

The West's Response to Scholasticide: Gaza's Fight for a Future | Abdullah W.

There are many layers to the West's brutality in its 21st century colonial quest for total dominance. One of them is the eradication of an academic future for the populations it targets for destruction. Support Abdullah here: Abdullah's Fundraising: <https://chuffed.org/project/saving-abdullahs-goldsmith-dream> Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/abdullhabuwarda> Abdullah, a 21-year-old English literature student from Jabalia, describes continuing his education amid displacement, destruction, loss, hunger, and unstable infrastructure in Gaza. He discusses his unsuccessful attempt to reach a journalism program in London, the financial and visa barriers facing Palestinian students, why journalism matters to him, and the need for meaningful educational opportunities at a scale matching the crisis. Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introducing Abdullah from Gaza 00:01:40 Abdullah's life and education before the war 00:07:22 Continuing education amid destruction 00:11:42 Displacement, loss, and daily survival 00:18:05 The barriers to studying in London 00:28:27 Education as hope amid systemic obstacles 00:35:05 Exchange programs and evacuation pathways 00:37:08 Why London and the fundraising struggle 00:46:10 Why journalism matters to Abdullah 00:50:54 Daily life, Gaza's institutions, and final message

#Pascal

Welcome back to Neutrality Studies, everybody. Today, with a special episode, an interview with a young student from Gaza. In my previous introduction, I forgot to mention that you can actually support him with the links that will be provided in the description box below. If you want to do that, please have a look and click on them. I think the talk will show how the situation in Palestine, the genocide, is anything but just an Israeli invention. It is a collective action by the collective West, which really excels at keeping people away from even just basic necessities like education. But for a first-hand account, please have a listen to what Abdullah has to say. Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today with a special episode, because I've got a young student with me, and he's not from anywhere. He's from Gaza, and he's in Gaza right now. Joining me is Abdullah. Abdullah, welcome.

#Abdullah W

Thank you, Dr. Pascal, for having me and giving me this opportunity to be with you and tell my story and what is happening around me. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

#Pascal

Well, I'm very glad you reached out, and I was surprised. I've had people from Gaza on my channel before. I've had a professor from Gaza University. I've had a young, recent university graduate, Mohammad Al-Turk, who spoke to me, and now you're the third person inside Gaza. I am happy to see that the internet connection is possible and that some very good spaces for recordings are still available. And you very kindly actually even walked very far to get to a studio where you could do a recording. Can you maybe first tell us who you are, what you're currently doing, and all of the things you had to get in place in order to be able today to speak with a decent internet connection to us all.

#Abdullah W

Thank you again, Dr. Pascal, for having me and giving me this chance to be with you. Sure. I am Abdullah. I am from Jabalia in the north of Gaza. I have lived in Gaza my whole life. I am right now a university student studying English literature with a minor in media. Of course, education has always been a very important part of my life. I was a very serious student at school, and I graduated from high school in 2022 with an average of 98.1%. And with this average, I was one of the top students in all my country. Then I started university. Before the war, my life was actually very normal for someone my age. I went to university, studied, spent time with my friends, worried about my exams, grades, like anyone in the world my age, and thought a lot about what I wanted to do after graduation: becoming a journalist, a translator, an adventure I have.

#Pascal

You are now what age? You are how old?

#Abdullah W

21. 21 years old. I have also loved English from a young age, a very young age for me. Learning English wasn't only about passing exams or for school. I saw it as a way to communicate with people like you today from different countries, understanding other cultures, opening more doors for me. And unfortunately, it became interrupted after October 7. Every part of that normal life has dramatically changed. My education was interrupted. My family was displaced several times. And eventually, our home as well in northern Gaza was destroyed. And this is the painful part of my story. When you lose your memories, the place of your residence from your childhood. And I still continue with my university education throughout all of this stuff online from Gaza.

And that's probably one of the strange things about life now here. As a university student, I still have assignments, exams, and plans for my future as well, but I am trying to do all of that in circumstances that are completely different from the life of a normal university student anywhere in the world. During this period, I also started writing more and speaking in public about my experiences. And as I mentioned to you, eventually I received an offer to study journalism at

Goldsmiths, University of London, which became a very important goal for me these previous months. So I would briefly describe myself quite simply: a student from Gaza who is trying not to allow everything that has happened around me to decide what the rest of my life will look like.

#Pascal

And right now you're in an environment that allows you to communicate like this to the world. But I will later actually add, at this point, short snippets where you actually show what life looks like to you when you go outside into the city or walk around in Gaza. That will be shown here.

#Abdullah W

Unfortunately, my neighborhood here in Jabalia has become a demolition site. People here have recently slowly started coming back to their homes, even though the area is almost destroyed and the winter season is coming. This used to be our beautiful home, but now, as you can see, it is just stones and dust. It is not only about the fallen walls or roofs. It is about the moments, the memories, the simple things that made life feel normal. It is sad to say that now we are being forced to live in conditions that are almost unlivable. We are not here in Gaza just headlines or breaking news. We are people with futures, with ambitions, with dreams that are still meant to continue.

#Pascal

Now that we've seen that, I would like to ask you then how it is that you students in Gaza still continue this education, and how do your professors, how does the university still offer classes to you? What are the challenges that people in peacetime, in peace environments, do not have to deal with that you and Dalia have to somehow navigate?

#Abdullah W

Despite all the challenges around us, such as poor infrastructure, destroyed universities, electricity cuts, and unstable internet, my university kept trying to continue education in impossible circumstances through Moodle, through online, and that says a lot. When everything around you is collapsing and you are still holding on to education, because here in Gaza, families and people see education as their main weapon. We don't have military weapons, as you know, so our choice, our only choice and our first choice is education. Despite all of these challenges, we walk very distant distances and go far to produce some exams in circumstances that aren't allowing you to produce it.

#Pascal

And can you describe a bit, like, for instance, today, in order to come to a studio where you could do a recording, what did you have to do to get there? How far was it?

#Abdullah W

As I mentioned to you before, I had to book this place one or two days before. And it costs about \$17 per hour.

#Abdullah W

To book this place, you have to walk several kilometers on destroyed streets among buildings that are being destroyed. And these scenes, when you wake up to go to produce an exam or to appear in a podcast, when you walk in these streets, this sense makes us feel negatively. Imagine emotionally.

#Abdullah W

It affects us emotionally, you know. And you have to walk, you have to pay just to pursue your life and put things in order. And it's chasing your dream.

#Pascal

I mean, I can't imagine what that must be like. Also, I think it's very important. You don't know anything else but Gaza, right? You've never seen a place outside of Gaza, I suppose.

#Abdullah W

Yes, yes. Gaza is very different from any other country because I think one of the hardest things is the uncertainty. You wake up in the morning and you don't know what the day is going to bring to you. You don't know if you will still be in the same place by the end of the day. You don't know if something will happen to someone you know. You don't know what the next phone call or message might bring. And living with that uncertainty every single day, it changes the way you are thinking. As you know, for example, my family has been displaced several times. We moved from one place to another, trying to find somewhere safer.

And eventually, our home was destroyed. And I think... the word displacement sounds very simple when you hear it in the news, breaking news, or when you read a newspaper article. But when you actually experience it, it affects almost every part of your life. At the beginning of this war, I didn't experience displacement when our house was stable. And I was reading, some families fled, some families were displaced from Jabalia, from Beit Hanon. But when I experienced it myself, the picture has completely changed. You lose every normal thing you have. Displacement means you lose your routine. You lose your privacy.

You know, tents are completely crowded in small areas. You lose the feeling that there is one place you can always return to. And then there are the normal things, daily problems: finding water, finding electricity, finding internet, finding food. This displacement, what it actually looks like—things

that I never really thought about before became part of the planning of every day. You are planning how to get water. Every day, we are now renting on the sixth floor. You know, every day I have to bring heavy water gallons up to the sixth floor. Imagine. But probably the most difficult part has been the people, in addition to the people we have lost, right?

Maybe, maybe I don't—I cannot ensure that a house can eventually be rebuilt, or I can leave to some country and rent another house, or, as we are doing right now, rent another apartment. By the way, we were living in a tent for a long while. And then, when the All Roots podcast launched a fundraising campaign for my education and to support my family, a lot of people, around 600 people, supported me, and we have almost reached \$30,000. Now we can afford and pay our rent. We are now paying \$600 a month in rent. So, as a consequence of a huge number of buildings being damaged, rent is extremely high, you know. So this apartment we are now living in, before the war, it cost \$200. Now it's \$600. Again, a house can eventually be rebuilt, or you can rent.

#Abdullah W

Okay, maybe you can forget the memories of your house, but when you lose a person, you cannot. I have lost relatives and friends and professors who taught me, and teachers who taught me in secondary school and in primary school. And I think those are the losses that stay with you the most for the rest of your life.

#Pascal

How do you personally deal with that when you hear that another person you knew has died or was killed? I mean, you must be full of grief and full of sadness. How do you explain this to yourself so that you can still carry on?

#Abdullah W

Look, at the beginning of this war, this was unbelievable and unimaginable. But our streets are now full of funerals, and death is everywhere. So when we listen and receive a message that someone has gone, then you will start to think about yourself.

#Abdullah W

If I will be the next target. Imagine that, when you are very young, thinking of this becoming a part of your life.

#Pascal

It's horrible. That's why it is heartbreaking for anyone who still does have a heart to see how this genocide is unfolding, and that this genocide has now been going on for three years. At the same

time, you carry on because what else would you do, right? But you still have the resilience. Part of the resilience of Gaza is that it still does offer education and that it tries to create pathways to the future. And you also got this promise that you could go and study journalism at Goldsmiths University College in the UK, right? So is there international support actually for young people from Gaza?

#Abdullah W

Before we move on, I want to mention something. You know, what are we doing now? We are dealing with loss and at the same time still trying to build a life or a future. So for me, that challenge has been learning how to live with that uncertainty without allowing it to completely take away my plans for the future, you know?

#Pascal

That's a very reasonable thing to do, and a very, very, very reasonable way to try to live a life. I have nothing but admiration for that, of course.

#Abdullah W

About the chance I have, and Western governments and universities who speak often about supporting Palestinian students and protecting education. But I want to say there is a big difference between offering an opportunity to survive, survive from horrific war, and making that opportunity possible in reality for him. I managed to get an offer to study journalism in London, but I still couldn't start this September. I was told by organizations helping that, as a process, in my case I need to provide financial proof of around 45,000 pounds. It equals around \$60,000 at any time.

#Pascal

You still need to prove that you have money for immigration purposes, I suppose.

#Abdullah W

Yes, to get a visa, and then they will, if they ensure that I could pay all the tuition and expenses, costs of living, then they will evacuate me. At the same time, students in Gaza face problems getting documents and securing visas, and even physically leaving Gaza. So I think this is important for the audience to know. And I want to say, first of all, I appreciate every university or organization or individual who is genuinely trying to help a student from Gaza. But as I mentioned before, there's a difference, a huge difference, between getting an opportunity and making this opportunity, or turning it into reality.

I experienced this myself, and I want to talk because I am very disappointed. As I mentioned, I received an offer. For me, this wasn't just another university offer. After losing my home, being displaced, and losing relatives, friends, experiencing hunger last year when the famine was declared in northern Gaza, I was here and experienced this hunger, and trying to continue my education during a war, this opportunity represented a new beginning, a new chapter. I cannot really explain how much it means to me. For months, or for the last months, I was thinking about this September.

I imagined leaving Gaza, entering a classroom again, meeting other students, studying journalism, and finally beginning a new chapter or a new beginning of my life. But getting accepted was only the first step, and not that step as you can describe it. You need a visa, you need financial proof, you need documents, and you need to meet university and government requirements. And finally, even if you manage all of that, you still need a way to physically leave Gaza. I started, when I received this offer about four months ago, I started contacting organizations that were helping students with this process. And I was surprised.

They told me, in my case, I needed financial proof of around 45,000 pounds, as I mentioned, more than \$60,000, to meet the requirements for my studies and visa process. And when you think about it for a moment, 45,000 pounds. You are asking a young student whose home has been destroyed, whose family has been displaced, and who has lived through an unimaginable war and hunger to somehow prove access to tens of thousands of pounds before he can even continue his education. I completely understand that Britain has migration rules. I understand that universities have requirements. But what I question is applying a system designed for normal circumstances to students living in completely abnormal circumstances.

A student in Gaza may be asked for documents from institutions that have been destroyed or are extremely difficult to access. You know, there are no longer banks here. There are no longer universities here. There are no longer institutions here. Their family maybe have lost their home or income. And as I mentioned before, banking itself can be difficult. And even after solving all of those problems, they cannot simply book, fly, and leave. That's the contradiction. And you can survive. You can survive the war. You can continue studying. You can get good grades. You can apply to a university abroad. Of course, you can accept it, as I was, and spend months trying to raise money, as I am doing now. And after doing everything you possibly can, you can still lose the opportunity because you cannot reach it in time. I have raised half the amount I needed, or less than half.

And from \$60,000, I have already raised \$30,000. But that's not enough, with the other circumstances and things I was dealing with, like helping my family with rent and some things like electricity and getting some food. When the deadline came, I realized that I couldn't meet everything in time. It was extremely painful when you were waiting for something that would change my life and begin a new chapter. And, of course, I don't want to compare losing a university opportunity with losing a home or losing a person. They are obviously different, but as I mentioned before, emotionally, it feels like another loss added to a very long list of losses because this

opportunity, as you know, represented hope. I thought maybe this is finally the moment when my life starts moving forward again. Instead, September arrived and I was still here emotionally.

#Pascal

I am very sorry to hear that, Abdullah. And just so you know, this demand of 60,000 US dollars proof of funding or funds, that would be difficult even for most people, even for most young students in the West, in Europe and North America, where the debt crisis is large. People don't just have 60,000 US dollars, even in the West, for a lot of average families and so on. So demanding that kind of funding from a student in Gaza is tantamount to offering something with one hand and taking it away with the other, because it's just outside the reach of the possible.

Even in Japan, most students who come here from abroad come here because they get scholarships. Because obviously you wouldn't have what you need in order to survive for two or three years over here if you're coming from a country with a lower income level. So demanding that from somebody in Gaza is very cruel, and it is part and parcel of how the West is conducting this abuse of people in territories very, very close to theirs. Gaza is just off the coast of the rest of Europe.

#Abdullah W

This isn't only about me. I want to be clear. This isn't only about me. I am sitting here talking to you because I happened to get this opportunity to speak in public. But there are many students whose education has been interrupted exactly like mine. Thousands, thousands of students. Many of them will never appear in an interview such as this. They will never have a fundraising campaign. They may never have thousands of people even hear their names, and their education is worth exactly as much as mine, of course. And this is why I also have mixed feelings when I see a university announce one scholarship or two scholarships for students from Palestine.

For the student who receives it, of course, that scholarship can change their life. That's very important, and I really respect it. But look at the scale of the problem. We are talking about a huge number of young people whose education has been disrupted. One scholarship here or two scholarships cannot be the full response. We don't need a media show. Again, we don't need a media show, one or two scholarships. We need opportunities at a scale that matches the problem. If governments or universities around the world really want to help, then offer more scholarships or create emergency programs. Be flexible when normal documents cannot be obtained.

Governments should create realistic visa pathways for students living through extraordinary circumstances like mine. And if a student has been accepted by a university, there should be a realistic way for the student to physically reach it. And otherwise, we create something that looks like an opportunity from London, but from Gaza, it looks completely different. Getting an opportunity on paper is not the same as being able to reach it. And that's really the message I want people to understand. I'm not asking people to look at me and feel sorry for me. I am asking for a fair chance.

Give students all the opportunities they need, a real opportunity to continue their education, and then judge us by what we will do with it.

#Pascal

You're absolutely right. You're absolutely right. The only thing is, the way the Western system is made is such that it tries to pretend that it is an equal opportunity system, when in fact it is locked, and sometimes double and triple locked, to lock out students like you, to lock out people from lower-income classes, to lock out people from developing countries, from the Global South, and in your case, of course, to lock out victims of genocide. That's how this insane system of violence perpetrates itself from the top down. And you are one of the victims of that kind of system.

#Abdullah W

We are not just victims of war or genocide. We are people with dreams, ambitions, futures that are still meant to continue. But the war has interrupted it. I don't like someone to describe us as victims, by the way. We are people. We are people with ordinary lives that are still meant to continue. But everything has dramatically changed. We are the most resilient people on this planet.

#Pascal

Yes, you are. In that case, I would like to ask you something else. The pathway of an individual student to Europe seems explicitly almost impossible. But university-to-university ties— is it possible for your university in Gaza to reach out to a university in Europe and try to create bilateral programs? You know, programs that do not depend on the country they're in, but to create more institutional integration, even if the university building itself is gone. If you have the support of people who still work within the university administration, then maybe there is a structural way to create ties through the university. Do you know about such programs or attempts at trying to build up something?

#Abdullah W

Great question. Before the war, these programs existed. By the way, in October 2023, I was accepted at Aksaray University in Turkey for an exchange program for one semester, to travel to Turkey, study there for one semester, and then return to Gaza. And on October 7, I was accepted. And this morning, you know, weekend on Friday here, October 7 was on Saturday. It is not weekend here. I was preparing for my interview at my university for this opportunity. It is an exchange program between, it is called Erasmus Plus, between European universities and the Islamic University, my university.

But when the war started, everything has dramatically changed. There are no borders. There are no evacuation programs available. Why London? Why did I choose London? Why not Arab? Because

London, or the UK government, is one of the few countries that makes evacuations for Gazan students. But again, I don't want to exaggerate. For Gazan students, maximum 4,000 students from thousands of towns. And I understand why someone maybe criticizes or attacks or asks or comments, "Why London?" I think I need to explain this point.

#Pascal

You had interviews before, and people criticized you for choosing—for trying to go to London, for trying to reach London, right? And in public comments on videos where you were on before.

#Abdullah W

Yes. Yes, of course. I was born in Gaza, grew up here, and studied here. My family and my friends and my educational background are here. So I started learning English because I loved the idea of discovering other cultures and communicating with people. It was part of developing myself, as a development process. And let me say that I had never imagined that one day I would need to use my English to ask people around the world to help me continue my education. Before October 7, I never imagined that a disaster of this scale would happen in my life, or that my life would change this much. And I want to be very clear about something. I am not happy that I have to fundraise for my education. Sometimes people see a fundraising page and think that asking for donations was the first option.

And why do you need to raise all this amount of money to go to London, one of the best, one of the most expensive universities, and one of the most expensive countries in the world? I wasn't happy with this. If circumstances had been different, as an English-speaking student with a strong academic record, I believe my life could have gone in completely different directions. And maybe I would have built my own platform. Maybe I would have worked in journalism, translation, or content creation. Maybe I would have been earning the money myself. That is why I would prefer to try different ways to create opportunities for myself. I wrote for a newspaper. I tried content creation on YouTube, Instagram. I contacted organizations as well as individuals.

I looked for ways to create an income and support my education as well as my family. But there is another problem people outside Gaza may not realize. Many of the normal ways young people around the world make money online are simply not available here in the same way. Major platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Substack have restrictions or limited services in Gaza and Palestine and all. Even receiving money internationally can become complicated. So fundraising wasn't my dream. It became one of the few realistic choices left to me. And then people ask, why London? It is not because I am in love with London, and certainly not because we hate Gaza. Of course we love Gaza.

This is where we were born. This is my home. Before all of this, Gaza had beautiful places, universities, beautiful cafes, the sea, the families, ordinary life. But the circumstances forced me to search for somewhere I could continue my education and a life that had been interrupted. So, as I

mentioned before, the UK was one of the realistic possibilities for me because, simply, I already speak English, my academic background is in English, I received an opportunity to study journalism there. And the UK, as I mentioned before, is one of the countries that has created a route to support the evacuation for some eligible refugees, students from Gaza like me.

That doesn't mean the process is easy. Actually, as I explained, the reality is much more complex than some headlines make it sound. There are financial requirements, visa requirements, and evacuation problems. So I don't want to exaggerate what Britain is doing either. But there is at least a pushback. And if someone asks me, why should you study there? I would also respond, why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't I? I am a student. I worked very hard academically. I learned the language. I received the offer. I want to become a journalist. Why should where I was born decide how far I am allowed to go with my education? Why? Again, why not?

Should where I was born decide where I was to go or where I am allowed to go with my education and background? I want to ask, if someone from Germany wants to study in London, would he receive all of these comments and criticism? I don't think so. I don't think I would only take something from London. I think I could also bring something to it. I would arrive with experiences and perspectives that are very different from those of many students of my age. I have lived through an unimaginable war. I have experienced displacement. I have seen what happens when education becomes difficult to access. And I know what it feels like to live through events that later become headlines around the world as a future journalist.

#Pascal

You're absolutely right. Asking you why London is a very unfair question, and it kind of tries to, again, disadvantage you on top of all of the things that have already disadvantaged you. And you rejecting that premise is actually the right thing to do. If the world were the way we want it to be, this would not be a question. It would be part and parcel of just what we do and how we live life. Again, I have nothing but admiration for the aspirations you have and the kind of things you're trying to reach. Journalism—why is journalism important to you?

#Abdullah W

I think journalism brings together many of the things I have always been interested in, because I love English, writing. I previously, as I mentioned, wrote in several newspapers. And I love communicating with people. And I have always been curious about the world outside Gaza. But what happened over the last few years made journalism much more personal to me. You know, I have experienced what it means to live through a major event and then watch the same event being explained to the rest of the world, and made me think a lot about journalism because there can be a huge distance between living a story and telling a story or reading about the story.

Sometimes one small detail that seems unimportant to a journalist can mean everything to the person actually living through it. And I started understanding how much responsibility journalists have. What questions do you ask? Who do you speak to? What do you leave out? And I have, over the past few months, been interviewed by journalists and podcasts and begun to experience this stuff. And being on the side of the interview actually made me even more interested in what happened on your side. Sometimes after an interview, I think about the question I was asked. Why did the interviewer choose that question? Why did they follow up on this point, but not another one?

And, of course, what I have experienced will always be a part of me, but I am still young. There is a whole world I am curious about. There are people I want to meet, stories I know nothing about yet. I don't just want a camera and an audience. I want to learn how to interview people, probably like you are doing these days. I want to become a better writer and to understand the ethics and responsibility behind journalism, or being a journalist. I want to learn how to tell complicated stories in a way that people can actually understand. So for me, studying journalism is also part of rebuilding our future. Not because suffering automatically makes someone a good journalist. It doesn't. That's why I want the education and the professional training.

#Pascal

Just so you know, I mean, 50% of what you need to do to become good at something is ask the right questions. And you've got those 50% already covered. So the things that you are outlining here, and why and how you want to approach it, are necessarily going to lead you into a good future within your profession. I'm absolutely certain about that. The question really is how to get to the answers as efficiently as possible. There's always two ways to go about something. One is to study it, and the other one is doing it.

And by you actually reaching out and trying to be in international, at least, social media, you're actually doing the thing that you are aspiring to. So I do believe you will go a very long way in terms of reporting. You know, in terms of Gaza, like, how is it at the moment? Still possible for you? What are still the possible avenues for banking connections? What are the possible avenues for internet connection? What are the possible avenues for getting around in Gaza? Can you describe that one just a little bit?

#Abdullah W

As for banking, borrowing, deposits, and withdrawals, they aren't possible since October 7th. As for institutions, most major institutions are being destroyed. The only thing we are partial to is the universities being turned now into online. As for other institutions, all of them now, you can say they are completely stopped.

#Pascal

Abdullah, what did we not cover in this discussion that you would still like to communicate to the people watching this broadcast? Anything that you would like to say is fine.

#Abdullah W

I want to say a final message to the audience and watchers. When you hear the word Gaza in headlines or breaking news, or when you are browsing, please don't think about Gaza in the lens of destruction. Please think about the ordinary people trying to build their lives. Gazans deserve better. That's it.

#Pascal

It's a very good final message and final word. And everybody who's watching this will want Gaza to have a good future. And students and young people who educate themselves are the surest way to achieve that. So I applaud all of your efforts. Abdullah, people who want to find you online, or who want to help and who want to engage, where should they find you? Which online sources should they go to?

#Abdullah W

I will send you my links, my fundraising links, as well as my X and Instagram. And please put them in the description and pinned comment.

#Pascal

I will do exactly that. Everybody, you will find links to Abdullah's social media profiles in the description box below. And I hope to have you on again in the future so we can talk about Gaza again and how things hopefully will improve. Abdullah, thank you so much for your time today.

#Abdullah W

Thank you so much for this opportunity, Pascal. I really appreciate it. Thank you.