

# As the Tide Turns Towards Justice for Palestine, Where Does the Palestinian Diaspora Stand?

By [Barbara Nimri Aziz](#)

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***The Palestinian diaspora, particularly those living in the US, should not be overlooked as a player in calls for the freedom of Palestine.***

A new generation of professional Americans of Palestinian origin have worked tirelessly for a half century to document and update a largely unresponsive US public on conditions in their occupied homelands. Their efforts had seemed fruitless; the risks they took were high; the difference they made hardly registered. Today, coalitions they built, the quiet admiration they earned, the skills they acquired, the resources they provided, must be recognized as preparing the ground on which expanding support rests. Albeit it has come with immense suffering and martyrdom by Gazan residents in past months.

Despite a US veto of Palestinian membership in the UN; despite dismissals of elite college presidents; despite major media's unmitigated coverup of Israeli war crimes; despite accelerated funding for the Israeli war machine; despite a US congressional resolution banning the chant "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"; despite small crowds in early demonstrations against Israel's genocide on Gaza; despite individuals risking careers and friendships to defend free speech as a hallmark of American democracy; despite the obfuscation of truths about Israeli apartheid policies by independent journalists; despite the weaponization of the charge of antisemitism – public protests continue.

Last week, US-based protests which had lagged behind those elsewhere in the world took a new turn. Student encampments at Columbia University were assaulted by New York City police, with over 108 arrests and suspensions. By the beginning of May similar protests had erupted at more than 75 colleges across the nation. They continue, despite more arrests, a hostile media and threats from university administrations. International universities are joining in.

We've seen nothing like this since students opposed the Vietnam war. Conditions today are very different. In the 1960s the US military draft was in effect and cellphone cameras were non-existent. There were no live feeds of war carnage overseas. And apartheid was a concept limited to South Africa's white regime. Doubtless commentators will be discussing [analogies and contrasts](#) between current uprisings against the Gaza genocide (notwithstanding increased daily killings and ethnic cleansing underway in the [Occupied West Bank](#)) and protests related to Vietnam and South Africa.



The groundswell of public outrage expressed in current campus revolts seems to indicate a real turning point. **Some reasons for the shift are obvious; others less so. First, is the availability of painful, even horrifying, images and stories arriving direct from Gaza residents via Twitter, [TikTok and other social media](#).**

These expose truths masked by the lies and biases in major media. Unimaginable barbarity to the degree underway in Gaza since October has never been witnessed so widely. **Targeting of medical staff, journalists and aid workers alongside the staggering death toll of children is, literally, shocking.**

**The massive scale of murder, home destruction and wounding of Gaza civilians and the withholding of food and water is irrefutable. A single story focusing on one child can trigger moral outrage unlike anything else.** On the political front, Ireland, South Africa, Malaysia, [Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil, Jamaica](#) – most of them nations viewed as minor global players – have led the way, by one means or another, to support Palestinian rights and challenge Israeli and US policies. One cannot discount the role of some brave Jewish Americans working in solidarity with Palestinians and other agencies to end the siege.

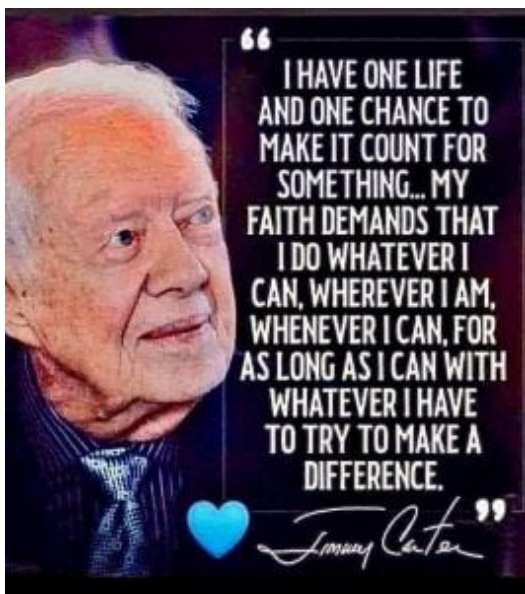
Since early in the war on Gaza, traditional 'influencers' on matters of human rights have been largely silent. Celebrities for example. Notwithstanding the courage of two – actors Susan Sarandon and Cynthia Nixon – others known for championing the weak and downtrodden, like Shawn Penn and George Clooney, are absent. There's no Jane Fonda, no Mohammad Ali, no Bono in this anti-war movement. Although one must single out the steadfastness of [Vanessa Redgrave](#) now in her 80s, defamed for support of Palestine rights as early as the 1970s, and the irrepressible Bassem Youssef who is lashing out wryly over

media biases. This in contrast to a mute [Amal Clooney](#), a human rights lawyer and a woman with Palestinian roots.

Working behind the scenes however is the effective and hardly celebrated Palestinian diaspora. Their numbers are to be found throughout the world, from Latin American to Europe and the Middle East. Many live in the USA, the children of refugees settled here following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. We may have heard the names of Jerusalem-born intellectuals **Professor Edward Said** and poet **Mahmoud Darwish**.

Although Said is hailed in comparative literature circles for his groundbreaking Orientalism, [his 1979 book, The Question of Palestine](#), made Palestine a subject of serious debate. Equally importantly Said, who died in 2003, doubtless had a major impact on the emerging generation of educated Palestinians in the US. Now in their 40s, 50s and 60s, these Palestinians occupy a range of professions across the country. Said's generation confined themselves to engineering, political science and history; today those men and women are outpaced by a large, industrious and creative community of poets, [filmmakers](#), novelists, comedians, journalists, musicians, lawyers, teachers, and community organizers. Most may not be household names – not yet.

But [Ali Abunima](#), Palestine Chronicle's [Ramsey Baroud](#), activist Linda Sarsour, Cherien Dabis, Mai Masri, Lisa Suheir Majaj, [Amer Zahr](#), Dean Obeidallah, [Samia Halaby](#), Steven Salaita, Fady Joudah, Naomi Shihab Nye, Susan Abdulhawa, and [Rabab Abdulhadi](#) are a few of the best known and most influential. Their research, films, writing, speaking and organizing have kept information flowing about conditions in their homelands: daily killings, dispossession, prisoners in Israeli jails, home demolitions, settler expansion, non-violent resistance, uprooted trees, confiscated homes and lands, the crushing embargo on Gaza. Their novels and poems may have as much impact as facts-on-the-ground by historians. Risk is part of their identity. Undeterred by the marginalization of their efforts, by threats and firings, their work had steadily seeped into a determinedly unresponsive American culture.



One example of their resolve is the [BDS movement](#). Founded in 2005, it has waged an [uphill effort to call for the divestment](#) of US financial support for Israel. Unknown to the wider public, BDS is perceived as such a threat to Israel-American interests that 37 of 50 states have been pressured to adopt anti-BDS legislation making institutions (including colleges)

and individuals who support BDS ineligible for government funding! (Sometimes [employees who refuse to sign an anti-BDS declaration](#) lose their job.)

While talented articulate Palestinians and their institutions grew, Palestine's traditional support base – local leaders and Arab League states – weakened.

Elected Palestinian leaders and officials in the Occupied Territories were neutralized and corrupted. Arab states which had offered refuge and succor along with diplomatic support for Palestinian statehood were also neutralized – some by war and civil strife, others by US brokered treaties with Israel, a process best summarized in **former President [Carter's 2006 brave expose](#), [Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid](#).**

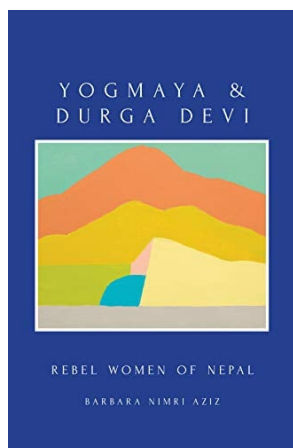
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**Barbara Nimri Aziz** whose anthropological research has focused on the peoples of the Himalayas is the author of the newly published [“Yogmaya and Durga Devi: Rebel Women of Nepal”](#), [available on Amazon](#).

*She is a regular contributor to Global Research.*

*All images in this article are from the author*



## [“Yogmaya and Durga Devi: Rebel Women of Nepal”](#)

**By Barbara Nimri Aziz**

A century ago Yogmaya and Durga Devi, two women champions of justice, emerged from a remote corner of rural Nepal to offer solutions to their nation's social and political ills. Then they were forgotten.

Years after their demise, in 1980 veteran anthropologist Barbara Nimri Aziz first uncovered their suppressed histories in her comprehensive and accessible biographies. Revelations from her decade of research led to the resurrection of these women and their entry into contemporary Nepali consciousness.

This book captures the daring political campaigns of these rebel women; at the same time it

asks us to acknowledge their impact on contemporary feminist thinking. Like many revolutionaries who were vilified in their lifetimes, we learn about the true nature of these leaders' intelligence, sacrifices, and vision during an era of social and economic oppression in this part of Asia.

After Nepal moved from absolute monarchy to a fledgling democracy and history re-evaluated these pioneers, Dr. Aziz explores their legacies in this book.

Psychologically provocative and astonishingly moving, "Yogmaya and Durga Devi" is a seminal contribution to women's history.

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