

Cover Artist Reflection: In the Time of Genocide Collaboration between a Palestinian Artist in Gaza and two Activists on the Southwest Borderlands

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In May 2024, after seven months of the Israeli genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza, I witnessed both the pro-Palestine students' protests on campus and then their brutal arrests. In this context, I, a Palestinian feminist professor in a public land-grant university on the Southwest border of the US, had the opportunity to begin a sincere connection with one of the activists, Albert. He is a young Cuban American artist looking for ways to use art as a tool of resistance and liberation, especially with Palestinians and Palestine. After many encounters getting to know each other, we decided to find and collaborate with a young artist from/in Gaza. So, at the beginning of June, Albert saw the powerful work of Shahd Rajab on Instagram. He wrote her and then immediately began a WhatsApp group for us to get to know each other. I mainly communicated with her in Arabic and translated into/from English between her and Albert. We agreed that building a friendship and sharing her art would educate the American public and also express our solidarity with her during this time of genocide.

Given I am a professor who teaches Palestine Studies and decolonial research and Albert has been protesting the university's funding of military research and cooperation with US and Israeli weapons companies enabling the genocide in Gaza, we asked Shahd to share her new drawings reflecting the current reality living under this brutal war and how it translates into her daily life and impact on education in Gaza. She shared her drawings that reflected her displacement and the destruction of her university, which directly impacted her educational journey and future aspirations.

The war started while Shahd was a junior at the University College of Applied Sciences in Gaza, studying Information Technology and Information. At the beginning of this war, the Israeli military forces bombed Shahd's house in Gaza City and university buildings to the ground. She was displaced to shelter in Deir El Balah, a UN school, an area deemed "safe."

In response to our request, Shahd's sketches depict the killing of educators and the destruction of educational institutions in Gaza. She had to draw on paper when she could find it because her tablet was destroyed in her family house. Albert offered to digitize her drawings and edit them how she prefers to prepare them for print production or other forms of dissemination.

Being aware of the urgency of this work and the significance of sharing her drawing, we tried to communicate with her daily when she had one-minute access to the internet. We engaged her sketches and gave her feedback while encouraging her to keep drawing and perhaps distracting her from the grief and shocks she lived with daily. We were worried that we might lose contact with her as we followed the devastating news of the Israeli forces committing daily massacres, especially in Northern Gaza, where she is. We went through several worrisome moments and more than 48 hours of no communication, thinking of the worst scenarios. In a span of three weeks, Shahd shared five drawings with us. Then, we decided together on one of the drawings to submit for the cover of the special issue of this journal focusing on “struggle over struggle.”

This collaborative process during genocide is an intentional approach to co-creating knowledge in/with art. It is a praxis built on loving relationships and place-based knowledges and driven by reflective, informal, and trust-based conversations. It is an Arabya feminist decolonial approach.

Shahd’s drawing, *Our Right to Education was Stolen, Destroyed Too (Scholasticide)*, for this issue is built on a century-old significant Palestinian tradition of artistic resistance. Art is one tool of struggle against Israeli Zionist settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, military occupation, and land theft. This year, Shahd created art amongst the rubble of houses, hospitals, libraries, universities and schools, playgrounds, churches and mosques, and mass graves of her people, the Palestinians, as they are now facing another Nakba, a massive Israeli campaign of ethnic cleansing. Her artwork adds to thousands of Palestinian artists portraying the brutality they live in but also what they imagine their lives could be without the war and the violence of Israeli settler colonialism. Art is Shad’s source of sustenance and the center of her sumud, insistence on life, and living with love and dignity.