



Yasmeen Mjalli

My name is Yasmeen Mjalli, and I am one of four daughters of Muslim Palestinian parents. Growing up in both the United States and Nablus, I finally settled in Ramallah at the end of 2016. I am currently pursuing a graduate degree in women's rights at Duke University and am

passionate about social engagement and women's rights.

Disturbed by the rampant sexual harassment on the streets of Ramallah, I created a jacket with the words "Not Your Habibti" (Arabic for darling) as a sign of protest and defiance. And indeed, the day I put on my Not Your Habibti jacket, my world changed. This jacket became the conduit to reclaiming my body as beautiful, powerful, and entirely my own. On International Women's Day 2016, I posted a picture of myself wearing the jacket on Instagram, and girls and young women began to ask me to make jackets for them. Not Your Habibti: these words started a community of young women in Palestine to step forward and speak out, knowing they are not alone.

In early 2017, with the conviction that business and social impact should foster one another, I founded BabyFist as a socially conscious fashion brand that manufactures clothing in Ramallah and Gaza. Jackets, T-shirts, and hoodies are sold in Palestine and to Palestinians of the diaspora all over the world: from England and New Zealand to Singapore and Costa Rica. With the goal of challenging oppressive structures through grassroots projects, 10 percent of proceeds is donated to various women's empowerment projects, such as women's rights workshops, clothes drives, and school supply drives.

BabyFist also runs and organizes workshops that allow women to share their stories of gender-based violence, gender inequality, and occupation. For example, just this month we launched a grassroots menstrual education campaign in which we worked with volunteer doctors to educate school girls about their periods, equip them with supplies, and destigmatize womanhood. At the same time, BabyFist provides an online platform and space where Palestinian women and girls can discuss the labyrinth of gender-based issues that affect them. I recognized that from a very young age, women in Palestine and elsewhere are made aware of



the consequences of being a woman by experiencing harassment on the streets, gender-based discrimination, and unequal opportunities.

BabyFist has become a means to foster a conversation about these issues and to challenge the structures that seek to oppress us. We listen to each other from a place of compassionate and unconditional regard. Young girls regularly send in messages telling us that wearing BabyFist apparel helps them to feel more confident because they know they are part of a community, as if they were wearing armor. In our discussions, we challenge one another to share our stories and understand why we should not be ashamed or afraid to speak up. We understand that speaking out against the forces that seek to oppress us is a bold and dangerous act. Yet we also know that speaking out is the only means to healing, empowerment, and enacting change. And so we dare to say to one another: *حقيقتك تكلمي* – speak your truth. Our stories have become our sources of strength. The story of the Palestinian woman is not one of oppression but one of resilience in the face of oppression.

Artwork by Nabil Anani entitled Celebration in Haifa (1920s), 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 115 x 145 cm. Photo courtesy of Zawiyyeh Gallery, Ramallah.

