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By April M. Short
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‘Practices for Care and Endurance’ Support Those Organizing for Ceasefire in Gaza

Teaser: Amid genocidal violence and mass civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip, well-known writers, artists, healers, and activists shared practices of care and endurance to support efforts for ceasefire and peace.

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[Article Body:]

Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip—which began following the [Hamas attack on Israel](#) on October 7, 2023—has led to mass civilian deaths including those of [more than 6,000](#) children as of November, with “[damning evidence of war crimes](#),” according to Amnesty International. On November 16, UN experts [warned](#) of genocidal violence on the

part of Israel in the Gaza Strip. On December 6, the UN secretary-general [invoked](#) Article 99 of the UN Charter citing a “severe risk of collapse of the humanitarian system in Gaza.” Beginning in early October, public protests around the world have called for a [permanent ceasefire](#) and an end to Israel’s violence against Palestinians.

Practices for Care and Endurance

To support those calling for a ceasefire and bearing witness to the violence, a group of writers, artists, healers, and activists offered an online panel titled, “[Practices for Care and Endurance](#),” on November 13, 2023.

The panelists—[Hala Alyan](#), [adriennemaree brown](#), [Spenta Kandawalla](#), [Adaku Utah](#), [Layla K. Feghali](#), [Noor](#), and [Sepideh Moafi](#)—took turns sharing their experiences, grief, and practices of care with thousands of online attendees on the [CTZNWELL](#) platform.

The panel’s speakers emphasized the importance of collective care and endurance in the face of trauma and violence. The discussion was organized during a time of near-constant news of violence, dehumanizing practices, and horrors coming from Gaza. Reports ranged from the [use](#) of white phosphorus chemical weapons on civilians, to the Israeli military’s intentional [targeting](#) of hospitals, to the heart-wrenching [practice shared](#) on social media of writing children’s names on their bodies so that they did not become part of the growing piles of unidentifiable young corpses if they were killed.

Well-known author, essayist, podcaster, and musician adriennemaree brown moderated the panel discussion. She said Hala Alyan—the acclaimed Palestinian-American poet, [author](#), psychologist, and professor—had the initial idea to gather around “Practices for Care and Endurance.”

“[Alyan] blew me away with her [piece](#) in the Times on empathy,” brown said in an online interview with me for the Independent Media Institute (IMI). She was referring to Alyan’s op-Ed originally [published](#) in the New York Times on October 25, which points out the many ways Palestinians have been made to “audition for empathy and compassion.”

Alyan [writes](#) in the piece:

“To earn compassion for their dead, Palestinians must first prove their innocence. The real problem with condemnation is the quiet, sly tenor of the questions that accompany it: Palestinians are presumed violent—and deserving of violence—until proved otherwise. Their deaths are presumed defensible until proved otherwise. What is the word of a Palestinian against a machinery that investigates itself, that absolves itself of accused crimes? What is it against a government whose representatives [have referred to](#)

[Palestinians](#) as “[human animals](#)” and “[wild beasts](#)”? When [a well-suited man](#) can say brazenly and unflinchingly that there is no such thing as a Palestinian people?”

Brown and Alyan connected for an Instagram Live discussion following the op-Ed’s publication. After the discussion, Alyan came up with the idea for the panel.

“She envisioned this expanded practice and reflection space and asked me to collaborate,” brown said in the interview. “She recognized that for everyone organizing and trying to change this moment, we are facing different kinds of exhaustion, and that we need to hold onto each other to endure for the long haul. We both invited healers we know to be politically grounded.”

Among the panelists was [Layla K. Feghali](#), author of [The Land In Our Bones: Plantcestral Herbalism and Healing Cultures from Syria to the Sinai](#), who shared with me in an interview with IMI that Alyan, her friend, invited her to speak on the panel.

“[Alyan] being my Palestinian sister in a time of great need for our people, I said yes to her request,” she said in the interview. “I have strong hesitations about speaking on panels of this nature during this critical and urgent crossroads for the people of Palestine, Lebanon, and our broader region and world. But I decided to participate, ultimately, to offer a perspective anchored in the lived experiences and needs of our communities being more directly impacted by Israel’s aggression—and to redirect the Western conversation about individual care toward a more proactive stance of responsibility, action, and systemic healing.”

During the panel discussion, Feghali spoke about the need to heal our relationship with the land.

“You can lean in on that land to help you... to give you the remedies,” she said in the panel.

Spenta Kandawalla, owner of Jaadu Acupuncture, joined the panel discussion because she works at the intersection of organizing and healing trauma, she told me in an interview with IMI.

“I believe that trauma and oppression have significant impacts on us individually and collectively, and that working to heal our trauma can make us more effective organizers,” she said in the interview. “As an anti-Zionist organizer and a healer, it felt like one of the most aligned offers I can make during this time. I believe it is critical that we are all putting our primary efforts into organizing for a ceasefire, and then committing to efforts beyond that for a fully free Palestine. This makes it necessary to engage in care and practices that can actually keep us committed, keep us connected to ourselves, and caring

for our people so that we're not only well once we're free, but we're as well as can be along the way, too."

During the panel discussion, Kandawalla spoke to the idea that witnessing the genocide taking place in Gaza has been "a shock to our system," individually and collectively. "[T]his is more than dysregulating... It takes us to a state of hypervigilance," she said, adding that there is "nothing wrong" with this hypervigilance.

"I think that vigilance is a mark of our humanity," she said. "As we are living through this, it's very normal to be experiencing a whole host of feelings—fear, rage, grief, numbness... Many of us are organizing... our lives as we know it have been disrupted and so is our sense of well-being."

She added that ceasefire is "a minimum."

"[Ceasefire] is just the beginning and we have ongoing work," she said in the panel. "We are not just talking about enduring today, we are talking about enduring until we are all free. ... We don't want to stay in a trauma response if we can get out of it."

She added that one way to start to move out of this panic response is to "bring care and curiosity to whatever it is that we are feeling."

Collective Care

At the beginning of the "Practices for Care and Endurance" talk, brown said the intent was to "share practices that help us to remember that we are in bodies, remember that we're in community, and remember that we're on Earth together, here. That there's ground and resource for us."

Then, brown started the panel off by first inviting attendees to thank the land right where they were at the moment.

"Thank you to the Earth that, under duress, and under constant attack, and under constant change is holding all of us right now," she said.

After brown opened, Alyan spoke, starting with an invitation to think about care "within a collectivist, community-based framework." She pointed out that often in our world, self-care is conceptualized through a "very individualistic" framework.

"We think of engaging in self-care from a collectivist framework because, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, it becomes an act of self-preservation," she said. "We're preserving ourselves not just to feel better, not just to replenish, but so that we—replenished—can go back to attending to things that matter to us. We can go back to the people that matter to us, the places, the causes, the value systems."

Alyan acknowledged that anyone feeling "burned-out right now, overwhelmed, or furious,

or rageful; or frustrated, or in grief,” was “completely normal.”

“It is what we are bearing witness to which is outside the norm,” she said. “What we’re bearing witness to, in many senses, is unbearable. And we have to think about the ways that we can replenish ourselves in order to keep showing up for the task,” she said, specifying that while “we want to think about ways to be action-oriented,” the fundamental task for most is “about bearing witness.”

Adaku Utah shared about the power of rhythms to move people through challenging times. “Moments like this, where the terror is huge, and the violence is deep, safety can feel just like, ‘what can we cling to right now?’” she said in the panel. “And what I like to look toward are reliable rhythms, rhythms that exist inside of our bodies... and exist around us, that are bigger than us.”

Brown said the group of panelists asked CTZNWELL to support their panel discussion “as allies on logistics” and the platform “stepped up and organized volunteers for planning the call, handling translation, and interpretation and transcription.”

The free replay of the talk on “Practices for Care and Endurance” can be accessed via a Google Drive link after signing up [here](#).