

# JWAN HADDAD



BY LEAH ELLIOTT

One Uhaul, four girls, and several hours of extensive planning, driving, and assembly later, the UCSB community headed to campus one morning of the Spring '22 quarter to find that a student cultural group, SJP, or Students for Justice of Palestine, had erected a wall along the sides of the Arbor. The wall, borrowed from the University of California, San Diego and composed of several hand-painted panels that came together to make a massive mural, articulated awareness of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the genocide of Palestinian peoples, and championed the school's divestment from companies and organizations that benefit from the Israeli occupation. Met with a mix of significant support and backlash, it seemed that the wall and what it stood for kick-started a discourse on campus that illuminated philosophies of Zionism that have unexpectedly thrived within the UCSB community for years.



For months throughout the Spring Quarter of 2022, you could not walk down the Arbor without drawing your eyes to the wall. With unspeakable energy and force, the students involved with SJP stood alongside the wall every day and relentlessly took to megaphones to amplify facts about the consequences of the Palestinian displacement and continued support of Israel. It was a moment where several communities came together in solidarity for a central cause, a moment where students, after years detached from campus following a global pandemic, reaffirmed their presence and demands within the University. It was a moment where decades of overlooked injustices became undeniable, and it couldn't have happened without one student: Jwan Haddad.

It was Jwan that began reaching out to the SJP members of UC San Diego and

UC Los Angeles about borrowing their wall at the beginning of the Winter quarter. It was Jwan that achieved full funding from the external vice president of statewide affairs for the transportation of the wall. It was Jwan who coordinated a meeting with the assistant vice chancellor and fire marshal to gain permission to erect the wall. It was Jwan who, after organizing and hosting SJP's 'culture night' hopped in a U-haul with three other students and made the trek down to UCSD, loaded as many panels of the wall that they could fit, drove back up to Santa Barbara, and assembled the pieces along one of the schools central walkways.

A third-year UCSB sociology student, Jwan Haddad and her extensive efforts on campus have been rooted in advocating and achieving justice for the universities most overlooked communities. Working directly within different

cultural clubs, starting a social justice coalition, traveling to other universities to make public commentary, putting together protests, and organizing the appearance of influential speakers for campus social justice conferences; Jwan stands out as a trailblazer for eliciting true change across campus. All the more, Jwan's work has shown to inspire action within her fellow students to join the fight and find new ways to pioneer their own pathways to liberation.



## AN UNLIKELY BEGINNING

Over a cup of coffee at the School's Univeristy Center, Jwan tells me how at the age of 2 years old, her family moved to California from Jordan. Casually swirling the freeze-dried strawberries in her iced tea with a paper straw, she conjures up images of the quaint, close-knitted lifestyle that characterized her childhood in Jordan; a place where everyone knows everyone. A place where children could wander and play as they please and parents need not fear of any danger hurting them. Over the first few years of Jwan's life, her family slowly made the move, piece by piece, to the United States for school.

Their new life in Lancaster, CA, a desert city nestled at the Northern point of inland Los Angeles,



could not be more different. Overwhelmed by this vast new city and language, Jwan shrunk into her family and herself.

“My siblings and I were so shy. We would only talk to each other and our parents, not even our cousins. But I was especially quiet, I wouldn’t talk in class or speak to my teacher at all. In early elementary school, the teachers would always have to call in my sister who was 2 years older than me. She would act as the messenger between the teachers and I.” Even into high school, Haddad remembers remaining fairly reserved, only coming out of her shell with close friends- quite a stark difference from the person she is today.

As for the causes she champions, Jwan also has an unexpected history: Growing up, Jwan says that her

parents normalized relations with Israel and she never had any major conception or concern over their occupation of stolen lands. She reflects, “In my home, Israel was just Israel, you know? As far as I was concerned, it was simply just a neighbor.”

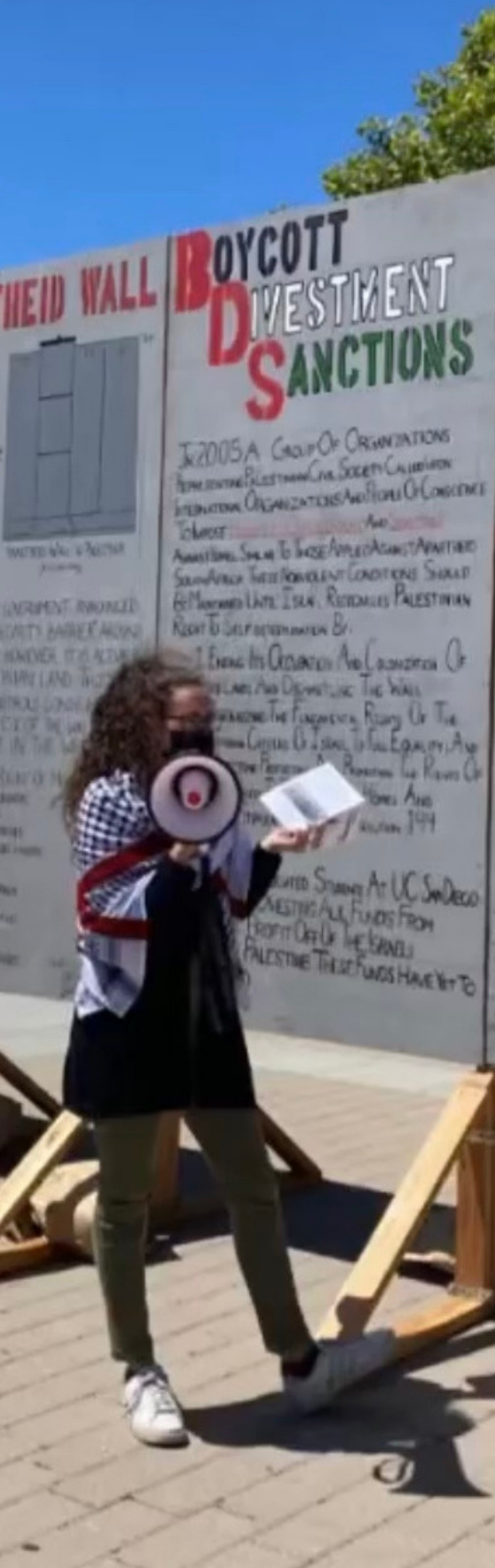
So, how is it that this shy, young girl with a passive disposition for politics transformed into an outspoken anti-zionist that spends all her efforts fighting for the rights of UC students?

# ACTIVISM ONLINE

Jwan's push into action did not originate from any life-altering personal experiences in her youth, or from some central figure in her life. Jwan Haddad's career as an activist began at her home in Lancaster, behind the screen of a computer while she worked remotely as a freshman in college at UCSB. In an attempt to connect with a community that was 100 miles away from her bedroom, Haddad's interest in the environment inspired her to seek out an internship with the universities Environmental Justice Alliance; it was from this starting point she was sent down a rabbit hole of activism that would eventually lead her to be a key figure in the organization and execution of some of the most impactful actions towards justice the UCSB campus has seen since its return to in-person education.

Jwan's activism and experiences as a rising catalyst for divestment is, at its heart, a story of immense gratitude and connection. As she recalls her long lists of involvements tracing the journey of her activism from where it started to where it is today, there was not a single experience that did not start or finish with the acknowledgment of the students who stood beside her and guided her towards opportunity. Variations of the phrase "I'm really grateful for them", recurred throughout our conversation together.

"Ultimately, I'm really grateful for my time with EJA, and especially our co-chair who was heavily involved in MKP and encouraged me to attend some of their meetings", Jwan reflects. The small work that Jwan would do during her freshmen year with Mauna Kea Protectors, MKP, a





student-led organization that campaigns for UCSB's divestment from the Thirty Meter Telescope project that is set to be built on sacred indigenous Hawaiian land, would first expose her to the concept of divestment and put forth connections that would come to her help in future projects. Exhilarated by the feeling of a cohesive community rooted in a central cause, Jwan became interested in exploring the school's Arabic organizations and connecting with others through her heritage and culture. After bouncing around through communities like the Lebanese club, Jwan eventually found herself settled into SJP, Students for Justice of Palestine.

When Jwan first joined the organization during what she calls her "COVID year", there were only around 4 or 5 members. From her first meeting, she was immediately given small tasks to help support their divestment campaign, urging the university to divest from funding or working with companies that somehow support, aid, or benefit the Israeli army in their occupation of Palestinian lands.

"I'm really grateful they gave me those small jobs because I might have forgotten about them and not come back for more meetings", she laughs, "Ironically, I met so many people over COVID and was exposed to so many issues that, had we been in person on campus I probably would have been too nervous to throw myself into."

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# THE HYPER ACTIVE ACTIVIST

Rolling into her sophomore year, Jwan remembers buzzing with anticipation to join the community in person and fully immerse herself into the organizations she had been working with through a computer screen. Struck by her new understanding of the Israeli occupation and enraged at the injustices caused by the university's failure to divest, Jwan was adamant to learn more about ways to make a change. So, during the fall and winter quarters of her second year, she took on additional courses through the school's professional certification program PACE. Underneath the Intersectional Justice Facilitator program with PACE, Haddad was exposed to the effects of intersectionality and was able to learn, more in-depth, about the true effects of the Palestinian displacement and movements of solidarity that sprung across the world in response to the violence. With PACE, Haddad also went on to work as an Intern for Eco-Vista, a locally based organization whose purpose is rooted in reconstructing the local Isla Vista community through projects that focus on native restoration, affordable housing, sustainable food production through community gardens, and more.

It seems impossible, that all while taking a full course load Jwan powered through the year. From her perspective, however, it was by working on all of these enormous projects simultaneously that she gained the ability to become an effective community organizer, and gave her a clear definition of what she is organizing for.

Graduated seniors from SJP left new vacancies on board at the beginning of the year and Jwan was given the chance to amplify her efforts now as an organizer for the club. With this opportunity, her newfound passion for bringing Social Justice projects to campus was fortified and before she knew it, Jwan was fully immersed in the efforts to push UC Santa Barbara to discontinue the funneling of student funds into Pro-Israel investments.

With divestment being her primary goal, taking her newfound understanding of intersectionality and the need for unity, Jwan realized real change wasn't going to happen without some type of coalition.



“I knew a lot of different people from all the different organizations I had involvements or connections with, like MKP, that were similarly fighting for justice through divestment. So, I gathered all of us together and from that started the Social Justice Coalition”, Jwan tells me nonchalantly while tucking one of her thick brown curls behind an ear. “I had started it alongside another student who, now graduated, was a part of the underground scholars that I had met when I was organizing a rally for political prisoners”, she also throws in, just as casually.

It was with the support of the Social Justice Coalition that Jwan and her SJP members could fully bring the divestment wall to campus and finally bring awareness to the issue in a way that would surely start conversations.

For weeks throughout the spring quarter, members of SJP and allies surrounding the wall projected the hard facts about Pro-Israel efforts and the injustices of Palestinian students on campus and displaced Palestinians across the globe.

Reflecting on this time, Jwan tells me, “I remember that evening of the first day we had put it up, I went to do laundry and I overheard these people talking on the stairs saying, ‘I get it- I get why they have the wall and everything, but why do they need to be screaming?’ And that proves my point exactly, because like if we’re not screaming, you’re just going to keep walking by, you might glance at it, but you’ll keep walking by.”

Yet as major of an event as this was, the 2022 spring quarter still held much more for Jwan. Following the wall, she reconnected once more with MKP to head down to UCLA to make public comment at the UC Regents meetings, and it was through these connections that MKP and SJP finally became an active part of the UC-wide Coalition for Divestment.

By the end of the year, through the guidance of fellow members of the Social Justice Coalition, Jwan gained a position as a Jackson Social Justice Legacy



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Intern with the Multi-Cultural Center where she currently works. This past February, Haddad, alongside her co-workers, organized and hosted the 10th annual Social Justice Conference- a weekend-long event that brings together a variety of speakers, workshops, and activities to encourage practices of anti-racism and student advocacy.



## THE BIG PICTURE

As the midway point of her third-year approaches, Jwan admits she experiences burnout. But, she holds, it is clear that now more than ever, we need to continue to unite together and create a sense of community that advocates compassion for not just others, but ourselves. At UCSB, where divestment has still failed to be passed, Zionism is an ongoing threat and to Jwan, the disappointing reactions surrounding the wall revealed the true hostile climate the school has regarding Palestinian solidarity: ultimately proving the fight must go on.

This year, working with fellow Jackson Social Justice Legacy interns, Jwan helped create and host a Social Justice Conference themed 'Restoration For Revolution' that focused on forms of healing and self-care as a means of resistance to oppressive ideologies. In planning the event, Jwan was able to get the hosts of the podcast *Palestine Pod*, to attend as guest speakers. Co-host Michael Schirtzer is a UCSB alum himself and was eager to share his experience as a student on campus who, after being subjected to an act of Zionism, found a strong sense of inspiration when finding the SJP divestment wall. During Schirtzer's talk, Jwan also emphasized the words of a student who shared their difficulty at UCSB as a Jewish person. She says, "they felt guilty for not getting involved with SJP but also, felt fear and embarrassment at the

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idea of people calling them a self-hating jew". These experiences, along with the events surrounding the wall, keep Jwan going and gaining momentum for future endeavors.

"As much as Palestinians need community on this campus, they need community in general because they are being pushed out of places that are supposed to be representing them. It's those moments that make me realize we need to outreach a lot more because there are always other students out there who feel the same way and are being marginalized from their 'supposed' own community."

While the work that Haddad has brought to campus shows the markings of a great leader, it's clear that she's not just a leader for the changes she advocates for, but for the sense of inspiration and motivation to action that she ignites in her peers. Jwan's experience as an organizer shows the story of a chain effect. Coming into UCSB, Jwan had so much to learn about all the causes she so passionately fights for today and ways to enact justice. Now Jwan serves as an educator and motivator to her peers, who see her efforts and feel inspired to take steps of their own.

"She is one of the most hard-working people I have ever met", fellow Jackson Social Justice Legacy Intern Davina Reed tells me, "At a group workshop, we all had to share one thing we love about ourselves and each member of the board. Every person participating said the same thing about Jwan: admirably, unfathomably driven."

Approaching her last year on campus, Jwan plans to only increase her efforts in Palestinian solitary and outreach with other campus communities. Specifically, Jwan hopes in her last year she can work to bring more Palestinian speakers, collaborate further with grad students, and collaborate with other Arab culture clubs. But above all, what Jwan says she wants to push is, "just educating people and bringing joy to campus".