled.

Unfortunately, this is not the only conflict raging at present –the other closest and most prominent one is being waged in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine–, and no one can decide which war is the cruellest. However, the ongoing genocide in Palestine strikes us as particularly poignant for a number of reasons. Whilst the brutality of the devastation cannot be disregarded, the lingering sense of historical injustice further contributes to the sympathy and compassion for Palestine which have been globally expressed. It may be argued that the ravages of European colonialism, now more widely identified as such, are currently being revived on Palestinian soil. In 2003, Cameroonian philosopher and scholar Achille Mbembe coined and articulated the concept of Necropolitics, pointing to several colonial contexts as paradigmatic of this form of systematic annihilation of life by those in control of social structures: the plantation system and the institution of slavery in America, the apartheid system in South Africa, and, crucially, the encroachment of the Israeli state on the territories and peoples of Palestine. Sadly, two decades on from the publication of that seminal work, Necropolitics is in place in this latter part of the world with a vengeance.

Between May 7 and 23, 2024, Catalan students and other young people occupied the Historic Building of the University of Barcelona in solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians. They were attuned to a transnational movement of students around the world who wanted to speak out against the atrocities being committed. Some of these students were repressed or berated, as was the case in some American universities. In Barcelona, they were supported by many: the media, the public, their own lecturers and other members of the university network. The community of students self-organized efficiently, and besides managing daily subsistence tasks, such as shopping and cooking, they organized protests, demonstrations, and cultural events that engaged the broader society, moving many people into political consciousness and activism. Arguably, it was a moment of intense beauty that, albeit temporarily, broke through the routine apathy of the current neoliberal university. The intensity –again, the beauty– of the situation never allowed those involved, or those observing in admiration, to forget the root cause for this contingent of politicised students: the suffering of the Palestinian people.

In view of the extraordinary nature of these two realities –the genocide currently perpetrated against the Palestinian people and the outstanding period of solidarity that it created during those weeks at the University of Barcelona, as well as in other places around the world–, it seems pertinent to devote this year's issue of *Blue Gum*, the unruly journal published by the *Centre for Australian and Transnational Studies* every end of the year, to the cause of Palestine. This choice wants to both convey condemnation of the genocide and carry a tribute to those students who, like Judit Salas Adell, the author of the research paper that constitutes the body of this issue, participated in the 2024 university encampments as a form of solidarity.

At that time, Judit was in the fourth and final year of her degree in English Studies at the Faculty of Philology and Communication of the University of Barcelona. In the first semester, she had enrolled in an optional course devoted to the analysis of a number of postcolonial contexts of the English-speaking world (“El món postcolonial anglòfon”), regularly offered as part of our curriculum. I was the teacher, and I can say that Judit was part of a very special group of students. In our classes we discussed distressing situations, such as the systematic violence to which women are subjected in varying contexts and world conflicts (dissected in works by Nimmi Gowrinathan and Tishani Doshi), South African apartheid (in texts by Koleka Putuma and J.M. Coetzee), and the Sri Lankan Civil War (as valiantly depicted by Jean Arasanayagam, Cheran and Anuk Arudpragasam), among others. Most of these situations, approached through literary representations as is the norm in the courses at our Faculty, tragically echoed the indiscriminate killing carried out by the Israeli government and the suffering of the Palestinian people beyond the classroom windows.

Those months coincided with the moment in which our students are invited to choose a preliminary topic for their End-of-Degree paper. Come to this, Judit felt she could not eschew the responsibility that comes with knowledge. Thus, she chose to focus on the Palestinian plight. And on she went, from day one working indefatigably in her research –which I grant could have expanded to reach the length of a dissertation if not for the normative limitations of an end-of-degree paper, such was her curiosity and dedication. Besides condemning the atrocities, in her text Judit wanted to highlight the

deep sense of resilience that has characterized the Palestinian people for decades. Determined and focused from the beginning, she decided to work on the genre of poetry as a form of resistance to violence in this context. The present issue of *Blue Gum* contains the results of Judit's intensive work over those months.

Later on, after her Viva (on the occasion of which she shone), when she agreed to submit her paper for publication in this year's *Blue Gum*, I suggested that she might translate some poems to complement her academic approach. She liked the idea, and chose to translate some poems by Sara Anam, a young Muslim author with a large following on social media. It should be noted that Anam is not Palestinian and does not live in Palestinian territories. Yet, by means of her creative impulse, she is driven to denounce the genocide. Her efforts seem genuine and honest. Undoubtedly, Anam's work raises questions about legitimacy and the perennial problem in the postcolonial context (and more broadly) of who is entitled to speak for whom. However, Anam's poetry speaks volumes about love, connection, and empathy towards those who suffer. So let it be. Judit has translated four poems, which feature after her paper, entitled "Genocide and Resistance: An Analysis of Palestinian Poetry."

I trust you will benefit from Judit's work. I thank her most sincerely for her efforts as well as for granting *Blue Gum* permission to publish.

As I write these lines, little more than a week has passed since torrential rains and floods caused havoc in the Valencian territories, in the east of the Iberian peninsula. Our condolences and courage also go to those suffering the consequences of this calamity.

Barcelona, 7 November 2024.