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Reading Fady Joudah's *[...]*: Never Losing Sight of the Palestinians' Humanity

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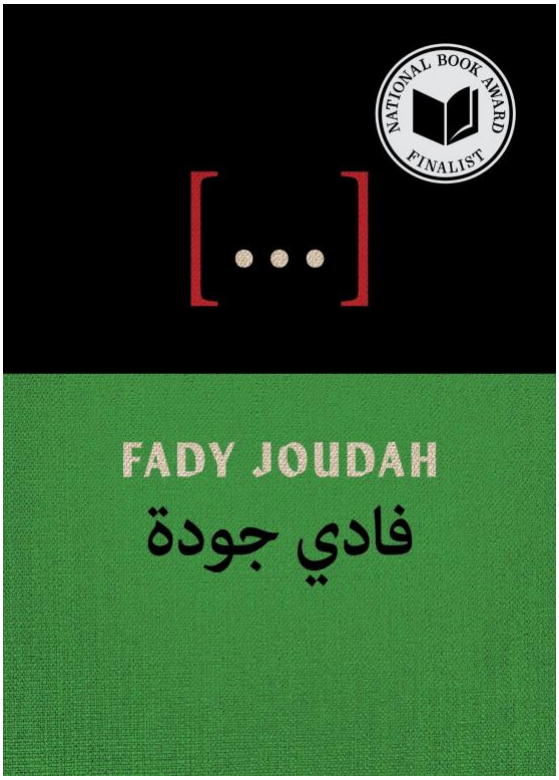

From the perspective of a 24-year-old U.S. university undergraduate student—learner on/of the borderlands, and one committed to the liberation of Palestine—I found poet Fady Joudah's *[...]* to be one of the most devastating and necessary works I've encountered about Gaza. This collection, written during the first months of Israel's 2023 military assault on Gaza, does what US media headlines cannot: it captures both the scale of the genocide and the unbreakable humanity of Palestinians living through it. The empty brackets of the title *[...]* immediately struck me as a powerful representation not only of how Palestinian voices are systematically erased, but also of the West's strategic blindness to the Palestinian plight, making the poems that follow all the more vital.

The untitled poem opening Section IV confronts complicity with devastating clarity. The accusation, "You who remove me from my house have also evicted my parents and their parents from theirs," lays bare how the Israeli dispossession and displacement of Palestinians compounds across generations, making the Nakba not a historical event but an ongoing present. The final questions of the poem, "How is the view from my window? / How does my salt taste?" force readers to confront the intimate violence of settler colonialism—not just the theft of land, but the casual cruelty of occupying homes where family photos still hang, of cooking in kitchens where the scent of Palestinian meals lingers. The poem reveals how colonization demands not just physical removal, but the erasure of an entire way of being.

The poem "Dedication" is one of the most heartbreaking pieces I've read about the current atrocities. Its repetitive "To those . . ." structure creates a relentless litany of loss, memorializing everyone from children killed before receiving birth certificates to elders who survived 1948 only to witness their descendants' erasure. Lines like "To those who composed songs and sang them to the syncopated thuds of annihilation" offer the reader more than statistics, instead uplifting the

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humanity of Palestinians, those indiscriminately targeted by Israel, refusing to reduce the martyred to arbitrary numbers. The poem's unflinching documentation—naming specific places, such as the Omari Mosque and Saint Porphyrius Church—gives concrete weight to statistics that often feel abstract when reported accurately by the media.

"Sunbird," the collection's closing poem, transforms the political slogan "from the river to the sea" into something lyrical and alive. The imagery of a bird moving between "gleaming river" and "glistening sea" beautifully asserts Palestinians' deep connection to their land, not as a territorial claim but as an ancestral relationship that predates and outlasts occupation. This ecological perspective feels particularly urgent as Israel systematically destroys Gaza's olive groves, farmlands, and water sources. The poem's shift between "all that we / to all that me" captures how collective identity and personal survival intertwine under siege.

This book, masterfully written by Fady Joudah, strikes a balance between documentation and defiance. Between scenes of horror, Joudah preserves moments of Palestinian joy: weddings held during power outages, children playing in bomb craters, and the stubborn persistence of olive trees. These aren't just poetic flourishes—they're acts of resistance against dehumanization. The poems also model how to create language to counter oppression, whether by exposing euphemisms like "humanitarian pause" or reclaiming phrases like "from the river to the sea" from racist fearmongering.

As an activist committed to the liberation of Palestine and as a reader of poetry, I will return to Fady Joudah's *[…]* collection often. I will also share it with and recommend it to my comrades and family, and to all those who are seeking to learn Palestine or are students of the humanities, law, history, political science, education, ethnic studies, and liberation studies. Fady Joudah's *[…]* clearly articulates the brutal and painful truths of the logics, regimes, and practices of settler-colonialism that apply to Palestine and far beyond it, showing how violence repeats through institutional bureaucracies, language, and time. But most crucially, Fady Joudah's *[…]* reminds us that solidarity isn't just about opposing Israel's crimes—it's about centering Palestinian life, grief, and joy. In a media landscape that reduces Palestinians to statistics and erases them with "bothsidesism" debates, Fady Joudah's *[…]* ensures that its readers never lose sight of the humanity of Palestinians.

Joudah, Fady. 2024. *[…]*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.