



READING GROUP GUIDE

A Rebel in Gaza: Behind the Lines of the Arab Spring, One Woman's Story

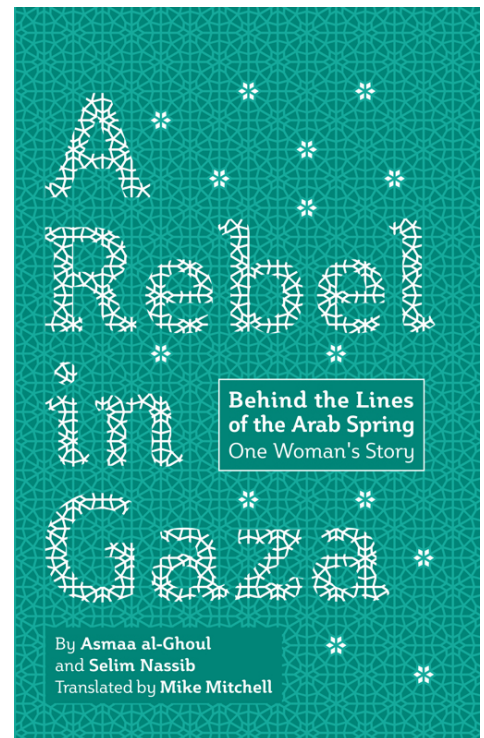
By Asmaa al-Ghoul and Selim Nassib

Translated by Mike Mitchell

Introduction

Asmaa al-Ghoul is a Palestinian journalist who grew up in the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza. Her book offers a rare view of a young woman coming into her own political and secular beliefs amidst the region's relentless violence. She has been called "too strong minded," frequently criticized for not covering her hair and for being outspoken. As a journalist and activist, she has led demonstrations and been vocal in her opposition to Hamas and Fatah, which has led her to family strife, imprisonment, brutal interrogations, death threats and attacks.

A Rebel in Gaza is Asmaa's story as told to Franco-Lebanese writer Selim Nassib over meetings, phone calls, Skype, and even texts during the 2014 Israeli siege of Gaza, when she was locked in the "open air prison" that her homeland had become. Both determined and dedicated to its liberation through writing, education and culture, she paints the sensory portrait of the native country she passionately loves, which over years has become a cauldron of wars and fundamentalism.



Gaza has always been rebellious, . . . stubborn, addictive. I'm her daughter, and I look like her.

"The story of [Asmaa al-Ghoul's] life is above all that of a struggle for freedom in the land of dual occupation."

– La Croix



PRAISE

A fierce advocate of women's rights, some of Al-Ghoul's most vocal opponents are religious Muslim women. She says that Gaza's secular and Islamist camps both have strong female contingents, and that 'this is healthy, to see all these voices in the same small area.' But Al-Ghoul's criticism of Hamas does not make her pro-Israel. [...] Al-Ghoul says she eschews violence and hopes one day to see peace between Israelis and Palestinians. [...] Ultimately, though, she looks to her writing to sustain her.

– JTA (Jewish Telegraphic Agency)

Asmaa embodies all oppressions, all possible occupations. She has a spontaneity whereby nothing calculated; all of that entails risks for her, by the way. That's what moved me most, the story she gave me: she never does anything premeditated. She told me, 'I'm braver than myself.' Her memoir is dominated by a sense of freedom that has absolutely nothing self-pitying. [...] Her testimony, in the time in which we live, puts her in the clan of resistance. She is for and with ordinary people. Because she lucidly reports their reality, the perspective she offers on this part of the world becomes all the more human and necessary.

– interview with coauthor Selim Nassib in *Le Droit*

Rebellious but humble. [...] With *A Rebel in Gaza*, Asmaa al-Ghoul delivers through the pen of Selim Nassib a poignant story. From Gaza to Cairo, via New York and even Seoul, where she will become friends with Mahmoud Darwich, they invite the reader to question assumptions, to open visible and invisible borders. This book is also a declaration of love to her city: "Gaza has always been rebellious ... It's a crazy city, stubborn, addictive, I'm her daughter and I look like her."

– *Agenda Culturel*

The story of her life, translated from Arabic to French, is above all that of a struggle for freedom in the land of dual occupation: Israeli and Islamist.

– *La Croix*

In Gaza, the intimate and the political are bound together, one does not go without the other. One can not imagine, living in France, the hell that life can be in Gaza for a free woman. To overcome it requires extraordinary willpower and courage, because Asmaa al-Ghoul has received and still receives an incredible number of threats. [...] A political but at the same time sensual book, intersected by the glow of guava trees and olive trees, the scent of strong tea and jasmine.

– *Libération*



READING GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In the Preface, Asmaa tells her coauthor Selim, "We are being subjected to the siege of the mind that is much more important than the siege on the borders" (p.10). According to Asmaa, what do Fatah and Hamas do "to the mind" that is more destructive than military action by Israel?
2. What are some examples of ways in which Asmaa interprets national, religious, and political borders? Are they transitory or permanent? Do you agree with her interpretations, given current international affairs and issues of religious intolerance?
3. Throughout the book, Asmaa talks about her encounters with the idea of protecting the "honor" of women. Discuss the story of Yasser and Imane and what it reveals about so-called "crimes of honor" and the continued oppression of women.
4. How has this concept of protecting one's honor been used by political forces as a tool to gain power and control by playing into the idea of "resistance"? Does Asmaa offer a solution for social and political liberation from such restraints for women? For Palestinians in general?
5. How do both Hamas and Fatah use control and discipline of the body (e.g. restricting hand-holding and going to the beach) as a way to maintain political order? What are some instances Asmaa experiences this during her adolescent years? During her professional life? Are there similar examples from your own culture that you are familiar with?
6. When Asmaa agrees to cycle with her friends from Rafah to Gaza after the Ministry of the Interior forbids women to ride bicycles, how does her trip become a metaphor for her defiance, and against whom? What happens to her along the way? How is her experience made visible by international media, and what different meanings does her trip hold for others? What does it mean to you?
7. Writing has an important role in the book. How does the distribution of oppositional ideas through writing, especially when shared on social media, yield influential power over politics? Specifically, discuss Asmaa's experiences surrounding the events of the Arab Spring and how she used her social media savvy to organize.



8. How do Asmaa's creative stories and poetry reflect the passions she has for the people in her life, and specifically how does she use writing as a tool for personal power and gender equality?
9. Despite being criticized publicly for being "too strong-minded," her parents' tolerance of her behavior and decisions (though sometimes limited) provide her a certain degree of freedom and support. What are some ways in which they advocated for her in her altercations with other adults? Is there is a generational shift happening?
10. What do you think about Asmaa's statement that the deaths of the thousands of civilians during the Israeli siege of Gaza in 2014 was made possible by "general blindness" (p. 200). Is there similar blindness happening elsewhere in the world?
11. Provide some examples from the book of how the pressure to conform affects individual choice. What are some instances in which Asmaa gets into trouble for rejecting established rules and beliefs, and what are the consequences?
12. Asmaa discusses the idea of "homeland" and her attachment to Rafah in the Gaza Strip. What is her experience like while in Seoul? In Egypt? In the U.S.? After reading the book, why do you think she always returns to Gaza?
13. Asmaa talks about the importance of television, which becomes "a kind of virtual compensation for the intellectual and religious state of siege, for the flagrant absence of freedoms" (p. 181). What does this reveal about human behavior? How is this related to access to TV and film as both an escape and a tool for opening up to the world, especially in regards to Mohamed Assaf and the "Arab Idol"?
14. In her marriages, Asmaa had to compromise between her life and her work as well as navigate through differences of opinion. What do her choices to leave both marriages and her honest reflection that she is a "paradox" in her love life (p.164) reveal about her character and her identity as a woman?
15. What does Asmaa believe is the ultimate solution to liberating Gaza?



ASMAA AL-GHOUL is a Palestinian journalist and author. Born in 1982 in the Rafah refugee camp in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, and the eldest of nine siblings, Asmaa grew up in a society dominated by political strife, corruption and male chauvinism, but also by an incredible humanity. Described by the *New York Times* as a woman “known for her defiant stance against the violations of civil rights in Gaza,” Asmaa al-Ghoul is currently living in Southern France working on her next book, while maintaining a large social media following on her self-styled channel, where she has delivered some of her most important breaking news. She has reported and authored articles for, among others, the Washington D.C.-based *Al Monitor*, *Al Ayyam*, *Al Quds*, *Amine*, and opened the Palestinian office for the Emirati magazine *Woman of Today*. At the age of 18, Al-Ghoul won the Palestinian Youth Literature Award. In 2010, she received a Hellman/Hammett award from Human Rights Watch, aimed at helping writers “who dare to express ideas that criticize official public policy or people in power.” In 2012, Al-Ghoul was awarded the Courage in Journalism Award by the International Women’s Media Foundation. She works for Lebanon’s Samir Kassir Foundation, which lobbies for media freedom.

SELIM NASSIB was born in Beirut in 1946. He is a journalist for *Libération*. A connoisseur of the Middle East, he is the author of the novels *I Loved You for Your Voice* and *The Palestinian Lover* (Europa Editions). He lives in Paris.



DOPPELHOUSE PRESS is an independent publishing company with a focus on architecture, design, and art, as well as histories of immigration and exile. Our mission is to bring together a plurality of voices relating to architecture and the arts, as well as stories of exile and displacement of creative peoples, giving shape to little-known histories through personal testimony and critical reflection in the form of memoirs and biographies, monographs, critical texts, and select fiction.

DoppelHouse Press is based in Los Angeles, a home to many exiles and immigrants from all over the world, which makes us further able to reflect on global conditions, cultures, politics, and crises that disperse creative people to new homelands, where they often flourish, transform local vernaculars, and influence future generations. in the form of memoirs and biographies, monographs, critical texts, and select fiction.

<http://www.DoppelHousePress.com>

Contact:

Publisher@DoppelHousePress.com

T: (424) 258-4423 | F: (323) 349-0985

A Rebel in Gaza: Behind the Lines of the Arab Spring, One Woman's Story

By Asmaa al-Ghoul and Selim Nassib

Translated by Mike Mitchell

October 2018.

Hardcover and Paperback.

206 pp.; trim size 5" x 7.75"

\$28.95 | 9780998777023 (hc)

\$18.95 | 9780998777054 (pb)

Ebook also available.