

BE FUCKING GENTLE

written by Isabelle Davis | October 13, 2014



a woman is talking on npr. another woman is talking over her. the first woman is talking in arabic & the second woman is talking in english— this is called translating. both women are saying *i sleep with a knife under my pillow. to protect my children.* if you speak both arabic and english this probably has a discerning echo effect. the first woman lives in gaza. the second woman probably lives in london. (this is npr but it's really bbc world news.) the first woman has four children but no husband or sister; they did not have enough warning when the strikes came. they did not have warning. the first woman needs warning when the strikes come.

her kids are sleeping in the next room but she wants them to sleep in her room she wants to put her body over theirs & shape shift into a force field whenever the ground shakes & when she feels it she wants to pull that knife out from underneath her pillow & cut up every explosive that would dare come near her family & she says *i know it's stupid but it's all i have.*

the second woman's voice falters when she says that last part.

I used to avoid this topic. I did not understand it; I did not want to understand it. I acknowledged it only to insist both sides were fucked. A lot of my friends in high school were Jewish and similarly unaware, but their parents wanted to take them to Israel for their eighteenth birthdays. That seemed pretty cool.

A separate interview. NPR/ BBC World News takes on an American Zionist studying abroad in Jerusalem. He does not have to be translated because he is speaking in English. The interviewer wonders if he is nervous about the airstrikes, if his family is worried about the airstrikes. His family is very, very worried, but he isn't too concerned. He says every time he sits down at a restaurant he looks around and figures out if he can get to a safe spot in two minutes from where he's sitting. That is when the sirens go off. He always can. The hardest part about this whole thing for him has been trying to explain his dedication to Israel to his family and friends. He says, *Being a Zionist in New York City is kind of weird, people look at you strangely.* Then he sighs. He wants his loved ones to understand why he feels like he has to be here for this, why he has to have it happening all around him, why he won't book a flight back to the states. They don't get it. He tells the interviewer, *Israel is my promised land, and I won't let anyone take that away from me.*

Tammara Nassar will probably never step foot in Israel; it sometimes feels like her life revolves around this fact. She tweets about Palestine, she tweets about the fragility of human life, about emotion, about wanting to do something to help so badly but being helpless to do it. She does this all in 140 characters. Small children get taken by big soldiers, and there is nothing that can be done so she tweets *be fucking gentle.* I never strained

our relationship by blocking her out whenever she happened to be talking about the conflict. This was in part because I knew how awful and selfish and privileged I was in getting to make the decision to be uninformed, but also because she made it her mission to teach me about these things anyways.

She taught me biased but I do not think that matters. She would invite me to her room under the guise of studying only to completely ignore her books and turn on a Zizek lecture at full volume. Loud enough so that not listening became impossible. He yelled at stupid students asking him stupid questions about how the Holocaust made a Jewish State essential. He said, isn't it funny how these people (his people) are using that excuse to do something so similar to another people? My mouth formed questions before my brain could tell it to shut up.

"But is it really that simply horrible? Did they really just kick them out and make it theirs? I thought it was more complicated than that."

"They did not *just* throw us out, Isabelle, they tortured us and they raped us and they killed us and they evicted us until they bombed us."

Tammara goes to school in Appleton, Wisconsin but she lives in Jordan. She is Palestinian. She is a descendent of refugees. Her father went to prison when he was eighteen for peacefully protesting getting unceremoniously and literally thrown from his own home. Her grandfather had done the same thing twenty years before. Both dreamed of going back but neither will be able to get in. Tammara's grandmother was raped. This was routine.

In March, Tammara did not eat for three days, except for tiny bits of salt. This was in solidarity. Palestinian prisoners of war go on hunger strikes for months, eating only tiny bits of salt every other day. Without food she had less understanding for the uninformed. She did not want to explain her anger, she just wanted to live in it. She lost five pounds and fell asleep on my floor at four pm listening to slam poems for The West Bank. My roommate got annoyed.

"It's not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's a genocide."

Tammara told me this at the beach. Later in the day she ran up to her boyfriend to tell him she had found a dead fish on the shore; they kissed over it and spent some time talking to a little girl who wanted to know who was a boy and who was a girl— the two of them had similar haircuts and big white t-shirts on. They told her neither of them had that figured out yet.

The sun was out and we were on benches. The sun was out and three Israeli teenagers had been kidnapped. We didn't say much about it. We just exchanged glances and ruminated about how it couldn't be good while sipping on our hard cider. Tammara said that it didn't matter if Hamas had done it or not and I

didn't know who Hamas was exactly, but I knew she was right.

Two weekends later I was back in Chicago and she was back in Jordan and 200 civilians in Gaza were dead.

two women are talking on national public radio. one of them is supposed to be relating this story back to her listeners impartially but how can you be impartial when the woman you are translating for is trying to fight bombs with a kitchen knife because she can't flee her beautiful country even as it goes up around her in flames? how are you supposed to be impartial when the death count is 2,131 & 2,049 of those lives were her people's? how are you supposed to be impartial when two of those lives were her family's? there comes a point when no one is being impartial anymore.

all the women are saying, *be fucking gentle.*