How Dough Rises in Gaza: Palestine's Foremothers and Recipes against Genocide

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Abstract

Amid imposed starvation and Israel's genocidal assault, Palestinians in Gaza return to their foremothers' ovens, practices, and recipes to survive. Ancestral food practices such as baking bread in a clay tabun oven in the absence of fuel and electricity, and foraging for edible and medicinal herbs, become practices of *sumud* and material survival. Through Palestine's foremothers, the seeds of steadfastness had long been planted. Gaza's food vloggers assert an Indigenous presence and a refusal to be erased even in the darkest hour of genocide. I argue that Gaza's digital storytellers provide the source material for Indigenous survival made possible by the creativity of the Gazan people and the lessons they carry from their foremothers.

Keywords:

Foremothers; bread; starvation; genocide; tabun; Indigenous food epistemologies; Gaza.

Renad Attallah (@renadfromgaza) is a ten-year-old online storyteller on Instagram who cooks from her displacement camp in Rafah in the context of Israel's genocide in Gaza. She shares her recipes in Arabic with English subtitles, while noting the conditions around her. Her most popular video log (or vlog) is a recipe for a "war burger," using canned meat received from a humanitarian relief agency, which garnered almost half a million "likes" in just sixty days, a notable digital footprint for a displaced child surviving a genocide under siege.[1] She

started her account on 30 March 2024, almost six months into Israel's genocide and mass starvation campaign. She posted two videos that day: one "unboxing" of a parcel of aid, which received over two hundred thousand "likes," and another of her kneading dough and baking bread on a makeshift oven made from a flipped pot.

In her videos, Renad is always smiling and cheerful, giggling nervously as her tutorials are interrupted by the buzzing of remotely operated drones and sounds of aerial bombardments all around her. She ducks, frightened, before resuming her instructions: "Rolling dough in the tent," she announces beneath the deafening din of explosives. Her daily routine in Gaza is "struggling to survive," one dish at a time. Israel is killing children her age in the deadliest attack on children in modern history.[2] Her videos bear witness to the culinary productions of a child surviving a genocide. Combining meager ingredients, her videos are also a call to action: to spread awareness about Gaza and help her surviving family members escape to safety.

Through her online presence, Renad defies the blackout imposed on Palestinian journalism and people while trying to stay alive. In the absence of oil or bread, her incomplete meals reflect the ruinous destruction around her. She works to survive in her beloved Gaza as a storyteller against settler erasure. "The roads have changed, they are no longer filled with joy as they once were … In the past, we could walk comfortably and enjoy the space around us," she shares.[3] In addition to a "war burger," Renad also makes "war lasagna" which she cooks in the tabun – a communal, outdoor oven common during harvests, traditionally made from materials collected from the land and patted together by Palestinian women.[4] Her videos are instructive, teaching viewers the process of preparing common Palestinian dishes, such as *maqluba* (a savory dish of layered meat, vegetables, and rice cooked in a turmeric broth), while telling a story about the people of Gaza and their survival in real time.

Genocide is part of Israel's long, violent process of settler-colonialism; its purpose is to annihilate and erase the Indigenous from their land and from global memory. This essay looks at Gazan food content creation during the first nine months of the Gaza genocide to analyze it as a record of Palestinian presence-making and presence-affirming. Beginning with a brief Indigenous history of Gaza as the land of spice and *samak* (fish), I explore how Palestinian food is a land relation sustained even in the darkest hour, through Indigenous cunning and ancestral knowledge, which helps many survive genocide in Gaza. The Nakba of 1948, which began a process of dispossession, military occupation, and total containment, transformed Palestine's bustling Gaza District to an emaciated "Strip," a violently colonized, isolated, and militarized land, under siege, and actively starved. Through my discussion of olive oil, bread, *khubiza* (mallow), the use of the tabun, and the preparation of traditional dishes like maqluba, I contend that Palestinians continue to enact their *sumud*, or steadfastness; food enables the continuity of a people, reflecting an Indigenous land relation and the wisdom of Palestine's foremothers.

I argue that survival is not passive; it is active and rooted work animated by the place-based food knowledge of Palestine's foremothers. Palestinians' Indigenous

survival reflects an existential, insurrectionary, and activated sense of presence; it is resistance in itself.[5] That is the premise of the Palestinian Indigenous praxis of sumud. In the context of colonized Palestine, sumud has come to embody a range of significations, sensibilities, affections, attachments, aspirations, and practices. What connects them is a political subjectivity "that embodies the possibility of escaping hegemonic configurations of colonial liberal politics."[6] Indigenous food preparation and consumption, then, emerge as radical acts of embodied protest, refusing the necropolitical practices and sanctions by Israel's settler colonialism, military occupation, and efforts to erase Palestine and Palestinians. Food enables us to continue "as we have always done."[7] Cooking food in the context of its scarcity is work for survival against genocide that conjures an Indigenous ethos of presence, longevity, and durability. Under acute deprivation, food ritual and knowledge emerge to assert an Indigenous politics of sumud that summons the knowledge of our elders and asserts: *We are still here and we aren't going anywhere*.[8]

The Land of Spice and Samak

The coastal waters of the Eastern Mediterranean have long been a source of abundance, regeneration, and cultural exchange for Palestinians. Gaza's rich culinary traditions are composed largely of spice, samak, and other seafood and reflect the diversified desires of its people, including urban elites and land cultivators. Gaza served as a nexus of trade since the Bronze Age and its food reflected a long history of transnational trade and diplomatic relations, the tastes of its Bedouin communities, and the generations of fishers who made fresh seafood kebab and barbecued fish on open fires.

Gaza was also a famed spice hamlet along the Silk Road. In addition to Indian silks, African wood, and Arabian balsam, spices such as pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon would be loaded onto ships at the seaports of Gaza, ready to be sent off to markets all over the Mediterranean. Pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves – the spices that for centuries moved the world's economy in their storied transit across the "Old World" – all passed through Gaza.[9] Gaza connected East Africa to Western Europe through land and sea routes and served as a loading dock for citrus, wheat, and barley harvested in the Gaza District.

As elsewhere in Palestine, olive oil was central to Gaza's cuisine. The wealthy urbanite, the land cultivator (fellah), and the fisher alike enjoyed olive oil produced from local olive trees that flourished in the coastal district. They used olive oil to dress salads and stews and cook traditional Gazan dishes like *sumagiyya* (sumac, chard, and meat stew), one of the oldest recorded meals in history, mentioned in Muhammad bin Hasan al-Baghdadi's 1225 CE cookbook.[10] In addition to olive oil, seafood, and chilies, Gaza had an abundance of dill and other fresh herbs. Gaza city, whose history stretches back some four millennia, has long been a culinary hub and the aromas, flavors, and tastes of its rich cuisine have been familiar to Palestinians for many generations.

Before 1948, most people worked the land in the surrounding countryside; Gazan landowners and land cultivators alike harvested citrus groves and fished for seafood. When the state of Israel was established on lands it dispossessed from Palestinians, Gaza was cut from its traditional food sources and markets, especially the land. The Gaza District – one of five districts of historic Palestine – was made up of two subdistricts, Gaza and Bir al-Sab‘. After the Nakba, the state of Israel took control of Bir al-Sab‘a and most of Gaza’s subdistricts. The once large and productive Gaza District was shrunk into an emaciated “strip,” and the Gazan economy was ravaged; within a few months, the people in the crowded strip were forced into poverty and aid dependence. Gaza simultaneously became a sanctuary for many of the Palestinians displaced by the Nakba. In September 1948, there were 83,000 refugees in the Gaza Strip; by December of that year, there were 250,000 refugees displaced from 144 cities, towns, and villages.[11] In a matter of weeks, 70 percent of the people living in the Gaza Strip were refugees of the 1948 Nakba.

In the 1950s and1960s, a steady influx of refugees into the Strip prompted a series of interventions by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Following a freezing winter in 1950, UNRWA built better facilities. Soon, there were eight central refugee camps in Gaza: Jabaliya, Nusayrat, al-Maghazi, Dayr al-Balah, Khan Yunis, Rafah, Shati’, and al-Burayj. These refugee camps symbolized the continuation of the Nakba through Israel’s ongoing policy and practices of dispossession and militarized violence, but also the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. The part of the Gaza Subdistrict that remained Palestinian land was administered by the Egyptian military. Between 1950 and 1967, many Palestinians in Gaza worked and studied in Egypt. They would continue to cherish their ancestral recipes, fusing them with the coastal traditions they encountered.

After occupying the Gaza Strip during the 1967 war, Israel ran Gaza like a plantation economy. Wealthy settler “developers” replaced ancestral groves with cash crops, exploited Gazan land and labor, and forced Israeli commodities into Gaza’s markets. Israel coerced the descendants of the famed Gaza spice traders and the Nakba’s refugees to work fields of strawberries and avocados for export to its settler metropole. Young Palestinians in the Gaza Strip confronted a chokehold of ecological collapse, food deprivation, economic sanction, physical containment, settler-state violence, agricultural dumping, aid dependence, and a lifetime of besiegement. Those who could obtain temporary permits worked on Israeli plantations, making on average thirteen dollars a day, leaving the harvests to the elders and women as they sought to find a way out of impoverishment. By exploiting the labor of young Palestinian men, the settler state would maintain its branding as a Mediterranean paradise with excellent brunch options, “like Southern California. Only nicer.”[12]

Meanwhile, Gazans innovated their cuisine. As Israel established plantations of strawberries and avocadoes, Palestinians in Gaza began to integrate such produce that could be indigenized into Gaza’s environs, traditions, and diets. Bayt Lahiya became famous for strawberries, attracting tourists from across Gaza to its fall and spring harvests. Despite Israel’s military occupation, locals reported malnutrition levels near

zero in Gaza in 2003.[13] Gazan cuisine had a level of nutritive sophistication both in the creamy yogurt-based broths and tart flavors of the north and the savory tomato-based stews of the south.[14] Gazans also innovated their cuisine in the context of scarcity, making do with rations of vegetable oil, powdered milk, and water supplied by humanitarian organizations to make dough a canvas of possibilities: they spread olive oil and cinnamon sugar on it to make fresh cinnamon rolls; they stuffed it with cheeses, za'tar and olive oil, or spicy minced lamb and pine nuts to make savory pies. They ate freshly baked breads with tomatoes, cucumber, olive oil, labneh, salty cheeses, falafel, hummus, or *ful mudammas* for breakfast. In 2007, however, the adaptive and creative capacities of the people of Gaza were placed under a completely new order.

There Is No Olive Oil in Gaza: Erasure as Slow Starvation

In 2007, Israel put Gaza under an oppressive siege, closing its borders, destroying the very plantation economy it had imposed upon the captive population, and forcing Palestinians in Gaza into systemic food deprivation. To survive, Gazans were forced to rely on donor rations that arrived on humanitarian aid trucks and were distributed to households in accordance with Israel's policy of "counting [the] calories" allowed into the Gaza Strip.[15] Under international law, occupying countries are required to provide basic life necessities to occupied people. A leaked Israeli report estimated that 2,279 calories per person in food assistance would be sufficient to ensure the population would not starve, but would be held captive to "a basic fabric of life."[16] Olive oil became a luxury afforded by few, an astonishing fact in lands where olive trees make up at least half of the landscape. For over seventeen years, Gazans had to smuggle sage, cardamon, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, and ginger, as well as chocolate, fresh meat, seeds and nuts, vitamins and oil for animal feed, fishing rods, chamomile, and other items banned in the name of security by the state of Israel. Items like chocolate are admitted for international organizations, but are specifically not for Palestinian use.[17]

The colonization, theft, and desecration of Gaza's lands and waters has deeply affected the traditional diet of its people. The theft and destruction of the land directly impacts the availability of fresh food. Half of Gaza's farmlands lay along Israel's "buffer zone" – a settler-military area within occupied Palestinian territory along the entire northern and eastern sides of the Gaza Strip. Israeli soldiers in dystopic watchtowers regularly opened heavy machine gunfire on land cultivators and shepherds who were denied accessing 85 percent of the Palestinian maritime areas and orchards recognized in the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement. In the 2010s, the Israeli navy routinely shot at Gaza's four thousand fishermen or any Palestinians who fished or boated beyond two nautical miles.[18] This nautical colonialism had a catastrophic impact on the environment as overfishing along the coasts depleted fish stocks, leaving a large gap in Gaza's traditional diet and economy.

Israel destroyed local food production and replaced Palestinian foods with Israeli brands at supermarkets. During Israel's 2009 assault on Gaza, Israeli forces destroyed

chicken farms belonging to Sameh Sawafeary and his family in Zaytun. In total, 131,000 of Sawafeary's chickens were killed; Sawafeary and his family had supplied approximately 35 percent of the eggs on the market in Gaza. Egg prices soared and Gaza's stores stocked frozen chickens supplied by Israeli firms.[19] Israel also destroyed dairy processing plants, bombed the al-Badr flourmill – the last one still operating in Gaza at the time – to rubble, and destroyed the famed strawberry fields of Bayt Lahiya. Through this material destruction, Gazans became more dependent on the Israeli state to grant official permission for flour to enter the Gaza Strip via international aid.

Still, Gazans refused to stop eating well. Instead, they returned to old methods of harvesting passed down by their foremothers. If they no longer had access to plots of land or if regular Israeli bombardment had contaminated the soil of their farmlands, they planted what they could on their rooftops, balconies, and entryways. They created small community gardens and invested in hydroponic agriculture. They became adept at preserving foods in the face of electricity blackouts imposed by Israel. Gazans planted and pickled and made jams; they sundried tomatoes and they dried herbs on clotheslines. They boiled water with rations of milk powder to replicate *jibna baladiyya*, a traditional farmer's cheese. These "slow food" methods became a matter of surviving slow starvation for an ever-growing population, of which half are children, under eighteen years of age.[20]

Motivated by the self-reliance and steadfastness of their predecessors, including the example set during the first intifada, the people of Gaza developed plans for wastewater management, water recycling, and rainfed agriculture. They became exceptional builders and rebuilders in the aftermath of Israel's repeated bombardments and massacres. Reconnecting with ancestral foodways disrupted by the ongoing Nakba was a move toward economic, political, national, psychological, and social sovereignty.[21] Despite the fact that 85 percent of Palestinians in Gaza were officially food insecure and dependent on donor agencies like UNRWA for flour, beans, sugar, salt, and vegetable oil, they continued to innovate food as a form of refusal of Israel's conditions of deprivation. To circumvent Israel's violent entrapment via air, land, and sea, Palestinians smuggled in goods through underground tunnels. Thus, Gazans draw from a rich historical tradition of sumud as well as a proclivity for creative problem solving and ingenuity. This "get it done" attitude, resourcefulness, and creative problem solving reflect the resilient spirit of the people of Gazan.

There Is No Bread in Gaza: Genocide in the Seas of Abundance

After nine months of genocide, flour is either scarce, held captive by Israeli forces, or extremely expensive. People are forced to eat grass and drink polluted water, and the bakeries, like most buildings, have been destroyed. Within a few days of 7 October 2023, bread queues began to lengthen as Israel cut off fuel, water, and electricity. People would line up at bakeries at 1 AM to secure a place in line and return home at 9 AM. Sometimes they would return the following afternoon, often empty-handed due to the absence of flour and water. Finding bread was a stressful and terrifying journey.

People in line were concerned that their gathering would provoke an Israeli strike and they became tired: "You can imagine waiting all that time under the missiles, the bombardment, the heat, and the crowding," reported a Gazan baker. Before long, bakeries went out of service. A young Gazan baker recalls that people who were "fortunate with flour" made *saj* and tabun bread and sold the loaves in the streets.[22] Soon they were flooded with even more customers as people became more and more desperate to feed their families, especially as winter loomed. By January, a sack of flour was four hundred shekels, or more than one hundred U.S. dollars. "We now eat beans with saj and then finish it using spoons," the unnamed baker says.[23] Then, there was no more bread left to sell in Gaza. In February, Hamza Abu Toha spent five days searching for food for his wife who had just given birth to their child, returning with a plate of uncooked rice and a few pieces of meat, which cost him ninety-five dollars.[24]

Currently, 100 percent of Gazans are food and life insecure. Israeli-declared "safety zones" have become death traps. The United States continues to enable the genocide, delivering thousands of weapons including precision-guided munitions, two-thousand-pound bunker buster bombs, tank shells, and other arms.[25] At the same time that the U.S. government arms Israel with weapons that level entire neighborhoods in the blink of an eye, it continues to allow Gazans to starve. Israel continues to kill journalists, poets, musicians, teachers, doctors, nurses, patients, medical workers, land cultivators, scientists, and bakers – all agents of Gaza's social reproduction – through aerial bombardment, targeted assassinations, recurring massacres, tank shelling, snipers, and ground assaults.

By late February 2024, the UN described the conditions in Gaza as the "highest percentage of acute food insecurity ever classified" and reported that pregnant or breastfeeding women were particularly vulnerable.[26] In five months, hardly any flour had made it into Gaza and people were desperate and exhausted. Death was taking its toll as children succumbed to starvation. Searching for flour or bread was tedious and results were meager.

On that rare 29th day of February, fifty-two-year-old Faris Elewya, a resident of the Sha'f area east of Gaza City, left his house, braving Israel's aerial bombardment in the hope of bringing home flour for his children. "It's been forty days, and none of my children has seen the sight of bread," the father of five told reporters.[27] At approximately 4 AM, Israeli troops opened fire on Elewya and others who had gathered to collect flour from humanitarian aid trucks. Israel killed at least 112 people and injured 760 others. UN officials condemned the massacre, calling on Israel to end its deliberate campaign of starvation.[28]

Over a two-week period, Israeli soldiers killed over four hundred Palestinians seeking the scant aid allowed into Gaza.[29] Israeli forces shot and shelled them as they gathered to get food for their starving families. Israel targeted Palestinian crowds desperately searching for flour at locations that aid groups had coordinated with the Israeli military in advance. This string of killings came to be known as the Flour Massacres.[30] Israel's policy of slow starvation became more systematized and crueler. The same day Israelis murdered starving Palestinians seeking aid, the military

bombed a UN aid shelter. Israeli officials claimed without evidence that UNRWA – a lifeline for food in Gaza – was supporting terrorism.[31] The United States and some of its allies immediately halted their financial support, further accelerating already imminent starvation in the Gaza Strip. Israel has since passed a law banning UNRWA from operating in Palestine.

Today, Palestinians in Gaza continue to be deprived of food. Under pressure from mass popular movements for Palestine, the United States sent canned food packed in flimsy boxes, dropped unceremoniously into the Mediterranean Sea. In six months, the United States conducted two airdrops totaling 126 bundles of food, or seventy-five thousand meals, for a population of over two million people. Desperate children risked being shot by Israeli snipers patrolling Gaza's coast as they dove into the Mediterranean Sea to receive the sloppily airdropped aid. Several parachutes failed to deploy and the aid parcels landed on five Palestinians, two of them children, crushing them to death.[32]

"We need fruits and vegetables," Gazans shouted at journalists covering the humiliating "rescue mission." By 4 November 2023, the average Palestinian in Gaza was surviving on two pieces of bread a day. Two weeks later, the only remaining mill in Gaza was shut. By spring, at the onset of Ramadan, nearly 1.5 million Palestinians displaced to Rafah were on the brink of famine. On 15 May, an unnamed Palestinian man held a bag of flour to reporters: "This bag belonged to a martyr, his blood is on it. A human life is worth a bag of flour now."[33] In Gaza, food continues to be a weapon of dispossession and erasure.

The Ovens of Our Foremothers: Tabun as a Feminist Praxis

Many video logs from Gaza during the genocide show young men bringing elderly Palestinian women sacks of dough. These women are often kneeling beside an oven made from an oil tin or a tabun or saj oven. These videos typically depict a woman kneading the dough, rolling it out, shaping it into balls, and stretching it into rounds over hot stones. People gather around her, many helping by breaking up the task of bread making, each person taking on a role. The tabun oven is lit and will run for as long as the fire continues, as long as needed. And as long as there is flour, the dough will rise, its aroma alone sacred in this ashen landscape – a pause from death, a reprieve from hunger, a source of comfort.[34]

When it comes to food for survival, Palestine's history is indeed our future.[35] Palestinian ancestors innovated the tabun oven using raw materials they gathered from the surrounding countryside. Earth and compost materials packed together and sterilized through the natural aerobic bacteria found in the soil was formed into a heating vessel. The tabun was heated by ground olive pits and other composted material. Once ignited, the oven remained lit for hours, the stones glowing dimly. These tabuns were coveted possessions often passed down from one generation to the next, and a tabun would serve a family, clan, village, or collection of *hamula*s (extended families) for hundreds of years. Sometimes they were in people's private homes or gardens, but

more often they were built in the open outdoors, near a central location like a spring, the base of a hill, a natural clearing between trees, or a community garden. In almost all cases, they were open for use by the community, including the village where it was located and neighboring villages. Traditionally, especially in the countryside, Palestinian women baked bread daily and the tabun was set up for the gathering of women. Women would sit beside the oven, cracking jokes, gossiping, exchanging resources, offering condolences, prayers, and blessings, or celebrating good news. They did this while watching the dough rise over the hot stones in a perfect puffy round. When crispy bubbles form on the surface of the bread, it is done. The smell of fresh bread signaled that someone was finishing up and the tabun would soon be free.

Tabun also refers to the kind of bread made in the tabun oven, a large round flatbread. Its dough is a simple recipe of flour, water, salt, sugar, yeast, and olive oil. Once the dough is rolled out and shaped, it is slapped onto the oven's walls or on hot stones to bake. The result is a doughy flatbread with a slight crisp to its edges and on the grooves that form on its surface from the stones. The inside is fluffy and aromatic. Once the fresh bread is made, it makes its way across clean hands and elders praise the blessing. Everyone tears a piece of the round, a cloud of billowing steam bursting from the fresh bread, and dunks it into a bowl of zingy, peppery olive oil characteristic of Palestine's olives, savory za'tar, creamy labneh, or soul-warming ful. The combination of piping fresh bread and the pepperiness of the neon-green olive oil is the ultimate satisfaction offered first to elders and eager children during the harvests.

In corners of Gaza, the tabun oven flickers due to the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the Gazan people. In Khan Yunis in January, a displaced elderly Palestinian man makes a clay oven as children play around him, a brief reprieve from the missiles encircling their makeshift shelter. In the ruins of Dayr al-Balah, Gaza Strip, fifty-three-year-old Inshirah Salem al-Aqra, a mother of ten, shares that the secret of delicious bread is in our foremothers' hearths, and that the wood-fired tabun makes food extra flavorful. Before 7 October, she would hand mold ovens from clay, straw, and organic materials, as Palestine's foremothers had done for generations, for sale to whoever wanted them. She would pat and mold, shaping the vessel by hand, before leaving it to dry in the sun. She says, "In this war, everything is so hard. People need the tabuns even to make coffee or tea."[36] With Gaza in total darkness, people come to Inshirah to ask her for a tabun. In the genocide's early stages, her gentle patting and molding became the only source of income for her family. Her husband was a fisherman, but Israeli forces burned his fishing boat in October. Inshirah returned to her foremothers' hearth to support her family of twelve. She made and sold five ovens in one week, more than she would have made in a month before October. But she is firm in maintaining her old prices, explaining: "I don't want to take advantage of people, especially during these times." She sells a small oven for twenty-one dollars and the largest for forty dollars. Inshirah has also opened her home to displaced women sheltering in nearby schools. "They bring me flour, so I can bake bread for them," she said. If she has clean water, she fills their jars.

The process of making tabun contains a lesson about land relations, social reproduction, and culinary creativity. Our foodways are lessons from our ancestors taught through stories and practices passed down from generation to generation, usually by women. Palestinian Indigenous foodways help us see food not as a commodity to be produced and consumed, but a site of mediation between our place of belonging, the way of our ancestors, and the worlds we seek to create. Food is a site of social, ancestral, cultural, and material regeneration, endowed at different times with various meanings: sustenance, care, currency, medicine, heritage, ancestry, identity, and traditional knowledge systems. Characteristically Palestinian culinary arts, including making tabun bread and foraging for plants, become practices and recipes against erasure, even when it stares people in the face.

The tabun method of making bread – a tabun methodology – guided and inspired by relations between women and the land, is imbued with lessons from our foremothers. Itself a product of the land, the tabun espouses a set of Indigenous principles that articulate a decolonial food praxis in the context of acute violence: 1) the centrality of the land (and water) and our appreciation for its sacredness; 2) the importance of connectedness, cooperation, and co-creativity for the regeneration of land, body, collective, and spirit; 3) the ritual of reciprocity in mutual nourishment and mutual accountability; 4) the emphasis on individual and collective wellness; 4) the sacredness of life; and 5) respect for human and nonhuman beings. Tabun bread is fortified through the spirit of collectivity informed by the gathering of women working to sustain life across generations.

Content creators from Gaza showed Gazan women baking bread in accordance with ancestral Palestinian traditions, to survive Gaza during the genocide. These videos show women's hands, kneading, rolling, rounding, sifting, stuffing, and baking. This is their house, and they invite young content creators to watch them skillfully knead and roll, forming balls of dough and then patting them flat in their palms. The young men and boys are responsible for the fire; they light the tabun, bring the precious rolls to the oven, kneeling beside it with a long-necked spatula or tongs and handling the dough with care and gratitude. The young men's agile hands place, flip, and bake.

At one tabun oven in a makeshift encampment for the displaced in Khan Yunis, Umm Ahmad bakes bread and calls for a young Gazan journalist Mohammed Majed Aborjela (@aborjelaa): "Here is a *manqusha* for you, Mohammed."[37] She has finished baking bread in her tabun and has saved her last few rolls to make these savory pies with the few ingredients she has. She offers Mohammed a za'tar flatbread, or manqusha, to which he responds with gratitude and supplication: "May God be with you … May this war end … May we eat these pastries at home upon our return." In the video, which has close to fifty thousand views, he describes to his viewers a Palestinian bread making tradition where the baker reserves the last few balls of dough to make savory flatbreads and pies that she distributes at will to her loved ones. These are typically stuffed with cheeses and herbs, scrambled eggs, minced beef and pine nuts, or spinach spiced with sumac and onions. Today there is only za'tar and Mohammed delights in the delicious, warm, and familiar pie: "We are proud of our Palestinian traditions and our traditional Palestinian foods as well," he tells his viewers.

At another encampment in the south Umm Mustafa calls another young journalist Ahmed Elmadhoun (@madhoun95) to enjoy a similar freshly baked pie. Umm Mustafa is a displaced mother from the north living in a makeshift UNRWA camp in southern Gaza. Ahmed is hungry and grateful to receive the fresh baked bread: "It was the first thing we ate since the morning," he shares. "Mothers are the ones helping us endure and stay strong."[38] Umm Mustafa bakes bread in her tabun oven for the many hungry people that surround her, distributing what she can. She also allows people to bring their own dough or wood, and she helps their dough rise. She greets Ahmed with a solemn blessing:

Umm Mustafa: May God calm our lives.

Ahmed: Praise God.

Umm Mustafa: With God's will, may this not be prolonged.

In her prayers, Umm Mustafa's voice is strong and resolute. Her bread is made simply and out of necessity, but robust prayers make up for the meager ingredients. Her blessings inspire a response from the content creator. *Ya rabb*, he says, "Praise God." Ahmed receives the bread with gratitude, calling the generous stranger "aunt." He blesses her hands (*salim iydayki*). Their interaction is soft, quiet. Ahmed gives Umm Mustafa "a thousand thanks" and makes his own supplication: "May the next time that we meet be in our homes," he tells her.[39] The quick exchange, mediated by bread and blessings, reflects a rooted sense of belonging. The Gazan baker becomes a spiritual and material lifeline anchored by a collective desire for safety and return. The final prayer between the Gazan acquaintance-kin is that Palestine will rise from the ashes of despair. This is a scene that is repeated over and again in videos of Gazan content creators in their depiction of food and survival beside the tabun oven.

As an oven quite literally made of the earth and a bread intended to feed a collective, Palestinian tabun brings with it the praxis of connection that has sustained our people. From the makeshift ovens first introduced during the neolithic period to the ongoing practices of foraging and harvest, our food, including the foods made under conditions of forced starvation and deprivation in Gaza, is a record of our belonging and rootedness to the land. Palestinian foodways thus serve as subversive records of presence, life making, and steadfastness that gather and sustain people even in genocide.

Maqluba Is a Call to Action, Khubiza Is an Antidote to Genocide

The feminist praxes of creativity, responsibility, co-creativity, relationality, and individual and collective nourishment converge at the Palestinian hearth. Gazans now collect what little vegetables and produce is available and teach people to make maqluba. Typically, a Gazan maqluba consists of layers of fried vegetables, meat,

rice, and spices cooked in a rich broth. Once the pot of layers has cooked, the pot is flipped over to reveal a perfectly tiered cake of savory layers of spicy rice, fried vegetables, and lamb or chicken. This is where maqluba, meaning "flipped over" or "upside down," gets its name. In Gaza, the dish is traditionally prepared with eggplant and lamb. I grew up eating the dish with chicken and fried cauliflower typical of my city, al-Khalil. In any case, maqluba is delicious, hearty, and soul-nourishing. It is perfect in the cold winter months and paired with a crunchy Arabic salad (cucumbers, tomato, onion, bell pepper, and leafy greens or cabbage dressed in olive oil, lemon juice, and a sprinkle of salt) and fresh whole fat yogurt, which has a cooling effect with the spiced rice.

With the destruction of gardens and groves and the extremely high cost of vegetables, and the prevention of humanitarian aid by Israel, Renad from Gaza makes an "orphan maqluba." This is a meatless maqluba with a few paltry vegetables and spiced rice that she fries with little oil over an open fire. Nisreen (@nisreendiary), another Gazan content creator displaced to Rafah, also makes the traditional Palestinian dish for her English-speaking viewers, using the only vegetables she could find. "After 124 days [of genocide], we were finally able to make maqluba!" Nisreen announces.[40] Nisreen has a few tomatoes, one eggplant, and some small potatoes. She expresses gratitude for the ingredients she has and concern that others do not have even this much: "We were lucky to get these few ingredients. Unfortunately, our brothers and sisters in the north are still struggling to find food and water as we are living in real hunger now."[41] Normally, she would slice and deep fry the vegetables, but there is not enough oil for frying. Every bit of food counts and nothing is to be wasted. Nisreen's cooking video briefly pans to crowds of people around small wagons of produce. "After layering the veggies, we should add meat at this point, but meat is very rare to find, so we added chickpeas as a source of protein," she informs the audience.[42] She then adds spices, rice, water, and bay leaves to the pot of vegetables and they simmer over the open fire. When the rice is fluffy and the spiced broth is absorbed, the maqluba is done. The maqluba is removed from heat and left to sit for a few minutes until it is ready for the grand finale: the flip. Nisreen expresses excitement because no vegetables stick to the bottom of the pot: it is a "perfect flip." She ends with a lesson: "Maqluba is about patience, love, and being together as a family. It's also a great way to talk more about Palestine." Nisreen concludes the video with a call to action: make a maqluba, invite your friends and family to enjoy it with you, and use it to raise awareness about Palestine. Use the hashtag #flipyourmaqluba on social media and connect with the people of Gaza through this traditional Palestinian dish.

Like Inshirah, who transforms the hearth into a tool of temporary repose, Nisreen's cooking demonstration is a pedagogy of life making, combining a necessarily pliable cuisine in the face of catastrophe and the assignment to learn and speak up. Her creativity imbues her food content with urgency and dynamic praxes of sumud. She also provides a space for solidarity through the appreciation of Palestinian food. These collective efforts to sustain life in the context of great deprivation, despair, and mass

murder transform the space of the hearth such that even in the face of atrocity, Gazans can make something delicious and enjoy when they flip their maqluba. Palestine is held by the steadfast Palestinian woman who breathes life into these ovens when the nexus of racial settler capitalism has imposed darkness.

As with her tabun oven, the Palestinian foremothers' knowledge emerges in the context of genocide through the embodied practice of foraging. Gazans take to foraging for wild plants and herbs like the Palestinian common mallow, *khubiza*, which grows wild across Palestine, to survive genocide. "This is my first time making Palestinian Khobiza," shares Nisreen in a different post. "I grew up watching my grandmother and then my mom prepare it with care. The leaves and stems are edible, and you can also eat it like a stew."[43] Like tabun bread, the wild mallow invokes Palestine's foremothers; they emerge as protective ghosts to feed the starving. They materialize as knowledge and lessons through stories passed down from one generation to the next, retained in collective memory as a toolkit for survival, replenishment, and regeneration amid the ruin. The edible plant contains anti-inflammatory and antioxidant components, is used to treat insect wounds or burns, and as cough relief. "This dish is part of our Palestinian heritage," Nisreen tells her 148,000 subscribers, and with healing properties, khubiza quite literally emerges from the land to heal Palestinians from Israel's imposed hunger.

A sister to *mulukhiya* (jute's mallow), khubiza grows everywhere in Gaza, in open fields and in the cracks of concrete along a highway. Like the tabun oven, foraging is about resourcefulness, making something delicious from the land, and appreciating food as it mediates the relationship between our people and homeland. Khubiza is also about the continuity of life, even in the circumstances of its negation. Khubiza became an antidote to the famine imposed on the Palestinians of Gaza: "Nowadays, it's common to see people in Gaza foraging in fields or stopping by the roadside to collect khubiza," writes Nisreen. To make a Palestinian khubiza salad, clean the greens thoroughly with vinegar and water, and give them a rough chop. Sauté the greens in olive oil with a diced onion, and season with salt and pepper. During the genocide in Gaza, foraging for khubiza and making salads like this became the steadfast work of survival.

Conclusion: Rising

In times of collective grief and tragedy, Palestine's foremothers make themselves present, providing the lessons and tools for survival. The food knowledge of our foremothers and the lessons it provides are not a vestige of the past, but animated in the present through a praxis of sumud. These practices are part of a process of "retrospective ethnogenesis," providing Indigenous people with new and updated content that connect the Indigenous past with an Indigenous insistence on presence.[44] The content of our collective past becomes the source material for our present and future, affirming our roots and sense of belonging, while materially enabling our people to survive.

In the context of Israel's settler-colonialism, military occupation, and besiegement, food is used as a weapon of starvation and genocide. The systemic destruction of Indigenous sources of food, including environments, livestock, and food establishments, has been a central part of a long history of Palestinian struggles for food and land sovereignty. Israel's theft and destruction of land and food sources are the primary means by which Gaza was transformed from a space of abundance to a starved "strip." Since 1967, more than eight hundred thousand Palestinian olive trees have been uprooted by Israeli authorities and settlers; many were centuries old.[45] Israel's consistent assault on Gaza's biodiversity has been prodigious, costing Palestinians a vital source of income, food, and medicine for the Palestinian cultivators who have long cared for it. For years, the settler state maintained a monopoly over imported goods and ran Gaza like a plantation. It sprayed Palestinian farmlands with toxic chemicals and pesticides.[46] Israel's seventeen-year siege systemically denied Gazan sovereignty by destroying access to land and water, fishing infrastructures, farmlands, and livestock.

This year's harvest is scorched or buried alive with other life beings along the captive coast. In Gaza, buildings filled with people have been razed to the ground, reduced to craters on the earth's surface. Mountains of ruin created by the settler state contain the dismembered bodies of Palestinians, most of them women and children, in a genocide that continues as I write. Ann Stoler writes that "ruins provide a quintessential image of what has vanished from the past and has long decayed."[47] But for Indigenous people, ruins are the story of our continuation. These ruins are the content of our lives. They are affirmations and reminders that our roots came before the ruin. The tabun, often considered a premodern relic of Palestine's past, emerges as a vessel of life making in the context of genocide. A product of our foremothers, the tabun oven is a gift to us from them, emerging directly from the land and providing a praxis for individual pleasure and collective well-being. The tabun also reflects the knowledge of its makers, including the children and young people who celebrate Palestinian food even in its deprivation. Palestine's foremothers' knowledge sustains us in this nightmarish reality. Tabun breadmaking reflects the insistence on Palestinian presence that stirs quietly in the spirits of the people. In Gaza, food provides a glimpse into the way people survive genocide and rise again; food is the culmination of the past embodied by the foremother, who reemerges through her knowledge and lessons to nurture the children of the land, across time and space, through the oven that will help the people rise.

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