

Introduction

Hello everyone. Welcome to Eyes on Gaza, our daily gathering of protest and learning. I want to begin by sending congratulations to Manwa Al-Masri, who spoke with us on Sunday. This morning she spoke with Amalia Sa'ar. Her daughter gave birth to a small baby named Layla. The mother, the daughter, and the grandmother are all well, and we hope the child will grow up in a better world. Today is a day of disruption and protest. We at *Eyes on Gaza* refuse to normalize the horrifying reality in Gaza and the West Bank, and the devaluation of life and the future for all of us here, from the Jordan River to the sea. The last semester at the University of Haifa was especially important. Led by our wonderful students, we worked together in a unique and meaningful collaboration—Palestinians and Jewish students—to organize demonstrations against silencing at the university and against the destruction in Gaza. Even if we did not manage to stop the atrocities in Gaza, we succeeded in energizing the campus and somewhat dispersing the heavy cloud of silence that has hung over us for nearly two years. All of this happened because we were led by an amazing action body of students—Palestinian and Jewish. Two of them are here with us today: Ariel Dukolsky and Elia Levin. Both are active in *Standing Together* and, as mentioned, are students at the University of Haifa. After disrupting the broadcasting of the “Big Brother” TV shows and organizing a hunger demonstration at the airport, they came to speak to us about disruption. Thank you very much, Ariel and Elia, for joining us. The stage is yours.

Presentation

Hello everyone, and thank you very much for the invitation. We are very excited about *Eyes on Gaza* initiative, and more broadly about the growing collaboration between students and academic staff around opposition to the war. We are here today to talk about a tool used in protests called nonviolent civil disobedience as a form of stepping up resistance. During this horrific period—the destruction, the genocide in Gaza, and the abandonment of hostages—we are sure that many of you feel despair, a lack of direction, and a lack of leadership. It is unclear what our role is now in the face of the terrible reality unfolding around us. We will not speak about Gaza directly, but today we will address this tool of civil disobedience, which has been used throughout history to fight against oppressive regimes, wars, and other atrocities. So why nonviolent civil disobedience? We will compare it to violent protest and try to understand together what this tool can offer us. In this photo you can see an action we initiated at the airport: a protest against mass flight, against turning Israel into an impossible place to live, regardless of political views.

Throughout history there have been many struggles worldwide where this tool of nonviolent resistance was used. Until 105 years ago, women in the United States did not have the right to vote. Thousands of women who entered detention won that right. Regarding what we will discuss next, it is difficult to prove a causal link between tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience and the success of a struggle. But we do see a correlation in many places worldwide where this tool—nonviolent but also illegal—was used to achieve change. We will briefly discuss an event called The Children's March, in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, a city that had strict segregation policies with much racism and segregation. At that time, Martin Luther King was in prison, and from prison he spoke and told his people, his group: “We need now to fill the jails!” The protests and marches had weakened somewhat because he was in prison, and the struggle needed to be intensified. His idea was that “if we fill the jails to capacity, the pillars of the regime will understand that they cannot continue like this.” The group then held a meeting to decide on a march in the city and asked who was willing to be arrested. There was little response except for some children who suddenly realized it was their time, their opportunity. This was understandable: parents had to support their households. If they were arrested, they might lose their jobs. The next day, the march took place.

Within five days, 3,000 children were arrested. This was a very significant step toward agreements and equal rights.

So how does this tool work? We carry out a disruption action, which openly creates provocation and receives coverage. This coverage forces decision-makers, the public, institutions, to respond, and thus to influence public opinion. If these stages are carried out thoughtfully, and we succeed in swaying public opinion in our favor with coverage and reaction, the circle grows, and we create more people who disrupt and get more coverage. As this circle grows, people realize that things cannot continue as usual, and something must change. According to Erica Chenoweth, who studied violent and nonviolent protests, she believed some struggles required force. But following her research, she concluded that in many ways the outcomes of nonviolent protests were better in the long term than those of violent protests. The reason is that violent struggle generates a violent alternative. Nonviolent struggle allows more people to participate. Movements built around nonviolent struggles create infrastructure conducive to democracy, stability, innovation, and creativity—what we aim at when we talk about regime change.

Gene Sharp is another researcher who studied civil disobedience. He based his research on the protest movement Otpor in Serbia. He examined nonviolent protest and tried to identify its elements. He concluded that a regime can continue to rule as long as its pillars of support remain loyal. These pillars are institutions such as academia, the police, the army, the media. When we carry out massive disruption, with or without mass arrests—but massive disruption of people, with documentation showing that the protesters themselves are nonviolent and subjected to violence—we create a dilemma for those pillars of support and for the public, forcing them to choose a side. When images of thousands of children entering detention cells are published, it is clear who is right and who is wrong. The images clearly show that the demonstrators are nonviolent, yet violence is applied to them. By destabilizing pillars of support and public opinion, we can generate change.

Regarding our “Big Brother” action that caused various reactions, two important things happened. First, people who think as we do that the destruction in Gaza must stop, received a new spirit of hope and energy, in their struggle. Second, people watching Big Brother who chose to remain neutral, suddenly understood that if these two young women were willing to disrupt the “Big Brother”—rather than passively watching the show—, maybe they should take a stand too.

We would like to add that we understand that because we live in an unequal state—not everyone is equal in the eyes of the law—joining disruptive actions is different for Palestinians, for Ethiopians, for LGBTQ people, than it is for others. We are aware of this and take it into account in every action we plan and carry out.

Finally, we invite anyone to contact us, at any age, life stage, gender, or role. We have different roles, different actions, and we need many people to stop the atrocities taking place. Please reach out to us: “Let’s change together!”: Ariel – 054-7772521; Elia – 054-6867080.