



Ancestors of Palestinian Liberation is an initiative that marks the decades since the *Nakba* by featuring the stories of seven Palestinians whose lives and work have contributed to the steadfast foundation upon which the struggle for Palestinian liberation persists.

Through a collection of artistically rendered portraits and short biographies, this project highlights some of the brilliant and courageous ways in which Palestinians have reckoned with life, identity, and cultural resistance in the aftermath of the *Nakba* and in the face of ongoing settler colonialism.

This multi-faceted, visual, biographical, and educational tool is intended for organizers, educators, and community members who want to bring Palestinian history and stories into everyday spaces. These seven Palestinians are just a few among the many whose lives may be gone but whose legacies and work live on.

Fadwa Tuqan, The Poet of Love and Pain

Ghassan Kanafani, The Fearless Writer of Resistance and Truth

Naji Al-Ali, The Timeless Palestinian Conscience

Mahmoud Darwish, The Poet of Palestinian Identity

Rim Banna, The Voice of Palestine

Edward W. Said, The Voice of Palestinian Self-Narration

Razan Al Najjar, The Angel of Mercy

Learn more about how you can engage with this project online, print the portraits and biographies in English or Arabic, and explore the educational resources at www.PalestineAdvocacyProject.org/Ancestors.

Vision, design, and creation: Zeldia Edmunds, Anemoia Projects

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Contributor: Sarah Gold



THE POET OF LOVE AND PAIN 1917-2003

FADWA TUQAN



Fadwa Tuqan:
Artwork by
Zelda Edmunds.

“Enough for Me
Enough for me to die on her earth
be buried in her
to melt and vanish into her soil
then sprout forth as a flower
played with by a child from my country.”

Excerpt from “Enough for Me” in *The Night and the Horsemen*, Fadwa Tuqan, 1969

The poet Fadwa Tuqan witnessed so much. Born in 1917 in Palestine under British rule, she lived through Britain’s issuance of the Balfour Declaration, the *Nakba* in 1948, the 1967 War and beginning of the Israeli occupation, the 1993 Oslo Accords and the formation of the Palestinian Authority, the initial construction of Israel’s apartheid wall, and two Intifadas.

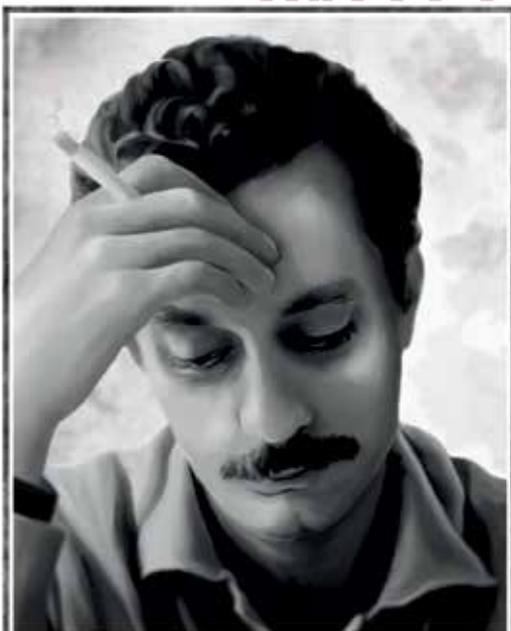
Born into a deeply conservative household in the city of Nablus, Fadwa rejected any customs that she felt stifled her pursuit of knowledge. She learned to write poetry at an early age from her talented brother Ibrahim, a famous poet himself. Her early work reflects a pioneering bravery in its candid accounts of femininity, love, and emotion. After the 1967 War and Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, her poetry adopted a more overtly political tone, emphasizing anti-colonial resistance and the role of women in social protest. Israeli army general Moshe Dayan is known to have said that reading a poem by Tuqan was like facing 20 enemy commandos.*

In 2003, Tuqan died of natural causes in her hometown as it was under Israeli siege. Today, she is considered to be among the most distinguished figures of modern Arabic literature, an indomitable writer and poet who defied patriarchy, colonization, and occupation to give voice to Palestinian national loss and resistance.

*Poet of the Palestinian Nation’s Sense of Loss, *The Irish Times*, 2003.

THE FEARLESS WRITER OF RESISTANCE AND TRUTH 1936–1972

GHASSAN KANAFANI



Ghassan Kanafani:
Artwork by
Zelda Edmunds.

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“We were heaped up there, withdrawn from our childhood, away from the land of oranges...

‘oranges that died,’ an old farmer once told us, ‘if watered by strange hands.’”

Excerpt from *The Land of Sad Oranges*, Ghassan Kanafani, 1958

Ghassan Kanafani was a prolific Palestinian journalist and writer, an unapologetic speaker, and a pioneering cultural leader. Decades after his assassination at age 36 by the Israeli Mossad, Kanafani’s writings continue to inspire, reclaiming the right of Palestinians to narrate for themselves their ongoing struggle for liberation.

Forced into exile by Zionist forces in 1948, Kanafani worked as an art teacher for Palestinian refugee children in Damascus, Syria. There he was inspired to write short stories to help his young students cope with their own dispossession. Among his most well-known stories are *Men in the Sun* (1962) and *Returning to Haifa* (1969). Kanafani’s writings broke with tradition, employing new literary styles to explore Palestinian statelessness and exile. He wrote everything from short stories to novels, plays to analytical studies, and boasted a massive body of journalistic work. In some ways, Kanafani seemed to live as though he knew his time was limited, writing constantly and publishing without respite.

He fearlessly spoke truth in the face of powerful, hostile governments, emphasizing the liberation of Palestinians as part and parcel of the liberation of all oppressed people across the world. Kanafani was never able to return to his homeland. His obituary in the *Lebanon Daily Star* called him “A commando who never fired a gun, whose weapon was a ball-point pen, and his arena the newspaper pages.”*

*Hannah Szeto, “Profile: Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972),” *Middle East Monitor*, July 14, 2019.

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THE TIMELESS PALESTINIAN CONSCIENCE 1938–1987

NAJI AL-ALI



Naji Al-Ali:
Artwork by
Zelda Edmunds.

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“[Handala] was the age I was when I had left Palestine and, in a sense, I am still that age today... He was the arrow of the compass, pointing steadily towards Palestine. Not just Palestine in geographical terms, but Palestine in its humanitarian sense – the symbol of a just cause...”

Al-Ali to Egyptian novelist Radwa Ashour, 1985ⁱ

Naji Al-Ali was a satirist, political cartoonist, and visual journalist. Forcefully displaced from his village of Al-Shajara in 1948, his family fled to Lebanon, where they lived in a refugee camp. His drawings, which numbered approximately 40,000 over his lifetime, expressed solidarity with the poor and marginalized, criticizing the Israeli government, Arab regimes, and Palestinian politicians alike for their crimes and failures. “This man draws with human bones,” *Time* magazine wrote of Al-Ali, whose drawings were first published by Ghassan Kanafani in *Al-Hurriyya* magazine.ⁱⁱ

He developed a cast of characters, including Fatima the unyielding, ingenious Palestinian woman, and the Evil Man, a fat, bare-bottomed depiction of oppressive and corrupt forces. His most famous character is the ten-year-old boy Handala, named after Handhal – a deep-rooted, bitter Palestinian fruit that grows back when it is cut. Handala reflects Al-Ali’s experience as a child refugee: barefoot, destitute, and deprived, but enduring. A representation of Palestinian agony and steadfastness, he appears with his back turned, looking towards his homeland. Handala remains frozen in time: ten years old until all displaced Palestinians are able to return home.

Al-Ali lived as a refugee until his assassination in 1987. His unwavering integrity and exceptional work earned him the distinction of being “one of the best cartoonists since the 18th century.”ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ “Revisiting the Great Palestinian Cartoonist Naji al-Ali 30 Years After his Assassination,” *PRI.org*, August 31, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Jamil Sbitan, “Handala Will Age Again Soon,” *Jadaliyya*, June 3, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Who killed Naji al-Ali, Palestine’s most beloved artist?” *The New Arab*, 2017.

THE POET OF PALESTINIAN IDENTITY 1941–2008

MAHMOUD DARWISH



Mahmoud Darwish:
Artwork by
Zelda Edmunds,
original image
reference: Denis
Dailleux/Agence
VU'.

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“I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: Home.”

Excerpt from *I Belong There*, 1986ⁱ

A cornerstone of Arabic literature, Mahmoud Darwish was a deeply beloved poet, author, and cultural icon. Expelled from his village of Al-Birweh in 1947, he soon returned to find that it had been destroyed, two Israeli settlements standing in its place. Over the course of his life, he lived as an exile in seven countries, as a refugee in his own homeland, and as a prisoner behind Israeli bars for resisting the colonization of his land through pen and paper. “Sometimes they arrest you while you are committing a dream,” he wrote.ⁱⁱ No stranger to Israel’s silencing tactics, Darwish was even placed under house arrest when Palestinian demonstrators turned his poem “Identity Card” into a protest song.

Darwish’s over 30 books of poetry speak of love, of exile and longing for homeland, of Palestinian resistance, and of the joy and pain of the common human experience. His writing has on multiple occasions sent Israeli society and politicians into uproar. “The Israelis do not want to teach students that there is a love story between an Arab poet and this land,” Darwish said. “I just wish they’d read me to enjoy my poetry, not as a representative of the enemy.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1996, Israel granted him permission to live in the Palestinian city of Ramallah. He passed away in 2008. A kind, polite man with a sharp wit and sense of humor, a humanist and poetic tour-de-force, Darwish will forever be remembered as the Palestinian National Poet.

ⁱ Poem from *Unfortunately It Was Paradise*, Mahmoud Darwish, 2003.

ⁱⁱ *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, Mahmoud Darwish, 1973.

ⁱⁱⁱ “A Love Story Between an Arab Poet and His Land: An Interview with Mahmud Darwish,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2002.

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THE VOICE OF PALESTINE 1966–2018

RIM BANNA



Rim Banna:
Artwork by
Zelda Edmunds,
original image
reference:
Kirkelig
Kulturverksted.

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“Oh root of my roots, I will surely return, so wait for me
Wait for me in the cracks of the rocks and the thorns
In the olive blossoms, in the color of the butterflies”

Excerpt from “The Voice, the Fragrance and the Figure,” 2005*

Rim Banna was a fearless singer, lyricist, and composer. She used her voice as a means of cultural self-assertion and a call for steadfast resistance to colonization. Born and raised a Palestinian citizen of Israel in the city of Nazareth, she was known for her modern interpretations of traditional Palestinian folk songs and poetry, reviving stories at risk of being lost due to Israeli erasure of her people’s culture.

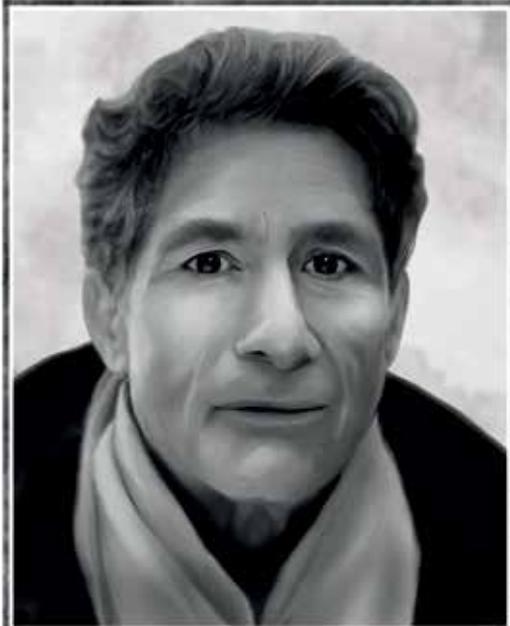
Banna’s musical career began in the 1980s, her voice bringing hope to Palestinians in the occupied territories living under a relentless military campaign. By the 2000s she was known across the world by Palestinians and non-Palestinians alike as a cultural icon. First and foremost an artist led by principles, Banna denied numerous lucrative contract offers to work on projects that failed to acknowledge Israel’s crimes against her people, refusing to compromise her commitment to uplifting the Palestinian struggle. Peace would not come at the expense of justice, no matter how profitable. Her album *April Blossoms* was dedicated to Palestinian children, and *The Mirrors of My Soul* was dedicated to all Palestinian prisoners. Her music explored themes of love, childhood, homeland, freedom, and revolution.

Banna produced 13 albums. Though breast cancer claimed her life in 2018, the music she left behind continues the work of resistance, unstoppable by the apartheid wall, military checkpoint, or gun-toting soldier.

*“The Voice, the Fragrance and the Figure” from Rim Banna’s album *The Mirrors of My Soul*, 2005.

THE VOICE OF PALESTINIAN SELF-NARRATION 1935–2003

EDWARD W. SAID



ANCESTORS OF PALESTINIAN LIBERATION

Edward W. Said: Artwork by Zelda Edmunds, original image reference: Jeremy Pollard.

“Criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom.”

Excerpt from *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Edward Said, 1983

Edward Said was a prolific scholar, activist, and public intellectual. Born in 1935 Jerusalem, Said left Palestine just before the Nakba and lived most of his life in the United States, eventually becoming a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University.

His experience as a Palestinian in exile informed his belief that boundaries and barriers (invariably set by oppressors) must be crossed, that intellectuals must speak truth to power in service of justice. He questioned: who narrates stories of the marginalized, and why not the marginalized themselves? Said’s groundbreaking book *Orientalism* (1978) and subsequent publications helped to create entirely new fields of study. These include postcolonialism, a school of thought that critiques European colonial control and violence, disempowers theories that were born of this control through generating knowledge about colonized peoples, and centers impacted peoples’ voices in describing their own experiences and identities.

A relentless advocate for equal political and human rights for Palestinians, Said never shied away from criticizing the US government’s unconditional support for Israel, despite facing consequences in his personal and professional life. He condemned many US endeavors in the Middle East and beyond, and indeed spent his last months vocally opposing President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq. He passed away in 2003 after a twelve-year battle with leukemia.

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THE ANGEL OF MERCY 1997–2018

RAZAN AL NAJJAR



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Razan Al Najjar: Artwork by Zelda Edmunds.

“We want to send our message to the world: I’m an army to myself, and the sword to my army... We have one goal, and that’s to rescue and evacuate, and to send a message to the world, that we – without weapons – can do anything,”

Al Najjar told the *New York Times* in 2018.ⁱ

Razan Al Najjar was born and raised in Khan Yunis, Gaza, where her family has lived as refugees since the *Nakba*. In her 20 years of life, Al Najjar lived through three of Israel’s deadly wars on Gaza. Vibrant, hopeful, generous, and tenacious, she dreamed of being a doctor.

Unfortunately, the Israeli blockade left her family unable to finance her aspirations, so she instead took courses in nursing. Al Najjar often worked 13-hour shifts, while providing pro bono medical services to the sick and injured whenever possible. She dismissed societal criticism for her work, responding: “Women are often judged, but society has to accept us. If they don’t want to accept us by choice, they will be forced to accept us. Because we have more strength than any man.”ⁱⁱ

When Gaza’s Great March of Return protests started in 2018, Al Najjar sold her jewelry and cell phone to buy medical supplies. She was the first woman to volunteer as a medic, treating demonstrators injured by Israeli soldiers, despite suffering injuries herself.

During a protest on June 1, 2018, an Israeli army sniper shot and killed Al Najjar as she carried out her medical duties. Even after her death, she continues to inspire bravery and strength of spirit, including in her own mother, who has since taken up the torch as a paramedic for the ongoing Great March of Return.

ⁱ David M. Halbfinger, “A Day, a Life: When a Medic Was Killed in Gaza, Was It an Accident?” *The New York Times*, December 30, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Iyad Abuhweila and Isabel Kershner, “A Woman Dedicated to Saving Lives Loses Hers in Gaza Violence,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2018.