

Palestine Unbound

Published each issue and updated regularly on *Palestine Square* (palestinesquare.com), this section strives to capture the tenor and content of popular conversations related to the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Increasingly, these conversations are held on new and dynamic platforms unbound by traditional media. Therefore, items presented in this section are from a variety of sources and have been selected because they either have gone viral or represent a significant cultural moment or trend.

This Quarter's Topics

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An image from the Facebook post announcing a farewell event, endorsed by fifty organizations, for Palestinian activist Rasmea Odeh before her deportation from the United States. (12 August, Facebook)

#HonorRasmea

On 12 August, more than a thousand supporters gathered in Chicago to say goodbye to longtime community activist Rasmea Odeh before her planned deportation from the United States. After a four-year legal battle, Odeh pled guilty to unlawful procurement of naturalization in March in order to

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avoid imprisonment or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention. A leader in Chicago's Palestinian and Arab communities, Odeh founded the Arab Women's Committee during her time with the Arab American Action Network (AAAN), to defend the civil rights of newly arrived immigrants and others of Arab descent. She served as a mentor and friend to hundreds of immigrant women in Chicago, and received the Outstanding Community Leader Award from the Chicago Cultural Alliance in 2013.

Although federal judge Gershwin Drain argued that Odeh's prosecution was not "a political case," Odeh's legal team, friends, and supporters maintain that it originated in the U.S. government's targeting of twenty-three antiwar Palestinian community organizers in Chicago and Minneapolis in 2010, AAAN Director Hatem Abudayyeh among them. The charges against Odeh were pursued amid increased efforts at the state and federal levels to criminalize Palestine solidarity organizing and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

In 2013, Odeh was arrested by Homeland Security agents and charged with unlawful procurement of naturalization for failing to disclose on her twenty-year-old U.S. immigration application a 1969 conviction in Israeli military court on charges of involvement in two bombings. The Israeli conviction was based on a false confession obtained after Odeh was tortured and sexually assaulted by Israeli military authorities, information that Odeh was not allowed to include in her testimony in U.S. court. Judge Drain also barred the testimony of expert witness and clinical psychologist Dr. Mary Fabri, who planned to testify that Odeh's false answers on her U.S. immigration forms resulted from her post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Odeh's 1969 conviction in Israeli military court was no secret. She publicly testified about her torture at the hands of the Israeli military to the United Nations after her release in 1979. The U.S. Embassy and the State Department were aware of her conviction and release before she applied to come to the United States to care for her ailing father.

In the days before Odeh's farewell ceremony, her supporters expressed their gratitude for her work and discussed her impact on the Chicago community using the hashtag #HonorRasmea. Professor, activist, and former political prisoner Angela Davis delivered the keynote address at the ceremony, emphasizing resilience and hope for the future. While Odeh was unsure of where she would go next, she assured her supporters: "Wherever we go, we will grow."



Odeh's supporters honored her via Twitter in the days before her farewell event. (2 August, Twitter)

#BoycottWonderWoman*

A new comic book superhero made her way to Hollywood when *Wonder Woman* opened at the box office the first weekend of June. It marked the highest grossing opening weekend for a film by a female director, but it sparked debate on social media as many wondered why a former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conscript was deemed the best choice to play the character meant to empower young women.

In *Wonder Woman*, Israeli model and actress Gal Gadot's character dons a cape and armor and defends the peace and justice of the underdog. In real life, Gadot wore the uniform of Israel's occupation forces and defended unjust and brutal policies against Palestinians. For many, the contradiction between *Wonder Woman*'s persona and Gadot's service in a military occupation, characterized by Human Rights Watch as one defined by its "unlawful killings; forced displacement; [and] abusive detention," was too glaring to overlook for two hours and twenty-one minutes.

As an IDF soldier, Gadot was recruited to be an ambassador for one of the first "Brand Israel" public-relations campaigns, designed to distort the brutal reality of Israel by recasting it as a hip, liberal playground. In a 2007 photospread organized by the Israeli Consulate in New York, Gadot and fellow female soldiers posed as the "Women of the IDF" for the U.S. men's magazine *Maxim*. Presenting IDF female soldiers as "a bunch of hot babes with machine guns" whitewashed Israeli violence and military occupation.

During the 2014 assault on Gaza, Gadot endorsed the Israeli offensive with a message posted to her official Facebook page on 25 July. "I am sending my love and prayers to my fellow Israeli citizens. Especially to all the boys and girls who are risking their lives protecting my country against the horrific acts conducted by Hamas, who are hiding like cowards behind women and children," she wrote with the hashtags #weareright, #loveidf, and #freegazafromhamas.



This cartoon by Carlos Latuff went viral among those calling for a boycott of *Wonder Woman*. (1 June, Twitter)

* An earlier version of this story, written by Khelil Bouarrouj, appeared on *Palestine Square*, the blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies, on 8 June 2017. —Ed.

The New York Times called women-only screenings of *Wonder Woman* an act of “solidarity,” but for many feminists that act of solidarity rang hollow. Gadot has never expressed solidarity with the Palestinian mothers forced to give birth at Israeli military checkpoints or any Palestinian women who have suffered at the hands of the armed forces she was proud to serve. Using the hashtag #BoycottWonderWoman, social media users censured Gadot’s support for the IDF and Israeli military offensives. Lebanon and Tunisia went as far as banning screenings of the film.



Many Palestine solidarity activists criticized *Wonder Woman* actress Gal Gadot for her staunch support of the Israeli military. (29 May, Twitter)

Showcasing Israeli Cultural Appropriation at Cannes[†]

Nearly fifty years since Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967 (after its 1948 seizure of West Jerusalem), Israel’s Minister of Culture and Sport Miri Regev walked the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival in France donning a gown emblazoned with a panorama of the Jerusalem skyline, including the fabled Dome of the Rock Muslim shrine. In so doing, Regev showcased before the world Israel’s well-established appropriation of the cultural heritage of the Palestinians whose erasure it has long sought. Not only was the dress symbolic of Israel’s persistent efforts to impose an exclusionary Jewish nationalist stamp on the city of Jerusalem, a dress of similar design first appeared in a Palestinian fashion show. Palestinian designer Maro Sandrouni prepared a gown displaying the gates of Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Costumes across the Ages show in December 2009, which was organized by a group of Palestinian civil society groups to celebrate the city’s Arab cultural heritage.

Regev’s Cannes attire did not go unnoticed; it was roundly mocked on social media, where many offered their ideas for a dress more fitting of an Israeli right-wing politician. Photoshopped images of her “Jerusalem dress” featured the Israeli separation wall and Israeli bombs over Gaza.



A tweet by the Palestinian Information Center juxtaposed earlier Palestinian designer dresses with Regev’s Cannes gown (right), asserting that Regev’s design was stolen. (21 May, Twitter)

[†] An earlier version of this story, written by Khelil Bouarrouj, appeared on *Palestine Square*, the blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies, on 31 May 2017. —Ed.

A former chief military censor, Regev represents the vanguard of a new generation of Israeli far-right politicians. As reported by Haaretz, in 2012 she told a TV interviewer that she was “happy to be a fascist.” Recently, Regev has used her ministerial position to deny state funds to an Arab theater in Israel that produced a play about Palestinian prisoners, has sought to defund cultural institutions that avoid staging events in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, and has proffered subsidies to cultural organizations that do. Regev’s mantra is simple: artists should be loyal to the state, in accordance with a legislative amendment she proposed in 2016; otherwise, they risk losing government funding for their program.



Photoshopped images mocking Regev’s dress were shared widely across the Internet. (18 May, Twitter)

#IAmGaza[‡]

On 18 July, several organizations and activists in Palestine and the United States launched an online campaign to highlight the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Home to two million Palestinians, the coastal enclave has been under a severe siege imposed by Israel for ten years, and more recently, an intensified closure of its southern borders by neighboring Egypt.

Using the hashtags #IAmGaza, #ISeeGaza, and #UnlockGaza, the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights and the American Friends Service Committee hoped to shed light on the rapidly deteriorating situation in Gaza at the height of massive electricity and water supply crises.

In the weeks leading up to the social media campaign, Gazans had only an average of two hours of electricity per day—compared to only an average of six hours per day prior to the Palestinian Authority’s June decision to no longer pay Israel for Gaza’s electric supply. This shortage has crippled hospitals, water treatment plants, and schools, effectively bringing day-to-day essential activities to a halt.



Palestinians described the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza during the #IAmGaza Twitterstorm. (18 July, Twitter)

[‡] An earlier version of this story, written by Dorgham Abusalim, appeared on *Palestine Square*, the blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies, on 18 July 2017. —Ed.

In 2012, the United Nations warned that Gaza would be uninhabitable by 2020 due to such conditions. However, a July UN report, Gaza Ten Years Later, indicated that this projection was “overly optimistic.” Indeed, repeated Israeli assaults against the Gaza Strip have only accelerated the decline of basic human living conditions.

The crises reached a tipping point with the news in late June that several Palestinian patients, including days-old infants, had died due to delays in processing their transfer requests for medical treatment abroad.

The campaign organizers urged online users to highlight the situation in Gaza and demand from their elected officials an end to the Israeli siege of the territory.



Twitter users shared photos from Gaza's crowded hospitals, highlighting the disparity between Israel and Gaza. (18 July, Twitter)