



# PALESTINIAN WOMEN LEADING PROTESTS: LESSONS FROM ORGANIZERS IN EXILE

## A Roundtable Discussion

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On March 19 and 20 of 2022, we held three roundtables with 10 Palestinian organizers from North America and Europe. We discussed their experiences leading local protests during the Unity Intifada in May and June of 2021.

The conversations centered on the triumphs celebrated, the communities who stood by them, the lessons learned that helped prepare them for subsequent protests and events, as well as the challenges faced in organizing crowds and interacting with police. Principally, they spoke about the perceptions and behaviors they had to navigate as women leaders.

*Palestine Square* — the blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies — is committed to collecting testimonies and documenting the work of Palestinian grassroots organizers in exile. Organizers participate in the liberation struggle in real-time, contributing to raising awareness about Palestine in their local communities and exerting pressure for change on the international stage in support of the Palestinian cause. Organizers must be able to narrate their own stories from the ground.

We believe these testimonies will help inform the work and experience of Palestinian grassroots organizers everywhere and contribute to the growing production of knowledge on Palestine and the Palestinian people.

*This roundtable was organized and facilitated by Laura Albast and co-edited with Hannah Shraim. Asma Barakat and Luke Fanous transcribed parts of this roundtable.*

### *Biographies of Participants*

**Nerdeen Kiswani** is a [Palestinian organizer](#) from New York City. She is the founder and chair of [Within Our Lifetime - United for Palestine](#), a community organization revitalizing the revolutionary spirit of the Palestinians in exile in pursuit of liberation. Nerdeen has spoken for the Palestinian cause at events and conferences worldwide and has organized rallies with tens of thousands of attendees supporting Palestine. Nerdeen recently [graduated](#) from the CUNY School of Law.

**Rawan\*** is an organizer based in Canada.

**Dalya\*** is an organizer based in Canada.

**Rou'aa\*** is a Palestinian organizer currently based in Pennsylvania. During the Unity Intifada, she was organizing in Indiana.

**Jamila Rashidi\*** is a Palestinian-Italian writer, podcaster, and researcher. She studied at SOAS University of London and graduated with a dissertation on the Palestinian diaspora in Italy. She produces the podcast “Chronicles in Diaspora,” which discusses issues relevant to the Palestinian diaspora in Italy.. She is also part of the Italian network “Giovani Palestinesi d’Italia” - Young Palestinians of Italy.

**Wala Al-Soofi** is a Palestinian-Canadian entrepreneur and works as a creative director for several Palestinian organizations. She has been an activist and community organizer for the past seven years in the Greater Toronto Area. Wala's activism is rooted in fighting hate, oppression, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and anti-Palestinians sentiment.

**Mimi Abou-Ghazala** is from Nablus, Palestine and Latakia, Syria. She is currently completing her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at George Mason University. Mimi became involved in activism at the age of 11, leading protests and rallies for both the Syrian and Palestinian community. Since then, Mimi has always started performing poetry as a way to express the triumphs that accompany her identity in the West.

**MG\*** is a Toronto-based Palestinian organizer, educator and poet. She is grounded in her community and seeks to nurture healing, justice, and generosity in her organizing.

**Shahd Hammouri** is a lecturer in law at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom. Her research is generally focused on critical approaches to international economic law, with a geographic focus on Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. She is currently completing a monograph on War Economies and International Law. She was

born and raised in Jordan and has been active in movements calling for social justice in the region since an early age.

**Dania Helou** is a Palestinian-American organizer and co-founder of Memphis Voices for Palestine.

### ***Biographies of Editorial Contributors***

**Laura Albast** is a Palestinian journalist, editor, and media analyst. She has been published in *The Washington Post*, *The New Arab* and *Arab American News*, and has appeared on Al Jazeera, KPFA, Black Star Network, TRT, and other outlets. She was one of the organizers of the largest Palestine protest in the history of Washington, DC during the Unity Intifada. She regularly offers media training to social justice activists working for Palestine. She is currently the Senior Editor of Digital Strategy and Communications at the Institute for Palestine Studies-USA in Washington, DC.

**Hannah Shraim** is a Palestinian-American organizer, speaker, and [writer](#). She is the co-chair of Maryland 2 Palestine, a grassroots organization led by Palestinians in exile building for liberation. Hannah has organized protests and spoken about the Palestinian struggle and issues of injustice at events across the DC, Maryland, and Virginia area. She is currently the Communications and Outreach Assistant at the Institute for Palestine Studies-USA.

**Asma Barakat** is currently a second-year graduate student in sociology at The New School. She is the co-creator of an oral history archive titled *Rooted in Palestine*. Asma holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Montclair State University.

**Luke Fanous** is a Public Affairs Intern at SKDK. He holds a Master's in Political Science from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Arkansas. Previously, Luke was a Research Fellow for Human Trafficking Search, where he published pieces on labor exploitation in the EV supply chain and the Kafala system.

*\*Palestinian activists are regularly subjected to state and online surveillance, censorship, doxing, and harassment. Some names are anonymized to protect the privacy and identity of participants.*

*Roundtable Discussion*

## How do you see the role of women in exile in the Palestine liberation movement?

**Nerdeen:** I've always seen women, especially in my family, as those who carry both the Palestinian culture and struggle. All the stories about Palestinian symbols and figures like Leila Khaled, Handalah, Naji Al-Ali, and Ghassan Kanafani were told to me by my grandmother, who also taught many Muslim and Palestinian youth through community programs in New York City back in the 80s and 90s. She would volunteer her time to ensure that younger generations remember.

My grandmother used to attend our protests in Brooklyn and our conferences. She performed poetry that she wrote when she was younger. She fled during the Nakba on foot when she was 10-years-old. Her education was disrupted, and she was never able to attend school again. But she is the most educated woman I know and has educated so many people around her, whether through teaching the Quran or about prominent Palestinian figures in history. She told her Nakba story at one of the conferences we held: for many who attended, it was the first time they heard from a Nakba survivor. She passed away in 2021. My biggest regret is that she couldn't see a Free Palestine after the Nakba, but I'm hopeful she knows we're fighting to return.

The way that I see my role in the movement is to continue the political popular education — I want Palestinian youth to feel empowered, I want them to know their history, and I want them to know that there have been people fighting for the struggle for so long. The only right thing to do is to keep going, and if we do that, we will be free. That's why the group I lead is called Within Our Lifetime. I see my role as to really carry that hope, determination, and resilience, and I know that we're going to be free.

**Rawan:** Women have always been at the forefront, but somehow, they've also always been pushed back. We've seen women leading actions back home, in the diaspora, and in Arab countries, but then... who is usually perceived as the face of a movement? Not usually a woman. And when it is a woman, her role is rarely discussed, and people may not always see it as impactful. We have seen examples of this in the first and second intifadas — the ways in which women were very much at the forefront of resisting Zionist oppression and yet those stories are not documented in the same way.

**Rou'aa:** Women are pillars of the movement for freedom, justice, and equality — for Palestinians and our Palestine liberation movement. Women's paid and unpaid labor has been

foundational to this movement and has really pushed us forward. Every social justice organization I've seen or been a part of has been led primarily by women; I think that in and of itself speaks to how powerful women are to our national liberation struggle.

**Dalya:** I think, especially in 2021, a lot of female organizers were at the forefront, and what I mean by that is that they physically put their bodies at the forefront of protests. Their labor carried campaigns. Every Palestinian woman I knew was organizing on the ground and behind the scenes, and at times, they weren't acknowledged. We also have these women doing this labor under extreme conditions. They may be harassed by people on the ground, by other organizers, by men... there's also a lot of pressure on them from their communities to be doing things a certain way, [in] an acceptable way. I speak from experience; I know many organizers in North America who have worked under these sorts of conditions and the double standards they are subjected to versus their male counterparts.

**Mimi:** Women are the ones who give birth to all revolutionaries; without women, we wouldn't have a liberation movement. Being Palestinian and Syrian, I've been able to see differences and similarities in the spaces where I've organized for both causes. There was just so much emphasis within Palestinian culture on women that I didn't necessarily see much in the Syrian community here. Growing up, my dad was actually the one who instilled in me to always speak my mind and to speak up for what's right, even if everyone in the room didn't agree. Palestinian women are known to be strong. When men took up arms in the past, women who couldn't join them stayed on the sidelines, where they cooked for the fighters and rebuilt homes after raids. Our role, however, is just the same as everybody else's, if not more powerful.

**MG:** Women are the backbone of the movement, the heart of the movement... they create life for the movement. My grandmother is the matriarch of my family; she's told us stories about her upbringing and expulsion. She was 7-years-old during the Nakba and walked to seek refuge in Lebanon. I see revolution in our poetry, in our artwork, and our culture. I believe that part of our role in exile is to keep those stories — the stories of our ancestors — alive through storytelling or poetry.

**Dania:** I grew up in a matriarchal family. My paternal grandfather was shot and killed in front of his family in Jerusalem during the 1967 War. They couldn't bury his body and had to shelter in the same building for three days. My grandmother took on the responsibility of the family after that, and after she passed away, that responsibility was taken up by my aunts. One of my aunt's sons has been administratively detained in Israeli prisons for over seven years. When she visits him, she always says, "Raise your head, you didn't do anything wrong. You are Palestinian and being Palestinian is your only crime."

## **Reflecting on experiences that occurred during the April-June 2021 Unity Intifada and beyond**

**Nerdeen:** We are regularly protested by the Jewish Defense League (JDL), an organization that, until recently, was designated by the [FBI] as a terrorist group and denounced even by the fascist Zionist Anti-Defamation League as ‘thugs and hooligans.’ So you have to imagine the level of these people. Regardless, they still come to openly protest against us with signs all the time. And, of course, they’re protected, escorted, and defended by the police. They come to incite people. They’ve chanted my name before, taken videos of me, and sent fake reporters to entrap me.

During the Unity Intifada, I remember at one of our protests, I was leading the crowd through Manhattan, and suddenly, I saw this man charging towards the crowd from far away, cursing, spitting, and flailing his arms. He dives into the crowd of protesters. These are people with families being killed and detained back home in Palestine. And this person is disrespecting and physically harming Palestinian youth — they will defend themselves. And, of course, this is what this person wants, because he wants to claim to be a victim. I remember the crowd caving in around me and the cops trying to isolate this person so they could protect him from the crowd. I remember seeing them run from storefront to storefront trying to seek shelter for him. But, you know, it just feels like these situations are manufactured. Who does things like that?

In 2021, a renewed doxing campaign was launched against me, and Zionists would continue to ask my law school to expel or discipline me for organizing protests. The CUNY School of Law had to issue a public statement stating that they were not going to tolerate anti-Palestinian racism and defended my freedom of speech.

[During our protests], I have had men try to physically intimidate me and other women in my organization. I’ve been sexually and verbally harassed, and I’ve witnessed my comrades get subjected to derogatory comments. You would think the perpetrators are random, one-off people who can’t be controlled, but many of them work within the movement or related organizations. They feel empowered in their affiliation, permitting them to be disgusting. There were times when men would circle me and my and woman comrades, and that’s just so weird. People in our community don’t really do things like that; I can easily tell any guy around me, “I don’t feel comfortable with these guys,” and they would take care of it. Doxxing and smear campaigns happen all the time, but the pain I feel from that pales in comparison to what I feel when I’m undermined and disrespected by those who are supposed to be fighting collectively with me in the same struggle.

**Rawan:** More than 15,000 people attended our Nakba day protest. We ran into a counter-protests organized by Zionists. The cops put up barricades between the two groups — there were so many people crammed into one space. Our loudspeakers weren't loud enough, we didn't have the best equipment, and we were not funded in the best way either... we're grassroots organizers! The cops told us to "keep the peace," but we did not want to police our protesters, we wanted to let them be angry — their anger was valid. We asked that they don't engage with the cops. Zionist protestors were harassing young Palestinian men to provoke an altercation. One of them hurled a wooden stick at a Palestinian man, prompting him to defend himself. The cops lunged at the Palestinian protestor, smacked his head to the ground, and arrested him. This happened more than once, and this example revealed the relationship between the police force and Zionist protestors. The Zionists were armed with wooden sticks, and they were whipping them at the Palestine protestors. The cops only reprimanded Palestinians who were defending themselves.

At another point during the Nakba day rally, some community members approached our speakers and turned them off, saying, "we don't want to hear this." And there was an incident of three men who approached me and a co-organizer, trying to help us from the overbearing crowd, but ended up making us uncomfortable as they tried to hug us. We were shocked. There's a video of me giving a speech where you can see men huddling near me, trying to take the mic from my hand, trying to take over the space. That was recurrent in many of our protests. This is a stark example of how much harassment we were continually experiencing and how normal it was for these behaviors. When we tried to address this, we were either scolded for insinuating that harassment was happening or being treated as helpless victims.

**Rou'aa:** We didn't have big altercations with police, but we saw cops following protesters. The presence of the police intimidated people. There were also two men, wearing army-esque uniforms and carrying enormous guns, following the crowd. People in the back felt unsafe and called on us as organizers, and we had to handle that. We ended up getting these men to leave, but there's definitely a lot of intimidation and harassment. At another protest, a semi-truck tried to drive into the crowd. It got pretty close to us, and one of the cop cars actually drove and parked in front of it. The semi stopped about a foot in front of the cop car.

If you're a woman and shorter, it's easier for folks to overlook you. As far as perceptions, how I present has played a big role in how folks at protests engaged with me. One stark example is a group of teenage boys who attended every protest we organized — they were disruptive and did not follow community guidelines. At one protest, a pedestrian passed our crowd, took a look but continued walking. The teenage boys began shouting, "why are you looking at us?" The pedestrian got nervous and began walking faster, the teenagers chased him. I intervened and told them to stop — he was a pedestrian and not an agitator, and even if he was, we don't engage with them. They looked over my head and continued to shout. When a taller white woman spoke to

them, they stopped. Sometimes people made requests of us, and if we said no, they would get upset and accuse us of excluding the community. They had a sense of ownership of the protest and expected us to do what they said.

**Jamila:** In Italy, the awareness of the Palestinian struggle and cause is insufficient. There's low engagement in civil society. During May and June, there was a very big response from the Arab population in Italy — in Milan, specifically. Usually, our demonstrations get an average of 100-200 people, but during the Unity Intifada, it was in the thousands.

At a demonstration in Milan in May 2021, a man shouted at me, saying I'm not a real Palestinian, so I shouldn't lead this demonstration. He questioned my faith, asking if I was Muslim, and tried to take the mic from me and told me I was not Arab enough. We also had issues with left-wing Italian groups. We sensed that they were uncomfortable with us leading demonstrations and not taking their suggestions into consideration. For one demonstration, we decided to do a sit-in instead of a march. An Italian group organizing with us wanted us to move, but we explained that many of our protestors were refugees from Syria and Lebanon, so if we moved, we risked problems with the police.

**Dalya:** We were holding a vigil for Gaza when a cop approached me. He told me that he was the diversity liaison of the police department and wanted to make sure that we were protected. And the reason that they [the police] had him approach us obviously is because he was a man of color, and they thought that would sit well with us because we're Palestinian... [effectively] weaponizing that racialization and also tokenizing people in the police force. He gave us his card and said, "my partner over there," and he pointed to someone in the crowd, "was undercover." It was a white man, and it was so obvious that he was undercover. Before he even pointed, I said, "is that him?" He was embarrassed. As we were setting up, a Zionist counter-protest began nearby. The same officer who spoke to me approached them and told them, "we want to make sure you're safe. We want to make sure Palestinians aren't attacking you," and we could hear [the conversation]. The cops then started surrounding the Zionist protestors to ensure we wouldn't approach them. All that after they told us that they were there "to protect us." After the vigil, a policeman coerced me into having a conversation, threatening to arrest me if I didn't speak to them. They told me that they had a dossier of information about me and named two other organizing members. They said that they have been monitoring our social media accounts.

A lot of the harassment that we faced in the May protests came from men in the community. They had no respect for the women organizing. We had people come up to a co-organizer, who was a man, and ask him to "control" me, "why was [I] talking?" Typical misogynistic, sexist stuff. Indeed, it was an advantage to have another male member to communicate with the men in

the community so I could do everything else without interruption. We also had community harassment on social media.

**Mimi:** I've had a lot of altercations with the police during protests. If you show up in joint struggle with other marginalized groups, it makes the police hate you ten times more than they already do. I had one altercation a couple of years ago when the Jewish Defense League showed up to one of our protests, and their members were physically assaulting me. The police just stood by watching. Zionists often record activists without our knowledge or consent. They approach with the intention of having a conversation, but they have underlying motives. So, when I was younger, I didn't know that I should not engage with Zionists, because I thought they perhaps wanted to hear me out. After one protest, a former IOF member approached me insisting that I speak with him. The video he filmed without my consent was doctored and went viral. It was a terrible experience. A similar incident happened during the Unity Intifada when Bart Media, a right-wing conservative outlet, covered one of our protests. They harassed a lot of our organizers and took a video that portrayed me in a really ugly manner. I remember giving a heated speech to the crowd about the Zionists who infiltrated the crowd and began vandalizing nearby buildings. Bart Media filmed my speech: the edit framed me as an angry, violent Palestinian woman. I've learned that we have to be very wary of every move we make and each person we speak to in these spaces. You never know who's recording you, and everything you say can be doctored and used against you.

I usually take on the role of a chant leader. I noticed a difference in how the crowd reacted to me chanting or speaking via megaphone versus a man, who was tall enough for everyone to see, doing that. Some comments that were directed at me during one of the protests was that 'this is not a woman's job, who let this girl hold the microphone, this is a job for a man.' When people found out I'm half-Syrian, my belonging to the cause was questioned. 'Why is she leading? Why should she have any say?'

I've also had discouraging experiences in the movement. I felt exploited. Some organizations felt that I owed them my time and energy because I was younger, that I didn't have a role to play, except ones they gave me at the last minute when their plans went awry. I've also experienced men physically pushing comrades who were women to the back so they could lead. There were definitely some men who admire the power of a woman's voice and who stood by us.

**Dania:** The group I organize with, in Memphis, is abolitionist — we understand the institutionalized racism that exists in the United States and the deadly exchange between a lot of police departments who train with the Israeli Occupation Forces. Being from the South, many people don't realize that we have a high level of racialized violence. This is where Martin Luther

King was assassinated. The Klan was founded a few hours away. A mosque was shot up here. We have neo-nazis here. It's a difficult and unsafe environment to organize in. In 2018, the Memphis Police Department was sued by the ACLU for spying on Black activists via fake Facebook profiles, and members of my group were also targeted for their political beliefs. We've also had venues refuse to host our events when they realize it's for Palestine. I know it's because Zionist organizations in the city pressure local institutions to not work with us. Some members of our community consider my group to be radical because we believe in economic reform and transformative intersectionality.

**Shahd:** During our protests, we had to factor in cameras with facial recognition technology. Most of the Arabs here in the UK are on visas and do not want to be deported. Many showed up to protests in hoodies covering their faces. I remember one of the organizers trying to defend a bus driver who honked in solidarity with our protest. A policeman approached the driver and took his papers. The organizer tried to talk to the policeman but was met with aggression and was physically injured. He was arrested for a couple of days, and it took a while to find out where he was held.

I'm an academic, and I post a lot about Palestine on social media. Many Zionists tweeted at my university, accusing me of anti-Semitism. They shared pictures of me holding a microphone at a protest.

**MG:** On Nakba day in Toronto, we held the largest protest for Palestine since 2014. We had over 13,000 protestors attend. As in other cities in North America, members of the JDL counter-protested us. The police set up a fence between us. Many fabricated stories were reported after the protest claiming that Palestinians were rioting when, in fact, JDL members had assaulted our people. On May 22, we held a second protest and marched to the Israeli consulate. Again, a large number of protestors attended, but this time, the police showed up in riot gear, on horseback. They tried to block our way and accused us of carrying a bomb. They wanted to pull us to a corner to search our truck. It was blatant Islamophobia. We asked our protest marshalls and our MCs to inform the crowd of what was happening: the crowd began to chant and the police let us through. When we got to the consulate, the riot police surrounded us and closed up on us in a way I've never seen before. It was terrifying to be boxed in. They changed their tactics after seeing the turnout on Nakba day.

On Nakba day, we had men circle women who were holding the microphone or chanting. Some called us derogatory names. So, for our May 22 protest, we asked trusted comrades in the community — young men — to act as a buffer. If anyone was seen harassing us, these men would speak to them. On one of our trucks, a queer Palestinian speaker took the mic: many

people were upset by that, which essentially put a target on both the speaker and the women who let them speak.

During a separate action, we held an art show. A non-Palestinian socialist group attended and, without our consent, set up their table in a way that blocked our Palestinian artists. We asked them to move, but the individual refused, and began arguing with two of the organizers (who were women), calling them an “occupying force.” He went on to email one of our male comrades to complain. There have been many cases where women would lead chants or organize events, and men who are unhappy with our involvement or method would go to other men to complain as if to say “control your women,” rather than addressing us directly.

We’ve also seen incidents of repeated sexual harassment, and when we try to address the issue with men in our community, although some would try to support us, many would ignore the issue.

**Wala:** On May 16, 2021, there was an incredible effort led by a group of women [to organize] a rally called All Out for Palestine in Hamilton. The Hamilton Rally for Palestine was a peaceful, family-friendly event, which abided by COVID-19 guidelines. At the time of the rally, we saw enormous outpouring of support from the Hamilton community for Palestine. In response, Hamilton Police Officers and City of Hamilton By-law shamefully and unjustly choose to target and ticket 14 visibly Muslim community members, two of whom faced a fine of up to \$100,000 and 1-year of potential jail time. I was one of the two.

Prior to the rally, our team received intimidation calls from the police to let us know that if we were to go ahead with the protest, we would be fined. But we went ahead anyway. We stayed after the rally concluded to clean up and pack up our equipment. When I got to my car, I realized that I was being followed by the police. I was suddenly surrounded by five police officers demanding that I get out of my car. It was a scary experience, especially as a visibly muslim woman wearing the hijab. To date, we’re still being intimidated and threatened with legal repercussions for peacefully protesting and speaking out against the Israeli apartheid regime. We organized a public campaign — #DropTheChargesHamOnt — asking the City of Hamilton to drop the charges against us. A few weeks after the rally, the police released a statement declaring that they will be monitoring social media and charging anyone they identify as a participant of the rally. I also received a phone call from a female cop who tried to extract names of organizers.

Another challenge came from the community. I remember ‘amos [uncles in the community] and men coming up to me and saying: “You’re a woman, you’re soft-spoken, why are you leading the protest? Give the megaphone to a man, we can’t hear you.” Some even tried to yank the microphone out of my hands.

## Building Momentum, Triumphs Celebrated

**Nerdeen:** I met a young man we could rely on to act as a buffer during protests. His cousin had been arrested at one of our protests, and we provided legal support. He spent many of the protests during the Unity Intifada by our side, shielding us from anyone attempting to take over our space. He passed away recently at only 28-years-old, my age now. There were moments when I was almost grabbed by the police — he would grab my arm and run. He saw things I couldn't because a million things were going on, so many people in my ear. The experience made me feel safe knowing that there are members in the community who respect the work we do and support us unconditionally. I would not have met him if not for the Unity Intifada, and because of the short time we knew one another, I often remember and pray for him.

Our biggest triumph is being able to consistently organize spaces where our community can come together in mourning and rage, particularly during the Unity Intifada, where we held multiple protests with tens of thousands in attendance. While it is often daunting to lead rallies with so many variables, we were able to pull it off because of our security culture. Of course, there are small instances of people trying to take the mic or block protestors with cars or start fights... but the reason we were able to manage all this is because we have a well-trained security and tactical team from our organization and others who work with us. We meet and debrief before and after almost every single action we hold, and we always provide security training. Following our protests, we provide support at police precincts if necessary. It's an effective strategy to get folks released. We would stay in front of the precinct until the early morning, chanting, playing music... we don't let those in the precinct rest until they release our people. We also always have legal observers, fellow law students, at our protests, which has helped at times like this.

**Rawan:** So many people joined our group in a volunteer capacity afterward and continued to keep up the momentum for Palestine. This did not end in the summer whatsoever. We could set the narrative we needed and shift people's perspectives. We were also able to mobilize more and more people and guide them on the path of righteous political discourse and language to use around Palestine. This outcome can be seen with BDS victories at several different universities across the nation. Moreover, there have been many high school students who organized a walkout for Palestine. As a result, we can attribute that to the ongoing organizing that happens in the city en masse.

**Rou'aa:** We held large-scale Palestine protests in Indianapolis that utilized a joint struggle and collective liberation framework. We had an incredible turnout at teach-ins and other events

surrounding afterward. We also built long-lasting relationships with progressive community organizations as well as local Arab and Muslim communities. Many community members thanked us for providing water and food during the protests and for thinking of the little things. Community members told us that they were proud to see the next generation of Palestinians taking up the cause for liberation.

**Dalya:** One of our biggest wins was community visibility and support from intersectional organizations. Our Block the Boat Action was super, bringing awareness about what Palestinian workers want. We did a lot of political education with 16 to 18-year-old Palestinians, and we also connected with some local high school teachers to give presentations at their schools.

**Shahd:** We experienced Global South solidarity during our protests — we saw support from international communities who shared their experiences with us but also showed up for us. From the Colombians, we borrowed the act of using kitchen utensils to make noise accompanied by musical instruments that reverberated in every protest. In a handout that included our chants, our Colombian comrades wrote an introductory line that I now hang in my office: *Our struggles are connected. Our resistance is collective. No one is free until we are all free.*

**Mimi:** As a Muslim, Arab woman who wears hijab and is an activist, I've learned that I will inevitably receive different forms of critique and judgment. I am expected to be an observer, not a leader, not someone who will take up so much space. I recognize the importance of my role in the struggle — I am using my voice to pave the way for future generations of grassroots organizers. Through this discussion, I now know the stories of other women who fight side by side with me in these spaces, not only for Palestine, but also against the patriarchy, Islamophobia, and xenophobia we endure as grassroots leaders.

**Dania:** Our press release was picked up by the local [abc news channel](#) — the anchor read out words like 'settler-colonialism,' 'apartheid,' and 'Palestinian liberation.' Publicizing that language was crucial because it allowed for fair coverage.

**MG:** Some older community members told us that they were proud of us. Their support makes me proud. We've also had a large amount of interest from youth looking to join our group. We've grown and our work has grown so much despite the challenges.

## Advice — On Impactful Organizing and Navigating Spaces in Exile

**Nerdeen:** Organizing is a collective effort, and our power lies in our unity. And not a false idea of unity, but truly struggling through our differences and putting our principles, discipline, and politics at the forefront. It's important that we don't fall into a liberal individualist framework that our universities or careers may try to lead us towards. What we're building towards is collective liberation, and we can only accomplish that together, not only within our community, but also by building international solidarity with oppressed people around the world who are also fighting for their liberation struggles. We cannot defeat our oppressors if they work together to oppress us unless we work together to defeat them. I also believe we should think about our protests as a space for our community, first and foremost. Education and awareness come from those spaces. When people see 50,000 protestors marching in Bay Ridge for Palestine, they will want to know what's happening. We also provide Arabic pamphlets and chant in Arabic because there's an Arabic-speaking Palestinian community here. Those who struggle with the language can learn, because it's important to create a space that empowers everyone, young and old.

**Rawan:** If not met with kindness in your organizing circles, question why and don't hold back. I think one of the most important lessons coming out of these experiences is that the people in your community need to support you, and other people that have hurt you need to be held accountable. Accountability stems from restorative justice. Sometimes, that takes time. That's okay. We are all learning from each other and from our experiences while organizing. Trust that you are a strong enough organizer, or even if you're new, trust the people around you and the organizer you're learning to become.

**Rou'aa:** I have three points of advice. One, trust yourself and stand your ground. Unfortunately, as organizers for Palestine and as Palestinian women, our leadership and authority within organizing spaces are both intentionally and unintentionally undermined or discredited. We know ourselves, our politics, and why we are here — we need to trust that.

Second, don't be afraid to rely on your community. As a new organizer, I tried to do everything myself, and it's important to know you don't need to — and you shouldn't — do everything alone. Especially as a woman, I often felt like I needed to do everything on my own to prove my capability.

Lastly, talking about these issues within our community is difficult, but it's necessary. Oftentimes, issues around gender are either ignored or intentionally not brought up for fear of reproducing negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. By situating the advancement of

women in organizing spaces as part of building a robust movement and analysis of Palestine liberation, we can approach gendered issues in ways that hold individuals accountable, while still bringing the community closer together and to the movement. We must balance genuine accountability with a sincere love for our community and allow that to guide our approach. Harm in this capacity — like all harm that we experience and commit — must be addressed with genuine understanding and trust.

**Jamila:** Understand your audience and the political ground. Be strategic in your actions and be as clear as possible in your messages.

**MG:** This work takes a lot of sacrifices and we tend to put a lot of guilt on ourselves, [because] our people back home are struggling. We often think to ourselves, “who are we to take a break?” But I think we need to take time to care for ourselves and care for each other, whether that's being in spaces with ourselves or with our elders that aren't just protest-based, because when you're at a protest, you're running on adrenaline. Associating your time with your community in these spaces only can be very hard and can lead to quick burnout. We need to show each other grace. If we have different political ideals, or were taught different traditions, we must be patient and learn from each other. Compassion is necessary for organizing in the movement.

**Wala:** Know your legal rights. This is from my personal experience. When the police approached me, I was too overwhelmed by the situation and I had no idea what information I could disclose and what questions I didn't have to answer. Had I known what my legal rights were, I would have handled the conversation with the police differently.

**Dania:** None of this is in vain. Everything we're doing has its claws in history. And we are creating a pathway for generations to come.

**Shahd:** You can't change the world by yourself. Having the weight of “I'm not doing enough” on your shoulders can be debilitating. You have a role. Figure out what that role is, and pragmatically try to execute it. We need to be really clear about who we are and where we stand. The community is not a monolith: it has many faces, and we have to be able to communicate with each other.

**Dalya:** Ground yourself in a political ethic that's a revolutionary and feminist one. I think many organizers have a wishy-washy political understanding of what it means to be in this movement. It's not that we're not accepting of everyone, but I personally am not going to be aligned with women who are Zionist or women who are imperialist. Remove identity politics from the way you organize and center grassroots organizing. Be on the ground, listen to what the community

asks, and talk to these people. Learn to educate yourself and ground yourself in a principled ideology.

**Mimi:** Children always gave me grace at protests. An 11-year old girl approached me once and asked: “how can I do what you're doing?” So I gave her the microphone and she started chanting and everyone was repeating what she was saying. I think it’s important to encourage our youth and let them know that they can start anywhere. We must embrace the youth and make sure their voices are heard.

That 11-year-old girl stuck with me. I was her age when I got into activism. I attended a Syrian protest and one of the older aunties pushed me up to do some chants. I want to make sure the next generation gets that experience as well. I know that we've all faced a lot of backlash as women from community members, allies, white men, etc., but it's important to stay steadfast in our movement, because people are watching us, and they are following us regardless. Don't be afraid to call challenges like these out. A lot of people say that calling out patriarchy and misogyny makes Palestinians look bad, but doing so is how we better ourselves.