

*Here We Will Stay
In Lidda, in Ramla, in the Galilee,
we shall remain*

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Here We Will Stay, by Tawfik Ziad



Land Day

Abdullah Omar

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Cover Image: Land Day, 1976

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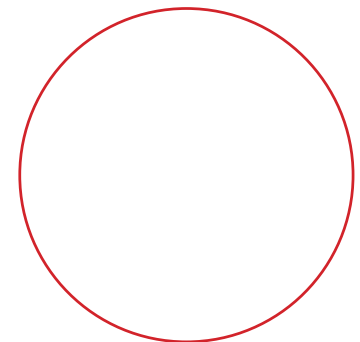
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Land Day

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We have on this land all of that which makes life worth living
On this land
The lady of our land
The mother of all beginnings
And the mother of all ends
She was called Palestine
Her name later became Palestine
My lady...
Because you are my lady
I have all of that which makes life worth living.

Extract from *On this land*, by Mahmoud Darwish

Land Day is commemorated by Palestinians on 30 March every year to reiterate their right to their homeland and identity in the face of an occupation that makes every effort to drive them from their land. The people of Palestine generally mark Land Day with a general strike and demonstrations of solidarity.

It was on 30 March 1976 that the Palestinian citizens of Israel — the land of Palestine occupied in 1948 — rose up against the state's arbitrary measures to seize more Palestinian land in the Galilee and Judaize it with more settlers. The Galilee remains the largest concentration of Palestinians in the occupation state; Judaisation is intended to weaken and disperse them.

The uprising against oppression that was sparked on that day continues to grow. However, so too does Israeli oppression, as the occupation continues to take ever more Palestinian land on an almost daily basis. Its racist, [apartheid](#) policies terrorise and kill Palestinians; the ethnic cleansing started in 1948 is ongoing as Israel grabs as much Palestinian land as possible with as few Palestinians living on it as possible.

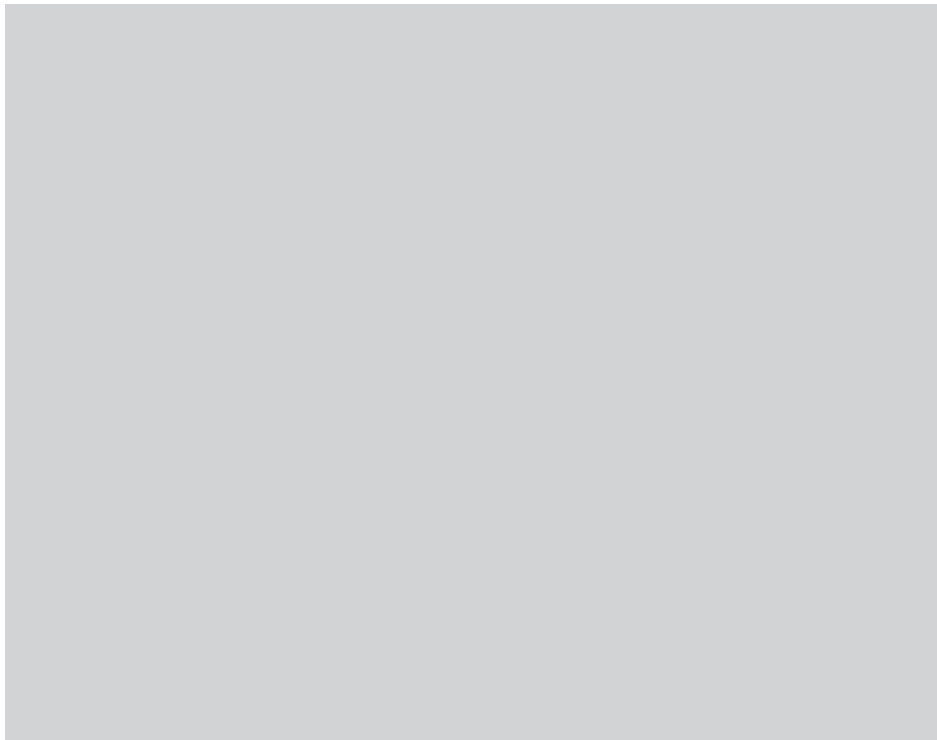
Land Day is one of the most prominent days of the struggle of the Palestinians who were able to stay on their land in 1948; a milestone in Palestinian history since the Nakba of the same year. Despite the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Zionist terror gangs and nascent Israeli army, around 150,000 Palestinians remained on their land in what became the state of Israel. Although Israeli citizenship and identity cards were imposed on them, they were not protected from the evil of Zionism and the theft of their land, especially in the Galilee.

The Palestinians in the area realised the scale of the Judaisation process and the danger it posed (and continues to pose) to their presence on their own land and the preservation of its Palestinian-Arab identity. That is why they united in a massive popular uprising in 1976 that confronted the occupation forces amid a general strike. Six Palestinians were martyred by Israeli bullets, but the unity, sacrifices and determination of the Palestinian people succeeded in thwarting the Judaisation settlement scheme for the occupied Galilee region. In doing so, they demonstrated that preserving their land and legitimate rights while protecting the Arab identity of Palestine requires struggle and sacrifices. It was made clear that the enemy cannot be deterred or forced to retreat from its expansionist plans in the land of Palestine and beyond unless it faces unbreakable popular resistance.

Historical background

In 1976 the general situation in occupied Palestine was the growth of a sense of nationalism in the desire to preserve the land and identity of the people. The second post-Nakba generation was growing up; its members had not been traumatised directly by the Nakba, as confirmed by a number of historians looking for the roots of this revival and the double siege imposed on the Palestinians inside Israel by the Arab world and the Zionist entity alike.

On the eve of the first Land Day, popular demonstrations denouncing the confiscation of Palestinian land took place in Al-Batouf area (Sakhnin, Araba and Deir Hanna), in which the people challenged the Zionist entity and its power. The Israeli authorities resorted to force without hesitation, and augmented the police with troops, who opened fire on the demonstrators. Khair El-Din Yassin from Araba was martyred. As soon as news of his death spread on the morning of 30 March, the Palestinian people erupted in anger; five others were martyred: Mohsen Taha from Kafr Kana; Khadija Qassem Shawahneh, Raja Abu Raya and Khader Khalileh from Sakhnin; and Raafat Ali Zuhairi from Nour Shams camp. Hundreds more were wounded by bullets and batons.



Land Day Martyrs

Name	Age	Martyrdom date	Town
Khadija Shawahneh	23	30 March, 1976	Sakhnin
Khair Yassin	23	29 March, 1976	Arraba
Raja Abu Raya	23	30 March, 1976	Sakhnin
Khader Khalileh	27	30 March, 1976	Sakhnin
Mohsen Taha	15	30 March, 1976	Kafr Kanna
Raafat Zuhairi	20	30 March, 1976	Nur Shams, Tayibeh

The Israeli authorities tried to give “legal status” to the confiscation or “expropriation” of Palestinian land based on emergency legislation known variously as settlement, closure, wasteland and other laws. The Law of Ratification of Procedures and Compensation was enacted in 1953 for the same purpose. According to the data of the Land Defence Committee, Israel confiscated about one and a half million dunams (excluding the Negev area) of land owned by the Palestinians who became Israeli citizens and remained on their land until 1976. This excluded the millions of dunams of so-called absentee property and the areas registered under the name of the “High Commissioner” since the time of the British Mandate rule in Palestine.

The theft and development of Palestinian land has always been linked to the Zionist goal of the exclusively Jewish state, the Judaisation of the Galilee, and the tightening of the screws on the Palestinians in the 1948-occupied territory. It was all essential in order to preserve the “demographic balance” that the Zionist movement and the Israeli authorities sought to perpetuate in favour of a permanent, absolute Jewish majority.

Israel has always been keen to rid itself of the “Arab Israeli” citizens and made sure that they were treated as a religious sect. It confiscated around 70 per cent of Palestinian-owned land between 1948 and 1976, especially after the restrictive laws introduced in 1968.

There is no doubt that Land Day brought important changes in the way that the Arab world viewed the Palestinian citizens of Israel. For decades, they had been regarded with suspicion and contempt as “traitors”. This started to change with Land Day, which opened many Arab doors to the “1948 Palestinians” on the official and popular levels.

It is noteworthy that from 1976 to 1982 the Palestinians within Israel commemorated Land Day every year, but silently and without strikes. For the past forty years, though, they have done so through general strikes and confrontations, with some activities such as festivals in the Negev and the Galilee, and planting olive trees in an attempt to protect the land from Zionism’s relentless expansionism.

For many years, Land Day was not limited to the Palestinians in Israel. The day galvanised Palestinians all over their occupied land as well as in the diaspora. Although the general features of the day are popular marches and clashes, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip changed their tactics and in 2018 exploited the media to organise the Great March of Return protests, which put the Zionist entity in an awkward position before the world and emphasised the fact that the Palestinians are increasingly attached to their land and insist on their legitimate right of return, despite the passage of time.

The organic connection between the Palestinian people and the land

In his book Land Day, between nationality and citizenship – Process and Transformation, Dr Nabih Bashir says that the events in 1976 were a crucial part of the development of the collective awareness of Palestinian society, and in the relationship of this society with Israel. Land Day remains a national day that nourishes and revives Palestinian collective memory. According to Bashir, it is not only important because

it is a day of challenge to the usurper state, but also because it revolves around the most important elements of the historic, human and civilisational facts of Palestinian existence: the organic relationship between the people and their land.

Palestinian historian [Mustafa Kabha](#) believes that Land Day was an important episode in the Palestinian national struggle that began in the early 1920s with the uprising led by Sheikh Shaker Abu Kishk against Jewish immigration in Jaffa and the surrounding areas; then the Buraq Revolution up to and including the revolution of Sheikh Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam (1935-1936) and others.

Kabha insists that Land Day and the popular strike and demonstrations contributed greatly to stopping Israel’s land confiscation schemes, and brought the Palestinian voice to all Palestinians at home and abroad, putting them back on the map of the ongoing struggle for freedom. Many had held, and suffered, from preconceived notions about Palestinian integration into the reality of the occupation, in the light of which the events of Land Day were a great expression of the struggle for the land.

The confiscation of Palestinian land and the expulsion of farmers began at the end of the nineteenth century, well before the Nakba. Land Day became an important crossroads in the efforts to stop this “ethnic cleansing”, as it has been described by Israeli historians. The theft — “confiscation” — of land was one of the most prominent moves by Israel against the Palestinians, and an important motive for the formation of the first organisations to resist the occupation state’s discriminatory policies. Israel relied in part on laws and regulations, some of which were inherited from the British Mandate authorities, to give a legal veneer to the confiscation of personally-owned land with no right of appeal and no compensation; it was theft by any other name.

Land Day demonstrations are thus a natural extension of the main conflict between the Palestinians and the occupation over “the land”. This has been at the core of most bloody confrontations between the Palestinians in Israel and the Zionist government; in the Al-Rawha land clashes in 1998, for example, and the Umm Al-Sahali clashes in 1999. Its essence was also found in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem as well, and later in the Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa clashes in 2000.

What we see today are the Zionist entity’s efforts in full swing to transform occupied Jerusalem and that part of Palestine occupied in 1948 into a land with a permanent Jewish majority and Palestinian minority. To this end, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, has introduced dozens of openly racist laws which incite the expulsion and displacement of the Palestinians. Ethnic cleansing is an ongoing process.

The people of occupied Palestine, however, refuse to give up. Israeli hopes that, with time, newer generations of Palestinians will simply forget about their land and legitimate right of return, have not been fulfilled. This was demonstrated last year when the Israelis sought to evict Palestinians from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood

of occupied Jerusalem. Palestinians in Israel, the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as the diaspora, stood as one with their comrades in occupied Jerusalem to challenge the Zionist state. The world was caught unawares by this, and Israel was forced to pull back from its military offensive against the people of Gaza, the perennial default target of Israeli anger and frustration.

Regardless of whether there is a new leadership behind such action or not, what is clear is that the Palestinian people decided to take matters into their own hands and not despair at the deterioration of Arab support. Israel’s daily theft of ever more Palestinian land for illegal settlements and settlers, and the accompanying repression and state-sponsored terrorism leave the people of occupied Palestine no option but to escalate their struggle to preserve their land, their holy sites and their identity. This is the core of the conflict and will remain so until Palestine is free.

Forced geographical and demographic transformation of Palestine

From its inception, the Palestine-Israel conflict has been a struggle about land and demographics. The primary goal of the Zionist movement and then its progeny the state of Israel was to seize as much Palestinian land as possible, and colonise it with as many Jewish settlers as possible. The measure for the success of the Zionist state is how much land it has been able to seize and colonise.

Geography and demography, therefore, have the final say in the war that Zionism is waging in occupied Palestine, where Israeli practices on the ground are represented by the forced displacement of Palestinians from their villages, towns and cities, and the theft of their land.

Research into the movement of the Palestinian people is important when considering the ethnic cleansing of the people of Palestine and Zionist ambitions to force a majority Jewish presence on the land.

After Britain's Balfour Declaration was issued in 1917, Palestine was placed under a British Mandate by the League of Nations (the forerunner of the UN) until 1948. The British government made it clear that it viewed with "favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object..." Unfortunately, the British reneged on the second part of that infamous sentence, "...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Thousands of Jews began to head for Palestine, even though mainstream Jewish organisations around the world did not support Zionist aims until the 1930s and the rise of Nazism in Germany. Their number rose from about 10,000 in the middle of the nineteenth century to approximately 62,500 at the beginning of the British Mandate, and around 650,000 in 1948. As a percentage of the total population, Jews in Palestine went from 8.3 per cent in 1919 to 31.5 per cent when the Zionist state was declared on 15 May, 1948.

The beginnings of demographic change in Palestine

The first estimate of the population of Palestine in the twentieth century was during Ottoman rule. In 1914, the year in which the First World War broke out, the population of Palestine was estimated at 689,275 of which 8 per cent were Jews. After the subjection of Palestine to the British Mandate, the population of Palestine was

673,000, made up of 521,000 Muslims, 67,000 Jews, 78,000 Christians and 7,000 other sects. As a result of the 1948 Nakba (Catastrophe), Palestine was divided into three geographical areas:

1. The lands occupied by the Jews after the Nakba in 1948, totalling 76.7 per cent of the area of Palestine.
2. The West Bank covering 22 per cent of Palestine.
3. The Gaza Strip covering 1.3 per cent of Palestine.

The Zionist entity was not satisfied, and kick-started the so-called Six Day War in June 1967 after which it also occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. All of historic Palestine was thus under Israeli occupation, with many Palestinians displaced from the newly-occupied territories. The Palestinian population of the West Bank fell to 581,700 and the population of the Gaza Strip fell to 937,600.

By 1998, the total population in historic Palestine was 8.09 million, of which 5.50 million were citizens of the Zionist state, about 67.9 per cent of the total. Around 17 per cent of Israeli citizens were Palestinians; that figure is now about 20 per cent. Almost 1.6 million Palestinians were living in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, with another million or so in the Gaza Strip. Despite the higher birth rate among Palestinians, Israel has managed to maintain the demographic balance in its favour due to waves of Jewish immigration.

These statistics were taken from the [Wafa](https://www.wafa.org/) website.

How did the Zionists force a demographic change in 1948 Palestine?

The secular Zionist movement called for the establishment of a “Jewish national home” in Palestine, which they claimed was “a land without a people for a people without a land”. From the very beginning of Zionist-Jewish immigration, it was clear that the intention was to dehumanise the people of Palestine as if they didn’t exist. The extermination of the Palestinians as a people in their own land became both a goal and a reality: today we call it ethnic cleansing, the deliberate expulsion of the indigenous inhabitants and their replacement by citizens by the colonial entity. Various means were used to achieve this in occupied Palestine, including massacres — such as at Deir Yassin in 1948 — intended to frighten other Palestinians into packing up and leaving at gunpoint. During the Nakba, five massacres were recorded in the central belt, five in the south and 24 in the northern Galilee.

Mass deportations followed the creation of the Zionist state in the effort to impose a new demographic reality in occupied Palestine with a Jewish majority. For example:

1. Historic Palestine (100%)
2. **1947** — UN Partition Plan (44%)
3. **1967** — Border lines endorsed by PLO in 1988 as a historic compromise for Peace (22%)
4. **2020** — Trump’s projected plan (15%)

Source: [Scene Arabia](#)

1. The Israeli authorities expelled residents from Al-Majdal, Al-Khassas, Ashkelon, Al-Ja’una and dozens of neighbouring villages.
2. The Israeli authorities expelled the residents of thirteen villages around Nazareth in 1951.
3. After its establishment, the Zionist entity destroyed 478 Palestinian villages out of 585, wiping them off the map.
4. The Israeli authorities destroyed 135 out of 210 villages in the Galilee and displaced their residents.
5. Immediately after its establishment, the Israeli authorities expelled 35,000 Palestinian residents of the Negev across the borders to Jordan and Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula.

Geographical and demographic effects of Zionist practices

As a result of Zionist practices, the Arab population in the land assigned to the “Jewish state” decreased from 52 per cent immediately after the establishment of Israel to 17.9 per cent in 1949, and to 12.9 per cent in 1950. The 1967 war was always intended to seize the rest of the land of Palestine, which the Zionists had been unable to control in 1948. The war resulted in the displacement of nearly 400,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and about 50,000 from the Gaza Strip. Between the end of 1967 and 1979, a further 354,000 Palestinians were displaced from the occupied West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

It is obvious that such migration was not voluntary, but a deliberate policy enforced by Israel to change the demography of occupied Palestine. Over the course of 74 years of Israel’s occupation of the land of Palestine, the land has been Judaised with changes to place names, street names and neighbourhoods. The demographic balance is not the only thing that has been changed in Israel’s favour at the expense of the indigenous people of Palestine.

Regional and international changes

The commemoration of Land Day 2022 coincides with many developments that require the Palestinian people to escalate their national struggle by relying on themselves without waiting for support from anyone. For example:

1. Extensive settlement expansion in Palestine: Israel’s illegal settlements have spread and grown alarmingly on Palestinian land and holy sites in the context of an accelerated process to impose a fait accompli and the Judaisation of Palestine. The people of Palestine

have been transformed into a minority in their own land, surrounded by illegal settlements and settler-only roads. The Palestinian Authority enjoys a degree of self-governance only within the framework of Israeli sovereignty, which makes the conflict a struggle between the indigenous people of the country and the racist, self-declared “Jewish state” based on discrimination and the oppression of the Palestinian Arabs who are the real owners of the land.

2. Weakness of the Arab states: The Arab countries are in permanent decline, both states and people, most of them preoccupied with internal conflicts that have shifted their attention from the question of Palestine so that it is hardly on their agenda any more. This has provided the opportunity for Israel to build even more settlements on stolen Palestinian land and achieve Zionism’s goals. This is an ongoing colonisation process; after 74 years Israel has still not declared where its borders are. It is unique among UN member states in this respect.

3. Arab normalisation with the Zionist entity: A number of Arab states have signed normalisation agreements with Israel, betraying the Palestinian cause. Egypt turned its back on the Palestinian cause in the late 1970s by signing the Camp David agreement, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Jordan joined it in the 1990s. Such normalisation followed top secret discussions before being announced to the world. In the past couple of years, though, Arab states have been brazenly open about normalising their relations with Israel. We now see consulates being opened and commercial and security deals between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco under the slogan of coexistence and peace.

4. The absence of Palestinian legitimacy: Since the recognition of Israel by the PLO in 1988, and the organisation’s rejection of resistance as it entered the dark tunnel of normalisation with the Zionist entity, the Palestinian people have been divided. They refuse to recognise

the occupation state and its “legitimacy”, with the result that there is no longer a national liberation framework capable of organising and leading the struggle for freedom. Palestine has been suffering from a constitutional vacuum since 2009. There is no legitimacy for its “president” and “government” since the role of the Palestinian Legislative Council has been usurped and public anger is growing over official corruption, abuse of power and security cooperation with the occupation.

5. The war in Ukraine between the West and Russia: It is too early to judge the war in Ukraine between the West and Russia, but history has taught us that power does not last for ever, no matter who holds it, and that countries and empires weaken and disappear with the passage of time. The fact that the US is the sole global superpower has upset the balance of the world in general and the Palestine cause in particular. The US has recognised and supported the Zionist entity for all of its 74-year existence in occupied Palestine. Washington provides financial and military aid, as well as political and diplomatic cover for Israel, which is able to continue its policies of land theft, ethnic cleansing, house demolitions and forcible deportations, as well as frequent military offensives against the Palestinians, all with impunity. Quite how this might, or might not, change when the dust settles in Ukraine remains to be seen.

Land Day in the memory of young people after four and a half decades

“The old die and the young forget,” said the founder and first prime minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion. This maxim was adopted by the most famous US Secretary of State during the Cold War, [John Foster Dulles](#). As far as Palestine is concerned, though, Ben Gurion was wrong. The Palestinians still stand steadfast in the land and cling to their legitimate rights, including the right of return.

Many European, American and international politicians try to evade the repercussions of Israel’s occupation of Palestine; they wish it would disappear, but know that it won’t. Their blind support for the occupation state rather than the people under occupation has been exposed as hypocrisy by the war in Ukraine. The international webs that the Western world has woven to legitimise the usurper Zionist entity will unravel one day. The West knows it. The Palestinians know it. And the Israelis know it.

It is true that old people die, but Palestine remains in the hearts and minds of young and old alike. Land Day is still commemorated because it represents all that is right and legitimate in the Palestinian cause. On Land Day last year, the [Arab 48](#) website interviewed some young people to find out what it means for them. Extracts from some of the responses are given below:

Muhammad Miteb: “Land Day for me is a pivotal event in our struggle with the [occupation] authority on the land and in our relationship with the Israeli establishment. Every day we have a land day. Every day they demolish our homes under the pretext of not having a licence, as now in Sheikh Jarrah, in Qalansuwa, Jaffa and elsewhere. They want to get us out of our homes through decisions of unjust courts.”

Nour Ehab Mahamid: “I know about Land Day... The young people were not afraid of confrontation at the time and went out despite the police and the army threatening them with death, but they were not afraid of bombs or bullets. We are standing on the threshold of Land Day, and we are fighting the criminals and complicit police having fought the confiscation of land. The scene is more or less the same as we have to confront the Israeli police with their bombs and bullets. We are not afraid of this threat because we have the right to fight for our country.”

Fatima Abdel Nasser: “I used to think that it was a memory of the land in general, and not dedicated to our Palestinian people, but with the passage of time I understood that Land Day is a day of struggle dedicated to us.”



Nour Ehab Mahamid and Fátima Abdel Nasser

Land Day, 1976

At the end, it must be remembered that the land is still at the heart of our struggle, our existence and our future. Our survival and development are linked to the land and its preservation. The land issue is the most common issue in which national and militant dimensions are mixed. The struggle is far from over. Indeed, we can say that every day in Palestine is Land Day as Israel's ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians and their land continues apace. The open racism of the Zionist state has been acknowledged by major aid agencies, including [B'Tselem](#), [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#). Israel seeks to delegitimise our struggle and our existence, not only steal our land.

Four and a half decades have passed since the first historic Land Day, and the Palestinians are still inspired by events on that fateful day as a way to confront the Zionist entity. They recall the experience of [Tawfiq Ziad](#) in the struggle and the expression of the steadfastness of the Palestinian people, their defiance of the occupiers and their adherence to their land. They are still reciting his famous poem Here we will stay, and will do so again on 30 March 2022.

Here We Will Stay
In Lidda, in Ramla, in the Galilee,
we shall remain
like a wall upon your chest,
and in your throat
like a shard of glass,
a cactus thorn,
and in your eyes
a sandstorm.
We shall remain
a wall upon your chest,
clean dishes in your restaurants,
serve drinks in your bars,
sweep the floors of your kitchens
to snatch a bite for our children
from your blue fangs.
Here we shall stay,
sing our songs,
take to the angry streets,
fill prisons with dignity.
In Lidda, in Ramla, in the galilee,
we shall remain,
guard the shade of the fig
and olive trees,
ferment rebellion in our children
as yeast in the dough.

Here We Will Stay, by Tawfik Ziad

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