

Making waves

Breaking the Gaza Blockade

Logs of a crossing, 2025

Edited by Catherine Benoît



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Disclaimer

At the time of this book's publication, the Global Sumud Flotilla, which departed from Barcelona on April 13, 2026, was attacked by the Israeli military in international waters off the coast of Crete. On the night of April 30, twenty-two boats were illegally intercepted; one hundred eighty people were kidnapped and mistreated before being released, with one hundred seventy-eight of them deported to their countries of origin.

Two crew members, Thiago Ávila, a Brazilian national, and Saif Abu Keshef, a Spanish and Swedish national of Palestinian origin, both long-standing members of the steering committee of the Global Sumud Flotilla, were transferred to Shikma Prison north of Gaza. On hunger strike since their capture, they are being held in solitary confinement and subjected to torture.

The sabotage of the flotillas, the murders, captures, and detention of their crew members are part of the policies of assassination, criminalization, and silencing of the Palestinian people and their allies.

The publication of the logbooks written by "ordinary" citizens who were members of the Global Sumud Flotilla at sea or on land in 2025 is a contribution to all actions aimed at breaking these policies

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في عرض الأزرق الواسع، الممتد مثل نجاة نتوق إليها ولا نبلغها، كنتُ أشاهدُ سفنَ المتضامنين في أسطول الصمود، تحملُ الأعلامَ الفلسطينية وترفرفُ في فضاءٍ حرٍّ خالٍ من الموت. لم تكن نفرحُ بالعلم لأنه رمزُ الوطن فحسب، بل لأنه كان في تلك اللحظة شهادة براءةٍ من تهمة الإرهاب. كانت ألوان العلم في البحر أكثرَ سطوعًا من أي وقت مضى؛ الأحمرُ لونُ الولوج في روح الشبان الأحرار المتقدة، الذين خاطروا من أجلنا، الأخضرُ لونُ السلامِ الهادي المطمئن في قلوبهم، والأبيضُ لونُ البراءة في أعمارهم الصغيرة، والأسودُ شاهدٌ لا ينام، ذاكرتنا التي تُخزِنُ الألمَ ولا تنساه. لم تكن أعلامنا فقط... كانت أرواحنا حرّة ملوّنة.

الاهتمام الذي جاء من بعيد، من وجود لا نعرفها، ومن لغاتٍ لا نتكلمها، أعاد إلي شيئًا انكسر ولم أكن أعرف اسمه. كمن يعيشُ طويلًا تحت ثقل الخذلان، حتى يصبح الخذلانُ جزءًا من تكوينه، ثم يرى فجأة من يمدّ يده إليه، كمواطنٍ من غزّة، كنتُ أفتّر هذا المعنى الإنساني الخالص، هذا التضامن الذي لا تحكمه مصلحة ولا ينتظرُ مقابلاً. كانوا يأتون إلينا من مسافاتٍ لا تُقاس بالكيلومترات، بل بقدرتهم على أن يشعروا بنا.

كنا نعرف أن الطريق لن يُفتح، وأن البحر نفسه مراقب، وأن كلَّ محاولة كهذه تُؤلّدُ وهي تحملُ احتمال الخنق، ومع ذلك، ظلّ في داخلنا شيءٌ صغيرٌ يرفض أن ينطفئ، لم يكن الأسطولُ غذاءً ولا دواءً، بل كان طريقةً أخرى لقول أننا هنا وهناك من يرانا

ومع ذلك، يبقى لذلك الضوء البعيد أثرٌ لا يمكن إنكاره. أولئك الذين خرجوا إلينا من عرض البحر، لم يغيروا المصير، لكنهم غيروا شيئًا في الإحساس به، جعلوا العتمة أقلَّ انغلاقًا، ولو قليلاً. أعادوا تعريف المسافة بيننا وبين العالم، لا بوصفها مسافة جغرافية، بل أخلاقية.

فالقضاء، حين يصل متأخرًا، لا يمنع الألم... لكنه يجعله مرئيًا أكثر.

لكنَّ شعور المخدول لا يظل على حاله، يتقلب كموج البحر

ففائضُ الألم الذي نعيشه، والإحساسُ الثقيل بأن هذا العالم سمح لكل هذا أن يحدث ويستمر، يخلقُ في الداخل طبقةً أخرى أكثر قسوةً وأقلَّ قابليةً للتفسير. كنتُ أرى أولئك الشبان على متن السفن، يغمّون، يضحكون، يلوحون للكاسيرات، وأجد نفسي - في لحظاتٍ لا أستطيعُ تزيفها - أفكر:

لولا موتنا، لما حظي هؤلاء الشبان بهذه الرحلة الرائعة.

كان موتنا كان من دواعي الحظ لولادة تجربة جميلة عند الآخرين. كأننا، في مكان ما، لسنا إلا الخلفية التي تُضفي على المشهد معناه. شعورٌ لا يلغي الامتنان، لكنه يكسّف جرحًا أصق: أننا في الحقيقة نموتُ وحدنا.

ربما لا يمكنُ شرح هذه الفكرة لمن لم يعيشها. كيف يتحوّل العالمُ كلُّه إلى شيءٍ يشبه الخيانة، لا لأنه يكرهك، بل لأنه لا يسمعك. حين تصرخُ من الخوف، من الجوع، من العتمة، ثم تُختزَلُ إلى خير

عابر، إلى سطرٍ يُمرَّرُ بالإبهام على شاشيةٍ مضيئة، هناك، في أماكن أخرى، يُكسرُ هذا الخبرُ مللَ يومٍ طويل، في عالمٍ متخِمٍ حتى الصجر.

حتى الطبيعة، في لحظاتٍ كهذه، تبدو كأنها منحاذاة، الشمسُ تشرقُ كما لو أن شيئاً لم يحدث، والبحرُ يحتفظُ بإيقاعه، والليلُ يأتي في مواعده. كلُّ شيءٍ مستمرٌ... إلا نحن:

ذاتُ النجوم التي كانت هنا تضيءُ الطريقَ لقطعةٍ
تبحثُ عن لحم الجثث.

كانت هناك - في مكان ما من هذا العالم - تحرس المكان لعاشقين على العشب يتبادلان القُبُل

وذاثُ الشاعر الذي ألقى قصيدة الرثاء - في مكان من هذا العالم - وأبكى جمهوره،
شكرُ الحرب التي منحتهُ قُوَّةَ المجاز والتَّهْجَةِ الواسعة.

وذاثُ الشمس التي تنشرُ خيوطها الدافئة على المدن المظلمة التي غطى النَّجْمُ أكوأخها..
تحرَّقُ الآن - هنا - وجوه أطفال الخيم.

وذاثُ تكبيرة الإحرام التي نبدأُ بها صلاة الجنائزِ على أطفالنا..
كان المسلمون يبدؤون بها صلاة الجمعة، ولا يأتون فيها على ذكرنا.

كان هنا عالمٌ،

وكان هناك عالمٌ.

ليس نهراً،

ولا ليلةً.

بل حمامان وثلاثة أيام،

بل سبعٌ وستون مليوناً ثانية،

وصراخُ مدينةٍ كاملةٍ.

د. عاهد حلس

Foreword

Off the coast of the vast Mediterranean, stretching out like a greeting we long for but can never reach, I watched the sailboats of the solidarity activists from the Resilience flotilla. They flew Palestinian flags, fluttering in a space of freedom, free from death.

We rejoiced not only in the flag because it embodied the homeland, but because, in that moment, it was proof of innocence in the face of the accusation of terrorism that the occupation was trying to pin on us.

At sea, the colors of the flag were more vivid than ever; the red, the burning passion in the souls of the free young people who risked their lives for us; the green, radiating like the quiet, secure peace in their hearts; the white, the purity of their youth; and the black, a sleepless witness—our memory that stores the pain without ever forgetting it.

They were not just flags... They were free souls in colors.

The attention coming from afar—from faces we didn't know, from languages we didn't speak — restored something within me that had been broken without my being able to name it. Like someone who has lived for a long time under the weight of disappointment, to the point that it becomes a part of them, and then suddenly sees a hand reaching out to them.

As a citizen of Gaza, I recognized in that moment humanity in its purest form: selfless solidarity, expecting nothing in return. They came to us from distances that cannot be measured in kilometers, but in their capacity to feel with us.

We knew the road would not open, that the sea itself was under surveillance, and that any attempt of this kind was born with the risk of being stifled. Yet something within us refused to die out.

The flotilla was not just food or medicine: it was another way of saying: we are here, and someone sees us.

Yet this distant light leaves a mark we cannot deny. Those who have come to us from the open sea have not changed destiny—but they have altered how it feels.

They cracked open the darkness. Even if only a little. They redefined the distance between us and the world — no longer geographically, but morally.

But light, when it comes too late, does not prevent pain... it only makes it more visible.

But the feeling of someone who has been betrayed does not remain static. It fluctuates, like the waves of the sea.

The overwhelming pain we experience, and that unbearable weight of knowing that the world has allowed this to happen and continue, create another layer within us: harder, less explainable.

I watched those young people aboard the sailboats—singing, laughing, waving at the cameras — and I caught myself thinking — in moments that are hard to disguise : without our death, these young people would never have experienced this extraordinary journey.

As if our death had become the pretext for the birth of a beautiful experience for others. As if we were, in a way, merely the necessary backdrop to the scene. This feeling in no way erases the gratitude—but it lays bare a deeper wound: in truth, we die alone.

Perhaps it is impossible to explain this idea to someone who hasn't experienced it. How can the whole world feel like a betrayal—not because it hates you, but because it doesn't hear you? When you scream — out of fear, hunger, darkness — and you are reduced to a brief, a line scrolled by a thumb across a glowing screen. Elsewhere, this information breaks the boredom of a day that drags on too long, in a world so saturated it has grown weary.

Even nature, in these moments, seems to take no one's side: the sun rises as if nothing had happened, the sea keeps its rhythm, night returns on time. Everything goes on... except us.

The same stars that, here, lit the path of a cat
In search of the flesh of bodies.

Were watching over — somewhere in this world —
two lovers lying in the grass, exchanging kisses.

That same poet who—somewhere in this world —
recited an elegy and moved his audience to tears,
thanked the war for giving him the power of
metaphor,
And great renown.

That same sun that spreads its warm rays over
peaceful towns whose huts are covered in snow...
Now burns—here—the faces of the children in the
tents.

And that same opening *takbīr* with which we begin
the funeral prayer for our children...
Muslims intone it for Friday prayer, without even
thinking of us.

Here, there was a world.
And there, a world.
Not a day,
Not a night.
But two years and three days,
Or rather sixty-seven million seconds,
And the cry of an entire city.

Ahed Helles, Gaza, April 9, 2026

Introduction

Catherine Benoît

On August 31, 2025, the first ships of the Global Sumud Flotilla set sail from Barcelona toward Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid to a population subjected by Israel to a land, sea, and air blockade since 2007 and periods of total siege since October 2023. They are joined by other ships in Tunisia, Italy, and Greece.

This initiative is eminently political: the blockade and siege of Gaza are illegal under international law, not to mention that Israel, as the occupying power, has a duty to care for the populations of the occupied territories rather than suffocate them. The crossing is being carried out in full compliance with the law: the law of the sea guarantees freedom of maritime navigation and considers any interception of a vessel an act of piracy. It must be applied by all states, even those, like Israel, that have not ratified it.

A total of some forty boats, carrying nearly four hundred and fifty people representing national delegations from forty-seven countries, arrived a few miles from Palestinian territorial waters despite the attacks and sabotage that had immobilized and destroyed a number of them in Tunisia and Greece. Their interception, the kidnapping of the crew members, and their subsequent detention in Ktzi'ot Prison also constitute a violation of international law.

The attacks against the ships of the flotillas that have been attempting to break the blockade of Gaza since 2010 are part of Israel's necropolitics: ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and genocide of the Palestinian people, as well as the ecocide of the occupied territories. In the face of the complicity of nearly all governments, actors in global civil society—NGOs, unions, associations, political parties, and citizens—have risen up to express their solidarity with the Palestinians of Gaza. The Global Sumud Flotilla is one of the most spectacular expressions of this solidarity.

How did participants in this flotilla—whether those at sea or those on land, who ensured the safety of the sailors and publicized this action—decide on their commitment, and how did they experience it? How did Palestinian artists, intellectuals, and journalists in Gaza and in the diaspora perceive this expression of solidarity?

The texts presented here were compiled by the communications/press department of Waves of Freedom France (Woff), the French delegation of the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) in 2025. They come in various forms.

Logbooks—two of which were collected with Mehdi Cheriet during the crossing—bear witness to the commitment of three female sailors from French-speaking delegations: Malika Baouya and Lyna Al Tabal on the Capitaine *Nikos*, and Joëlle Tischauser on the *Inana*. Short texts, written three

months after their return, round out these authors' reflections on the challenges of the 2025 flotilla. An interview with Ismaël Wadhi by Émilien Urbach—both sailors on the *MiaMia*—explains the reasons behind Ismaël's commitment.

A flotilla also relies on the commitment of people on land who are present around the clock to monitor and support the sailors. Oumessaad, one of Woff's ambassadors, shares her reflections and experience of the pro-Palestinian activists' encampment in front of the United Nations headquarters in Geneva in September 2025, and Malika Terre, from the communications/press unit of the same delegation, describes the logistics required to ensure the safety and media coverage of the crossing.

The rationale, objectives, and impact of the flotillas are the subject of debate. Is this an effective mode of action that should be repeated? Does mobilizing international civil society alleviate the suffering of Palestinians? Why bring medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, and infant formula that will never reach the occupied territories?

Palestinian authors and artists share their own perspectives on what the 2025 Global Sumud Flotilla crossing was like. Ahed Helles, poet and professor of architecture at Al-Aqsa University, provides the foreword to this book. Maisara Baroud contributed one of the illustrations from his "*I am still alive*" series in his daily journal, published on Instagram at a rate of one drawing per day from October 7, 2023, until the so-called ceasefire of October 10, 2025.

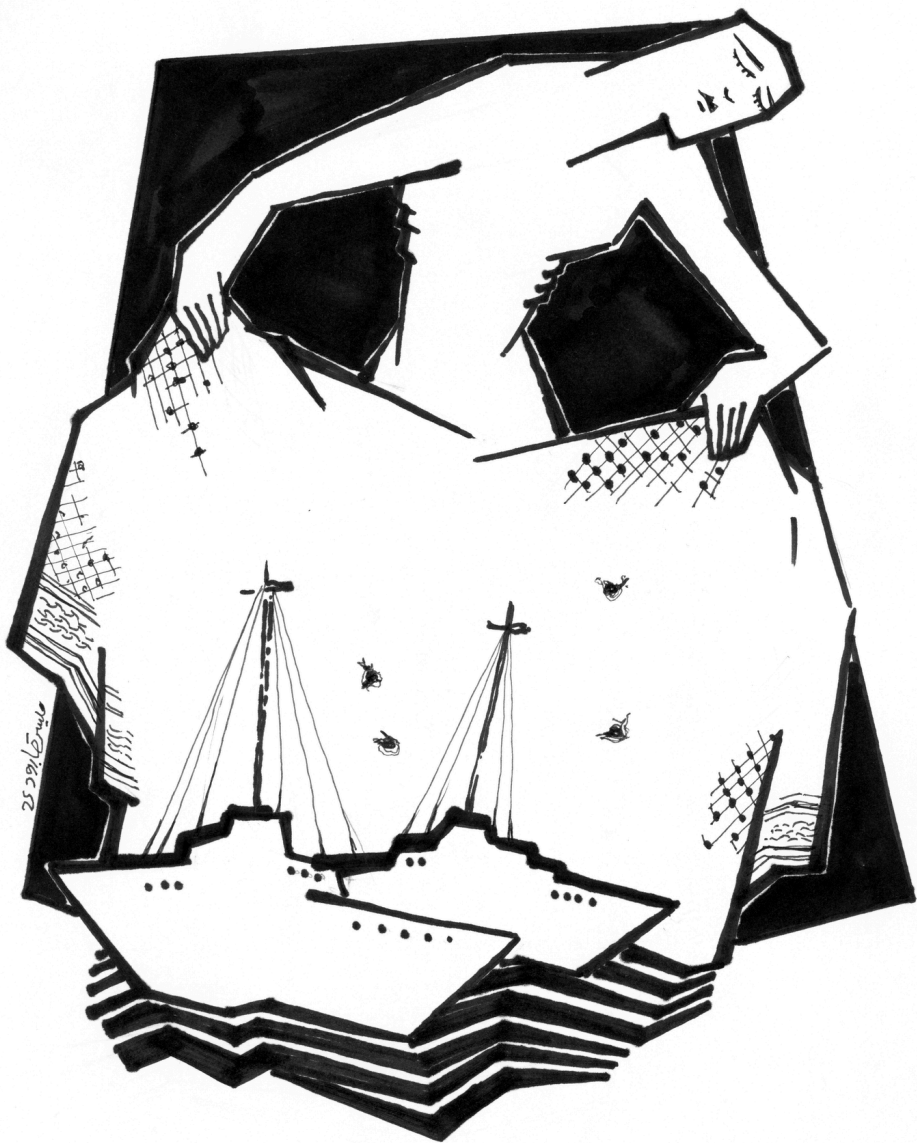
Maha Nassar, a Palestinian-American activist and historian, offers an analysis of the concept of sumud. An interview with Rasha Abou Jalal, the first reader of the French delegation's journals published on Substack and a journalist in Gaza, concludes the book. As an afterword, there is a drawing by Abderrahman, a child from Gaza who, as part of a project by the associations Education4Gaza, Éducation vers Gaza, and Gaza la vie, drew the flotilla. This drawing responds to an installation by Khadidja, a young middle school student living in France.

This book was made possible thanks to the dedication of several people who followed all the ups and downs of its making: Aïcha Amina Malek for her daily proofreading, Cleo Pace for proofreading and editing the final manuscript, Marion Hureau for the layout, and Sylvie Parmentier for facilitating its publication.

A big thank you to Adrià Fruitós for allowing us to publish one of his illustrations on the book's cover and to Esmâ Hind Tengour for the translation of the preface from Arabic into French.

In 2023, Maisara Baroud lost his home and studio as a result of Israeli bombings. Since then, he has been creating daily black-and-white drawings in the form of a diary. This work is part of the series “*I am Still Alive.*”

© Maisara Baroud, “*I am still alive*” series, September 11, 2025



1. Palestinian sumud: deep roots and a global cry

Maha Nassar

In the face of Israel's ongoing genocide, the Palestinians in Gaza hold firm to their homeland. They are determined to remain, rebuild, and return to their homes and lands in a free Palestine. Their *sumud* (Arabic for resilience or steadfastness) has inspired people around the world to act in solidarity. As the Global Sumud Flotilla gets ready to set sail, we should ask, what is *sumud*, and how did it become so central to the Palestinian struggle for freedom?

Dr. Samah Jabr, a Palestinian psychiatrist and writer from Jerusalem, teaches us that *sumud* differs from Western concepts of resilience. While resilience in the West focuses on individual, reactive coping mechanisms, *sumud* is a collective and proactive concept. *Sumud* involves not only dealing with adversity, but also actively resisting the structures of oppression that sustain it. Palestinians' *sumud* can be seen in their daily acts of defiance against the Israeli occupation and in the global movements of resistance against Israeli dispossession, displacement, and siege^[1].

The concept of *sumud* comes out of the Palestinians' long struggle for freedom. In the 1930s, the British responded to Palestinians' anticolonial revolution by demolishing homes,

[1] Samah Jabr, *Radiance in Pain and Resilience: The Global Reverberation of Palestinian Historical Trauma*, Wakefield Press, 2025.

jailing people without charge or trial, executing political leaders, and launching various divide-and-rule schemes. A 1938 headline from *al-Difa* newspaper summed up Palestinians' resilience when it declared that, despite such brutality, the Arabs of Palestine were "united, steadfast, and strong."

Following Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands in 1967, *sumud* re-emerged as a call for Palestinian defiance, solidarity, and freedom. With Israel banning all expressions of their national identity, Palestinians invoked *sumud* as they waved of their flag, marched in their streets, and faced armed soldiers with their bare chests, demanding freedom.

In recent years, Palestinian *sumud* has gained global currency. From academic circles to popular culture, *sumud* now finds echoes in the global struggles against colonialism, state violence, dispossession, and oppression. Palestinian *sumud* has transcended national borders to inspire collective action worldwide.

Yet the genocide in Gaza is testing the limits of *sumud* as never before. While the world embraces Palestinian *sumud* as a powerful symbol of resistance, we must be careful not to romanticize the Palestinian people as they endure unimaginable suffering. As Gazan Palestinian scholars warn, "Those who expect us to embody *sumud* to inspire them must engage in genuine, tangible efforts to support our liberation so we need not embody *sumud* any longer." [2]

[2] Khalid Dader, Malaka Shwaikh, Hala Shoman, and Saga Hamdan, "When Resilience Becomes a Burden: Reflections from Gazan Palestinian Scholars," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 54, no. 4 (2025): 51–59.

The responsibility to support Palestinian liberation belongs to all of us. We can boycott and divest from corporations that enable genocide; we can pressure our governments to impose arms embargoes and trade sanctions on Israel, and we can fight to ensure that our right to speak out on the Palestinian cause is protected. We each have a role to play.

As the 2026 Global Sumud Flotilla sets sail, the question is not whether we admire Palestinian *sumud*, but whether we will stand with Palestinians in their struggle for dignity, justice, and freedom. Our responsibility is clear: to move from celebration to action, from sympathy to solidarity, and from passive acknowledgment to unwavering support for Palestinian liberation.

[2] Khalid Dader, Malaka Shwaikh, Hala Shoman et Saga Hamdan, « Quand la résilience devient un fardeau : réflexions d'universitaires palestiniens de Gaza », *Journal of Palestine Studies* 54, n° 4 (2025) : 51–59.

2. Chronicle of the Flotilla's organization on land

Malika Terre

This essay recounts the journey of the Waves Of Freedom (Woff) 2025 flotilla, as experienced from behind the scenes by the on-the-ground coordination, specifically the communications/press team. It offers an immersion in civic engagement.

Awakening: From Silence to Action

It all began just a few days before the big departure from Barcelona. Images of Gaza scrolled endlessly across my screen in a cycle of pain that kept me awake. Broken by these unbearable visions, I could no longer settle for the numbing comfort of routine.

My journey was not new; I had already invested my hopes and energy in the Global March to Gaza (GMGT). This peaceful gathering in Cairo, which was to be followed by a march to Rafah, was blocked from the start by the Egyptian military, preventing thousands of citizens from 80 countries from continuing their action.

Although only a few months separated this march from the launch of a new initiative, the reality remained bitter: on the ground, nothing had changed, and governments' inaction in the face of horror showed no sign of abating.

It was amid the buzz of online discussion forums,

where outrage turns into strategy, that the idea of a flotilla began to take shape. Faced with the apathy of governments, one thing became clear to us: only the voice of the people, immense and resolute, possessed the strength to carry the stifled cries of the women and children of Gaza.

It was with this conviction deeply rooted in me that I decided to be involved with the Woff team, the natural successor to the former French delegation to the GMGT. I knew by then that if governments chose to remain deaf, it was up to us, the citizens, to become the uproar capable of shattering the silence.

In this spirit of resistance, I understood that if *sumud*—that attitude of tenacity and perseverance in every moment—was rooted in the soil of Gaza, our flotilla must be its manifestation on the waves. The flotilla set sail not to speak on behalf of the Palestinians, but to rescue their situation from international oblivion and carry their voices beyond borders.

Communication as the First Line of Defense for the Safety of the Crew

On land, our organization was far from a calm river. We were a medium-sized company of citizen volunteers, coming from different backgrounds and, for the most part, having never met. Our daily life? A whirlwind of virtual meetings and encrypted messaging across a multitude of channels that kept multiplying.

The challenge was to stay informed in real time and coordinate actions while maintaining a level of confidentiality for the mission's security.

The communications team's top priority was clear: to create a citizen security shield. The strategy was based on the principle of constant visibility: a mission that the whole world "keeps its eyes on" is a mission that's harder to attack—or so we thought. For this shield to work, the public needed to see not just sailboats, but also faces. We had to forge a strong connection so that citizens could identify with the sailors. Yet, a strange, almost paranoid atmosphere sometimes prevailed: we had to juggle security protocols regarding what information could be disclosed with the impatience of a public eager to know the identity of these "ordinary citizens." Behind the scenes, the organization was siloed, and media coverage was earned at the cost of a real obstacle course..

The Ambassadors: The organization's territorial network of a "grassroots resistance"

It is also thanks to the ambassadors that the mission found its physical foothold in the daily lives of citizens. These local representatives were not mere sympathizers; they occupied the public sphere, spoke out, and supported other citizen movements in favor of Palestine. They are Woff's spokespersons, denouncing the blockade of Gaza and the international silence.

The alliances were numerous and well-organized. From Paris to Marseille, via Valence, Crest, and Rennes, all the way to the gates of the United Nations in Geneva, they demonstrated to the authorities that the fate of the flotilla was being closely followed by an active citizen base, thereby creating a form of political protection for the sailors.

The Race Against Time

The departure from Barcelona was approaching, and we were in a frantic race against the clock. We had to build everything from scratch: establish a network of journalists, expand the network of ambassadors, draft communication guides, develop a visual identity, edit videos, and maintain social media accounts. We worked tirelessly and slept little, constantly monitoring from all time zones to address any crisis that might arise.

D-Day: Barcelona

Photos and videos poured in wherever we were working, capturing an incredible buzz that I would have loved to experience alongside them.

On the quays of Barcelona, concerts and all kinds of entertainment followed one after another to cheer on the crews, creating moments of emotion where solidarity ceased to be just a word and became a cry of hope to break the blockade.

But as I set about building the infrastructure needed to cover this historic crossing, the first glimpses of the reality of the open sea began to dampen our enthusiasm. Some participants, many of whom were novices with no sea legs, had left the port in the midst of a violent storm.

On boats sometimes too frail for the vastness of the Mediterranean, they suddenly found themselves exposed to the crashing waves.

Their daily lives had turned into a relentless battle against seasickness and the elements. Between exhausting onboard tasks and the onslaught of the weather, these “ordinary citizens” were so consumed by their immediate discomfort that they came to forget the vital importance of making the flotilla visible.

In this maritime isolation, they lost sight of the fact that our public gaze—shaped by every image transmitted—was their only true lifeline in the face of the journey’s uncertainty.

Being an Interface

Journalists were kept informed, and the media were put in touch with the sailors to relay their accounts. Ambassadors stationed in various cities across France were hard at work, influencers were waiting for updates to create a buzz, and families were organizing to follow their loved ones throughout the crossing.

The interface between all these stakeholders served as the showcase for our communication efforts. We shared information in real time, communicated with travelers, stayed in touch with organizations to coordinate gatherings, and engaged with journalists, influencers, and citizens concerned about the cause and the Palestinian tragedy.

This visibility—essential for bearing witness to the genocide, even as it was broadcast worldwide—relied on the solidarity of donors.

Whether it was the purchase of ships, operating costs,

or logistical support, transparency regarding the use of donations and the monitoring of our missions was crucial.

Day 5: The excitement in Tunis and the first attacks on the ships

On the fifth day, in the port of Tunis, the adrenaline leveled up to cover the excitement of the departure, which had been postponed several times. Tunis meant crowds and high-profile arrivals, such as Greta Thunberg, Adèle Haenel, and Mandla Mandela. Their presence provided immense symbolic momentum. Mandla Mandela declared, “Africa is part of this struggle,” while Adèle Haenel affirmed her commitment to acting peacefully to break the illegal blockade. As in Barcelona, a massive crowd gathered on the docks to cheer on the flotilla.

For us, it was a showcase to establish Woff in the French communications landscape.

Beneath this veneer of hope, tension reached a fever pitch when the first attacks occurred with drone strikes on the *Family* and the *Alma* over two consecutive nights. It was at that moment that the small team I was part of tested our first live alerts via social media.

While the flotilla was supposed to reach Gaza in ten days, its departure from Tunis was delayed. And it was finally on September 13 and 14, after numerous twists and turns and difficult conditions, that the ships were able to set sail for international waters to join the Italian and Greek fleets.

We had to wait for this departure in order to broadcast images of this humanitarian effort, where the identities of the sailors would finally be revealed — a flotilla composed of citizens, including journalists, doctors, celebrities, politicians, and union leaders, all working toward a single cause at the risk of their lives.

Days 20–28: Navigating the Crises

Around the twentieth day, the forty or so ships that made up the Global Sumud were heading toward Greece. Then the bad technical news came in: four Tunisian ships had been forced to abandon the voyage due to engine or mast damage. Information reached the communication team with difficulty. The race for breaking news was difficult to maintain, as every member on land was focused on their own tasks.

On September 28, the fleet faced a critical moment. The original flagship, the *Family Boat*, reportedly suffered a catastrophic engine failure off the coast of Crete: all the engine oil had disappeared for no apparent reason. The sixteen crew members had to be transferred to other boats, and the *Alma* thus became the new flagship. In these difficult and confusing times, our role was clear: to turn every incident into a warning so that the world would keep its eyes on the mission.

Silence from some, cries from others

Experiencing this crossing from land was like riding a constant emotional roller coaster.

I was moved by the support of the Italian dockworkers, the mobilization of Greenpeace, and the commitment of the NGO Emergency's ship. I was relieved by the mobilization of an Italian and then a Spanish frigate to come to the participants' aid if necessary.

However, we were faced with a bitter disappointment: the silence of the mainstream French media. At the same time, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs was waging a full-scale psychological war on social media, labeling the mission "provocation" and "terrorism." Global Sumud responded with factual transparency, backed by Amnesty International, which denounced the criminalization of humanitarian aid.

Final Alert: The Interception

The climax came during the night of October 1 to October 3, 2025. While we had finally been able to compile profiles of each crew member and track the ships' progress via GPS trackers, alerts about the boarding were triggered in real time. The emotion was intense because I felt as though I knew every crew member being arrested out at sea by the Israeli military. My phone and I were one as we sent out real-time alerts on social media. The identity of each boat and all the sailors about to be illegally detained, along with the conditions under which these arrests were taking place—the use of water cannons, tear gas, and more—were revealed to the public.

All the events that occurred during this voyage were broadcast on social media.

These boardings lasted several days, allowing the people of Gaza to fish. Our hopes were immense when *Marinette*, proud and determined, held her course against all odds, but sadly, she too was intercepted 80 kilometers off the coast of Gaza. I couldn't take my eyes off the nautical charts on my computer screen as I tracked the last boat, the *Mikeno*, which managed to reach Palestinian waters. It was the first civilian vessel to have broken the Israeli naval blockade since 2009 !

The sailors' release and arrival

We had no further news of the sailors kidnapped in international waters, apart from the few images released by the Israeli government showing our compatriots being humiliated by their jailors while they were engaged in a peaceful humanitarian voyage.

Very quickly, lawyers from Adalah (a Palestinian human rights organization based in Haifa), who had been dispatched to the scene, were able to meet with the sailors, as were the ambassadors. We then learned of their imminent release.

Little by little, the details became clearer: the crew members would arrive between October 6 and 7. Many people came to welcome them, first at the airports, then at rallies in several cities across France.

The crowd at Place de la République in Paris turned out in force on October 8, 2025.

But the mission was not over yet. Our duty was to remain on the ground until the release of the last Spanish crew member, who had been held for twelve days in Israeli detention centers.

The information campaign had proven its effectiveness. The French mobilization, driven by community, labor, and political groups, had sparked massive demonstrations in cities across France. Thanks to sustained pressure, all the crew members were finally released and returned home safe and sound.

Today, new ships are at sea, and the “wave of resistance” on land, unwavering, continues its mobilization and its mission. As long as Gaza remains under siege, our voice will be its echo !

3. Why join the flotilla ?

*Interview with Ismaël Wabdi, sailor on the MiaMia, by
Émilien Urbach, captain of the same ship*

At sea, September 24, 2025

— E.U. Can you tell me how you're feeling this morning?

— I.W. This morning, I feel alone, abandoned by all governments. We have just suffered a terrorist attack, a dozen explosions on several boats. I was told there were no injuries, but a sailboat was damaged; its mast was broken. Here, in the international waters of the Mediterranean, we are truly in danger. We are here to deliver food to a people threatened with extermination, to starving children, and yet, after this nighttime attack, we are offered no protection. I ask myself: what is happening in this world? Perhaps that is why I am here on a boat, to draw attention to the dramatic situation currently unfolding on the international stage.

— You also mentioned the media's attitude toward these events; can you explain what motivated you to get involved ?

— What moved me deeply were the living conditions of Palestinians in Gaza, especially the children. As a father, I am deeply moved. But it was the media's lies, their silence, or their manipulation that gave me the strength to stand up and take action. Today, I am on this boat to fight against these false narratives. We came under attack last night; it's not the first time : drones regularly patrol overhead.

Where are the armies supposed to be defending us? Where does our tax money go? After twenty years of so-called war on terror, who is really protecting us? I want to understand, but above all, I want to bear witness.

— You often say that you're convinced this flotilla is going to change everything. What do you think it will change?

—This flotilla will show people that they hold the power. If we want it, we have it. Living in a peaceful world is something we have to earn. With this flotilla, we're setting an example, we're opening a door, we're proving that, even with our limited means, we're more powerful than any army or all the lies funded by the billions invested each year in the lying media. That's our true strength. We are just small sailboats, fragile on the water. But our true strength lies in all the people on land who support us. The strength of the flotilla is you on land. We are merely the symbol on the water. It is up to you to act. Be active on your phones, demonstrate in the streets, get involved.

This flotilla is yours; it was born out of the grief for all those children, and it is thanks to your solidarity that it continues. These boats are yours, ours, and those of humanity in revolt against oppression, plunder, and lies. I am neither an activist nor a militant. This flotilla must never stop: this is only the beginning of the awakening of the peoples in the face of the great powers that have dominated them for centuries.

—So for you, this goes far beyond Gaza—are you talking about a global movement?

— Yes, here on board, there are not only Gazans or Palestinians. Forty-seven countries are represented with crews of all origins. More than ever, we embody a humanity united in solidarity, a hope for universal peace. These sailboats form a true flock of doves. Yet they try to discredit us, to call us terrorists, while drones attack ships loaded with food and medical supplies. That's where we stand.

— What was your job before all this?

— I'd rather not talk too much about myself. I'm a father, a dad who loves his child and understands the love every parent feels—that indescribable, precious bond. Over there, children are dying, parents are crying, and some are watching their children undergo surgery without anesthesia. No parent on this earth can tolerate such suffering. That's why I'm here. My first job is being a dad.

— Yes, I understand you.

— I believe I am both an individual and everyone, an ordinary person—that's probably the most accurate way to describe me. There are others in this flotilla who are like me. I've always kept my distance from all this; I've never taken action to change the world. I just wanted to live my life, close to nature. I was a forester, then I worked in livestock farming.

That was my world. But today, here I am: if even someone like me, who's so far removed from all this, is moved enough to be here, then that means it's everyone's business. Today, no one can stay on the sidelines.

This flotilla is exactly that: the beginning of the emancipation of peoples by the peoples themselves. It's not about seizing power, but about taking our rightful place. It won't happen on its own. They want us to believe that the world is too complex, that we need armies to protect us from the "bad guys." But what if, deep down, the "bad guys" were actually them, and we were their victims?

— We've been living together for almost two or three weeks now, and you're telling me this! You're not an activist, you have no political training, and yet I find your words to be remarkably accurate. Few politicians are capable of that.

— I think I've been largely spared from all that. In the end, perhaps it's the human being I embody, through a life spent in nature, far from human society. I believe my testimony is that of humanity's primal nature. Quite simply.

—Yesterday or the day before, you also told me: "We're going to destroy Israel with peace."

—Yes, because I think that Israel's greatest enemies are peace and truth. And that is what we represent, what we carry: peace—that is what we are bringing across the Mediterranean.

— But you also made it clear from the very beginning, when we first met: "I have nothing against the Israeli people."

— Quite the contrary, I even believe that we're coming to help the Israeli people—and I'm talking about the people, not the government.

We're here to help them free themselves from the image that's been pinned on them, from the way they're being used. The great powers have exploited the Jewish people after having virtually abandoned them to their fate. Back home, in the streets, I used to play with my Jewish friends when I was a kid. So those images of the Holocaust have always moved me. I couldn't conceive that in the very places I went, there had been people who were killed, Jewish families who were denounced along with their children—kids who were in the same class as the children of the very people who had denounced them. I grew up with these values. There is no such thing as a bad people, nor a perfect people. There are only people who are manipulated, indoctrinated by the great powers to better enslave us.

4. 1. At the gates of the United Nations' silence : encampment and flotilla in Geneva

Oumessaad

This encampment wasn't planned; it was spontaneous and carefully thought out with my comrades.

This action was deeply sincere: an attempt not to stand idly by in the face of the unbearable.

But there is this inner rift.

Anger first—a deep, recurring anger that finds no outlet. It stems from the realization that everything is visible, documented, exposed... and yet nothing stops. As if the world were watching, knowing, without truly acting.

And then there is this even more difficult feeling: futility. Not an abstract futility, but a moral exhaustion—that of doing, of mobilizing, of building, of bearing witness... without seeing any concrete change. It gives the impression that every gesture is a drop in an ocean of indifference or political powerlessness.

At these gatherings, many people likely share this paradoxical mix. An almost vital need to act, to remain human, and at the same time, the certainty that it is not enough. This is not contradictory—it is precisely the sign of a very lucid awareness of reality.

Regarding the West Bank, the sentiment is similar: a pervasive violence, sometimes less covered by the media but constant, which fuels the feeling that the situation is systemic, deeply rooted, and difficult to reverse.

There is also something collective about this weariness. When public figures or international delegations get involved, it can provide momentum—but if results don't follow, the disillusionment can be even stronger.

What remains, despite everything, is the human connection in these spaces: the glances, the conversations, the shared silences, the concrete gestures like building a symbolic flotilla. It is not “nothing,” even if it does not immediately change the course of events. It is a way of refusing indifference.

We must not downplay what we express or feel. Feeling so powerless in the face of ongoing violence is deeply unsettling. Anger is therefore a legitimate reaction.

In Geneva, the encampment became more than just a place: an anchor, proof that we refused to look away. At first, there were just a few dozen of us, but then many others joined us. We were there for them. For the passengers on the flotillas heading to Gaza. They had paid to go there. They had chosen to still believe, to bring humanitarian aid, but above all something more fragile, intangible: hope.

And we, from a distance, tried to bring that hope to life, in a different way

With wood, fabric, and tired hands, we built a symbolic flotilla. A simple gesture, almost trivial, but for us, full of meaning.

There was anger that did not wane, that grew as the images piled up, as the calls went unanswered, as the horror continued, in Gaza as in the West Bank.

And then there was that persistent feeling: the feeling of being useless. No matter how much we struggle, no matter how much we endure, being so powerless to stop what seems unstoppable breeds a deep weariness, a weariness of the soul.

But in the midst of it all, one thing becomes clear. The Palestinian people are holding on. Despite everything.

Their resilience is not an abstract concept. It is a reality that defies comprehension. To continue living, loving, and standing tall under conditions we can only begin to imagine—that is a raw, unfiltered lesson in life. A lesson that unsettles as much as it inspires. Because it forces us to confront our own limitations.

So yes, sometimes we feel that our actions aren't enough. But they, over there, keep going.

And perhaps our role, however modest it may be, boils down simply to not leaving them alone.

We held out for a month in Geneva.

A month of occupying the space, of standing firm, of keeping watch, of not giving in. Of driving back and forth, taking buses to show our support for this People and the crews of the Flotillas.

I remember the fatigue in my body. The cold at times. The nights that were too short. But above all, I remember that constant tension, as if something inside me refused to let go. Me, us, here—we tried not to be useless.

So we built.
With our hands.
With what we had.
A symbolic flotilla, set up there, in the square.

I remember the wood beneath my fingers, the discussions, the heavy silences, the glances we exchanged without speaking because we already understood everything. And yet—despite all that—there is this anger. Anger that tightens my chest. Because everything is out in the open. Because everything is known. And nothing stops.

In Gaza.

In the West Bank.

And deep down inside, there's something even worse than anger: there's this feeling of helplessness.

I felt small. Really small.

As if everything we do carries no weight in the face of the magnitude of what is unfolding. It's a feeling that wears you down. That tires you in a different way. Not the body—the inside.

I can't stop thinking about them; the Palestinians. Their ability to hold on. To keep going despite everything that we, here, already struggle to look at.

It's not just resilience.

It's a strength that's beyond me.

A dignity that shakes me to my core.

They're teaching us a lesson in life—not a gentle one, no—a brutal, demanding, almost unbearable lesson.

And it forces me to face myself. Because I, here, am doubting.

I'm wearing myself out.

I feel useless.

And they keep going.

I'm left with this.

With this contradiction

The helplessness that gnaws at me, and at the same time this visceral need to stay, to do something, not to disappear.

Maybe my role isn't to change the course of things.
Maybe I don't have the power to do so.

But I refuse to be nothing.
I refuse to do nothing.
I refuse to feel nothing.

I stay and I keep fighting for Palestine.

5. Logbooks at Sea

Malika Baouya's Log

At sea, September 3

What day is it? I don't know anymore—somewhere between the open sea and consciousness.

I don't sleep much anymore. Not because of the boat's rocking or the noise of the engines, but because my mind is in turmoil. I'm aboard this flotilla to break the blockade of Gaza. To tell the truth, I came with a mix of anger, sadness, and a kind of vital need to do something. Perhaps even to save myself from a feeling of helplessness that had been gnawing at me for months.

Too many unbearable images, too much silence as well. Too much normality in the general indifference. I needed to stand up, to set sail, literally. Not to flee, but to move forward. To head toward Gaza.

And then came the boarding. That suspended moment when strangers gradually become fellow travelers, comrades in the struggle, almost an improvised family. I didn't know anyone on board just a few days ago. Today, I feel like I've known them forever. We come from Italy, France, Poland, Malaysia, Germany... a mosaic of origins, stories, and accents, united by a single goal: justice.

This boat has become a world of its own. A world where solidarity isn't just a concept, but a tangible reality. We share what little we have. We listen to one another

We respect one another. We talk, we laugh often, despite the worry in the pit of our stomachs. And in this small floating space, Gaza is already here with us. Gaza speaks to us. Gaza brings us together.

Before leaving, I was asked: “But what do you really hope to change with this?” I didn’t answer. Because it’s not just a matter of visible impact. It’s a matter of dignity. Heading to Gaza means we refuse to give up. It means carrying a message; it means breaking the silence as much as the blockade. It means taking a human stand in the face of inhuman injustice.

What’s crazy is that I thought I’d set out on this journey to give something to Gaza. But it’s Gaza that, from the very beginning, has given us so much. A lesson in courage, in resistance, in humanity. This besieged people teaches us what it means to stand tall. What it means to remain dignified.

Gaza brought us together. Gaza transformed us. Gaza is both our destination... and our compass. I don’t know what awaits us when we arrive. But I know one thing: I am no longer alone. We are here. Together. And we will keep going.

Tunis, September 4

Tonight, as we watch the waves from Tunis, we stand in solidarity with our comrades at sea. We know we will set sail again soon.

Until then, our thoughts remain with them, sailing, resisting, moving forward for what is right.

Tomorrow, we’ll be ready to set sail again. We must continue

Tunis, September 8

We arrived in Tunis, free with the people.

We have dropped anchor in Tunis. We are in the heart of a country small in size but immense in spirit. Here, we discover more than a welcoming land: a brotherly people.

Since we arrived, every symbol we wear—a badge, a T-shirt, a keffiyeh—is recognized. In cafés and alleyways, people look at us and say, “Free Palestine.” The smiles are sincere, the words full of emotion, hands reach out. We are not strangers here; we are welcomed as members of a shared struggle.

Palestinian flags cover the windows and walls of some shops. In conversations, the names of Gaza and the flotilla come up as a matter of course. The Tunisian people do not merely sympathize: they support, they share, they act, and they remember. It was here that the winds of the Arab Spring first blew. And it is this same wind, today, that carries the voices and hopes of those who want to break the blockade. Yesterday, when the ships that had set sail from Spain arrived, the Tunisian crowd welcomed them with rare fervor. It was more than a symbolic moment: it was a promise of solidarity with Gaza. We felt that this struggle was not just ours; it is carried by thousands of people here in this proud and free city.

Tunis is now our port of call. A stopover, an unexpected layover. But what a layover !

We walk the streets of this city that speaks our language: the language of freedom, dignity, and justice.

Unlike what we experienced in Cairo during the Global March to Gaza, where we faced repression and fear, here we breathe freely. We can speak, sing, and raise our slogans and keffiyehs. Here, no one silences us.

We wait to set sail again. Eager, determined. But before that, we take with us the warmth of a people, the courage of a revolution, and the memory of a city that, without knowing it, has comforted us. Tunis has reminded us why we are doing all this.

For Gaza. For freedom. So that the sea may be a bridge, not a wall.

Bizerte, September 14

Our flotilla has been stuck in the port of Bizerte for several days now due to organizational issues. The wait is sometimes difficult, as we are burning with impatience to set sail again and continue on our way to break the blockade of Gaza.

But during this forced pause, the city of Bizerte and its people are offering us a lesson in humanity. Just as in Tunis, the welcome is overwhelmingly warm. Every day, hundreds of people gather in front of us: they sing, wave flags, and light smoke bombs that color the sky and fill the atmosphere with a shared sense of purpose. Entire families come to bring us food, water, and coffee. Their smiles and generosity transform our wait into a rare moment of brotherhood.

Here, we can see just how much the Palestinian cause unites people, how much Gaza brings humanity

together across borders. These days in Bizerte will remain in our memories as a testament to a shared commitment and genuine solidarity.

We can't wait to weigh anchor and set sail again. But no matter what happens, Tunisia and the Tunisians will always hold a special place in our hearts.

At sea aboard the Capitaine Nemo, September 30

What day is it? I can't remember.

About 250 nautical miles from Gaza. We're moving forward. The boat glides over a sea that mirrors the sky. Ahead, behind, to port and starboard: a flotilla. I am never tired of seeing these boats surrounding us, all heading in the same direction. On every horizon, another ship sails toward Gaza. It's so beautiful.

We have been in international waters for a few hours now. I can barely grasp what we're creating: people from all over, gathered for a common cause.

The world is waking up, ready to react in case of an interception. The danger zone is approaching. We're preparing for it—not naively, but with determination. A confrontation is possible; the journey is dangerous.

Yet moving forward remains the only right thing to do.

Life on board. The days pass amid routines and simple moments of togetherness. Everyone has found their place in this small, rocking space. The Italians fish patiently; sometimes they cast their lines, sometimes laughter lingers on the deck.

Marcos, the journalist, writes tirelessly—notes, interviews, reflections. He turns every wave into a sentence. The three musketeers—our Spaniards—handle the boat’s controls like a musical score: precision, calm, confidence. Roger, our coordinator, loves organizing impromptu meetings; we complain from time to time, but these gatherings always restore order and purpose. Maria and Djamila whip up dishes that bring us together: familiar smells, comfort food. Sophia, our retiree, reads her book in Greek.

I can’t always make out the words, but I love hearing her read ; it’s an ancient lullaby carried on the wind. Everyone has found their place. Little habits replace the unknown: morning coffee, a chat at sunset, a shared silence when the sea commands respect.

Thoughts. To our families. To tomorrow. To Gaza. To the children, families, and unknown friends for whom we press on.

How can one be prepared to face a lawless army that relentlessly kills civilians, babies, children, parents ? These questions run through my mind on repeat. They sting, but they also galvanize.

Determination. The flotilla is not just a journey: it is a promise. To make this blockade visible, to be there, to bear witness, to show that solidarity knows no borders. Everyone knows why they are here. When the sea is calm, we share stories; when it roars, we stick together.

Preparation. An interception is expected. Plans, instructions, people in charge of security. But preparation doesn't ease the anxiety : training, discussions, mutual support. What we can do: stay clear-headed, united, and dignified.

Moments that linger.

Tonight, I watched the flotilla from the top of the deck.

Every light on the horizon was part of a collective heartbeat.

Extraordinary.

Even if everything changes tomorrow, hold on to this image: the unity, courage, and beauty of a people coming together to defend lives.

Nice, October 11

I'm sharing with you this treasure I brought back from my cell: a pendant made by a Palestinian prisoner who had hidden it in a hollow in the wall near the bars. There were five of them, fashioned from bread and water, a sort of salt dough.

I gave four of them to Rima and kept the smallest one. On the front it reads: "Salah the martyr, you are my most painful loss." On the back are inscribed three first names: Rawan, Mohamed, and Ibrahim.

This pendant is handmade, shaped by loving hands to honor loved ones.

A gesture of love, an offering placed in a squalid cell at Ktzi'ot Prison in the Negev Desert.

Today, by a strange twist of fate, it is in my hands here, so far from the place where it was left.

I wear it as a living prayer, as a testament to a presence that never fades.

I know that, behind these walls, so many Palestinians are suffering pain and injustice.

I will keep this treasure as a promise: to fight, through words, through action, and through conscience, so that this may end, so that Palestine may be free, and so that all prisoners may see the light again.

May this small handmade object continue to unite hearts despite the distance.

Nice, October 14

Now that my feet are once again on solid ground, that I breathe freely without bars or walls, I am finally taking the time to write these words, heavy and full of what we have experienced.

We were imprisoned in an Israeli prison. Our voices, our bodies, our minds, locked away. But not just us. Right nearby, on the other side of those walls, so close, were thousands of Palestinian prisoners. Men, women, sometimes children, locked away for years, some for decades. Tortured, forgotten, condemned to silence.

In that prison, we shouted: "Free Palestine." Again and again. Not for us. For them. So they would know we were there.

That behind those walls, there were hearts beating for their cause, voices that refused to be silenced. I hope they heard us. I hope those slogans broke through the concrete, the bars, the oppression. I hope they knew we were there, for them. For a free Palestine.

The days passed. We were released. Welcomed at the airports by the warm embrace of our loved ones, by tears and songs. We had returned.

Alive. Changed.

And then... a few days later, as if echoing our own release, images emerged. Those of Palestinians finally set free, wearing the same uniforms as us. Men who were being released after twenty, twenty-five, thirty years in prison. Their faces bore the marks of their ordeal. Some held rosaries in their hands that they had patiently crafted in their cells. Rosaries similar to those we found and brought back. Objects of prayer, hope, and survival.

Seeing these images, after our own. Feeling that, for one thing, our media coverage had opened a breach...

It could only be a sign. A blessing. A light.

They too, are finally free. With their loved ones.

And perhaps that is the greatest victory of all: that our freedom resonated until they, too, were free.

For them. For Palestine. Always

Joëlle Tischhauser's Log

At sea, September 28

The Flotilla has been underway for weeks now. Beautiful and united, it moves with the winds and storms. And in its wide-open arms, we, the participants, have faced seasickness, changes in course, and attacks—twice already, the first in the port of Tunis, then off the Greek coast. We have endured long waits, administrative hassles in the port of Bizerte in Tunisia, repairs in the port of Portopallo in Sicily, as well as here in Crete, our final stop, where we have been anchored for several days. Everyone is so eager to set sail for one last week of sailing and finally reach Gaza, the long-awaited destination for our humanitarian convoy.

I think back to that crossing that took us from Italy to Greece, led by the *Family Boat*, at the head of the flotilla because the *Alma*, our flagship, required major repairs that would have delayed its departure. The captain of the *Family* had then given us the order to weigh anchor, and I felt a sense of relief because inactivity doesn't suit our flotilla and its boundless energy for long. I watched all those sailboats crowding around the *Family* and thought of a makeshift family, whose bonds grow stronger with each passing hour, day, and week of sailing. At first, all those little boats had to learn to sail together.

Sailing is often a solitary art... Each crew must have started by getting to know and becoming comfortable with the boat they found themselves on, as well as getting to know their teammates.

Sailing during those first days and nights resembled a somewhat chaotic scattering of sails and lights, as if this small, colorful flock was intoxicated by the vastness of its playground!

But the mother ship *Family* called them to order and asked them not to lose sight of it. Sometimes, it seemed to me that the sea was like a vast playground of freedom where everyone could sail as they pleased, leap over the waves, or hide. But the danger of getting lost remained ever-present, and the *Family* kept reminding them and keeping watch. It repeatedly told everyone to identify their “buddy boat”, which was supposed to sail nearby, so they could assist one another in case of trouble. Some intrepid boats were rebuked: “I remind you not to overtake me!” Or: “Stay no more than 0.7 miles apart, regroup!” The hesitant boats bringing up the rear received encouragement.

The *Family*, ever attentive, would order a stop or slow down the fleet to allow them to catch up. I had grown accustomed to the calm call of the mother ship, urging its “little ones” to stay grouped and vigilant, then regularly relaying the GPS coordinates of the new meeting point. And each vessel would then pass on the message with diligence. All the boats—small sailboats or motorboats—would then point their hulls, bobbing along behind the big blue dot on the horizon that signaled the reassuring presence of the *Family*. But tonight, the *Family* won’t be setting sail with us. Our beautiful big blue boat, our compass, which guided us and showed us the way to Greece during that long crossing from Sicily, is now reduced

to a dancing stillness in a port in Crete. The engine is beyond repair, we're told. Sudden breakdown or sabotage? Anything is possible. We have faced so many obstacles and trials since our departure from Barcelona... Tonight, it is the *Alma* that will once again lead the way for us, and other boats are ready to take its place—that is the strength of our united and courageous flotilla.

Despite all the ordeals, our determination remains the same: to break the illegal siege of Gaza, to open a humanitarian path by sea and in the hearts of people until the liberation of Palestine. And it is with these convictions that we leave Greece for our final destination, Gaza.

Off the coast of Crete, September 29

Tonight, I am on watch, as I am every night, on the deck of a small sailboat in this incredible flotilla that set sail from Barcelona for Gaza, the land of Palestine, a land of all sorrows and all hopes. The landscapes change and envelop us in their vibrant colors or their gentleness: lush or arid coasts, ports that are mere parking lots or marinas, depending on the days and nights of this journey that seems to go on forever.

There was Menorca, then Tunis, Bizerte, Sicily, and finally a final anchorage somewhere in Greece, in the embrace of a rocky, uninhabited island, crowned by the ruins of a temple I would gladly imagine dedicated to Poseidon, the ancient absolute master of the sea and water, he who can summon storms, tempests, or dead calm with a single gesture.

Poseidon, perhaps intrigued by our proud, colorful boats and our freedom-loving waves, tested the resilience of our fleet by summoning a storm the very night following our departure from Barcelona. But the fleet held firm, the captains stayed the course, the crews banded together against the waves, almost all the boats weathered the storm, and ever since, I like to think that the Greek god with the trident holds us under his paternal and smiling protection.

Little by little, the images of our stops and anchorage spots fade and blend together in my memories, and as the journey goes on, they get lost in the wakes of all the boats rushing out to the open sea, toward the far end of the Mediterranean, where we are headed.

Tonight, as every night, I stand watch with my companions, like so many other anonymous souls on this great crossing. I keep watch, I scan the sea, the sky, the horizon, the firmament, from which many dangers may arise and from which, as we well know, spying eyes and malicious devices lie in wait for us in turn. But the night, sleeping on the liquid immensity with the stars as nightlights, soothes my fears.

Between watchfulness and wonder. Watch, because night navigation, with few lights and so many vessels sailing together, demands a vigilant presence to scan the shadows and faint lights, and to alert the captain to a sailboat coming too close, another that might cross our path, the sudden appearance of a drone in the starry sky, or any light or sound that seems out of the ordinary.

At first, for many sailors like me, unfamiliar with the open sea, it was a somewhat uncomfortable exercise, bearing no relation to our past experiences on roads on dry land. At sea, everything changes: perspectives, sounds, the perception of distances and speed. As we approach ports, we sometimes brush past the menacing shadow of a large, stationary vessel, like a wall that blends into the night and suddenly blocks our path.

But little by little, as the nights go by, my eyesight sharpens, my night vision improves, and I learn to recognize the faint red, green, or white lights that signal other boats. I venture to estimate their distance and course, and to anticipate our intersecting or parallel paths. But I am still often taken aback when a vessel suddenly appears alongside us—one I didn't see coming and that appears without warning, like a ghost ship.

The ever-changing waves sometimes reveal buoys marking fishing nets, formidable traps for our sailboat, which, in calm weather and flat seas, moves forward under motor power.

These fishing nets, giant spiderwebs lurking beneath the water, are a danger to the boat's propeller and force the skipper to dive beneath the sailboat's hull to untangle the ropes wrapped around the blades. Far too risky at night. So I keep watch, I scan the horizon, and I also try to identify any underwater glow, like the one we spotted off the coast of Tunisia that required police intervention, so much did we fear an attack or sabotage. As for the submarines lurking in the heavily armed Mediterranean,

I prefer not to think about them.

I then gaze up at the sky—the kind you only encounter in the mountains or at sea. I contemplate the circle of the Big Dipper, which reveals itself from an angle that’s unusual to me, skimming the waves, then circles our sailboat, carrying me in its nocturnal wake toward the other constellations.

I watch for the faithful appearance of Orion’s Belt, emerging in the east, straight ahead of us. One star, then two, then three stars in a row, resembling lights on a mast—the mast of a celestial ship beckoning to us and showing us the way to Gaza and Palestine, the ultimate destination of our flotilla.

For a few minutes, it is I who am capsizing in the sky as I gaze at the firmament, blending sky and sea on this giant screen that comes alive before my wide-eyed gaze, a setting that holds and remembers all human dreams—present, past, and future. And the sky, this sky that envelops and frames the open sea, seizes me and engulfs me.

I am swept away by the pearly glimmers of the Milky Way, into another dimension, one where dreams and reality are one, where the past meets the future, and where nature and the stars, in their eternal beauty, mock mankind and its wars, but sometimes welcome and grant the prayers and hopes of the shipwrecked, the oppressed, the forgotten.

But it is time to return to the lookout.

Memories of the sailboat

You are beautiful and proud, *Inana*, our sailboat!

I look at you with tenderness and melancholy. You carried us from Barcelona to the waters near Gaza; you bore us, you tossed us about in the storm and the rolling seas; you rocked us on calm, balmy nights; you sheltered us in your belly from the waves and from the water cannons of the Zionist entity when they intercepted us last night—you, *Inana*, your crew, and your passengers. The proudly hoisted Palestinian flags were taken down and trampled by the soldiers; the saloon and cabins were searched and turned upside down.

But you remain stoic, rocking your hull in this enemy port in Ashdod, where you too will soon find yourself a prisoner. I look at you and silently say goodbye, as we are pressed by Israeli soldiers to leave your deck where we have been gathered while awaiting imprisonment. We are leaving you for the first time in weeks and setting foot on other ground, forced to face other destinations, to turn our backs on the sea and the ships of the Flotilla.

In the port of Ashdod, where we are docked, you will not be alone, for all the sailboats and ships of the Flotilla are there now. Some even say they have seen the legendary *Madleen* and *Handala*, heroic solo sailboats that preceded us just a few months ago and which, too, were hijacked along with their cargo of humanitarian aid piled in the holds. None of these treasures will reach the Palestinians; all the boats and their precious cargoes will remain in the hands of Israel's colonialist leaders.

What an outrage, what a waste, what a disgrace !

One by one, we stand up under the threat of armed guards; each of us says goodbye in our own way, moved and sad but determined to return. Like the waves, the flotillas will follow one another tirelessly to the shores of Gaza, until we break the siege and open a corridor of life and justice. I take in the deck, the wheelhouse, the cockpit where we shared so many moments of solidarity: meals, songs, watch shifts, confidences, fears, interceptions... I look one last time at the foredeck where each of us found ourselves at least once, alone facing the horizon and facing ourselves, facing also our wild hope of reaching the shores of Gaza.

Our captain steps toward your mainmast, touches it, closes his eyes, and offers you a silent prayer of gratitude and farewell. We leave you by stepping over the rail; night is falling, and we are prisoners now.

Farewell, beautiful sailboat !

Memories of Ketziot Prison, the Negev Desert

She opens the door to our cell, number 3, accompanied by two of her henchmen. They all have weapons on their belts, as well as a spray can, and other objects whose purpose I'd rather not know. They order us to get up, to go out into the courtyard, for yet another act of intimidation, a new headcount, or just to keep us on our toes. They don't speak to us; they bark orders in broken English: "Come! Go out! Sit! No talk! Silence!" There are several women among the guards. I find some of them fascinatingly beautiful.

Especially her, who pretends to pinch her nose as we leave our cell, to humiliate us by making us believe we stink, like livestock emerging from a filthy barn. Human livestock to whom showers are off-limits.

I look at her. She is apparently of Ethiopian origin, with dark skin; her deep black hair, smooth and shiny, frames azure-blue eyes—a striking contrast. She is perfumed; her nails are long and polished. She exudes a femininity proud of her appearance, well-groomed and haughty—a magazine-perfect femininity.

Facing her, we line up in a row, humanitarian prisoners with dirty hair, our skin still salty from the crossing, our hygiene barely maintained with the help of small packets of shampoo found at the bottom of the black plastic bags we were given upon arrival. These are our fragile and precious bundles as prisoners, yet they contained no sanitary pads.

And yet we are dignified and certainly not as repulsive as she would have us believe. We possess the dignity of humanity—we who tore the sleeves off our t-shirts to make sanitary pads and gave them to our sisters in misfortune who needed them.

Yes, we are dignified and proud. Proud to be here for having defended the rights of the Palestinians and aware that their suffering—in Gaza, in the occupied territories, or here, in this horrible prison—is nothing compared to ours. For the Palestinian prisoners are right here, right next to us, separated from us in other concrete wings of this high-security prison, but behind the same walls and the same barbed wire. They are dehumanized, locked up, without rights, without lawyers, humiliated and tortured daily.

We, the people of the flotilla, are only scratching the surface of the reality of Israeli prisons where thousands of Palestinians are locked up, sometimes for many years. We are not treated well, of course, but we are treated in a way that bears no comparison to the treatment reserved for our Palestinian brothers and sisters. How many of them will not emerge alive from this grim prison? Whereas we know we should be released within six days, perhaps sooner, and that makes the humiliations and mistreatment bearable. We have the hope of seeing our loved ones again, the hope of leaving this repugnant place, the hope of returning to our country, our homes, our families, our routines, and our joys.

Yes, they say hope keeps us alive, so how do they manage—the ten thousand Palestinian prisoners, including four hundred children, some captured while playing in the streets, surgeons rounded up from their hospital, fathers arrested as they returned from water distribution points, their arms laden with precious, full jugs? How do they manage not to go mad, to resist and survive despite the beatings and hunger? They possess a strength we lack, an unshakable faith, and the conviction that Palestine will live on, no matter the cost. I try to connect with them, with their strength, their resistance, their perseverance, their *sumud*—that Arabic word that means all of these things at once. They who are so close to us, on the other side of the prison, and who surely hear us singing songs of encouragement and resistance to them, songs of love and return to the homeland.

As I leave my cell, I stop in front of the guard and can't help but tell her: "You are beautiful, yes. But deep in your soul, there is no beauty. Despite your appearance, you are a monster. I loathe you, just like all of you here." She looks at me, smiling, a smile that reveals perfect, gleaming teeth, and she replies, "You don't know me. You don't know who I am when I'm at home, when I'm with my family and my children," and she makes a gesture toward me, as if to shoo away a pesky insect, so that I'll move forward into the courtyard. Her perfume follows me a few more meters, and I wonder how many Palestinian prisoners she has seen die of exhaustion, after the torture that is, as we know, the norm in this prison deep of the Negev desert. I think of her children growing up in comfort, bottled with Zionism and raised in fear and hatred of the other—the Arab, the foreigner. Their minds washed by years of colonialist propaganda.

I join my fellow prisoners in the courtyard, under the watchful eye of the other guards and the dogs. I watch from afar this female guard, a symbol of the deception of appearances. In her pretty little head, there are convictions firmly rooted by vile propaganda: Zionism. A monstrous guard, straight out of a horror book, on the one hand, and yet she will tenderly embrace her children at the end of her workday at Kzi'ot Prison, deep in the Negev Desert, on the other. I think with dread of what is insidiously happening in our own countries—countries that hold up the Geneva Conventions or Human rights as their banners, countries that claim to be defenders of the rule of law, international peace, freedom, fraternity, and equality.

Countries that, nevertheless, confirm their support for a genocidal and supremacist people more and more every day.

I feel sick to my stomach. Our world is abominable, and I almost feel guilty when I think that I, for my part, will be lucky enough to be released in a few days, simply because I was born in the right place, without having earned it. But that also means, logically, that I was born on the side of the powerful and the manipulators, the accomplices and the profiteers.

Tonight, I have doubts about humanity.

Lyna Al Tabal's Log

The Last Three Days of the Crossing

The third Day Before Our Arrest

The final leg of the voyage is approaching... We are sailing toward Gaza, without stopping... We are sailing toward this place that the Israeli occupation has turned into the largest open-air prison.

We are here, in a final attempt to show that small boats still dare to confront the fleets of death. Every time we sail, we give the world a new chance to feel ashamed... but it never feels ashamed. It merely smiles and murmurs: "We are worried..." The night was calm, despite the drones flying overhead... It doesn't matter.

Gaza is there, suffocating under the blockade, and under every form of annihilation. Even the sea mocks us: "Do you think you're going to break the blockade?" the wave asks us, "Others have tried before you."

But we're sailing on.

We will reach Gaza... or not. But the world, however indifferent it may be, will be forced to see these small boats, decorated with the flags of Palestine and forty other countries, exposing its great powerlessness

In the end, what we're doing isn't heroism. True heroism is that Gaza survives all these heroes who watch it and smile with concern.

The penultimate day aboard the Resistance flotilla.

Imagine living in cramped quarters aboard a small boat, where the smell of fuel oil beats out the scent of coffee, bread, and the sea. There are three tiny rooms where you can't even take two steps... The large room is for the women and has a bathroom—a real privilege. Because some boats don't have bathrooms at all... There are twelve of us, with three rooms, two floors, and two bathrooms.

We wash our clothes in seawater, we cook with seawater, and we save every drop of fresh water. Daily life here is a lesson in water conservation: everything is scarce, and yet we share it. I woke up today to the news that the *Johnny M.* had sunk. It was evacuated.

Our boat was broken: volunteers from other boats came and fixed it.

We are a floating society, without a single flag, a small society, without contracts or a constitution. We share food, photos, information... seasickness, and even nausea.

You see our beautiful photos with the sea, the photos of solidarity with Gaza and humanitarian causes, the Palestinian flags and the flags of other countries. But after every photo, our heads spin and our stomachs threaten to turn. After my beautiful photo with the Lebanese flag, I immediately fell down and fell asleep... Believe me, heroism is only in the photos, but life trembles without ceasing

Imagine cooking, eating, drinking, talking, and planning—all on a swaying deck. Try spinning around for a few minutes, then try writing a political statement, an article, or cooking potatoes with onions. Then you'll understand the meaning of existence here.

These boats are equipped with the bare minimum of comfort. We're not on a trip, we're not tourists, and this isn't a luxury cruise to dream beaches.

Yesterday, we caught two fish and celebrated as if we'd liberated a port... We competed with the other boats. In the evening, I cooked potatoes with onions, a dish I used to make with my friend during our days as doctoral students, days when we ate, slept, and put everything off until tomorrow. I sent her a photo of the dish, and she said, "The onions should have cooked a little longer." " But everyone here liked it. This is how we share the tasks: Rima and I cook, Homot helps us, Malika and Mariana do the dishes, Pascal is the ship's doctor and also works night shifts for the other boats, and Carlos, Mustafa, Lionel, Stefan, and Marco keep watch at night and steer the boat because we never stop sailing, even in the dark...

But the best part is that we don't know the time or the date, and that in itself is a relief from the burden of painful dates.

The last day aboard the blockade-breaking flotilla

We are approaching Gaza; only a few dozen kilometers separate us...

The distance is short, but it is long in tragedies, famine, and international silence. We are living through the last day aboard the flotilla, and the last day is always an ordeal.

We know what is going to happen: troops from the 13th Division, specially trained, will come to intercept us tonight. This will be nothing new for Israel... Sea, small boats, hooded soldiers, then an arrest described as “legal.”

The Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Turkish warships that have escorted us coldly announce that they will not break the blockade with us. They will wait until after the disaster... They have made it clear: “We will not break the blockade with you. If a confrontation arises, we will intervene later.” That is to say :

“We will witness what happens, we will take notes expressing our regrets, and we will console you...” This is an international morality of belated humanity. They will take us to the port of Ashdod. There, we will be asked to sign a document stating that we entered Israel illegally. This is a reversal of reality: we are not targeting Israel in the first place; we are heading toward Gaza.

What is happening is piracy in international waters, but it is redefined, just as everything is redefined when the criteria become muddled.

We also know that communications will be cut off. We will be cut off from the outside world, and this is an attempt to create a void in memory: if our voice is not heard, then the event does not exist.

And that's where you come in: be our voice. Demand an end to the blockade, press for our release, remind governments of us... This isn't just the battle for Gaza; your own struggle will begin tonight as well...

Don't expect complete heroism from us; we are just human beings sailing in small boats. But we are facing a system armed with everything except conscience. So, hold onto your anger, don't exhaust your voice by shouting, and don't waste your anger on insults; transform it into organized energy to demand our release and the lifting of the blockade.

If we cannot reach Gaza, let your voice reach it. If we cannot break the blockade in practice, break it morally, politically, and humanely.

Here, we are living through a slow, heavy experience. It is life on a rocking boat, in a rocking flotilla, in a rocking world. Everything is small here, but it resembles the future we dream of: a society without privilege, without injustice, without borders, one that shares bread, photos, and fear...

Outside, the newspapers write about us in a few lines, as if our daily lives weren't worth telling. But the truth is that here, we represent a miniature map of humanity: we are ordinary people, on ordinary boats, facing an extraordinary blockade. We are not heroes...

We are people pitching and rolling, bringing medicine and flour to Gaza, and carrying with us a larger question: how has the world reached such a degree of helplessness that sending a bag of flour to a besieged city becomes a revolutionary act ?

Interception and Detention

(Originally published in the online newspaper Investigacion)

For Gaza, for Syria, for Lebanon... for Humanity.
Because pain knows no borders... and neither does
dignity.

I saw the Negev Desert stretch out before me, motionless and endless. I gazed at it for two hours through the narrow slit of a closed metal truck, unfit even for transporting spoiled goods. But the occupation had decided to test our ability to endure the silence, the crushing heat, the artificial cold of their air conditioners, and the roar of the engines. Yet, seeing the land of Palestine made time stand still: the occupier's routine tortures suddenly seemed to lose their hold.

When the truck finally stopped in front of the airport, they threatened to stop us again if we raised our fingers in a sign of victory.

An army bristling with weapons, the fourth largest in the world, a nuclear state, frightened by raised fingers! What power fears a symbol so much?

We got out calmly, heads held high, singing a gentle song for Palestine, chanting our slogans, raising our fists in victory. Before us stretched the Ramon Mountains, all the way to the horizon. A moment of silence, of peace, of spirituality—as if the world had stopped.

And I assure you : seeing Palestine is worth everything. Look up the Ramon Mountains on Google, then close your eyes... Imagine them before you.

We were a group determined to peacefully break the blockade of Gaza, carrying of flour, medicine, and what remains of human conscience. You know the rest: our abduction in international waters, under the sun, at sea. But we had approached Gaza... Kidnapped, we saw it at dawn, yes, we saw Gaza, under the sky of Palestine.

There are thirteen of us aboard a small boat, from eight different countries, enriched by our diversity and united by the same determination. The “interception” was, as they say, “professional”—that is to say, “justified” in their eyes, but still illegal, inhumane.

We were taken to the port of Ashdod, where the usual theater of the occupation unfolded: insults, threats, the same hatred, the same racism, unchanged for decades.

We were thrown into trucks, then into a metal cell barely 1.5 meters wide. A policewoman shoved me brutally; my head hit the steel wall. For a moment, I thought she had shot me. Next to me, MEP Rima Hassan whispered, “They hit me too. They might put us in solitary confinement, but at least we’re together.”

We laughed—because sometimes, when you’re exhausted, fear turns to irony.

Shortly after, they threw Zoubida, a seventy-year-old Algerian woman and former member of parliament, and Sirine, a young activist, into the cell. Four women, three continents, a single breath.

The air was thin. The suffocating heat was soon replaced by an icy cold: a carefully measured alternation designed to torture.

We were then transferred to the prison, sections 5 and 6. The women had been divided among fourteen cells. I was assigned cell number 7—a nice number, a bad omen. At four in the morning, Itamar Ben Gvir, the Minister of Terror, entered. He declared, grotesquely : “I am the Minister of National Security.” He had come, surrounded by soldiers and dogs, to threaten sleeping women. He asked me my nationality. I remained silent. It was better to sleep than to start a fight.



© *Lyna Al Tabal, Ben Gvir's Visit to the Cell*

Ben Gvir, if only you consulted artificial intelligence before speaking—it, at least, has a modicum of intelligence. If your stupidity were renewable energy, it would light up the entire Negev—and perhaps the darkness of your mind.

Every morning and every evening, they counted the prisoners. Fourteen, always fourteen. The number didn't change, but they started over. We laughed at every count before falling back asleep. No food, almost no water, constant death threats. No lawyers, no doctors, no medicine—not even acetaminophen.

Every day, we were led into a fifteen-meter cage, Guantánamo-style, where sixty women were crammed together for hours under the Negev sun, supposedly waiting for a judge who often didn't show up. A police officer pointed his gun at my head because I didn't have my hands behind my back. "I'm going to kill you," he said. I smiled at him.

Our favorite game: responding in unison, "Go ahead, kill us!"—thus extinguishing fear like a candle.

The Israeli police didn't understand what planet we were from. We wore them down. We chanted "Tahya Falastin!" and looked them straight in the eye. Sometimes, some of them would lower their heads.

I won't deny the fear. Yes, I was afraid, I trembled, I was exhausted. But those who hold the right have no reason to fear claiming it.

The walls of the cell were covered with names scratched in with fingernails or scribbled in with the lead of an old pencil : Abu Iyad, Abu Mamoun, Abu Omar, Abu Muhammad—from Beit Lahia, Jabalia, Shuja'iyya...—men who had been deported before us. In cell No. 7, there was also Judith, an eighteen-year-old German woman; Lucía, a Spanish member of parliament; Marita, a Swedish activist; Jona, an American singer and politician; Zoubida, Hayat from Al Jazeera, Patty, a Greek member of parliament, Dara, a filmmaker... Women from allwalks of life, united by a single phrase: “Tahya Falastin!”

I chose to treat the guards as “case studies”: the “nice one,” who slipped me news in secret; the “mean one,” whose gaze shot daggers; and “the indifferent one,” a soulless automaton, a cog without thought.

Then came the propaganda session: we were forced to watch a film about October 7. We refused. We shouted: “Stop the genocide in Gaza!”

They lost all control. It was our last battle—and our victory.

We were in the Negev prison, the one they call Ktz'iot in Hebrew—formerly Ansar 2, during the first Intifada.

From my cell, I could see a wasteland and, on a wall, a giant poster of a destroyed Gaza, topped with the cynical caption: “New Gaza.”

Such was my visit to Palestine: torture, threats, captivity. But I saw the mountains. I saw Gaza from afar.

And I saw, up close, the Israeli fear.

Finally, I visited Palestine.

And the story continues... See you in December.

The boats stop for a moment, but never stop sailing.

Yesterday, we marked our lawyers' numbers on our arms.

6. Marinette

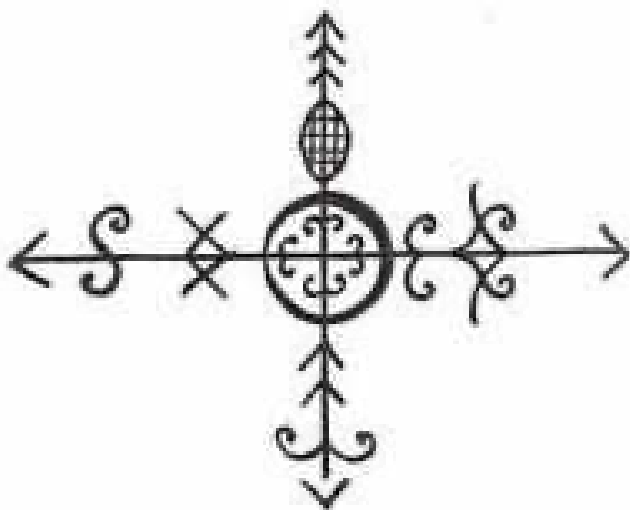
Catherine Benoît

October 2, 2025

Marinette, aptly named, unsurprisingly, sails alone and relentlessly toward Gaza.

The Bois-Caïman ceremony, on the night of August 14, 1791, held under the auspices of *Marinette*, a powerful deity in Haitian Vodou, launched the fight for the abolition of slavery.

This uprising of African slaves in Haiti marked the beginning of the struggle against colonial rule, which led to the independence of the first republic born through a successful slave rebellion.



Véné, symbol of *Marinette* in Haitian

7. Three months later

Malika Baouya

Nice, February 17, 2026

Nice.

The French Riviera.

The Promenade des Anglais is full of joggers, tourists, strollers, and lighthearted conversations. A perfect postcard. The blue Mediterranean stretches out before me, calm, smooth, indifferent.

And I walk along, with the feeling of being out of place, out of sync, a stranger to this setting.

Because this sea, this very same one, also laps at the shores of Gaza. And no one here seems to want to think about that. The same water, the same waves, but on the other side, other bodies, other cries, other nights.

Just a few weeks ago, I was actually there.

In Palestine.

An hour from Gaza.

Then locked up in Israeli prisons.

And yet, even behind those walls, I was not alone.

There were many of us, from different countries, speaking different languages, yet united by a simple and unshakable conviction: the blockade is not inevitable. It must be broken.

We had left everything behind: homes, families, work, daily life. We had put our lives on hold to deliver

a message, to take action, to show real solidarity. Not just words. And on the boat, something indescribable took shape. A brotherhood. A new family, born in the discomfort of the deck, in the salty smell of the sea, in the sharing of tasks, silences, fears, and laughter too. I shared with them a journey from which I will never fully recover.

The sea brought us together.

Injustice united us.

Gaza bound us.

I think of Lionel, my brother in spirit, who entered my life as if it were meant to be. On the boat, during the hardest moments, he always had a word, a presence. He came with his heart, simply, to do something for Palestine, for justice, for human dignity. He did so much for all of us. He is now a part of me, like so many others from that flotilla.

Then came prison. The tearing apart. The separation. We were together one day, and scattered the next, not knowing who was okay, who had been released, who remained locked up. And in that darkness, in that forced silence, the absence of those companions weighed heavier than the cell itself.

And now, here I am.

On the Promenade des Anglais

Surrounded by people who keep running, laughing, sunbathing, living.

I watch them, and I feel terribly alone.

I feel like I've returned to a parallel world where, collectively, we've decided to close our eyes. Where everything happening on the other side of the Mediterranean is just a distant noise, a disturbing buzz that we choose not to listen to.

I'm walking, but I'm not really there.

I'm missing something—or rather, someone.

I miss them.

My comrades. The boat.

The salty wind.

The feeling that every gesture matters. True brotherhood.

That raw, essential humanity that I found in Gaza far more than in many cities at peace.

I need to go back.

I need to rediscover that truth, that resistance.

The sea is calling me again.

Gaza is calling me.

And I ask myself the question I haven't stopped mulling over since my return:

What am I doing here?

I don't belong here.

I know it, I feel it, I'm certain of it.

I've returned physically, but everything else—my heart, my conscience, my thoughts—has remained somewhere on that boat, in that cell, on that Palestinian coast where we hear the cries but are not allowed to live.

And perhaps this text is my way, today, of saying that
I haven't forgotten.

That I cannot forget.

That I don't want to close my eyes here, simply
because it's more comfortable.

Gaza gave me a family.

Gaza transformed me.

Gaza has shown me that humanity still exists, even
where they try to destroy it.

And as long as there are walls, blockades, and
complicit silences, I know I will go back.

Joëlle Tischhauser

Thonon-les-Bains, January 15

It's already been three months since I returned. Three months since I've been on solid ground, three months since I've been getting involved in a different way for Gaza and for Palestine, as well as for justice and solidarity around the world.

This journey marked the beginning of a struggle that will never end.

Indeed, as the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, the lives of ordinary people in the countries subservient to the U.S. and their international court of the ultra-rich are gradually deteriorating. Every day brings proof of this: the dismantling of systems fighting for justice, the criminalization of protesters denouncing injustices and barbarism, the protection and enrichment of billionaires, and the collapse of equal rights to housing, education, and healthcare. I have come to realize the moral significance of this Flotilla, the importance of this desperate yet deeply hopeful act, of the movement it sparked, of the cry it raised that continues to resonate and spread throughout this suffering world.

The Flotilla was a cry, an example of what solidarity means, of what ordinary people can achieve, a living testimony to what it means to be human at our best, and a hope for humanity. "If Gaza falls," said one of my crewmates, "it is our humanity that dies."

This citizen mobilization resonated in so many hearts, around the Mediterranean and beyond. My nurse friends in Gaza, like many Palestinians in the occupied territories, followed us, waited for us, and thanked us. “We are not forgotten!” That was the point: to remind everyone that our governments endorse and are complicit in a genocide, in an illegal blockade, in defiance of international law, in defiance of humanitarian law, in defiance of the rights of a people, at the far end of the Mediterranean, yet dying right before our eyes.

By looking the other way, the law of the strongest is enshrined, the protection of the powerful is implied, the sacrifice of others is normalized, and obedience to the money of the powerful is taken for granted.

The Flotilla did not reach Gaza, but it reached the hearts of all those who still believe in peace and solidarity, whether on the beaches of Gaza, in the subways of Paris, in the docks of Italy, or on small family farms in France.

This Flotilla, made up of repaired boats and amateur crews, stood up to the Israeli army.

This flotilla held firm through storms and delays; it succeeded in mobilizing millions of people who came to cheer it on in the ports, support it with donations, and protect it through their presence, their testimonies, their prayers, and their gifts.

It was a great honor to be able to board a ship. I realized this when I learned that more than 20,000 people had asked to be part of it.

And also when I saw the thousands of people who had come out to say goodbye to us in Barcelona and Tunis, or to welcome us in Athens and Paris.

We are living through a dramatic moment in history: the height of colonialist capitalism, leading to the exclusive reign of profit and money; the rise of fascism in the service of racism and Islamophobia; and lies elevated to the status of dogma to protect the powerful and their money. The truth based on facts no longer matters to the mainstream media, which serves all-out imperialist propaganda.

This Flotilla, though certainly imperfect and disorganized—being civilian and spontaneous—has nevertheless shown the people that individuals united for a cause can reclaim power when the governments they elected betray their commitments and abandon their convictions. The system that fuels the crimes in Palestine, the wars in South Sudan, or in Ukraine is the same one that creates injustices in our own countries.

And I believe that is the greatest message left by this flotilla.

Lyna Al Tabab

Paris, three months after the flotilla

Following my return from the Sumud Flotilla..., the porcelain has reclaimed its place in my Parisian apartment. Dinners have resumed their hushed choreography, and shopping persists in its role as a social vice. Everything has returned to its place.

On the surface... Because something is broken, and this time, it's not the dinner service.

There were those sidelong smiles, those little remarks from people who always confuse courage with a whim: "The Love Boat," they called it.

Even my neighbors, who until then had classified me in the decorative category of urban sophisticates, discovered with almost comical astonishment that a woman can love porcelain and hate injustice, wear a beautiful jacket and refuse to capitulate, know the best spots in town and yet choose the sea, risk, discomfort, and the moral front line. For them, Saint-Germain-des-Prés and a fuel can turned into a makeshift table could not coexist. It was too much to ask to their salon sociology.

And yet, that improvised table at sea, covered with a vaguely baroque plastic tablecloth—kitsch with a false air of *Dolce & Gabbana*—held more truth than all the stuffy Parisian dinners put together. Out there, nothing was a lie. Not the fatigue. Not the fear. Not the hunger. Not the brotherhood. The sea has this genius: it strips the human being of all that is superfluous with an almost charitable brutality

There we learn that life depends neither on luxury nor on excess, but on that irreducible core that the oppressed call dignity and that the oppressors prefer to call agitation.

They kept telling us, with that dry satisfaction typical of unimaginative realists: “You’ll never reach Gaza.”

As if history boiled down to a matter of docking. As if a blockade existed only on the water. They have clearly understood nothing; we have already broken something, and it is not a naval blockade, it is the habit of silence.

It doesn’t matter that the ships didn’t touch the sand of the enclave. They touched something else: the shame of the onlookers.

From Canada to Australia, from Paris to high schools in the suburbs, hundreds of thousands of young people have followed us as one follows a story that finally restores dignity to action. For many, the flotilla was not just an event: it was an inner permission. Permission to no longer accept. Permission to resist.

In Lebanon, my bloodless country, this flotilla has become the lifeblood of a new hope.

And Tripoli... my hometown, unjustly punished, humiliated by history, Tripoli, which is caricatured, abandoned, starved, and accused.

Proud Tripoli has risen again. She, who languishes under the yoke of extremes and renunciations, has paid me tribute...

So why set sail again?

Certainly not to play the role of floating heroines in a militarized Mediterranean. We are setting out again because a flotilla is, above all, a factory of consciousness... A forge where wills are tempered that neither chancelleries nor bombs can produce. We are not just building boats. We are building resistance. We are building that raw material that has become rare: human beings with dignity.

We must set sail again to broaden the front. So that millions of people take to the streets and, in the face of the blockade imposed on Gaza, organize a human, political, and ethical counter-siege. A blockade of solidarity against the injustice done to Palestine, of course, but also against the injustice done to humanity wherever the empire demands obedience, wherever occupation demands oblivion, wherever force demands that we admire its crimes in the name of security.

For today is no longer the time for the comfort of decorative indignation. The Israeli occupation has reignited its war of destruction, with its usual vocabulary: threats, blackmail, crushing, impunity. Beirut is once again a target. Israel promises us in Beirut and in southern Lebanon the fate of Gaza. And explains to us that our neighborhoods could become a new Rafah.

Faced with Israel's arrogance, I am leaving.

I am not leaving my life behind. I am stripping it of its frivolities to take it with me.

I am taking with me my contradictions, my love of beautiful things, my anger, my memories, my loyalties. I am leaving with who I am, not with who they would like me to be.

I leave with my head held high, with the Lebanese flag ready to rise again on the horizon, not as a patriotic accessory, but as a sign of defiance against the Israeli occupation and against all those who agree to collaborate with the enemy.

We do not ask permission to exist from those who bomb us.

We exist without their consent. We move forward.

We persist.

And we return to set out once more.

8. Surviving in Gaza

Interview with Rasha Abou Jalal, journalist in Gaza

— C. B. How are you, Rasha? How is your family?

— R.A.J. Thank you for asking. In Gaza, the question “How are you?” takes on an existential dimension rather than being a mere polite formality. We’re doing well, in the relative sense of the term; we’re trying to live day by day and preserve our family unity amid a fragile and unstable reality. I have five children, and every day I think about how to protect their childhood from the noise of planes, the alarming news, and the anxiety that creeps into every detail of life. We try to create normal spaces within an abnormal reality—to laugh, study, and make plans, even if those plans are short-term.

— When and how did you become a journalist? How do you manage to write and publish during the war?

— I became a journalist driven by a deep inner need to tell the story of what is happening here through the eyes of those who are living it, not those who observe it from afar. I began my career years ago, convinced that journalism is not just about conveying information, but about bringing a fully lived human experience to life. In a war zone, writing becomes an act of resistance. I sometimes write under the pressure of bombings, power outages, or unstable internet connections. I use every means at my disposal: my cell phone, intermittent internet access, and temporary workspaces. Publishing on *Substack* and other platforms gives me a direct window

onto the world, beyond the oversimplifications imposed by fast-paced news cycles. I try to write with honesty and calm, even when reality is chaotic and painful.

—You were one of the first subscribers to the Logbook published on Substack. How did you discover Waves of Freedom France and the French Logbook? And what did you think of them?

— I discovered Waves of Freedom France and the Logbook while following European solidarity initiatives with Gaza. What drew me to the Logbook was its human tone; it wasn't just a political statement, but a personal space documenting emotions and details of daily life.

I was among the first readers because I'm always interested in how others perceive Gaza and the way they talk about it. I saw this initiative as a sincere attempt to break the symbolic isolation and bring Gaza into the European consciousness in a human way, not just as a number in the news.

— How was the Global Sumud Flotilla received in Gaza?

— The idea itself, even before the arrival, was met with hope. In Gaza, any initiative that breaks the isolation stirs deep emotional anticipation. The children who drew welcome pictures did not view the flotilla as merely a political event, but as a symbol that they are not forgotten. When the boats were seized, people felt disappointment, but not surprise. We are used to such outcomes. Yet the mere attempt had a moral impact. Even the incident in which Israeli forces were reportedly so preoccupied

that Gaza fishermen were able to fish for two days became a little anecdote that people told one another—a brief moment of respite amid a suffocating reality.

— Was this initiative significant? What do you think of its impact?

— From a human perspective, yes, it was significant. Solidarity doesn't always translate into immediate material change; sometimes, it changes the very meaning of things—the feeling that you're not alone. For the people of Gaza, isolation is one of the hardest aspects of the blockade. Did this actually change daily life? Perhaps not in a way that altered political realities. But it helped raise public awareness outside of Gaza and strengthened the discourse of global solidarity. That, in itself, is important in the struggle for public discourse and consciousness.

—Do you think the flotilla projects are useful? Should they continue? Are there other ways to express solidarity with Gaza?

—I think these projects are important symbolically and in terms of media coverage, because they draw attention to the blockade and keep Gaza at the center of public debate. Whether they continue depends on their ability to evolve and create an impact that goes beyond mere symbolism.

In addition to aid flotillas, solidarity can have a greater impact through political and legal pressure, support for independent journalism, support for health and education institutions, and the creation of more opportunities for Palestinians to tell their own stories.

True solidarity is not limited to a one-off event; it is a lasting commitment. What the people of Gaza need is not just symbolic gestures, but consistency in positions, fairness in discourse, and a genuine political will to address the root causes of the crisis.

Afterword

The Flotilla as Seen by Children in France and Gaza
A project by Éducation avec Gaza, Education4Gaza, and
Gaza la vie

Dozens of drawings, models, and paintings were created by children.

This initiative, launched by the Éducation avec Gaza collective in France, allowed them to show their support for the flotilla heading to Gaza.

Those most directly affected—the children of Gaza, who have been enduring this genocide for over two years—also expressed their solidarity with the flotilla’s crews thanks to the teams at Education4Gaza and Gaza la vie.

Through their drawings, they express their fears, their hopes, and their dreams of a life of dignity.

For them, the flotilla represents much more than a symbol: it is a concrete act of hope that could help break the blockade and, in its own small way, improve their living conditions so they can live in peace, study, play, and build a future for themselves.



© Khadija, a young middle school student in France, Installation



عبدالرحمان

© Abderahman, a child in Gaza, Drawing

Contributors

Malika Baouya

A nurse from Nice, founder of the NGO Nurses Without Borders, and member of the White Coat for Gaza collective. She took part in the 2025 flotilla mission and also participated in the March for Gaza in Cairo in June 2025.

Maisara Baroud

Visual artist originally from Gaza, where he also taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Al-Aqsa University. In 2025, he left Gaza with his family and currently lives in Marseille. He is a fellow of the Pause program and the Amidex Chair of Excellence in Audiovisual Anthropology, hosted by the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology (Ideas) at Aix-Marseille University.

Catherine Benoît

Anthropologist, professor at Connecticut College (United States). Her work focuses on the history and anthropology of French colonialism in the French overseas territories. Member of the WoffCommunication/press team during the 2025 flotilla crossing.

Adrià Fruitós

An illustrator born in Barcelona and based in France since 2008, he works across a wide range of media: children's books, the press, advertising campaigns, and even objects. He exhibits his work at illustration shows and contemporary art fairs around the world.

Ahed Sobhi Helles

Poet and professor of architecture at Al-Aqsa University (Palestine), born in Gaza in 1968. He published his first collection of poetry, *From the Inspiration of Madrid*, in 1992. His next book is titled *Gaza...a Gap in the World* (forthcoming). His poems and literary texts have been published in numerous literary platforms and cultural magazines.

Rasha Abou Jalal

Journalist in Gaza. She works for several media outlets covering Palestinian political, humanitarian, and social issues. She is a permanent member of the jury for the annual Gaza Press House Award.

Maha Nassar

Palestinian-American writer, professor, and historian at Arizona State University (United States). Her award-winning book and numerous articles examine the history of transnational Palestinian activism. Her current book project explores the role of Palestinian youth in the history of Global sumud.

Oumessaad

Works in the finance sector and is actively engaged in human rights advocacy. Guided by values of justice and dignity, she uses her experience to serve people in highly vulnerable situations.

Lyna Al Tabal

A lawyer and researcher in international law, specializing in human rights. She participates in civil society initiatives related to international criminal justice and the fight against impunity. Her work, publications, and policy analyses focus on the intersection of academic research, grassroots action, and international advocacy. Member of the 2025 Global Sumud Flotilla.

Esma Hind Tengour

Certified Arabic teacher, translator, and independent researcher.

Malika Terre

Engineer, she is deeply moved by the Palestinian tragedy and has always been involved in civic and humanitarian missions in support of Gaza. Member of the Woff Communication/press team during the 2025 flotilla crossing.

Joëlle Tischhauser

A nurse dedicated to humanitarian work, she has carried out several missions, including three in Gaza, where she witnessed the tangible effects of cynical political decisions.

Émilien Urbach

Journalist at L'Humanité and captain of the *MiaMia*.

Ismaël Wadih

Lives in the Pyrénées-Orientales, married with children. Neither a political activist nor a campaigner, the alarming situation of the Palestinians in Gaza prompted him to take action. From the *March to Gaza* to the Flotilla, he has traveled the world for peace, against suffering and injustice.