

One night in Custody

I regret that I panicked after walking out of the room behind Butcher Blinken,
testifying– lying.

It was apparent in the breaks in my voice, my almost tears.

Already charged twice before, I had cashed out on my disruption permits for the immediate future.
One of those previous acts was intentional,
the other an act with intent, born out of outrage.
This arrest was unplanned, unexpected.
I had left the room precisely to avoid it.

I wish I could say my moral clarity cut through the initial shock,
that I immediately placed myself in context.

The stakes vs. my stakes.

But when I meet eyes with a senior officer I've seen dozens of times before,
address him as "sir", and he does not nod as usual
I feel fear.

He only looks with a rage that expands and says,
I saw you.

I know right away I will face greater consequences than before.

It will not just be a fifty-dollar fine. An inconvenience.

It will be real jail. District jail.

Record bearing. Court sentencing.

I will miss an interview the following morning.

My stakes.

I was not speaking. I promise, I was just walking! I didn't make a sound!

I regret that my only verbal protest of the day is one for myself.

The officer does not care.

Eventually, he shuts down my pleas with a threat,

Stop resisting!

My wrists are bound behind my back and I am handed over to another officer who appears a few years
younger than me,

his expression is both righteous and timid as he leads me out the building.

I later learn this is his first arrest.

I pout like a small child being escorted down the aisle of a toystore, nothing in hand.

Except this is a marble tiled hallway,

and it is lined with cops and duffle bags stuffed with zip ties.

For the entire way out of the building and while waiting on the sidewalk,

I am naively, foolishly trying to explain the situation.
I am repeating that they have wrongly arrested me.
I am asking them to make a snap judgment just as quickly as the first,
to release me as arbitrarily as they detained me.
I believe I will be placed in custody until my pending court date the next month—
terms and conditions of the past arrest.

But I am wrapped in keffiyeh,
my hands are painted red, “Butcher of Gaza” written on my forearms in thick black ink,
and my chest reads “For the Children of Gaza, End the Blockade.”
I am a walking implication.
The thing they have grown to detest, or at least,
find the main nuisance of their day.

A group of us are bound, waiting to be loaded in the van,
all of us unplanned.
Each of us a lesson and a warning.
Today there has been a crackdown fully disinterested in the first amendment.

While waiting to be booked on the sidewalk,
I am still revealing my anxiousness and anger.
Only the words of a friend, a longtime activist and mother, calm me down.
She reminds me I am materially fine,
that the circumstances that will play out remain unknown,
and that hypotheticals are just that, hypothetical.
Besides — I am here. It is done.
Breathe.

This is the same woman I watched in a viral video months before.
In it, she stares into the camera and describes the inhumanity of defunding UNRWA as she is arrested for
disrupting a congressional hearing on the subject.
That arrest, many months before today,
That arrest, many more months before Congress passed legislation officially banning the agency for
refugees for at least a year.
More months too, before Biden signed it into law, cutting off life-saving aid in the midst of genocide.

We are then taken inside the Capitol Police building for hours of mostly nothing.
On previous visits, I was brought into the room that looks like an all-cement doctor’s office.
The room with the table-sized computer the officers struggle to operate,
and the wall hook that my right wrist was cuffed to.

This time is better.
The four of us are put in one of the cells with a metal bed.
We sit together, friends and comrades.

Is it shameful to admit that I found it somewhat enjoyable..
to be among them in that small room?

The hours pass and one by one they are processed and released.
I am left with the last guard on shift.
He is a stout and broad-shouldered middle-aged man who works in silence.
He completes the logistical work to prepare for my transfer:
fingerprinting, filling out digital and hard-copy forms.

I respond briefly and apathetically to his questions:
my age, medications, residence, citizenship, etc.
He appears equally apathetic of my answers.
By this time in the evening, my initial frustration and fear have subsided,
I have settled into an acceptance of what is.
I feel mostly indifferent and tired.
He appears the same.

There would have been utter silence between our exchange if it were not for the clanking and buzzing.
The cuffs hanging from his belt,
the holster with a taser tapping against the huge sets of keys,
the walkie-talkie sounding off static nonsense; an occasional code.

The night is monotonous
until I stand and he reads the unfolded letters of my shirt.
Disorderly conduct?
He says it like a question though we are at least an hour into the process.

What did you do, young lady? You yell and kick like everyone else?
His tone is three parts condescending and one part sincere.
I repeat my actions,
give brief justifications for them.
I wonder if he has properly read my forms.

There is a pause and then he surprises me,
I sympathize with your cause.
I am not sure what to say to this.
I am not sure of his intent.

There is another pause, a heavy gap, before he explains.
He says he is from Cambodia.
He shares brief details about his family,
volunteers pieces of his immigration story– the decade+ long process.
He then speaks of the genocide of his people,
of murdered relatives.

He states—not timidly—the U.S. government’s complicity in it:
the indiscriminate bombing,
the support of the Khmer Rouge.

He speaks of crimes not yet acknowledged,
not even really considered, by most Americans.

He asks, *Do you know what happened there?*

Before I can answer:

You’re probably too young, I bet you don’t.

There is another gap, maybe a minute, before he fills the silence with more:
why he believes in the security of the State,
that is, the job security of it, not the promises it makes.
How Gaza is just a part of a pattern.
Cycles, he says.

It’s not the first time in your lifetime, young lady, and it won’t be the last.

In many words he is saying to me:

*It is not my family now, as it was then, it is ‘them’,
and no one ever cares about the ‘them’ of the time, our time, this time,
so I would rather be here,
in the masses that just observe the ‘them.’*

I listen to his soliloquy of trauma folded into some version of the American dream.

I listen to a bootstrap story textured with tinges of empathy and swaths of dismissal; dehumanization.

He speaks with a tone that insinuates what he is saying is fact. Wisdom.

He is speaking in statistics, numbers;

Not of faces. Stories. Lives.

He implies:

This is just the world.

This is how it will be.

The End.

I remain silent, saddened, and humbled.

I feel at once greater connection and greater distance to him.

I sense he is also asking:

Is your empathy whole? Would you care for my family in the same way?

Later in the night, when another officer arrives for my transfer, we speak one last time.

He confirms my belongings with me.

They are all stuffed in a two-gallon plastic bag.

My keffiyeh is folded and wrinkled among my phone and keys and wallet.
It is stained with red paint.

On my way out through the big push doors, he says,
You are a bright young lady, stay out of trouble. Think of the consequences next time.
I do not reply.
I think of the young women in Palestine.
Every bright child.

I am brought on my own to the city jail by this new officer.
He will drive us in another van.
But before I can enter I am taken aback.
There are cheers and waves and smiles of sisters at the end of the parking lot.
They have been waiting,
standing in the dark for an unknown amount of time,
to offer me just a few moments of support.

When I see them I instinctually jump for joy.
I have seen footage since where I attempt to click my heels.
I don't quite remember my movement so much as the line of their dim faces,
the way it lifted me.
The officer responds with something along the lines of:
Don't move. I could charge you with contempt or assault.

In the van he tells me that my jump was *foolish*.
I figure it would have been more foolish not to respond to them,
to acknowledge this instance of care.
It is one of many I will receive in this process,
cushions most are not afforded.

Inside the van, which is really a dark metal cage-box with round holes,
I am trying to understand where I am spatially.
We are driving through the streets I walk so often,
but I have a hard time focusing by the thickness of the air,
I am also trying to keep myself upright with my hands behind my back.

We eventually drive into a garage.
For many minutes, maybe half an hour, I wait with this new officer.

He opens the door while I remain seated inside,
and stands just in front of me.
I am surprised when he begins to give his own soliloquy.
I am his assigned audience.

Like the first officer, he too speaks of injustice,
injustice he has witnessed and been subjected to.
He too describes his family, his daughter.
shares pieces of growing up in Ward 8,
of Poverty,
of being a brown man—he identifies himself as half-Black, half-Portuguese.

It is as if my charges and my shirt are an invitation,
or some sort of mirror,
that asks these men to explain themselves.
I do not have to engage.

Not always things you agree with, but that's just the job, that's any job, that's life.

They explain their cognizance of the boot, but affirm it's need to stomp.
The harms of empire, but the inevitability of it,
their acceptance of it.

I remain unsure what I am to say outside of defending my motives.
I clarify points when this new officer asks,
things he's heard on the news,
horrors he's seen as clips of on Instagram.
Mostly, I just listen, and wait to be moved.

Although they have the gun on their belt and I am handcuffed,
I feel aware of the gap between us:
the systemic violence they've known.
The way this country so often values my life more than theirs.
That it was built, its institutions structured, to value my life more than theirs.
It is not undone because they are wearing the uniform and carrying the badge of oppression.

Once inside the jail, the fluorescent, almost-orange lighting is the first thing to strike me.
It is somehow both dim and bright.
The woman behind the window also catches me off guard.
Her voice is as monotone as a DMV clerk, but her smile is strangely sincere.
She prints my blue plastic wrist band with my mugshot on it.
She calls me honey.
She puts it on gently.
This too tight?

Before I enter the cellblock I am taken to meet a lawyer.
I am sat in a bright white room, a pane of plexiglass separating she and I,
she looks like she could be my big sister.

She begins asking how I am, if I have been harmed.
She tells me many pieces of information:
the rationale for my charges,
the effort of those in our community to try to get the charges dropped,
what else happened that day,
who else was arrested,
what to expect tomorrow in court.

I nod during this part pep-talk part info-session.

It provides a sense of assurance that most people will not be so fortunate to receive.
Her stories are a hug from outside; another cushion.

I am then led, either up or down stairs— I can't recall,
into a space that at the time, I can only refer to as dungeon-like.
A space, that before this experience, I would have no reference point for *feeling*.
Being in.

I can hear voices inside,
see silhouettes of women,
but I see no distinct faces.

It is cold in a way that feels like the block is connected to the outside; uninsulated—
though I know it is solid like a fortress.
A smell of must and metal persists despite the frigidness.

I am surprised to be put in a block with a friend.
When I enter she is sleeping on one of the two metal slabs protruding from the walls.
This is another comfort most do not find themselves haphazardly stumbling upon.

The cell is as expected,
small, maybe 6 x 7 feet, and dim.
Against the wall there is a metal toilet and above it a metal push sink. No soap.

The metal slabs for sleeping are really ridged sheets with quarter-size holes in them.
The divets seem to serve no purpose other than being uncomfortable.
Over the course of the night, they will bruise my hips and make the cold air more concentrated.
They are still less bothersome than the clinical, flickering light above the top slab I lay on.
It will stay on indefinitely.
I will try to bury my face in my neckline to avoid it, but eventually I give it up.

At first, my thoughts center on time:
that I will spend some unspecified number of hours in this place.
I am told by a women in a nearby cell, that around nine am we will be transferred to the court for sentencing.
I do not know how to estimate the time now.

There are no clocks.

I regret that I did not ask the lawyer.

I am soon distracted however, by conversation.

It ebbs in and out through the night.

Two women speak the most among the eight— perhaps nine— of us.

They facilitate a rolling dialogue,

asking questions and encouraging the swapping of stories.

Early enough into the evening,

my friend— whom the other women are calling *Free Palestine*— stops a passing guard.

She is wearing only a tank top and shorts and the cold of the slab is stark.

She asks for clothes or a blanket.

He comes back and gives her a grey outfit: oversized sweats,

Another woman registers and asks the same.

She is ignored.

After a pause one woman asks,

Are you white?

She replies yes and the room echoes with laughter.

Laughter as genuine as it is unsettled.

A distaste and affinity for the honesty,

for the meaning of the answer.

Like the cold of the slab, the discussions will become increasingly sharp over the course of the evening.

They will venture into U.S. militarism,

the theft of taxpayer money to murder people of color in the U.S. and overseas,

the lies of the Democratic party,

Biden's incompetency,

the de facto segregation to DC,

the prison-industrial complex,

police brutality,

'Protect and Serve'—

Service to the State.

I think over and over again that I wish I had a recorder,

or at least a piece of paper and a pen,

anything to mark down these words.

Their analysis is far more profound than any lecture or panel discussion I've ever heard,

far more nuanced than a reading I've ever been assigned in some course on systemic injustice.

It is the expertise of lived experience and we are far from the ivory tower.

None of it theory, all of it felt.

The morning comes.

We know only because of the feeling that at this point it must be, and because the guard– who after hours of ignoring the women’s requests–tells us the time: past 9am.

We are all eager to leave.

We will wait two hours more before being transferred for sentencing.

Those last two hours are the longest.

The anticipation of the day ahead, paired with the inability to sleep, from the cold of the metal and the grime still worn from the day before, makes the hours stretch and the minutes drag.

It feels harsher than the physical conditions of the cell.

How anyone might endure solitary confinement, or remain in prison, for days, months, years, decades, a lifetime...

is something I feel as utterly incomprehensible.

That night, I think, is enough for me–

this either a testament to my fragility and impatience

or the baseline cruelty of it all.

When it is time to leave, we are searched, handcuffed, and lined up.

This is the first time we are really seeing each other after hours of talking.

We shuffle in a line to the van outside–

a van that even with doors open, appears dark inside.

We are slotted in it, one after the other, hip to hip.

We face one side of the van.

It is empty apart from a large cylindrical bar protruding from it.

It will eventually be pushed to sit at our necks, as though we are on some hellish amusement park ride.

Inside, even with the door open, the air is so stale and muggy that it is hard to breathe.

The walls and the seat and the bar are also covered in indistinguishable secretions.

Different shades of bodily fluids: spit and sweat and blood.

I wonder the last time it has been cleaned or hosed down.

It appears to me never, not once.

The woman next to me,

the one who was arrested for domestic violence for confronting her ex-boyfriend–a man who raped her–is struggling.

She tells me that she panics in confinement.

She can barely whisper that she is utterly afraid of tight spaces.

I ask her to inhale and exhale with me. I count.

Other women narrate the smells and the feeling of the heat.

They cough repeatedly.

Name it for what it is: disgusting and unnecessary.

Here, even before sentencing, and far before any trial,
it is clear that we are no longer those who deserve to be treated as fully human,
worthy of some basic decency.

We are those to be put in their place.

And it is in that van, counting and sweating,
tasting the rot of men and women who have been here before,
I become aware of something, a feeling, I do not know what to do with:
that I am passing through this experience prepared to be relieved of it,
certain I will be, at some point.

It feels as if I am on some perverse field trip,
knowing I am surrounded by women who have been here before,
with children and siblings and mothers who have too,
and who will likely return.

I feel this among women who do not know yet if they are going to be free of it.
Among those who also have brothers and fathers and uncles who have been killed in this place,
killed in their neighborhoods.
They've said as such.

I am next to those whose bodies are used and abused
to keep this institution functioning.
Today's tokens in the slot machine of the "justice system."

When we are taken out and given another pat-down,
the woman who has been taken for smoking weed—
or rather who the cops approached and then apprehended for loitering and
who was then charged, like me, for protesting with "disorderly conduct,"—
is visibly uncomfortable.

This search is the third or fourth of many more to come.
This is the most repeated action of our moving from place to place.
Although we are bound and they have watched us shuffle,
and although they have quite literally just searched us moments before we entered the van,
again, we must spread our legs wide and open our mouths.
The guards are making sure the only thing we've acquired are feelings of filth and discomfort.

Watching each pat down I register my small feelings of disbelief.
Each small, but perverse moment feels a ritual that is only purposeful in their use to mock and belittle.
Each time, I feel it ridiculous that I am slightly surprised,
most of the other women are not.

I am also aware of the look I get from the male guards,

particularly the white ones.

It makes my stomach churn.

Their eyes question,

quick puzzled glances.

The women around me—so familiar with this treatment and being arbitrarily detained—are immediately given cold stares.

It takes a few moments before they find their smirk.

Smug glares towards all of us.

We are then taken to another room,
a new cage to stand in among other women.

I do not know if they are coming from other jails or cellblocks,
but now we are in one group, waiting for our name.

Here, in the courthouse ‘jail’, they will shackle our feet and take us independently for more processing.
They will ask us to repeat the same information about ourselves and wait.

Eventually we women meet again in a large cement white room with no windows.
The door is locked from the outside,
it opens only with a buzz.
There is a toilet inside,
but it is only half covered by a cement barrier—an incomplete extension of the wall.

Just like in the cellblock, the women talk and laugh.

Speak of their families and of sex and of exhaustion and what they want to eat when they get out of here.

I try not to stare at the young girl who appears maybe just over fifteen.

My friend, who the women are still calling *Free Palestine* is resting on the floor.

I stand against a wall, quiet and listening.

I feel too fatigued to speak, to attempt to engage.

I am also conscious, as the other women recount their trauma, of my place here.

I don’t remember how or why,

but at one point the conversation moves to Free Palestine and I: why we were arrested.

One woman from the night before starts to explain what we have done to the others; our intent.

But soon, she is in tears.

She is crying for the children of Gaza.

She is crying for hearing of them torn apart.

She is crying for their mothers and the fathers.

She is also crying for the children in her neighborhood.

They are shredding our babies, she says

They are shooting our babies.

Our babies.

The room sits with a silence

There are nods and downcast eyes.
She believes it when she goes to relieve herself–
to shit in the uncovered toilet.
There is a collective understanding that we should look away,
manufacture some privacy.

In that white room,
besides the waiting, and counting, and anticipating when the guard might finally open the door and call my number and say my last name,
I am reflecting on another difficult truth:
that I am not just shocked by the reality of these women's lives,
the very tactile, embodied aspect of being treated as 'less than',
but that I am shocked *I am here*.
That I have never once considered jail a possibility for myself,
and if I am being fully honest,
the idea of me in this place is something I must reconcile.

To some degree, my sort of cookie-cutter, straight-edgeness contributes.
I must weave arrested for "disorderly conduct" into my story,
and not see it as a fracture in my identity.
Something to explain to my mother, perhaps a future employer,
but with that, I am reckoning too, with my ignorance.
Reckoning with my idea of justice.
Reckoning with my acceptance of mass incarceration,
and how it functions.
and what it serves.

It is not a bubble burst or a veil lifted,
so much as it feels someone has forced me to look
and only now, because I am intently looking,
do I see.

I am only facing a fraction of some reality I have only ever read about or heard described in podcasts.
It is no longer abstract,
this experience is not rare, not rare at all.
Never theory.

In accepting that I am here,
experiencing too, the material reality of what 'here' really is,
I also cannot help but think of all that has made jail feel so far from my potential reality:
my suburban Southern California neighborhood,
my family's income,
my access to higher education,
my whiteness.

It is all so plain.

Months before, going to jail might have felt a more distant hypothetical than visiting most other continents.

Meanwhile, for people living five, maybe ten miles from my family home, the distance between arrests, imprisonment, and their lives, is not far at all. Their present, their past, their future, never truly free.

Perhaps in the moment I am feeling white guilt– shame.

I know I am gutted for what is.

The gap between my ideals
and what really is.

The inevitability of my sustained oblivion,
had I not stood among brown folks, speaking on behalf of brown folks.

The power of empathy also reveals the true depth of my ignorance.

It is an hour when my mind moves faster than it has since I first left the hearing room, when I was desperate to avoid this temporary, ultimately, personally inconsequential experience.

I am finally called to court.

I shuffle in my chains, my wrists bound to my waist, also wrapped in a chain.

I am led into the courtroom from the back corner.

I can hear the judge moving through cases as I enter along with the soft murmurs from the back of the room– the benches for observers.

I am shocked when I find faces I recognize.

There is an entire sea of support.

I see smiles and hands in the shapes of hearts.

Twenty+ people waiting and beaming,
not just for me, of course,
but also present, there for me.

I am overtaken by a sense of warmth and joy.

It is one of the most true and full feelings of comfort I have ever known,
and not only because I am at a low.

I am told to put my arms down as I try to wave with my hands clasped near my abdomen.

I notice the security guard try to hold back a smile.

I am then told to sit behind the hazy glass barrier to wait for my case to be called.

I look at the fuzzy shapes of our community and try to determine who is who.

My eyes are watery and I cannot reach to wipe them.

Unlike most of the defendants I am not assigned to a court appointed attorney–

some lawyer who will review my charges in thirty seconds,
and impassionately ask for a slightly better plea deal.

I learn my community of organizers has arranged that I have a well-versed attorney,
someone whose done this many, many times before.

It is another unexpected, tremendous cushion.

As I sit, the judge whips through cases like orders at a ticket counter.
She seems brutal.

The others defendants, almost entirely people of color, come up swiftly.

I will listen for quite some more time as people sentenced to:

thirty days,

ninety days,

ten thousand dollar bail,

twenty thousand dollar bail

no possibility of parole...

It is as though she enjoys being tough, locking people away.

I grow nervous.

Many are younger than I, barely 25.

Each time I hear the sentence, I cannot help but do the math.

I multiply last night by the number of days.

I try not to absorb the reactions of the family members in the back: their exhales.

I am called before the judge only when Free Palestine and another comrade– who was quite literally
slammed against a wall by multiple officers and then charged for assault– are also ready.

We stand a few feet apart on spots marked with blue painters tape.

She reviews our charges.

In a few minutes, we are released with a stay away order and a pending court date.

I am unchained and then free to join my community.

They embrace me with hugs, pats on the back, forehead kisses, and care packages in paper grocery bags.

It is an almost overwhelming display of care.

Outside the courthouse I am greeted by more love, given piggy back rides.

We take group photos.

I am then taken by part-friends, part-mentors, part-temporary parents to dinner. A feast.

I am dropped off at my home.

I am shown so much love and generosity I don't know what to do with it.

I review my act: involuntarily moving through a place known to be harsh.

All I did before that: exit a room and without thinking, lift my arms behind a war criminal.

In the coming days so many will tell me:

It was a false arrest.

It was an act of suppression.

They will try to affirm me when I dismiss it or say it was a wasted disruption:
But your arms were visible!

That for a moment, *you could see the words 'Butcher of Gaza' on screen.*

It offers some comfort, but mostly, it sharpens the hollowness I feel.

Their generosity of spirit,

the displays of love,

I wish I could bottle it up and ship it off to those who need it.

I want to break it into pieces of and give some of it away.

I am getting an undue share.

Still, this one night will turn in me for weeks.

My thoughts will linger long past the discussions of it—

the women I met, their stories, the sensations...

I will deny it,

try to inculcate the thought: *I am fine* into my head.

I will insist I move on,

brush over it with loved ones.

Nothing happened. No big deal.

I will put in context,

see it shrink against the backdrop of humanity

see it shrink against the backdrop of my own life, my own history,

but ghosts of all kinds inhabit my bones.

It lingers.

The grime has seemed to seep into my tissues.

The feeling of sheer disgust and belittlement lodged somewhere in the back of my head.

There is a persistent tightness in my throat.

I can't sleep.

In the coming weeks I write little about it.

In my journal I refer to myself as "She"

She did this, she felt that...

I stew on the fact that this not my story to tell,

and more so, that it is not important now.

There are so many more stories to tell:

stories of loss on an unimaginable scale,

stories of murder and starvation,

the absolute worst stories one could ever tell.

I also fear I will not find the right words to speak of the experience,

to figure out how to separate the happenings from myself,

to speak of it and not make myself the protagonist,

that, not the point at all.

My mother, whom I would normally turn to at a moment like this, I cannot burden.
She has been carrying a mother's worry tenfold since that night—
having my location, but knowing no way to reach me.

It was agony, she tells me.

I long for a big cry alone in my apartment,
the kind made of heaving and shaking, to shake it off,
but it doesn't come.

It is only a few weeks later that an older friend—one of our community—pulls me aside.
He says that he has seen *my light dim*,
sees something different behind my eyes.
I break, tears immediately streak my cheeks.
He sits next to me on the curb and listens to my muffled whimpers.

He is patient before he offers something else:

You are good but you are weak,
His words are simple and piercing.
The love is obvious in the honesty.
He says,
You need to be strong.
You have tasted the harshness of the world, but you mustn't harden.

I latch on to the word taste,
feeling someone has finally articulated what it was:
a taste of something so disgusting that is force-fed to others.
Only a quick inhale of what so often suffocates,
a thick smoke or toxic fume so many make their lives in,
learn to live in.
Die in.

I will sit with his other words
You need to be strong,
You are weak,
for far longer.

I think of them when the waves come,
the heavy feelings that I can't yet name on that curb.
It is not self-pity,
but a grief of sorts.
Though "grief" also feels misplaced,
because the loss is not fresh.
It is persistent. Enduring.
Not really mine.

Over a year later, I have yet to define it.
I long for a revelation, but instead it feels only settled,
the feelings almost irrelevant.
A distant memory I am pulled into only at will.

My record has been expunged.
I completed the community service, my stay away.
Made amends for my crime.
It is not a secret, nor a story—something I hold with shame nor wear as a badge of honor.
It mostly just is—was.

I know the intent of my arrest was to intimidate me and those around me.
To make us stay away from certain spaces,
and in that regard, it did, of course, work to some degree:
I couldn't enter the building in the order for some temporary amount of time.
But mostly—as most any instance of repression does—it had a paradoxical effect.
It was radicalizing, not silencing.
Radicalizing, of course, is relative here.

Relative to normalized, state-sponsored, live-streamed genocide.
Relative to normalized, mass incarceration.
Relative to being told that taxpayer dollars being used to send bombs to murder families in Palestine and
keep a prison industrial complex profitable for private companies, is in service to public safety, is in
service to some notion of security,
is in service to democracy.

Some time ago I went to jail and it changed me in some way,
left a kind of wound.
Not a scar or ache per say, but a cut that altered.
It takes some of its shape from that night—the things I saw and felt—
but it does not resemble memory.
It is outlined by what it revealed,
finds its depth in how far there is to go
and how long it might have taken me to see it, had I never been there in the first place.

