THIS WEEK IN
PALESTINE
www.thisweekinpalestine.com



Issue 332 | March 2026

Women at the Forefront: Feminist Organizing and Empowerment

SCAN TO SHARE



Cover: Palestinian conductor Lamar Elias. Photo by Pauline Ballet.

forthcoming Issues

April 2026: **Generation of Hope: Nurturing and Defending Palestine's Children**

April 2026 (special additional issue): **Health and Resilience Under Occupation**

May 2026: **The Unfinished Exodus: Nakba Memory and Refugee Identity**

advisory Board

Sa'ad Abdulhadi, businessman

Rania Hammad, author and activist

Sam Husseini, businessman

Tony Khashram, accredited tourism consultant

Fadya Salfiti, chairperson, Rawa Fund for Palestinian Community Initiatives

Maia Tabet, editor and Arabic-English literary translator

tWiP Team

Publisher: **Sani P. Meo**

Art Director: **Taisir Masrieh**

Graphic Design: **Tamer Hasbun**

Content Editor: **Tina Basem**

turbo-design

Telefax: +970/2 2-295 1262
info@turbo-design.com
www.thisweekinpalestine.com
www.facebook.com/ThisWeekInPalestine

Printed by
iPrint

This publication is Proudly Produced in PALESTINE

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the publisher.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

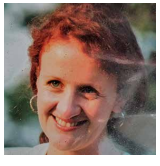
Ego-driven hegemonic aspirations of (predominantly male) world leaders, largely unchecked due to a prevailing Western colonial mindset that fails to stand up to violations of human rights and international law, are dragging the whole world into a conflict whose dimensions, duration, and consequences no one can entirely predict. Palestinian women have grappled for decades with an oppressive occupation in a male-dominated cultural and political environment, yet they are rising to the challenge and excelling on many levels. In addition to the long history of women who have engaged in community development, the fight for voting rights, the education of girls and women, and the resistance to occupying powers, contemporary Palestinian women are successfully running businesses, participating in political and economic leadership, sitting on boards that shape Palestine's economic future and sustainable development, engaging in solidarity movements, and creating films, art, and music. Women are volunteering and working as educators and health professionals in many places, including the occupied West Bank, which is under unprecedented attack by settlers, supported and shielded by the Israeli army. They do so also under the most dangerous and dire conditions in Gaza, where a genocide is taking place, albeit at a slower pace today. As the definition of genocide indicates: The intention matters. And with Israel limiting the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian aid, including food, water, fuel, and medical aid, and doing its utmost to prevent aid agencies access to the strip, the situation for Gazans is beyond abysmal. Yet women continue against all odds to do their best to feed and care for others – be they children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, or those who have been war-injured, whether family members or neighbors.

This March issue of *This Week in Palestine* highlights such achievements and outlines some of the challenges that women face, whether from patriarchal societal norms or the tactics used by the occupation to extend its reach and power.

We thank those who use *TWiP* as a communication tool to inform about their activities, while contributing to our financial sustainability. We also thank the authors who have contributed content to this issue: Ambassador Majed Bamya, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the UN; UN Women; Taawon (Welfare Association); the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; Business Women Forum–Palestine; Nada Elia, an associate professor of ethnic studies in the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Western Washington University; Huda Asfour, a co-founder of the DC Palestinian Film and Arts Festival; Aida Qleibo, a Jerusalemite Palestinian decolonial feminist activist and researcher; Randa Siniora, the general director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling WCLAC; UNFPA; Dr. Rulla Sarras, the director of funding and development at the Rural Women Development Society; CARE Palestine; Dr. Georgette Hazboun Rabadi, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Education at Bethlehem University; H.E. Vera Baboun, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Chile; Nadine Fitiani, an alumna of Bethlehem University; and Dr. Shahd Abusalama, a Palestinian British scholar, author, and artist, born and raised in Jabalia Refugee Camp, northern Gaza, whose academic career was cut short by a smear campaign over her speaking out on Gaza. Our Poem of the Month is by Ahmed Masoud, our three Books of the Month are *The Foundations of Zionism*; *An Odyssey of a City: The Story of Bethlehem City*; and *The Palestine Folk Museum: The Untold Story (1926–2012)*. Our Artist of the Month is the emerging girls' band Hatta.

The entire team at *TWiP* wishes a blessed Women's Day, Mother's Day, and Eid al-Fitr to all who are celebrating, and an end to the wars in the region and beyond.

Tina Basem



THIS WEEK IN
PALESTINE
www.thisweekinpalestine.com

6 **Leila's Light**
By Majed Bamya

8 **From Student to Doctor**
Courtesy of Taawon (Welfare Association)

10 **Something Stronger than Fear**
Courtesy of UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

12 **Displaced Countless Times**
Courtesy of UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

14 **Building Businesses, Shaping Leadership, Transforming a Nation**
Courtesy of Business Women Forum

24 **A History of Community Care**
By Nada Elia

30 **What I Learned on the Margin of the Margin**
By Huda Asfour

36 **"Honor" as a Weapon, Feminism as an Alibi**
By Aida Qleibo

46 **Building Gender Equality from the Grassroots**
By Randa Siniora

52 **Early Detection Saves Lives**
Courtesy of UNFPA

56 **Rooted in the Land**
By Rulla Sarras

62 **Beyond Survival**
Courtesy of CARE Palestine

64 **A Hidden War**
By Georgette Hazboun Rabadi

70 **Leading Under Constraint**
By H.E. Vera Baboun, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Chile

76 **Keeping the Possibility of Justice Alive**
An interview with Carol Mansour and Muna Khalidi
Questions by Omar Dana

82 **The Women Who Refuse to Disappear**
By Nadine Fitiani

86 **From Gaza to Japan**
By Shahd Abusalama

92 **Unleash**
By Ahmed Masoud

94 Book of the Month I
The Foundations of Zionism

96 Book of the Month II
An Odyssey of a City

98 Book of the Month III
The Palestine Folk Museum

100 Artist of the Month
Hatta Girls' Band

102 **The Last Word**
The West Will Choke on Iran

Leila's Light

By Majed Bamya



H.E. Ambassador Leila Shahid.

Leila Shahid embodied life for so long that I cannot associate her name with a eulogy. Anyone who met Leila remembers her as an incandescent being, whose light she would gladly share with anyone on her path. She would see everyone, care for everyone. She would listen, give advice, share a word or a laugh, deliver a reprimand, and offer comfort. She would tell stories. What a wonderful storyteller she was! – taking and exaggerating the traits of her characters, imitating their intonations, smirking as she prepared to deliver the punchline. She was so lively and lovely, just a force comfortably establishing itself in any environment. Present, and yet never overwhelming, finding a balance between being the life of the gathering and honoring every life within it.

Leila studied anthropology – the exploration of humans and communities – probably as part of her search for meaning. Leila forged her own science, building the whole edifice on two fundamental columns: humanity and humility. Humanity gave her the ability to create connections with very different human beings – intellectuals, politicians, activists, artists, drivers, cooks, and passersby – and to enter every world and instantly be part of it. The ability to show empathy even when she herself was drained. The ability to follow people's lives, to remember details, to pick up the phone and call to praise or convey concern.

Humility – not feigned but born of faith – enabled her to keep learning, to find greatness in others that nourished her own. Leila considered ego the Achilles' heel of many able people, telling me that it turns the smartest people into dummies because bathing in their own light prevents them from seeking inspiration from others.

The humility and humanity of Leila the Great led her naturally to other greats and at the same time enabled her to find greatness where it is not necessarily expected: in each one of us.

Leila was Palestinian. I dare say she was an embodiment of Palestine, instantly recognizable, a superstar, especially in the countries of the francophone world. A beloved and admired figure, she introduced many to the cause of Palestine. Leila was equally universal in her beliefs and commitment. Her Palestinianhood was universal. She would want people to rally for the cause of Palestine based on universal values and would reject the support of those who were motivated by hatred and racism.

Leila was brave. When I sometimes shared my concern about her safety, she would brush the matter away, despite serious and visible threats. So how do we explain that such a being could no longer face this world? The answer is to be found in her profound sadness at the fate of Palestine, Lebanon, the region, Europe where she served as a diplomat for decades, and the world.

Leila was a singular phenomenon. Her uniqueness cannot be overstated. But Leila was also the daughter of an era. She was a daughter of the Palestinian revolution, one of the greatest liberation movements of the twentieth century. She was a daughter of the movements for liberation from all forms of oppression that shaped the previous century. She was from the generation born at the onset of the *Nakba* who decided to dedicate their lives to bringing it to an end; only to see it reach its ultimate stage in Gaza.

In 1982, Leila was among the first to visit the camps after the massacres of Sabra and Shatila. She brought with her the great French poet Jean Genet to become the witness of the massacres, to speak on behalf of the thousands murdered in cold blood – women, children, the elderly, men. Leila thought that if the world knew about the massacres, it would be moved to action. That became her mission. Letting the world know.

But what happens when the massacres are live-streamed day after day and still allowed to continue? Forty years later, as her people were being massacred in Gaza, Leila found herself on radio and TV again, confronted with the same lines of questioning that Palestinians had faced decades earlier. She saw her people depicted as terrorists, as barbarians, as subhumans, or at best as legitimate collateral damage.

Leila felt the darkness overtaking her country and the world. She fought back and tried to find meaning. There was anger against such injustice. There were moments of deep despair followed by a rebellion inherent to her character. Sometimes she would call me, euphoric about the movements she saw around the world, only to be overtaken later by despair at the news of another massacre.

How terrifying is this darkness that threatens to devour beings of light! But Leila did not surrender. She chose to leave before the darkness could prevail.

As I read through the many messages of love addressed to her after her death, I hope Leila knows that her light inspires many to believe that we will eventually prevail over the darkness. We must all now carry what Mahmoud Darwish described as the burden of hope; a burden that became too heavy for Leila. Inspired by her light. Missing her human presence.

Ambassador Majed Bamya, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the UN, served with Leila Shahid when she was Palestine's ambassador in Brussels. She was his mentor and the reason he joined Palestinian diplomacy.

SCAN TO SHARE



From Student to Doctor

A Young Graduate's Story of Leadership in Gaza

Courtesy of Taawon (Welfare Association)



Suhair M., a medical graduate, walks into a temporary clinic set up inside a displacement camp in Gaza.



On International Women's Day, the offices of UN Human Rights, UN Women, and the United Nations Population Fund in Palestine launch the "We Survive, We Lead" campaign to amplify the lived experiences of Palestinian women. In partnership with Taawon (Welfare Association), we present stories of suffering, resilience and leadership as a testimony and a clear call to action to uphold and protect dignity and human rights.

In Gaza, leadership is not always visible from a stage or behind a microphone. Sometimes it is found in a hospital corridor under bombardment, in a young woman refusing to abandon her patients, her profession, or her future.

Dr. Suhair graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Al-Azhar University in 2024. By September of that year, she had begun her professional training at the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza. Medicine had been her dream for years. "A person should not spend their whole life in vain," she says. "This was the message I wanted my life to carry." Within weeks of starting her training, the war erupted. Hospitals were besieged. Programs were suspended. Entire neighborhoods were empty. Suhair and her family were displaced multiple times, moving from north to south and back to central Gaza. When they returned home, they found it largely destroyed. Yet she did not stop.

While many colleagues were forced to leave, Suhair moved between Al-Aqsa Hospital, Al-Awda Hospital, and field facilities in the central region. Transportation was scarce; sometimes she walked long distances just to reach the first available bus. There was no protection from rain or shelling. Hunger made concentration almost impossible during long shifts. "We saw severe blood loss. We saw malnutrition," she recalls. "There were moments when we had no treatment available and had to search for alternatives." When communications were cut, and ambulances could not reach them, staff members ran under bombardment to nearby hospitals to call for help. Leadership, in these moments, was not a title. It was a decision. The decision to show up.

As a young woman doctor, she also carried her family's fear. "At the beginning, my parents didn't want me to go out. They were afraid for me," she says. They called constantly to make sure she was safe. But gradually, they came to understand that her presence in the hospital was not just work; it was a responsibility.

The war changed her understanding of medicine. "It made me realize how important our role is in society, how much people need us," she says. In a matter of months, she gained experience that might otherwise have taken years. "The war taught me how to be strong."

Yet even as she served on the frontlines, another barrier threatened her future. Like that of many graduates in Gaza, Suhair's university certificate was withheld due to accumulated tuition fees during the war. Without the official release of her degree, she could not formally continue her specialization or advance her career.

Through an ISNAD scholarship, Taawon's initiative to protect higher education in Gaza had her outstanding tuition covered, and her certificate was issued. The support did more than settle a debt; it restored her academic standing and secured her professional path. "The obstacle was removed," she says simply. "Now I can continue."

For her, survival is not passive endurance. It is action. It is walking to work when transport is unavailable. It is treating patients despite hunger. It is insisting on education when systems collapse. It is refusing to let war define the limits of possibility. "The biggest lesson I learned," she says, "is that I will not give up. No matter how hard life is, we continue."

SCAN TO SHARE



Something Stronger than Fear

Courtesy of UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory



Yasmeen in the girls' makeshift tent, providing reproductive health and psychological services. UNFPA-funded project, Gaza City. ©SDF.

Yasmeen is a 27-year-old woman from Gaza City. She told the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OHCHR OPT) about her story of survival and her work to advance children's right to education against formidable odds.

"I used to love my life. I lived in a beautiful home with my family; I had a job and volunteered everywhere. I got engaged. My life felt stable. I was grateful. Before the war, I used to think about the future. Make plans. This is over now. We thought this was going to be like other wars: heavy, painful, terrifying, but survivable. By the third day, it was clear this time was different. The bombing was insane. The internet was shut down. People were shouting in the streets, telling us to evacuate because the army was advancing.

"We refused to leave Gaza City. We made the decision to stay together under one roof. My grandfather's household of four families all stayed in two three-floor buildings with a shared courtyard. We were besieged three times. One siege lasted 21 days, with Israeli tanks stationed two minutes away from the house. We hid on the ground floor so that the soldiers could not see signs of life. The building next to us was bombed, and the rubble collapsed onto my grandfather's house. There were no injuries, but every service was cut off: water, electricity, everything. There was water in old basement tanks, filthy and not fit for drinking, but it kept us alive. Food was rationed to one piece of bread per day. After the siege, we cleaned the rubble and stayed. We survived two more encirclements, including one during Ramadan.



On International Women's Day, the offices of UN Human Rights, UN Women, and the United Nations Population Fund in Palestine launch the "We Survive, We Lead" campaign to amplify the lived experiences of Palestinian women. In partnership with Taawon (Welfare Association), we present stories of suffering, resilience, and leadership as a testimony and a clear call to action to uphold and protect dignity and human rights.

"Six months into the war, I realized I could no longer live paralyzed like that. A colleague from the Social Development Forum (SDF),* where I had volunteered during the COVID-19 crisis, reached out. They needed a field coordinator for an emergency education project in northern Gaza. Despite the risks, I accepted without hesitation. My family begged me not to go. My mother was terrified. But I needed to reclaim some purpose, something stronger than fear.

"Our team had only three people. We searched for safe areas – 'safe' only by Gaza standards. We created educational spaces for children, sometimes in old schools, sometimes in family homes, sometimes using nothing more than a tent that became unbearably hot during the day.

"The situation was so miserable that we had to weigh rights against each other: the right to life, the right to shelter, the right to education. When the spaces we used were needed to shelter newly displaced families, we vacated. We escorted children to and from the educational spaces as if we could protect them from airstrikes. We tried.

"There were no bathrooms for children, no proper classrooms or equipment, and constant danger. But the children laughed there. They played. They learned. They felt human again. I was proud.

"Eventually, I transitioned to coordinating a UNFPA-funded project serving youth, adolescents, and women. I ran spaces for women and girls that offered reproductive health services, psychosocial support, and safe learning hubs. Today, I manage a team of 12 members.

"The war changed me. I am more stubborn now, and somehow more hopeful. I do not know what I will choose. But I insist on choosing. It is my right. Thinking about the future now feels like trying to see through fog. But here is what I know with certainty: I love my home; I love Gaza. I loved it before the war, and I love it now. I am not scared by its streets, and my love is not erased by its scars and mounting rubble."

SCAN TO SHARE

*The Social Developmental Forum (SDF) is a Palestinian NGO focused on fostering youth leadership in sustainable development. SDF is partners with the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OHCHR OPT).



Displaced Countless Times

Courtesy of UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory



Mayson.



On International Women's Day, the offices of UN Human Rights, UN Women, and the United Nations Population Fund in Palestine launch the "We Survive, We Lead" campaign to amplify the lived experiences of Palestinian women. In partnership with Taawon (Welfare Association), we present stories of suffering, resilience, and leadership as a testimony and a clear call to action to uphold and protect dignity and human rights.

Mayson is a 37-year-old widow from Beit Lahia, Gaza, a mother of a five-year-old son, and a person with disability. She shared her story and plea for the future with the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OHCHR OPT).

"I was born with a vision impairment, and I have a glass eye. My husband was the miracle of my life, my rock, and my support. I was happy and safe with him. But the story was cut short.

"We are from Beit Lahia in northern Gaza. Things were tense there from day one; airstrikes never stopped. We lived in the same building as my husband's extended family. The bombing was scary and kept intensifying. My sister and I took my son and sought refuge in a school building. My husband was supposed to join us the following day. But his phone stopped ringing. I called everyone in the building, everyone in my husband's family. Phones were not ringing. One number finally rang. Someone picked it up. He said everyone is dead. It was a fire belt; airstrikes killed everyone. I searched for his body in hospitals. I showed his photo to the nurses. I couldn't find him anywhere. My brother came to take me south, but I wanted to see my husband. My brother paid for a bulldozer, which kept digging for a week. My husband's body never recovered. I wish I had stayed with him and never left the house. This was in October 2023, just a few days after the war started. It has now been over two years since I lost him. I never had the chance to say goodbye, or to honor and bury him with dignity. There is no grave to visit.

"Since I left my house in Beit Lahia, I do not remember how many times I have been displaced. I can count at least 16 times. In the first tent, my son couldn't stop crying for his father, and people around us kept yelling at me to keep him quiet. Everyone was grieving. Everyone was suffering. There was no space for his grief.

"The war is not over for me. It was raining the other day, and my tent was flooded. All night, I cried while carrying my son from one spot to another inside the tent to try to keep him dry.

"I do not forgive the world for what has happened, for what keeps happening. My son spent two of his five years in this world in war, without his father, and in extremely difficult conditions. He has speech and learning difficulties, and there are no facilities to help him.

"If I ever leave Gaza, it will be to get a new glass eye. It has been painful, and I haven't been able to get medical attention for it. If it were not for Stars of Hope,* I would not have had a shelter and been able to support and feed my son.

"I had a life and a home. My son had a father. Now, it's all gone. There is no clarity. It feels like we are heading into the unknown. And the war is just not ending. I can't even protect my child from the rain."

SCAN TO SHARE

*Stars of Hope is a Palestinian NGO focused on the rights of people with disabilities and partners with the United Nations Country Team's Disability Inclusion Working Group, which is led by the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OHCHR OPT) and UN Women. Stars of Hope is also part of the Protection Cluster which is coordinated by OHCHR OPT.

Building Businesses, Shaping Leadership, Transforming a Nation

The Rise of the Business Women Forum: Celebrating 20 years of impact

Courtesy of Business Women Forum



Launching the Women in AI and Business Tech Network, 2025.

In the spring of 2005, a handful of Palestinian businesswomen boarded a plane to Tunisia, carrying little more than business cards and curiosity. The conference hall they entered would act as a foundation stone in the story of the Business Women Forum (BWF). Two hundred women from more than twenty Arab countries filled the room – lawyers, exporters, engineers, CEOs of manufacturers' associations – each speaking not only for her company but also for an organization that represented women in her society. Between panels and coffee breaks, the Palestinian visitors listened, watched, and compared notes. They were impressed, proud of the women they met, and quietly unsettled. Why did every delegation seem to have a collective voice except for theirs? On the flight back to Ramallah, the conversation shifted from admiration to resolve. If such organizations could exist elsewhere, they decided, then Palestine would have one too.

BusIness Women Forum-Palestine
منتدى سيدات الأعمال - فلسطين

Back home, the BWF's establishment was launched inside Manal Zraiq's office space. What began as informal meetings – shared coffee, exchanged frustrations, and practical ideas – quickly transformed into planning sessions. The women were not merely discussing opportunities, they were designing one. From that small office, they laid the foundation for what would become the Business Women Forum–Palestine. Maha Abu Shousheh, a founding member, states, "Shining the light on Palestinian businesswomen and their professional business achievements inspires more women in society to take the leap forward in establishing their own businesses, confidently taking credit for the work they already carry."

The early days were modest: a borrowed meeting room, volunteer hours, and a determination to create a space where women could learn from one another, build businesses, and speak collectively. Over time, that improvised gathering evolved into a structured organization with programs, partnerships, and a national presence. "We faced difficulties," Amali Moghrabi recalls, "but the spirit of collaboration and determination made a real difference. The forum is no longer just an idea; it is a platform that brings women leaders together and opens new horizons for success and partnership." Today, the forum stands as one of Palestine's leading civil society institutions, contributing to economic development and women's participation in public life, and demonstrating how a conversation among determined women can grow into a movement with lasting social impact. Najah

Through sustained training, mentoring, and advocacy, women supported by Business Women Forum have taken seats on boards of publicly listed companies such as banks, municipal councils, and the Palestinian Private Sector Coordination Council. Shuaa Marrar, who served as chairwoman from 2020 to 2023, explains, "Together, we supported one another, empowered women entrepreneurs and business owners, and became the collective voice of businesswomen in Palestine." The presence of these women signals a gradual shift in decision-making spaces that historically excluded women. These achievements are not symbolic; they influence financial policy, local governance, and economic planning.



Network event, Women and Youth Entrepreneurs Leading Change – OBADER project, 2022.

By combining leadership development with technological tools, the forum is positioning Palestinian women not only as participants in the economy, but as innovators within it. Current chairwoman Shireen Shelleh states, "We are building more than businesses; we are building leaders, women who access capital, sit on boards, and help shape Palestine's economic future. True empowerment is not only about income generation, it is about influence, visibility, and ensuring that women have a voice in the systems that drive sustainable development."

Osaily, a founding member, explains, "Women entrepreneurs from various cities across the West Bank and Gaza came together because they deserved a platform that cares about their issues and amplifies their voices." Nearly two decades later, that idea has matured into a national platform that has served more than 10,000 women entrepreneurs and supported many established business leaders across the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem.

In Palestine, women fill lecture halls and graduation ceremonies; nearly half of university graduates are female. Yet once diplomas are framed and hung on living room walls, only a small fraction of these women graduates – less than five percent – enter the world of ownership and enterprise. Manal Zraiq, a founding member, states, "Economic empowerment is not just about money. It is a woman's power to say 'no' to what harms her, and 'yes' to a future she chooses for herself and her family." The gap between education and economic participation is where BWF chooses to work. Its programs begin long before a business exists, introducing schoolgirls to real entrepreneurs whose stories make ambition tangible. At the university stage, young women are encouraged to imagine themselves not only as employees but as founders. And when an idea finally becomes a small enterprise, the forum stays beside them: guiding formal registration, improving product quality and branding, and supporting expansion into wider markets. What might have remained a personal talent practiced at home gradually becomes a recognized, professional business that operates in the public economy. Lina Mhaissen, board member in 2024, adds that BWF is "elevating the resilience of our women in continuation of their historic struggle; it enables them to contribute to the global markets, taking pride in their achievements, as they are carrying with them an honorable history and serve as models for Palestinian women."

BWF's success is not defined by a single project or milestone but by the living community of women who continuously choose to support one another. From the beginning, the forum was built on a simple yet powerful principle: women giving to women by sharing their time, expertise, networks, and encouragement. In the words of board member Assmaa Masri, "BWF is a leading national platform that supports women's economic empowerment and strengthens their leadership role in society. It is also a space for networking, exchanging expertise, and building partnerships that contribute to the growth of women-led businesses in Palestine." Operating in Palestine has required adaptability and endurance. Periods of uncertainty have tested the organization's stability, yet BWF has moved forward through strategic planning, a clear vision, and thoughtful risk mitigation. Having contingency plans and remaining agile have allowed the forum to respond to shifting realities while staying focused on its mission.

Through this collective spirit, BWF has not merely survived, it has expanded. It has strengthened services, broadened networks locally and internationally, enhanced institutional capacity, and amplified its advocacy voice. Former CEO Doa Wadi, affirms, "BWF stands today as proof to the world that supporting a woman's ambition and will is the most lasting investment you can make in our society." BWF serves all women across the full entrepreneurial spectrum, from home-based businesses to CEOs of established companies, offering capacity building, business development support, and tailored programs that respond to each stage of growth. The steady guidance and strategic oversight of its board of directors has also played a critical role in safeguarding the organization's direction and ensuring continuity, even in the most challenging circumstances.

The internal processes that generate the greatest external impact are the ones that are rooted in discipline, clarity, and alignment. Strong internal policies and standardized procedures reduce ambiguity, ensure accountability, and create consistency across programs and operations. These systems allow the organization to function efficiently while maintaining high standards of delivery. The BWF's structured program management is central to achieving measurable outcomes. Strategic planning and prioritization ensure that resources are directed toward initiatives that directly advance the mission. Monitoring and evaluation systems track performance against defined indicators, allowing for continuous

Current Board Members


Shireen Shelleh, chairwoman, 2024–2026


Maha Abu Shousheh, founding member, board member


Manal Zraiq, founding member, board member


Samira Hulaileh, founding member, board member


Amal Moghrabi, founding member, board member


Assmaa Masri, board member


Lina Mhaissen, board member


Mona Al-Ghalayini, board member


Hiba Abu Libdeh, board member

Executive Directors


Nora Regina Alawneh, executive director, 2025–present


Rinad Musleh, executive director, 2024


Doa Wadi, executive director, 2008–2023

Previous Chairwomen and Board Members


Samah Abdoun Hamad, board member 2013–2024, chairwoman 2023–2024


Shuaa Marrar, board member 2008–2023 chairwoman 2020–2023


Samia Totah, founding member


Najah Osaily, founding member


Rula Sharawi, board member 2013–2018


Hiba Wazani Walweel, board member 2013–2022


Reem Masrouji, board member 2012–2018


Rima Arafat, board member 2013–2016


Abla Maayah, board member 2008–2014


Iman Wadi, board member 2008–2010



Capacity-building program – AMALI Project, 2025.

learning, timely adjustments, and scaling of successful practices. Equally significant is BWF's organizational culture of collaboration and shared purpose. When teams, partners, and members operate with aligned objectives, internal efforts translate into sustainable external results. This alignment between systems, strategy, and people strengthens credibility with stakeholders and enables BWF to consistently achieve milestones that advance women's economic empowerment.

Technology is also a key enabler in expanding access, efficiency, and impact. Digital tools are integrated into program management to support data-driven decision-making and real-time monitoring of outcomes. This ensures more responsive and evidence-based interventions for women entrepreneurs. Looking ahead, BWF is preparing the next phase of empowerment through technology. Manal Zraiq adds, "By combining leadership development with technological tools, BWF is positioning Palestinian women not only as participants in the economy, but as innovators within it." Women entrepreneurs are learning digital marketing, e-commerce, and online networking, which enables them to access international markets and collaborate across borders. BWF is currently designing the first mentorship platform dedicated to women entrepreneurs in Palestine, creating structured digital access to guidance, professional networks, and knowledge exchange.

Current CEO of BWF Nora Regina Alawneh asserts, "BWF's project 'Women in AI and Business Technology Network' aims to equip Palestinian women with the knowledge required to seize emerging digital opportunities, strengthen leadership, and pioneer innovation and entrepreneurship in the tech sector." She takes pride that financial technology solutions are also embedded across programs to support digital payments, financial literacy, and credit-readiness systems. By integrating technology into both internal operations and external services, BWF models agility, transparency, and forward-looking institutional development.

BWF's approach is practical. Through its One Stop Shop model, women receive a pathway and set of resources that enable their economic success. Capacity-building training, individual coaching, mentoring, business development programs, access to finance, and market access support unfold together. Over 20,000 hours of training have equipped women with skills ranging from financial planning and product development to negotiation, leadership, and public speaking. Furthermore, more than 650 women have formally registered their businesses, moving from informal survival work into recognized economic participation. Hiba Walweel, a board member in 2022, notes, "Wherever women stand together, truly supporting and uplifting one another, the impact is powerful and beautifully felt by everyone. That has been my experience in the forum. I met the most wonderful entrepreneurs, and I learned so much from them."

Through continued support and partnership, the growing network of leaders will be able to further expand its programs, reach new communities, and ensure that more women can move from aspiration to enterprise – and from enterprise to influence.



HeR Mentor Program, Forsah TVET Project, 2024.

BWF's impact is visible in multiple layers of the economy. The forum has organized more than fifty exhibitions



BWF general assembly meeting, board elections, 2022.

and trade missions locally and internationally, linking Palestinian women's products to buyers in Germany, the Netherlands, Jordan, and the Gulf. Through partnerships with banks, the organization has facilitated loans and seed funding exceeding US$1.5 million, allowing businesses to purchase equipment, hire workers, and expand production. Through strategic financial grants, BWF has fueled the entrepreneurial journey of over 11,000 Palestinian businesswomen, transforming ideas into enterprises or strengthening existing businesses to endure and grow. Moreover, BWF has complemented this support with entrepreneurship training and capacity-building programs, equipping women with the skills needed to manage, grow, and lead their enterprises independently.

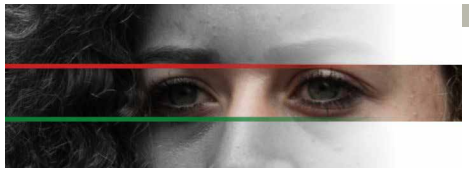
Women who once attended workshops as participants now sit on its board, shaping strategy and expanding services for other women across society. Many of them furthermore represent Palestine internationally, speaking at conferences, trade missions, and policy dialogues, carrying with them the experience of building businesses under complex economic conditions. And many of them continue to receive regional and international awards and recognition. Training women on the skills that enable them to become board members through the International Finance Corporation's program is a highlighted achievement for BWF. H.E. Dr. Samah Hamad, chairwoman of BWF in 2023–2024 and Minister of Social Development and Acting Minister of State for Relief Affairs, describes her tenure as "strengthening executive leadership while delivering meaningful impact at a critical time." Today many BWF members represent women at the Palestinian Private Sector Coordination Council as they lead seats on the board of directors. Samira Hulaileh, a founding member, stated, "By establishing the BWF, we have woven a powerful network of women across Palestine, the diaspora, the MENA region, and internationally. Over time, BWF has become a trusted reference for professional insight." Their presence signals a gradual shift in decision-making spaces that have historically excluded women. These achievements are not simply symbolic; they influence financial policy, local governance, and economic planning. Hiba Abu Libdeh, a current board member, states, "Being surrounded by inspiring women leaders of Palestine has given me the strength to push further during difficult times." Women's representation on boards – once nearly nonexistent – has increased, with several BWF members serving on boards of financial institutions, publicly held companies, municipalities, chambers of commerce, and NGOs.

One of the most remarkable achievements of BWF is reaching and celebrating 20 years of empowering women despite continuous political, economic, and social challenges. This milestone is far more than a number; it represents resilience, continuity, and unwavering purpose. Mona Ghalayini, a board member in Gaza, explains, "The forum serves as an inspiring space to exchange experiences, build effective partnerships, and support women's ambitions that make a tangible impact on society." Rula Sharawi, who served as a board member in 2018, adds, "Sustaining an organization for two decades in such a complex environment reflects deep institutional strength and collective commitment. I joined at a young age and learned a great deal from the founding women entrepreneurs about decision-making and crisis management. What distinguishes the forum most is its diversity."

Today, BWF is no longer only an organization that trains entrepreneurs, it is a pipeline of leadership. As founding member Samia Totah asserts, "Twenty years later, one looks back at what the Palestine Business Women Forum has achieved in relation to its initial establishment goals: The official registration of hundreds of establishments led by women, the training and workshops in various aspects, and the impact it has had on the lives of many women are significant and cannot be ignored."

Business Women Forum:
Email: info@bwf.ps,
Website: www.bwf.ps

SCAN TO SHARE

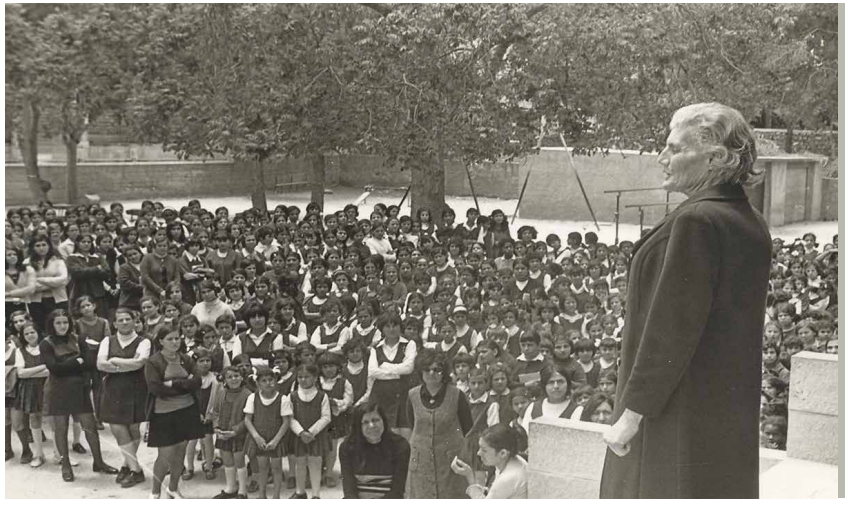


A History of Community Care

Palestinian Women's Radical Organizing

By Nada Elia

Palestinian Feminist Collective



Beginning with sheltering 55 orphans from the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948, Hind al-Husseini eventually established Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi (the house of the Arab child), a women's society in Jerusalem that offers humanitarian, educational, and cultural services. Today, 800 students attend Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi School.

In late summer 2025, I shared with a friend that I had been feeling such deep anxiety that, some days, I could not get myself to leave the house. I don't recall her exact answer, only that she mentioned that the way she was dealing with her survivor's guilt was by taking small actions toward alleviating the apocalyptic situation in Gaza. Even if it's sending just a little money to one family, or even one individual at a time, she insisted.

Survivor's guilt. I had not considered it, let alone taken it for granted that my quasi-paralysis was a result of this condition. But I now believe there are millions of us who have not been physically, directly threatened by the intensified genocide in the Gaza Strip,[1] who continue to live in comfortable houses, with heat, water, and food, who now wrestle with that "guilt."

Guilt. An odd choice of words, when surely neither my friend nor I, nor the millions of Palestinians driven to despair by the livestreamed genocide and our inability to stop it, were "guilty" of the crimes we were witnessing. We are just Palestinians who, through circumstances mostly beyond our control, do not live in that tormented, tortured, sliver of our homeland.

From Hind al-Husseini, who took in 55 children orphaned during the Deir Yassin massacre, to Matiel Mogannam and Tarab Abdulhadi, who drove around Jerusalem in convoys, handing out political leaflets, to the village women who broke down the barracks where British soldiers were holding their men, to countless women of all social backgrounds who were helping those in need, Palestinian women have engaged over decades in practices that have sustained our communities through the successive calamities that have befallen us.

But yes, we are survivors. Israel is intent on killing my people, and with survival – even if it's mere happenstance – comes responsibility. I will not elaborate here on what donations I made, to which organizations, to alleviate my "guilt"; rather, I would like to offer that it is a practice Palestinian women have engaged in for over a century, which we are continuing today, and which has sustained us through the many catastrophes that have befallen our people. This is not to dismiss the immense sacrifices made by Palestinian men. Rather, because the latter are generally recognized and recorded, I wish to uplift the small acts of community care that women have undertaken, that tend not to be seen as "resistance," yet without which we would not be the proud resilient people we are today. I truly believe that the Palestinian people, as a people, have evaded the defeatist attitude of some of our male political "leaders" because of women's tending to our life needs, from distributing food to passing down our cultural heritage, to nursing our emotional and physical wounds. Below are some examples from key moments over the past century.

Possibly the greatest individual act of community support a Palestinian woman has engaged in, at the onset



A Palestinian woman harvesting peppers at a farm near the border between Israel and Gaza.

of *al-Nakba*, is Sitt Hind al-Husseini's founding of *Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi,* the orphanage she established to shelter the children orphaned during the Deir Yassin massacre on April 9, 1948. Husseini was walking with a colleague to a meeting that evening when she came across the 55 terrorized children who had been dropped off in Jerusalem by the Zionist fighters who had murdered their parents. Husseini immediately took them off the streets, into her two-room apartment. Within days, she moved the children into a larger rented space, and eventually moved them into her grandfather's mansion, which she transformed into *Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi*, an institution that houses the orphanage and school that still educates Palestinian girls and young women to this day, along with a cultural museum, and an arts college associated with Al-Quds University. Today, thousands of once destitute Palestinian girls have graduated from *Dar al-Tifl* as women with an unshakable sense of self-confidence and self-worth, with a solid education, and a deep understanding that they are valuable members of society with a role to play in collective and national liberation.

Phenomenal as Sitt Hind was, she was following in the footsteps of other Palestinian women who had also taken it upon themselves to use their privileges to empower others. Thus as early as the opening decades of the twentieth century, Palestinian women from elite families were not content with hosting literary salons and cultural soirees in their families' mansions. The many women's organizations that formed across the nation at the turn of the twentieth century were considered "social" organizations, but their members understood that, in the absence of a national Palestinian government, which would legislate women's rights, they had to take matters into their own hands and tend to the needs of the disenfranchised.

Many roamed the Palestinian countryside to set up social services in underserved villages, while encouraging parents to send their daughters, not just their sons, to school. Women such as Matiel Mogannam and Tarab Abdulhadi knew full well that they were transgressing the social norms of the day by driving around the city in convoys, handing out leaflets with their demands. They were pioneers when they spoke at each other's respective places of worship: Mogannam, a Christian, outside a mosque, and Abdulhadi in a church courtyard. And they embraced being openly political, as they petitioned the British High Commissioner for Palestinian national sovereignty.

Not all of these activists called themselves feminists, a term that had little currency outside of very restricted circles of the educated upper class. But whether they did or not, these women were already articulating the feminist need for both social and political liberation, if all members of Palestinian society, rather than its privileged males, were to be free. They did not seek personal advancement, but community empowerment.



The participation of women during the first Intifada. Photo by Mahfouz Abu Turk/Courtesy of Just Vision.

Nor was activism limited to the elite. The *fellahat*, rural Palestinian women, were full participants in the 1936–39 Great Revolt. They never felt helpless without men; in fact, they frequently helped men, and boys. In 1936, when British Mandate soldiers rounded up Palestinian men and locked them up in barracks in Baqa al-Gharbiyyeh, Palestinian women broke down these barracks with their bare hands to liberate their male kin. This was not an exceptional incident: Palestinian women have rescued Palestinian men, mostly boys, from the clutches of the occupier again and again, frequently by putting their own bodies on the line to allow the youth to escape. Thousands have claimed a young boy as their son or grandson, so as to accompany him to an interrogation center, as Israeli soldiers violently grabbed and threw the child into their jeeps.

The First Intifada may be the period when women's leadership during political turmoil, and their attention to the needs of the marginalized, is perhaps best known, as they rose to the helm of the popular committees, taking critical political decisions while tending to education, food distribution, and medical care for the wounded. Importantly, when some of these activists saw signs of domestic violence among the women they were helping, they understood that it was a trickle-down effect of occupation, and educated their community about this devastating consequence of occupation, even as they opened shelters to shield women from its immediate harm.



The iconic photo from the first Intifada of a woman from Beit Sahour carrying her yellow shoes and throwing stones at the Israeli soldiers.

Women also denounced the alarming rise in femicide plaguing Palestinian society living under Israel's brutal military occupation, and have led workshops to discuss this otherwise "domestic" issue, demanding that it be addressed with legislation meant to penalize the perpetrator, rather than foreground "mitigating circumstances" so as to pardon him.

And it was Palestinian women, Haneen Maikey, Rauda Morcos, and Ghadir Shafie, who founded and headed the LGBTQ support organizations for queer Palestinians, clashing with the Palestinian Authority as they persisted in their determination to create the social support network for marginalized youth.

When Israa Ghrayeb was murdered by her family members in 2019, for posting a photo of herself with her fiancé on social media, Palestinian women came together to form *Tal'at,* a movement determined to end femicide in Palestine. Their slogan, "No Free Homeland Without Free Women," succinctly articulates the spirit behind Palestinian women's agency throughout the century: the understanding that women are an intrinsic part of the nation, and have a role to play in our liberation.

The formation of *Tal'at* in the West Bank in 2019 was the immediate impetus behind the formation of the Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC) in North America in 2020. And since its formation, the PFC has been actively engaged in numerous initiatives to alleviate the suffering of our people, from reaching out to allies, to building new alliances that would join the struggle for empowerment and liberation, to sending aid to Gaza, to supporting Palestinians in the homeland and far diaspora with legal, psychological, and medical needs.

Today, with the understanding that Palestine is indivisible, and that any talk of a "two-state solution" is mere delusion, Palestinians are actively discussing sovereignty beyond the nation-state formation, in the one land from the river to the sea. It is noteworthy that this visioning today recalls that of the opening decades of the twentieth century, when Palestinian women, seeing that they could not ask their government for rights because they did not have a government, organized to secure empowerment at the grassroots level.

We may still be few and far between in "politics," if by politics one understands officials elected to government positions. But at the community level, Palestinian women have always been engaged in organizing for the betterment of society, uplifting first and foremost its most disenfranchised members, because of the understanding that our society can only thrive when those on its margins are safe and thriving.



The new generation of Palestinian women: activist Ahed Tamimi.

So let us continue, proudly, with our grassroots organizing, our dreaming beyond borders, our radical generosity, our embrace of all children as our own. Our survival, our *sumud,* come from our history of community care, which women have been instrumental in organizing. As Hind al-Husseini's daughter, Hidaya, put it, "What men and governments couldn't do, Palestinian women have accomplished."[2]

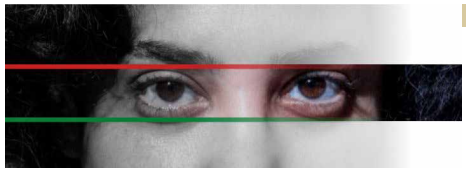
SCAN TO SHARE



Nada Elia is associate professor of ethnic studies and affiliated faculty in the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Western Washington University. A scholar-activist, she has served on the Steering Collective of INCITE! Feminists of Color Against Violence, and is currently a member of the Palestinian Feminist Collective. Elia is the author of Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts: Feminism, Inter/Nationalism, and Palestine *(Pluto, 2023),* Palestine and Feminist Liberation *(Between the Lines, 2025), and has just completed the forthcoming* Falastiniyyat: A Century of Palestinian Feminisms *(Verso, 2026).*

[1] It is important to note that Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people did not begin on October 7, 2023, but has been ongoing since 1948. It intensified after October 7, 2023.

[2] Sahera Dirbas, director, Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug, producers, *138 Pounds in My Pocket: The Story of Hind al-Husseini*, Culture Unplugged.



What I Learned on the Margin of the Margin

By Huda Asfour



Profile of Huda Asfour by Dima Asfour.

I have spent most of my life working on the margins – often without choosing to, sometimes deliberately staying there. Over time, I came to understand that the margin of the margin is not a place of exclusion, but rather one of clarity. On the margin of the margin, new ways of imagining our existence become visible. Quiet shifts in perspective become possible away from what seeks to exploit and extract. New pathways become possible through integration. Through my journey with systems that limit, extract, and control, I have slowly collected lessons: not rules, not formulas, not absolutes, but observations from experiments, failures, and attempts to create alternative spaces where my values and ethics did not have to be compromised.

My work, whether in art, engineering, or science, has always begun with imagining. Sometimes we call that dreaming – not as escape, but as method. The more one understands the universe through the tools of science, the more its beauty becomes undeniable. Patterns repeat across scale. Cells, ecosystems, and galaxies follow principles of relation, dependency, and balance. Nothing exists alone.

There is a word that often makes people uncomfortable in scientific or political spaces, even in artistic and intellectual spaces: spirituality. When I use it, I do not mean doctrine or belief. I mean attention to connection. Spirituality, for me, emerges from understanding how things relate. It comes from marveling at the functioning of a cell and recognizing the same principles echoed in the cosmos. From noticing that nothing survives in isolation. The more I learned, the harder it became to accept the fragmentation of our lives as natural. We separate work from values, ethics from pleasure, knowledge from care, humans from the earth. But the universe does not function this way. Neither do our bodies. Nothing in nature suggests that isolation is a condition for health.

Seen this way, oneness is not an abstract idea. It is a practical lesson. It asks how we organize our lives and our systems. It asks why we are here at all: To comply efficiently within structures that exhaust us? Or to participate fully in the web of relations that sustain life? The world, as I understand it, does not monopolize knowledge or resources in order to rule. It circulates, grows, and deepens it all through sharing. And yet, instead of letting this understanding guide how we live, many choose to exploit it – extracting value for the benefit of a few, instead of serving the prosperity of all. Most of us know this. Still, we feel paralyzed. Compliance is powerful, I learned. We comply not because we believe, but because survival often demands adaptation to available choices.

Neither a global pandemic nor a live-streamed genocide was enough to fundamentally alter our way of living. This is not a moral accusation, but an observation. It invites a difficult question: What is the difference between adaptation and resistance? And when does adaptation stop being a path toward

From Tanfis Tour in California; a project by Remix Culture.



survival and start becoming a barrier to liberation? Why is an artist speaking about this now? Because it is a matter of well-being.

In 2019, I made the decision to leave a seemingly successful academic trajectory. I had trained as a biomedical engineer, completed a PhD, two postdoctoral positions, and a year of adjunct teaching, two studio albums, and a film score. On paper, I was doing everything right. In reality, nothing about my life supported my well-being. My schedule, my environment, my community, and my sense of curiosity were all organized against me. Choosing to leave was not a rejection of science. It was a choice to be well. After years inside academic institutions, I began to understand that we were facing a crisis deeper than funding or representation; a crisis of imagination, curiosity, and care. The system was not designed to nurture these. It was designed to reward compliance.



From the launch of Huda Asfour's second studio album *Kouni* at Atlas Theater DC, May 2018.

For me as a Palestinian, this understanding is not abstract. We grow up knowing that systems do not accidentally fail us. Occupation, displacement, and erasure are maintained through systems that are highly functional. In such conditions, compliance is never neutral. Adaptation is often necessary for survival, but I learned that it does not necessarily lead to liberation.

I find that women in particular have long understood this. Much of what we do, especially in cultural spaces, is rarely named as resistance, yet it sustains life under pressure. Informal education, cultural transmission, collective care, storytelling, and all forms of art and their relation to seasons and rituals – these are not symbolic acts. They are infrastructure. They preserve coherence when formal systems are designed to fragment us. They preserve memory when other systems are there to standardize us.



Huda Asfour. Photo by Sachyn Mital.

My artistic work emerged from this understanding. Early on, it was clear that my journey as a musician was challenging norms, and that the odds were stacked against me in a music industry that prefers homogeneity. If I were going to be authentic, I had to be independent even within the independent scene. The truth is that after fifteen years of working in more traditional music making, I turned to improvisation not as an aesthetic preference, but as a necessity. The dominant structures of music – fixed authorship, rigid hierarchies, standardized forms – mirrored the same logic of control I encountered elsewhere. Improvisation offered a different organization of power: shared authority, attentive listening, responsibility without domination.

Through focusing on improvisation as an art, I learned to slow down, to listen more deeply, to stay acutely present. It taught me to respond honestly rather than strategically, to remain fully engaged in the well-being of the collective, knowing that no individual coherence can exist without collective coherence. Failure is not hidden; it is central. Improvisers are not trained to execute forms but to attend to sound, to others, to context, to silence. What emerges is not chaos, but another kind of order. One that does not require control to function.

The music industry, like many systems, treats artists primarily as entertainers. Any attempt to propose other values must be justified through numbers – followers, streams, visibility. Over time, I learned that the model of the broken artist is deeply profitable. Exhaustion, precarity, and controversy feed the machine. Care does not. The result is a culture that consumes art without responsibility and leaves artists depleted. I am learning to focus on the process rather than the outcome alone, to enjoy it rather than chase results. This was not natural for me and



Habibi Festival, October 2025. Photo by Sachyn Mital.

it remains a struggle. Joy did not arrive as a revelation. It appeared quietly, in moments of alignment, when being together felt sufficient, when work felt integrated rather than fragmented.

Colonial education operates in similar ways. It not only requires reduction for transmission of knowledge; it disciplines perception. It privileges abstraction over embodiment, standardization over relation, and certain languages over others. Moving between Arabic, French, and English, I became acutely aware of how legitimacy shifts with language – how lived knowledge is often dismissed unless it conforms to approved forms. Even in my teaching and workshops, I see how students start with total dismissal of the importance of richness or even complexity of Arabic music. As such, education becomes a site of reorientation rather than instruction. We reexamine beliefs, delve into relational aspects of language, music, and politics. We listen to the body, to others, to the environment. I provoke. Because provocations when done in safe spaces should ignite curiosity, should encourage questioning of dogma. These are not symbolic gestures. They are practical interventions in systems that depend on speed, fragmentation, and dysregulation.

Looking back, whatever I might call success has been built on failure. Repeated failure. Failures in leadership, in judgment, in timing. Lessons in how not to lead, how not to impose, how not to confuse control with care. Only recently did I begin to understand my own anger not as a flaw, but as a response to systemic incoherence.

At this juncture in time, I have become skeptical that dominant systems can be meaningfully transformed from within. That belief comes from experience, not ideology. What I believe in is the creation of alternatives. Alternatives create choice. And even limited choice carries a form of liberation. Choice appears in small, material ways: how we breathe, how we sit, how we move, how we rest. We have become deeply disconnected from our own nature, and this disconnection is profitable. We celebrate technological advancement while ignoring the fact that it has not translated into human advancement. Communal knowledge – once treated as wealth – is dismissed, even as it continues to sustain communities under pressure. Even green economies often reproduce the same logic of consumption. They offer relief without transformation, allowing people to feel ethical without changing how they live. Meanwhile, land, culture, and language are increasingly monopolized. Palestinian land and culture resist this because they live in people, in music, stories, memory, and presence. Human heritage, in all its forms, continues to defy enclosure.

This essay is not a manifesto. It is a record of learning from the margins – about failure, about choice, and about the slow, deliberate work of building choices. Living on the margin of the margin is not a retreat from the world. It is a way of staying in it, without surrendering the capacity to feel, to think, and to imagine otherwise.

And perhaps that is where liberation begins.

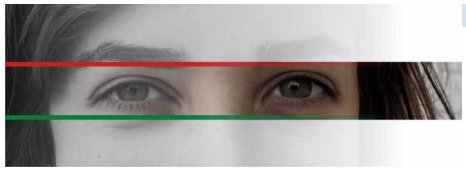
During the *Nahda* workshop.



SCAN TO SHARE



Huda Asfour turned to music full-time during the last ten years, after initially obtaining a PhD as a biomedical engineer. Huda is also a co-founder of the DC Palestinian Film and Arts Festival (along with Noura Erakat) and of the Cairo and Brooklyn Improv Orchestras.



"Honor" as a Weapon, Feminism as an Alibi

The Colonial Playbook

By Aida Qleibo



Thousands of displaced Palestinians are living in tents on the beach by Gaza's seaport. Photo courtesy of the UN.

When feminism arrives as a donor agenda that structurally erases occupation, land theft, incarceration, and siege, it is experienced not as solidarity but as intrusion – demanding internal reform from Palestinian society while leaving the colonial system untouched. In this configuration, women are conscripted as symbols of progress within a reality engineered to deny collective freedom, normalizing domination by managing its symptoms rather than confronting its cause.

In contemporary Palestine, the language of gender equality has become entangled with social uncertainty and deeply contested meanings. This apprehension does not arise from resistance to women's dignity or justice, but from the manner in which the concept has been translated into practice: reduced to a donor-driven, depoliticized intervention, abstracted from lived realities and disconnected from the structures of occupation, apartheid, and colonial domination. As such, this discomfort is neither reactionary nor conservative – it is historically grounded, politically informed, and born of lived experience. Across colonial and post-colonial contexts, women's rights have repeatedly been mobilized not as vehicles of emancipation, but as instruments through which domination is rendered palatable. When feminism is narrowed to individualized freedoms – abstracted from material conditions, collective struggle, and structures of violence – it becomes easily assimilated into projects that leave colonial power intact.[1] Detached from struggles for self-determination, such frameworks can coexist comfortably with regimes of occupation, apartheid, and racialized law.

Within decolonial feminist scholarship, this process has been identified as a shift from political struggle to administrative containment: Oppression is reframed as a problem to be managed, optimized, or culturally corrected rather than dismantled. This logic is central to what has been theorized as civilizational feminism: a framework that displaces colonial violence onto the terrain of "backwardness," allowing the structures that produce dispossession to remain intact.[2] In this formulation, feminism does not challenge the system, it humanizes it. In the Palestinian case, this takes the form of empowerment discourses that circulate freely alongside military rule, settlement expansion, and legal apartheid – where gender equality is invoked as an abstract value while its material preconditions are systematically denied. Within this framework, gender is decontextualized; severed from the land, history, and political economy, reduced to a development metric rather than a site of struggle.

This depoliticization is inseparable from the colonial ordering of gender itself. As theorized by Maria Lugones, colonial rule imposed Western, racialized gender systems that reorganized social life in service of control. The universalization of European women's experience depended on exclusion, producing a structure of double subjugation in which colonized women were dominated by the colonial power while simultaneously positioned as culturally subordinate within their own societies.[3] In the Palestinian context, this structure endures as women are subjected to simultaneous colonial violence and gendered control within their communities – conditions the colonizer actively exploits by weaponizing moral codes to coerce, discipline, and fracture collective resistance.



St. John Eye Hospital Gaza sustained collateral damage during the war on Gaza.

Politics must be grounded in the indivisibility of justice, recognizing domination as intersectional, structural, and mutually reinforcing. Gender liberation is not a secondary project but inseparable from the struggle for collective freedom and national liberation.

This is not a historical residue but a contemporary political formation, sustained through femonationalism, where feminist rhetoric is mobilized to legitimize settler-colonial violence. Claims to equality within the dominant state are inherently relational: Women's rights and legal status are secured through, and made possible by, Palestinian dispossession. Western frameworks that ignore this reality reproduce a hierarchy of womanhood in which some women's freedom is rendered compatible with – indeed, dependent upon – the erasure of others. It is precisely this contradiction that has generated widespread suspicion toward "gender equality" initiatives in Palestine.

For this reason, reclaiming feminism in Palestine requires rejecting approaches that seek to improve women's status within an inherently unjust order. A decolonial feminist praxis does not aim to integrate women into existing systems of power, but to confront the interlocking structures through which domination is produced[4] – colonial rule, racialized law, patriarchy, and economic dispossession. Justice for women cannot emerge through partial emancipation or selective inclusion within a system designed to manage and contain Palestinian life.

What is required instead is a politics grounded in the indivisibility of justice – one that recognizes domination as intersectional, structural, and mutually reinforcing, rather than fragmented into separate struggles. Within this framework, gender liberation is not a parallel or secondary project, but inseparable from the struggle for collective freedom. In the Palestinian context, feminism that is detached from national liberation does not merely fall short, it risks reproducing the very conditions that make women's oppression structurally inevitable.

It is within this framework – where women's morality is rendered a site of regulation rather than protection – that *isqat* (literally "moral downfall" or "social disgrace") was deployed by Israel as a deliberate counterinsurgency tactic aimed at undermining the national movement from within. This gendered strategy is not unique to Palestine. Similar practices were employed by French colonial forces during the Algerian War of Independence, by the FBI's COINTELPRO program against Black women leaders such as Angela Davis, and across contexts ranging from the Suffragette movement in the UK to Latin America's Dirty Wars, where women who resisted were morally attacked, discredited, and erased. *Isqat* belongs to this global repertoire of colonial governance, yet its Palestinian form was acutely strategic – systematized during the first Intifada precisely when women were leading underground schools, coordinating popular committees, and sustaining the national movement.[5] Israeli intelligence did not invent the social codes it mobilized; rather, it activated existing norms of honor, shame, and respectability to fracture collective resistance. Women's reputations, situated at the intersection of nationalism and moral regulation, thus became especially effective sites of coercion.

When feminist analysis is detached from its anti-colonial grounding, this history is obscured, and the moral regulation of women is misread as an internal cultural issue rather than a colonial strategy. Allegation alone – irrespective of veracity – was sufficient to isolate women socially and remove them from public and political life. While men were also targeted, the consequences for women were more durable, reflecting the gendered asymmetries through which honor operates. The persistent absence of broad-based

Gazans receiving emergency assistance. Photo courtesy of Anera.





A bus carrying a group of Palestinian prisoners released by Israel under the Gaza ceasefire deal.

Framing Gazan women as "protected civilians" recognizes their suffering only when they are considered apolitical victims separated from political agency, resistance, and collective struggle. While this framework seems protective, it is fundamentally exclusive, isolating women from their social and political contexts and recasting neocolonial structural dominance as a series of individualized harms that mask their genocidal nature.

Palestinian women's leadership cannot be understood apart from this historical intervention into the conditions of political participation.

Isqat persists as a structuring force, continuing to shape political participation. By weaponizing social codes to discipline women's political visibility, colonial power reshaped the terrain of leadership itself, producing a political field in which women's participation carries disproportionate risk. What is often framed as cultural conservatism is more accurately understood as the cumulative effect of a colonial strategy that governed not only through force and law, but through the internal regulation of social life.[6]

Through legal codification, the ban on family reunification represents the juridical consolidation of this continuum of control. It does not merely separate families across geographic lines, it institutionalizes vulnerability. Following the second Intifada, the Israeli parliament enacted the *Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order)*, prohibiting Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from obtaining residency or citizenship through marriage to Palestinian citizens or permanent residents of Israel.[7] Though framed for years as a temporary security measure, the law's demographic objective – the preservation of a Jewish majority – was made explicit in its 2022 version.[8] This legal framework operationalizes what *isqat* prepares.

Israeli forces preventing a medical team from entering Jenin Refugee Camp.



For Palestinian women living under this law, legal existence is conditioned on marital continuity. Residency, access to healthcare, freedom of movement, and the right to remain with one's children depend on remaining married, often irrespective of the quality or safety of that marriage.[9] Divorce is therefore not a neutral personal decision but a legally consequential act that can trigger residency loss, family separation, and forced displacement. Within this power structure, patriarchal dependency is not merely social, it is produced and enforced through administrative power and legal violence.

In East Jerusalem neighborhoods such as Beit Hanina, Shu'afat, Jabal al-Mukaber, Shu'afat refugee camp, Silwan, and Issawiya, women are not subject to the same immediate legal threat of residency loss under family law. Yet reporting domestic violence remains equally constrained. Here, the risk is not formal legal dispossession but social exposure and direct harm, rooted in the role of the police, who function for Palestinians not as a source of protection but as an arm of coercive control, enforcing a system built against them.

In one case documented during my research, a woman subjected to domestic violence called her brother and told him what had happened. As soon as they hung up, he went to her home, beat up the husband, took his sister and her children, and returned them to the family house. The incident was dealt with within the family, unreported and invisible to the state. This case illustrates how violence is often managed through internal communal mechanisms, while exposing the fragility of such arrangements: Although some women are embedded within family networks capable of intervention, others remain structurally unprotected, with no comparable access to support or mediation. In either case, violence –whether resolved internally or endured in silence – remains statistically invisible.



Palestinian feminist struggle – and the support thereof – must confront domineering structures, reject fragmentation, and include the right to remain, the right of return, and the right to collective self-determination.

The long wait at Qalandia Checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Photo courtesy of Jerusalem Story.

This invisibility is not incidental. Beyond entrenched social taboos, Palestinian women face the added burden of being perceived as "calling the enemy" should they contact Israeli police – transforming a private request for personal safety into a perceived act of collective betrayal by exposing family and community matters to a system experienced as hostile.

What is frequently dismissed as a cultural preference for patriarchal mediation is, in fact, a rational response to a neocolonial reality. The state's presence in these neighborhoods functions primarily as an apparatus of control rather than as an institution that women can reasonably expect to protect them, producing a protection vacuum. Within this vacuum, Palestinian women are forced into an impossible intersectional bind: choosing between remaining in abusive domestic conditions or engaging a legal system that treats them and their communities as demographic and security threats. By displacing responsibility onto the family, the state produces the absence of data it later cites to justify nonintervention, ensuring that violence remains privatized and politically obscured.

The structural underreporting of gender-based violence in Jerusalem – produced through legal precarity and administrative displacement – reveals a governing logic that is continuous with the one applied in Gaza, rather than distinct from it. What law and bureaucracy regulate in Jerusalem, brute force in Gaza annihilates. In Gaza, women are targeted not only as civilians but as bearers of life – through the systematic prevention of birth, the destruction of embryos, and the deliberate targeting of maternity wards, fertility clinics, neonatal units, and the infrastructure that makes motherhood possible – compounded by indiscriminate bombardment, siege, and starvation that eliminate not only life but the conditions that make life possible.[10] Palestinian reproduction is treated as a demographic and existential threat to be neutralized. The resulting desperation exposes a total moral collapse, epitomized by reports of women selling urine so others may simulate pregnancy to access aid – a reality in which even the biological markers of womanhood are rationed for survival.

These dynamics become most stark in Gaza, where the humanitarian frameworks and feminist discourse through which Palestinian suffering is internationally recognized reach their limits. Suffering is recognized only when it can be framed within the category of "protected civilians," a designation that privileges women and children, rendering Palestinian women acceptable as apolitical victims whose suffering is acknowledged only when detached from political agency, resistance, and collective struggle. While this framing appears protective, it is fundamentally exclusionary. Empathy is extended only to those whose suffering can be severed from political agency, resistance, or masculinity. Palestinian men are systematically positioned outside this frame; their detention, torture, and public humiliation are justified through legal and military measures that rationalize their suffering as necessity or collateral damage.

This selective empathy sustains the neocolonial order by reproducing a hierarchy of grievability, isolating women from their social and political context and recasting structural domination as a series of individualized harms. Yet neocolonial gendered violence is not confined to individualized violence; it is organized to disrupt the reproduction and continuity of a people – a regime of selective protection aimed at destabilizing the Palestinian domestic sphere as a site of resilience. By casting Palestinian men as security threats and Palestinian women as victims in need of rescue, colonial governance renders the family a political target. The destruction of the home – through administrative demolition in Silwan or aerial bombardment in Gaza – dismantles the primary space in which care, identity, and resistance are sustained. Feminism, in this context, cannot be separated from the right to remain, the right of return, and the right to collective self-determination; detached from these conditions, it loses its political force.

In the Palestinian context, these dynamics demand a feminist praxis that rejects fragmentation and centers the agency of those who navigate intersecting systems of violence, understanding women's liberation as inseparable from collective liberation. The emancipation of Palestinian women is inseparable from the humanity of Palestinian men and from the liberation of Palestinian land. What is required is not a politics of saving, but one of solidarity – one that recognizes the bombing of a fertility clinic in Gaza and the administrative silencing of a survivor in East Jerusalem not as separate crises, but as expressions of the same governing logic. As Angela Davis reminds us, feminism "involves so much more than gender equality, and it involves so much more than gender." Gender cannot be treated as a discrete or

> **The emancipation of Palestinian women is inseparable from the humanity of Palestinian men and the liberation of Palestinian land.**

This is where solidarity must take shape – not as sentiment or symbolic alignment, but as a shared political commitment with consequence. As Indigenous Australian activist Lilla Watson so powerfully articulated, "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

abstract category; it is produced through colonial violence, racialized law, incarceration, and collective punishment. Feminism must therefore confront the structures that determine whose lives are protected, whose suffering is rendered visible, and whose existence is made conditional.

SCAN TO SHARE



Aida Qleibo is a Jerusalemite Palestinian decolonial feminist activist and researcher. She holds a BA in international law and human rights, with a minor in political science, from Bard Liberal Arts College, and an MA in nonprofit management and leadership for social change from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research examines decolonial feminism, human rights, and the political structures shaping Palestinian life.

[1] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, 2003.

[2] Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, London: Pluto Press, 2019.

[3] María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22(1), 2007: 186–209.

[4] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6), July 1991: 1241–1299.

[5] Islah Jad, *Palestinian Women's Activism: Nationalism, Secularism, Islamism,* Syracuse University Press, 2018.

[6] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage, 1977.

[7] Adalah, "'Ban on Family Unification' - Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order)," January 25, 2026.

[8] Adalah, "Israel Reinstates Ban on Palestinian Family Unification," January 25, 2026.

[9] Physicians for Human Rights, "Israel's Ban on Palestinian Family Unification: Analysis and Recommendations," Adalah, 2014.

[10] UN News: Global Perspectives and Human Stories, "Gaza's Maternal and Newborn Health System 'Decimated,' UN Warns," United Nations, December 11, 2025.

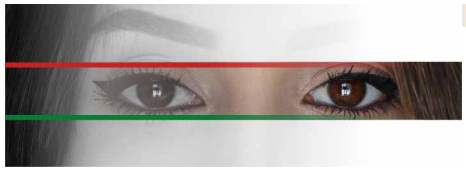
Ambassador
COLLECTION



Under one roof, we gather for her
with lots of love & gratitude

Happy Mother's Day

Ambassador Hotel | Sheikh Jarrah | Nablus Rd.5
Call to reserve 025412222



Building Gender Equality from the Grassroots

Women and Youth Mobilize

By Randa Siniora



Providing psychological support to members of the cultural forum.

Palestinian women and girls live under multiple, compounding systems of oppression. Within their own society, they face entrenched patriarchy, persistent gender-based violence (GBV), and deep socioeconomic marginalization. At the same time, their lives are shaped – and constrained – by the structural violence of Israeli colonial occupation: militarization, forced displacement, apartheid policies, settler terrorism, and the systematic dismantling of legal and social protections. These intersecting forms of oppression deprive women of safety, dignity, access to justice, and the full enjoyment of their rights.

For decades, Palestinian women have borne the brunt of both colonial occupation and patriarchal structures that confine them to traditional roles and limit their participation in public life. Our intersectional feminist experience shows that in times of crisis, conflict, and colonial occupation, repression deepens and GBV intensifies – often behind closed doors, beyond headlines, and outside the reach of formal protection systems. Political violence does not remain at checkpoints or frontlines; it seeps into private spaces, magnifying existing inequalities and exposing women and girls to heightened risk.

For the past 35 years, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) has worked alongside Palestinian women to confront these intersecting systems of oppression. WCLAC has provided free legal aid and psychosocial support to women survivors of gender-based violence, represented women in family courts, and advocated for laws, policies, and legislation grounded in equality, nondiscrimination, and respect for women's rights and gender equality. It played a pioneering role in developing protection systems, including initiating the national referral system for women survivors of domestic violence, contributing to the establishment of the first protection shelter, and supporting the development of specialized family protection units within the Palestinian Civilian Police. WCLAC was also the first feminist organization to conduct systematic training and capacity building for government officials and service providers within official Palestinian institutions.

Grassroots Organizations as a Successful Model for Reaching Women in Marginalized Areas: Grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) have strengthened WCLAC's ability to reach women in marginalized and remote areas by providing safe spaces for accessing legal and social services and for raising awareness about their rights. WCLAC has played a key role in delivering legal services and psychosocial support, as well as organizing awareness sessions in cooperation with CBOs, ensuring that services reach women facing economic or social hardships – particularly in marginalized areas that suffer from limited services. In areas of the northern part of the West Bank with thousands of families displaced, CBOs responded quickly to women's and girls' needs and addressed increasing cases of gender-based violence (GBV). WCLAC has also coordinated local activities through grassroots organizations to enhance community engagement in protecting women, building their capacities, and empowering them to make sound decisions about their lives and futures, while ensuring continued support and follow-up beyond the direct activities.



Launching the seventh women's protection network, located in Jenin.



Volunteers of a youth initiative.

At the same time, WCLAC has worked closely with grassroots feminist and women-led organizations, reaching the most marginalized Palestinian women in remote areas, villages, refugee camps, and Bedouin communities. Through this work, WCLAC learned that legal reform and service provision alone are not sufficient. Sustainable change requires social mobilization and the widening of alliances to include local communities, activists, volunteers, youth-led community-based organizations (CBOs), and both women and men. Without working directly with rights holders, professional organizations risk remaining distant and disconnected from the lived realities they seek to change. Grounded in international human rights law and Palestine's obligations under treaties it has acceded to, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, WCLAC adopted a feminist, intersectional, women-led, transformative, and evidence-based approach. Working at the grassroots became central to influencing national and international advocacy and to building feminist solidarity movements that are rooted in human rights values, mutual accountability, and knowledge exchange – particularly among feminists in the Global South and beyond. This solidarity is shaped by amplifying the voices of the most marginalized women and by a deep analysis of the intersecting oppressive forces that reinforce one another and deepen inequality and discrimination.

Our feminist practice affirms a simple truth: Gender equality cannot be imposed from above. It must be rooted in women's lived realities and driven by their needs, priorities, and active participation as rights holders and agents of change. Legal reform, while necessary, is not enough. Transformative change requires confronting social, cultural, and religious norms that sustain patriarchal power, alongside resisting colonial structures that deny Palestinians their fundamental rights to freedom and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Women's rights and gender equality are political, and the private and the public domains are inseparable.

Recognizing that meaningful change must be community-driven, WCLAC made a strategic decision to work in partnership with women-led and youth-led community-based organizations to build networks of support, advocacy, and leadership. These partnerships ensure that marginalized women can access psychosocial and legal services within their own communities, without crossing Israeli checkpoints or traveling to urban centers – constraints often compounded by patriarchal social norms. Working with women became essential to addressing their priorities and to honoring the principle that nothing about women should happen without their meaningful engagement and participation.

Through its social mobilization program, WCLAC has built strategic partnerships with professional hubs, volunteers, and human rights activists,



A training session with members of protection networks.



Training young people on the division of inheritance funds.



A meeting of feminist activists in Bethlehem.

both women and men. It has initiated seven protection networks across West Bank governorates, focused on the prevention of and response to GBV. These networks bring together feminist organizations and official service providers, strengthening communities' ability to respond rapidly to life-threatening situations, ensure survivors' access to critical services, and reinforce local protection mechanisms. Through the Palestinian national referral system, these networks respond collaboratively to emergencies while also raising awareness through mobile clinics, educational sessions, and emergency interventions during settler attacks, forced displacement, and other Israeli violations. Their effectiveness lies in being locally rooted, trusted, and ready to respond to community needs and priorities.

Partnerships with youth-led CBOs also empower young women and men to challenge violence, inequality, and injustice from within their own communities. Youth volunteers and human rights activists reach spaces traditionally dominated by men – such as coffee shops, schools, and public gatherings – using art, music, digital campaigns, and new technologies, including AI, to spark dialogue on gender equality in innovative ways. Grounded in local realities, these initiatives challenge claims by conservative and extremist actors that feminism is a "Western agenda," affirming instead that respect for women's rights is an authentic Palestinian value. This further enhances our efforts toward social change by meaningfully engaging youth to address new problems and emerging forms of violence faced by women, such as cybercrimes, which are becoming increasingly common. As catalysts for change, youth CBOs and young volunteers conduct digital advocacy campaigns on social media, reaching wider audiences and influencing younger generations in meaningful and more relevant ways.

Grassroots engagement goes beyond immediate interventions. It fosters transformative change in social norms and public consciousness, addressing gender discrimination at both individual and collective levels. Working with women, youth, and local activists makes these efforts credible, resilient, and sustainable within Palestinian society.

Today, more than ever, Palestinian women demonstrate remarkable resilience and leadership in the face of the genocidal war on Gaza, forced displacement and land expropriation in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and escalating settler violence and daily terrorism. Supporting their organizing, amplifying their voices, and investing in community-led feminist initiatives is not only a moral imperative – it is essential for advancing gender justice and human rights in Palestine.

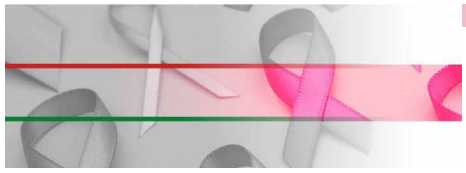
SCAN
TO SHARE

A meeting of protection network coordinators.





Randa Siniora is the general director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling. She is a human rights and women's rights activist with over 38 years of professional experience in the field of international human rights and humanitarian law, and was the first Palestinian woman to brief the UN Security Council on women, peace, and security in 2018. In 2019 she was recognized as one of the 100 most influential people in gender policy around the world. Randa holds an LLM in international human rights law from the University of Essex in the United Kingdom and an MA in sociology-anthropology from the American University in Cairo.



Early Detection Saves Lives

Strengthening Breast Cancer Screening in Palestine

Courtesy of UNFPA

Breast cancer remains the most common cancer among women in Palestine and a serious public health challenge. According to the 2024 annual health report, 584 new cases were recorded in the West Bank alone, with an incidence rate of 19.5 per 100,000 people. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Palestine overall, and breast cancer ranks first among cancer-related deaths among women.

Despite this burden, screening coverage remains critically low. Over 65 percent of the West Bank is classified as Area C, home to nearly 300,000 Palestinians who face significant barriers to accessing healthcare. Among women aged 40 to 64, only 1.8 percent of those targeted for breast cancer screening in the West Bank were examined in 2024. This gap undermines efforts to detect the disease early and reduce mortality.

To help close this gap, UNFPA supports five mobile clinics across the West Bank. One mobile clinic, operated with Augusta Victoria Hospital, provides breast cancer screening and referral services. Four additional mobile clinics, operated with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, deliver primary healthcare, antenatal, postnatal care, and STI services, expanding access to essential reproductive health services in underserved communities.

Suheir from Tulkarem remembers feeling confused when she first noticed symptoms. Like many women, she did not know which service to approach. A friend directed her to *Fahsek Hayatek*



Woman at a UNFPA-supported AVH mobile clinic in the West Bank holding a badge with a pink ribbon for breast cancer awareness. ©UNFPA/Ahed Izhiman.

Early detection is not merely a recommendation; it is a lifesaving intervention. Yet for many women, the barrier is not unwillingness but uncertainty about where to go. The challenge is to ensure that every woman has the knowledge, access, and support to act in time.



A female community health worker consulting a woman and reviewing medical forms inside a temporary tent clinic in the West Bank as part of a PMRS mobile primary and reproductive health service. ©UNFPA/PMRS.



An AVH mobile clinic parked in a West Bank community, offering breast cancer screening and health services to women. ©UNFPA/Hardy Skills.



A nurse navigator presenting a breast cancer awareness session to a classroom of girls in a West Bank school. ©UNFPA/Mariam Foundation.

("Your Checkup, Your Life"), a digital application developed* by Augusta Victoria Hospital with UNFPA and funded by the Government of Japan. Through it, she identified available screening services and connected with a mobile clinic operating in her area. "At first, I noticed symptoms and wanted to act, but I felt lost. I didn't know where to go or who to ask," she says. "The mobile clinic helped me get screened in Tulkarem. After that, they followed up with me step by step until I reached the hospital. The way the doctors treated me, their approach and the way they spoke, made me feel like I mattered."

Mobile clinics bridge access gaps, particularly in hard-to-reach communities, by bringing healthcare services, including screening and referral services, closer to women who might otherwise delay care. The clinics provide examinations, counseling, awareness sessions, and coordinated referrals to specialized facilities when needed.

Suheir's experience highlights a broader structural issue: Access alone is not enough. Women need guidance throughout the continuum of care. To address this gap, UNFPA, with the Mariam Foundation, has introduced the breast cancer Nurse Navigator model in Palestine, marking the first initiative of its kind in the country. Designed specifically for the local health system, the model introduces structured coordination from suspicion or diagnosis through treatment and survivorship. Nurse navigators coordinate between hospitals and specialists, provide medical information, conduct psychosocial assessments, and ensure that women understand their options.

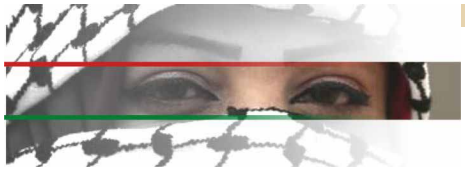
More than service providers, nurse navigators serve as consistent points of contact in a system that can otherwise feel fragmented. By reducing delays, strengthening referrals, and improving continuity of care, the model aims to lower drop-out rates and improve treatment outcomes.

Suheir now uses her experience to encourage others. "I want to tell every woman, even if she isn't sick, that early detection is a must. Every woman should go and get screened," she says. She understands the hesitation many women feel. Yet delaying a test out of fear can allow the disease to progress silently, making treatment more complex and outcomes less certain.

Expanding screening coverage, strengthening mobile outreach, integrating digital tools, and institutionalizing nurse navigation are not isolated measures. Together, they form a coordinated response to reduce late diagnosis and prevent avoidable deaths. Ensuring that women are informed, supported, and able to access services without delay is essential to reversing current trends and improving survival outcomes nationwide.

SCAN TO SHARE

*https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.progmix.app.avh&hl=ar



Rooted in the Land

Rural Women as the Backbone of Palestinian Steadfastness (Sumud) in Area C

By Rulla Sarras



With women from RWDS around the oldest olive tree in the world in al-Walaja, Bethlehem on March 8, International Women's Day.

Rural women in Area C hold far more than households together; they hold land, food systems, and continuity under constant constraint. While women's official labor force participation in Palestine is around 19 percent, much of rural women's agricultural and cooperative work remains unpaid and invisible. Their enterprises and daily cultivation are not only livelihoods but acts of resilience that sustain community presence. Investing in rural women is not charity – it is a strategic investment in Palestine's social stability, food sovereignty, and steadfastness.

Before the first light reaches the hills of Area C, a rural woman is already awake. She steps outside not only to begin her work, but to check what remains. She looks toward her olive trees to see if they were damaged overnight. She inspects the water tank that may have been punctured. She presses her hand into soil she planted days ago, measuring moisture with experience rather than instruments. Her land is not only farmland. It is inheritance. It is livelihood. It is proof of presence. She knows the access road may close without warning. She knows irrigation may be restricted this week. She knows expansion is nearly impossible under permit systems that keep communities in permanent uncertainty. Still, she plants. Still, she irrigates. Still, she harvests. This is how *sumud* is practiced in rural Palestine.

Rural communities in the West Bank are situated largely in Area C, an area that comprises more than 60 percent of the land. Though only about 14 percent of Palestinians reside in rural localities, these communities inhabit the majority of the territory. In this expansive and tightly controlled space, rural women sustain cultivation, households, and the continuity of presence. Official figures indicate that women's labor force participation in Palestine stands at around 19 percent, among the lowest globally. Yet this number conceals more than it reveals. It does not capture the unpaid agricultural labor, livestock care, food preservation, and cooperative organizing that define rural women's daily contribution to household survival and rural stability.[1]

In agriculture, a sector that contributes around 7 to 8 percent to Palestine's GDP, women are indispensable actors.[2] They cultivate land, manage livestock, process dairy, harvest olives, grow thyme, preserve seasonal foods, and stabilize household economies. They are farmers, producers, environmental stewards, and caregivers simultaneously. Their work is often described as "help," when in reality it is the foundation that keeps rural families and communities functioning.

To understand Palestinian steadfastness is to understand rural women. In Area C, where more than 60 percent of the West Bank remains under full Israeli control, daily life is shaped by layered constraints that affect every agricultural decision.[3] Restrictions on land registration, construction permits, water infrastructure, and movement fragment communities and impose high costs on rural livelihoods. Roads can close without warning. Agricultural inputs can be delayed or blocked. Water networks are uneven and often insufficient, and access to natural resources, particularly water springs, is largely controlled by the Israeli occupation. In many places, families farm under the constant reality that infrastructure improvements may be denied, delayed, or targeted. In this landscape, agricultural continuity is not simply economic activity. It is territorial presence. Rural women sustain that presence.

For more than two decades, my work, through the Rural Women Development Society (RWDS) and through academic research, has focused on rural women's economic resilience. I have worked alongside women in Bethlehem, Hebron, Jenin, Tulkarem, and remote communities in



Greenhouse in Wadi Foukin village, cucumber cultivation. Wadi Foukin Women's Club.

Area C, listening to how they navigate the intersection of occupation, gender norms, and economic exclusion. Their strategies are rarely dramatic. They are practical. They are built around risk management, household survival, and the constant calculation of what is possible today.

My recently approved research paper, "Challenges Facing Palestinian Rural Women Entrepreneurs That Impact the Sustainability of Their Enterprises in the West Bank," to be published in *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, examines the layered barriers that rural women face. Political instability disrupts access to markets. Limited access to land and water constrains production choices. Permit regimes restrict the expansion of greenhouses and agricultural structures. Market fragmentation reduces profit margins and predictability. At the same time, gendered inheritance patterns and limited access to collateral restrict women's financial autonomy, often leaving women to build enterprises with minimal capital and high exposure to shocks.

Yet the research also revealed something vital: Innovation mediates sustainability. Sustainability in rural Palestine is not theoretical. It unfolds across three interconnected dimensions that rural women manage simultaneously: economic viability, social legitimacy, and environmental resilience.

Economically, rural women build home-based enterprises and cooperatives to generate income under conditions of instability. Olive oil production, dairy processing, herbal cultivation, embroidery, and preserved foods form the backbone of rural markets. Because formal financial access is limited, women often depend on collective models and cooperative structures to pool resources and share risk. Cooperatives also create space for women to access training, market information, and shared equipment that would be difficult to secure individually.

Socially, entrepreneurship gradually reshapes norms. Income generation strengthens women's decision-making power within households. Cooperative leadership expands women's public roles. Change rarely arrives through confrontation. It emerges through persistence, credibility, and the slow accumulation of proof that women's economic leadership benefits families and communities.

Environmentally, rural women adapt constantly. Water-saving irrigation, crop diversification, and indigenous seed preservation are not optional improvements. They are survival mechanisms in a context of increasing scarcity and climate stress. In southern West Bank communities that are facing limited water access, thyme has become a strategic crop because it can withstand harsh conditions and requires less water than many alternatives. What appears to be a small agricultural choice is often a highly strategic decision that links environmental reality to household income.



Maftoul produced by Wadi Foukin Women's Club; Food Processing Unit.

Innovation in rural Palestine is not luxury. It is adaptive intelligence under pressure. And in Area C, adaptation carries political weight. Agriculture anchors land. Cultivation reinforces belonging. Continuity strengthens presence.

Um Ihab from Wadi Rahal embodies this reality. She lives from her land and protects it daily. Settler attacks have damaged her crops and uprooted trees. Water tanks have been vandalized. Every planting season carries uncertainty, and every crop she cultivates has a struggle story attached to it. "If they destroy my land and uproot my plants and trees," she says, "I will continue to work with more determination." Her words are not symbolic. They are practical. Each time she replants, she refuses disappearance. Each harvest becomes an affirmation that leaving is not an option. Her persistence is not just personal strength; it is a form of livelihood defense and land preservation enacted through daily labor.

Her story reflects a broader pattern across rural Palestine. During periods of intensified closure, economic downturn, and most recently the genocide in Gaza and escalating settler attacks in the West Bank, rural women have repeatedly demonstrated their centrality to community survival. When supply chains falter, home gardens buffer food insecurity. When markets are inaccessible, cooperatives reorganize local distribution. When movement becomes restricted, women absorb expanded responsibilities, not only in agriculture but also in



Salwa Odeh (Um Ihab) at Naba'a Al-Khayrat Market, presenting her organic products, including za'atar, olives, and medicinal herbs.



Palestinian women producers from RWDS at Terra Madre Salone del Gusto 2024, Turin, showcasing thyme and olive oil.

caregiving, community coordination, and household crisis management. Much of this labor remains unpaid. Much of it remains absent from economic indicators. Yet it sustains rural Palestine.

Despite their indispensable role, rural women remain underrepresented in economic governance. Women own only a small fraction of registered agricultural land. Agricultural credit systems often require collateral tied to land and property, which many women do not possess due to inheritance patterns and registration barriers. Decision-making bodies within agricultural unions and market institutions remain predominantly male spaces. The contradiction is stark: Rural women sustain the rural economy while remaining marginal to the policies and structures that shape it.

If *sumud* is to move beyond admiration and become strategy, recognition must translate into structural support. Development frameworks must treat rural women's enterprises as strategic contributors to food sovereignty and territorial resilience, not as short-term income projects. Area C policies must incorporate gendered analysis, recognizing that restrictions on water infrastructure, land access, and agricultural inputs often fall hardest on women-led initiatives. In a context where movement and access are unstable, long-term investment in cooperatives, shared production spaces, and local processing facilities becomes essential, not secondary.

Digital inclusion and value-chain integration are also no longer optional. Rural women already innovate, but their ability to reach markets is often limited by geography, transport constraints, and lack of access to digital tools. Expanding women's access to marketing channels, sustainable packaging, and market networks can transform survival-based enterprises into more resilient livelihoods.

Most importantly, rural women must participate in shaping rural economic policy. Their lived experience navigating layered instability provides insight that cannot be replicated by external frameworks. Rural women understand the terrain – political, social, and environmental – because they live it every day. Policy that ignores this lived reality cannot produce sustainable outcomes.

The March issue of *This Week in Palestine* centers women at the forefront. In rural Palestine, women have long been at the forefront, not through visibility alone, but through continuity. Their leadership is steady rather than loud. It is found in irrigation lines repaired after sabotage. In trees replanted after uprooting. In cooperative kitchens that transform seasonal produce into income. In seeds preserved for seasons that remain uncertain. It is found in women who carry the daily weight of farming, caring, and sustaining life under pressure.

The backbone of Palestinian steadfastness is not abstract. It is rooted in women who wake before dawn to tend contested land, who calculate water use against unpredictable supply, and who refuse abandonment through cultivation. They do not simply survive on the land. They hold it. And as long as rural women continue to plant, protect, organize, and innovate, Palestinian presence remains anchored, quietly, strategically, and unyieldingly, in the soil of Area C.

SCAN TO SHARE

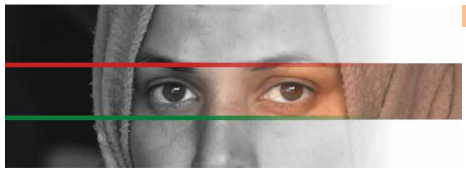


Dr. Rulla Sarras is director of funding and development at the Rural Women Development Society (RWDS) and a researcher focusing on rural women's entrepreneurship and sustainability. She holds a PhD in strategic planning and crisis management from Leeds International College, UK, and an MSc in human resources management from Claremont Graduate University, completed under the prestigious Clinton Scholarship (US State Department). She has led development and humanitarian programs supporting rural women and youth across Palestine and serves as chairperson of the Global Advisory Board for the Fair 4 All Program at Oxfam Novib and a member of the Bethlehem Governorate Consultative Council.

[1] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Survey: Annual Results 2023*, Ramallah: PCBS, 2024.

[2] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *National Accounts Statistics 2023: Gross Domestic Product by Economic Activity*, Ramallah: PCBS, 2024.

[3] World Bank, *Area C and the Future of the Palestinian Economy*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2013.



Beyond Survival

Women Driving Structural Transformation

Courtesy of CARE Palestine



Women Lead in Emergencies Training, Ramallah. Photo courtesy of CARE Palestine.

CARE applies an integrated approach to women's equality and empowerment in Palestine. For example, its Women Voice and Leadership (WVL) program considers institutional strength as power, building trust-based partnerships among women-led organizations. Other programs aim to advance women's agency and participation in social and economic transformation.

In Palestine, women's leadership is a visible reality, including on International Women's Day. Across communities, women sustain institutions, manage families, deliver services, run enterprises, and shape civic life under occupation, economic contraction, and recurring humanitarian crisis. Yet systems remain fragile: Women-led organizations face limited investment, while entrepreneurs and micro, small, and medium enterprises owners navigate shrinking markets and restricted mobility.

CARE's Women Equality and Empowerment (WEE) portfolio supports women's agency, connecting institutional support with economic opportunity. The approach advances women's agency, shifts power relations within households and institutions, and reforms systems that shape access to resources and decision-making. With support from donors, collaboration across the CARE global network, and partnerships with local actors, this approach strengthens change from communities outward.

In context of shrinking civic space and volatile funding environments, institutional fragility can undermine feminist movements. Women Voice and Leadership (WVL) program strengthens CARE's long-term investment in institutional resilience, replacing transactional grants with trust-based partnership. Through rapid response mechanisms, multi-year funding, capacity strengthening, and sisterhood networks, WVL promotes women-led organizations as local humanitarian leaders and rights advocates shaping agendas.

Sukaina Khalawi, of Women Media and Development (TAM) states, "This experience was more than a set of implemented activities. It created space for learning, exchange, and shared decision-making, where localized leadership was visible and communities were engaged as key actors of change."

To strengthen economic resilience, CARE established the AMALI and WATAD projects, supporting displaced women, integrating skills development, mentorship, and market linkages. around 150 grants provide financial and nonfinancial support to help women stabilize and grow their businesses.

Salam Bayatneh, founder of Peace Pieces Jewelry, joined AMALI when restricted mobility and declining purchasing power reduced her sales. Through training, digital tools adoption, and grant support, she diversified her products, strengthened her planning, and expanded her market reach. Today, her business has stabilized and grown, generating income for her household and creating jobs for other women. She explains, "joining AMALI was a turning point for me and for Peace Pieces Jewelry. It gave me the space to think bigger, refine my vision, and grow despite the challenges. Through mentorship and connecting with inspiring women, I strengthened my leadership and began managing my business strategically. The impact was not only professional, but deeply personal; my hesitation turned into confident steps forward."

For displaced women, economic loss comounds trauma and restricts recovery. By restoring income-generating activities and reconnecting women to markets, the initiative bridges humanitarian response with long-term recovery.

The Powered by Women (PbW) project advances leadership, civic participation, economic justice, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and social norms transformation. Through flexible, women-governed grants and the Women Lead in Emergencies model, it strengthens emergency leadership, advocacy capacity, and meaningful participation in decision-making. These layers form a cohesive ecosystem connecting institutions, livelihoods, and leadership to shift power.

Across CARE's Women Equality and Empowerment (WEE) portfolio, institutional strength, economic agency, and collective leadership drive change. Women-led organizations stabilize communities, entrepreneurs strengthen local economies, and feminist networks sustain solidarity. Palestinian women are not merely surviving crises; they are redesigning the systems shaping their future.

SCAN TO SHARE



A Hidden War

Education as a Battleground Under Occupation

By Georgette Hazboun Rabadi



Notorious Qalandia checkpoint every morning.

> **This is what I have come to understand as the hidden war on Palestinian education. It is not fought with tanks or airstrikes alone. It unfolds quietly in ministries, courtrooms, and classrooms. It operates through curriculum revisions, permit regimes, funding conditions, and legal restrictions. It targets not only schools, but identity itself. And in Jerusalem, it is intensifying.**

On a cold winter morning in Jerusalem, a young teacher stands at a checkpoint along the apartheid wall before sunrise. In her bag are lesson plans, graded papers, and a children's story about olive trees. In her heart is a simple intention: to reach her classroom. Yet she waits, uncertain whether she will be allowed to pass. Behind her, dozens of Palestinians stand in long, quiet lines, hoping to cross in time for work. In front of her, an impersonal system determines whether she may teach her students. I remember my own mornings there, standing shoulder to shoulder with crowds before dawn, all of us carrying responsibilities that could not be postponed.

As Interim Dean of the Faculty of Education at Bethlehem University, where nearly 60 percent of our students across our bachelor's and master's programs come from Jerusalem, I witness the impact of this struggle every day. Our students, 90 percent of whom are women, do not simply study pedagogy; they navigate a fragmented landscape of permits, licensing systems, financial instability, and political uncertainty. For many of them, becoming a teacher is both a calling and a risk.

Education under occupation has long been recognized as particularly vulnerable. UNESCO affirms that the right to education must be protected during conflict and occupation and that education should safeguard cultural identity and human dignity.[1] Yet in Jerusalem, the Palestinian curriculum – an expression of collective memory, history, and national identity – faces growing pressure.

In recent years, Israeli authorities have required changes to Palestinian textbooks used in Jerusalem schools, removing references to Palestinian history, geography, and national symbols, often under the justification of preventing incitement. For many Palestinians, recalling their culture, history, and identity is increasingly framed as a political threat. According to reports by Human Rights Watch and Palestinian educational organizations, revised textbooks have deleted maps, removed references to the *Nakba*, and modified terminology connected to identity.[2] The message sent to children is indirect yet deeply profound: Your story can be revised, your history adjusted, and your narrative made conditional upon approval.

For many schools, the pressure goes further. Funding and licensing are often conditioned on the adoption of the Israeli curriculum (*bagrut*, the Israeli national matriculation certificate required for high school graduation, university admission, and employment, typically taken in 11th–12th grade). Private and semi-private Palestinian schools in Jerusalem face an impossible choice: Accept the imposed curriculum to secure budgets and permits, or risk financial blockage and potential closure.[3] Schools that resist report delays in license renewals or threats to their legal status. This is not merely a bureaucratic adjustment; it reshapes the intellectual and emotional formation of a generation. Curriculum is never neutral. It carries narratives of belonging, memory, and future possibility. When Palestinian history is diluted or removed, students internalize a fragmented identity. Education becomes a space of cognitive dissonance, where home narratives clash with textbook silences.

Teachers, too, stand at the center of this hidden war. Many Palestinian educators living in the West Bank must obtain special permits to enter Jerusalem. These permits are frequently denied or delayed, leaving classrooms without qualified staff. Women teachers are particularly affected, having to balance family responsibilities with the unpredictability of crossing



Children on their way to and from school have to navigate at least one of the over 200 checkpoints and gates that Israel has installed in the old city of Khalil (Hebron).

Imagine a classroom where students wait for a mathematics teacher who may never arrive because her/his permit was revoked. Imagine a science lab without a certified instructor because she/he lives on the other side of a wall. Education becomes irregular, unstable, and fragile.

systems. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has repeatedly documented how movement restrictions disrupt access to essential services, including education.[4] Many teachers in Palestinian society are women, especially in elementary schools. Moreover, their income frequently supports their families financially, while they also care for children and elderly relatives. When salaries are delayed or permits are denied, the impact is therefore not only professional but also personal and economic. Entire families are affected. In this way, the pressure placed on education also becomes a pressure placed on women.

Recent legal developments deepen the crisis. New policies restrict graduates of Palestinian faculties of education from working in schools under Israeli municipal control in Jerusalem. Degrees earned in Palestinian universities – once a badge of professional qualification – are increasingly treated as liabilities. Young graduates ask me: "If I study here, will I be allowed to teach?" This question alone reveals the distortion of a system where education is politicized to the point of professional exclusion.

The hidden war extends beyond curricula and teachers. International institutions operating in Jerusalem – many of which provide vital services in health, social work, and education – face increasing pressure regarding licensing and operational permits. When licenses are not renewed, services are suspended. When funding channels are restricted, programs shrink. Education is interconnected with these broader institutional ecosystems. When a community center closes or a scholarship program loses legal standing, the ripple effect reaches the classroom.

Meanwhile, Palestinian government schools in the West Bank struggle under severe financial constraints. The Palestinian Authority faces recurring budget deficits, exacerbated by the withholding of tax revenues collected by Israel on its behalf (in violation of signed agreements). These fiscal crises directly affect teachers' salaries, often leaving them for many months with partial or unpaid wages, forcing strikes as a last resort. Teacher strikes in the Palestinian Authority public schools are rarely about ideology; they are about survival. Educators demand the payment of delayed salaries, fair contracts, and professional recognition. Budget shortages furthermore limit infrastructure, resources, and professional development opportunities. Political instability and restrictions linked to the occupation further disrupt continuity, often reducing teaching to only two or three days per week, a reality that impacts not only students' learning outcomes but also teachers' families and the economy as a whole. UNESCO and UNICEF have repeatedly warned that prolonged disruptions to schooling undermine learning, social cohesion, and children's mental well-being.[5]

This struggle parallels the situation in schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, in refugee camps, where generations of Palestinians have already endured cycles of forced displacement and loss. Refugee camps, established as temporary shelters for those uprooted in 1948 and 1967, have long depended on UNRWA to provide essential services, including healthcare and education. Today, that fragile stability is increasingly threatened. Schools that once offered safety and normalcy are being closed or demolished, and clinics that provided basic care are no longer secure. Families that were expelled decades ago now face the risk of displacement once again, without certainty, security, or access to basic services.

In both contexts – governmental schools and UNRWA schools in refugee camps in the West Bank – the disruption of education reflects a broader reality: The ongoing occupation and structural challenges risk not only learning but also identity, dignity, and the continuity of Palestinian life. A 2025 UN report highlights how displacement, restricted access to services, and interruptions to schooling have devastating effects on children and families, amplifying poverty, limiting opportunities, and threatening basic rights.[6] Whether in public schools, refugee camps, or private schools, the education system is under pressure, underscoring the urgent need for sustained support, protection, and global attention.

For our applied students – those completing their practicum in governmental schools – the situation is heartbreaking. Many of these practicum students are young women preparing to become teachers. They face uncertainty about whether they will be allowed to work in Jerusalem schools after graduation. This creates stress and fear about their future. They invest years in their studies, yet they are unsure if they will be able to practice their profession. For young women especially, this uncertainty affects career planning, financial independence, and personal life decisions. Add to this situation that these young professionals enter classrooms where their mentor teachers have not received full salaries for months. They observe strikes that interrupt academic calendars. They witness exhaustion in the eyes of professionals who still insist on teaching despite financial uncertainty. For some of our Jerusalem students,



We teach our children about Palestine.



Daily dehumanization and humiliation of Palestinians.



The hidden war continues, but so does the determination to teach.

commuting itself is a daily negotiation with checkpoints and transportation barriers. And yet, despite all this, classrooms persist.

I have sat in lectures at our Faculty of Education where students from Jerusalem share stories of teaching children who ask difficult questions: "Why is our map different?" "Why did my teacher disappear?" "Why do we not learn about our grandparents' village?" "Why does my little sister in kindergarten need a permit to pass the checkpoints? "Why can't we go to the sea?" These are not abstract inquiries; they are the lived experience of a generation raised in contested narratives.

The Fourth Geneva Convention obligates an occupying power to facilitate the proper working of educational institutions and to ensure the welfare of children.[7] Yet the cumulative effect of curriculum control, permit denial, financial pressure, and legal exclusion suggests a systematic reshaping of the educational landscape. It is a form of structural domination that rarely makes headlines but profoundly shapes futures.

Education is not only about literacy and numeracy, it is about dignity. It is about the right of a child to see herself reflected in her textbooks. It is about the right of a teacher to cross a checkpoint without fearing that her profession will be suspended by a bureaucratic stamp. It is about the right of a university graduate to practice the vocation for which she trained. And it is about giving girls and young women hope for a stable future in their own communities. Teaching has long been one of the main professions through which Palestinian women contribute to society and support their families. When education becomes unstable, women's opportunities become unstable as well. Protecting education therefore also means protecting women's role in public and professional life.

As an educator and administrator, I often reflect on what it means that 60 percent of our students come from Jerusalem. They carry the city's tensions into our classrooms. They bring resilience, determination, and, at times, anxiety about their professional futures. When policies render their degrees uncertain or their practicum placements unstable, the impact is not theoretical; it is personal. The hidden war on education seeks to normalize uncertainty. It attempts to transform instability into routine. It reframes identity as a curricular error to be corrected. But education in Palestine has always been more than institutional policy; it is an act of collective perseverance.

In villages and cities, teachers continue to improvise when books are altered, to adapt when colleagues are denied entry, to teach when salaries are delayed. Universities continue to graduate cohorts of educators who believe that classrooms remain spaces of possibility. Parents continue to send their children to school, even when political realities intrude on the school gate. International reports consistently affirm that quality education contributes to peacebuilding, resilience, and social stability.[8] To undermine it is to weaken the very foundations of a just future. The struggle over Palestinian education in Jerusalem is therefore not marginal; it is central to the broader question of rights, identity, and coexistence.

The teacher at the checkpoint eventually passes. She reaches her classroom late, but her students greet her with smiles. She begins the lesson not with politics, but with a poem about the land. In her quiet persistence lies resistance. In her daily return lies hope.

SCAN TO SHARE



Dr. Georgette Hazboun Rabadi is currently the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Education at Bethlehem University, where she has served for several years in academic, administrative, and leadership roles while continuing to teach a range of courses and remaining deeply engaged in teacher preparation. With 34 years of experience in education, she bridges higher and school education supporting and coordinating with schools and teachers. She integrates expertise in university work, school leadership, and research, guided by her lifelong philosophy: "As long as you're alive, you ought to learn."

[1] Brendan O'Malley, *Education Under Attack, 2010: A Global Study on Targeted Political and Military Violence Against Education Staff, Students, Teachers, Union and Government Officials, Aid Workers and Institutions,* UNESCO, 2010.

[2] Education Cluster: Occupied Palestinian Territory, "*Education Cluster Strategy: Palestine 2020–2021,"* 2020.

[3] International Crisis Group, *"Reversing Israel's Deepening Annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem* (Report 202, Middle East & North Africa)," June 12, 2019.

[4] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Factsheet: West Bank Movement and Access Update," May 2025; UNESCO, "Education in Emergencies: Education Is a Lifeline for Children in Crises," and UNICEF, "Education in Emergencies: Ensuring the Right to Education in Emergencies and Building Resilience in the Face of Crisis."

[5] International Committee of the Red Cross, *Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War,* August 12, 1949 (English text).

[6] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Factsheet: West Bank Movement and Access Update," May 2025.

[7] UNICEF, "The State of the World's Children 2024: The Future of Childhood in a Changing World," 2024.

[8] UNESCO, "Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 press release: 251 Million Children and Youth Still Out of School, Despite Decades of Progress," October 31, 2024.



Leading Under Constraint

My Political and Diplomatic Experience as a Palestinian Woman

By H.E. Vera Baboun, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Chile



Latin America Diaspora Conference in Bethlehem 2016.

Palestinian women's leadership has long been diverse and resilient, rooted in the collective effort to sustain and serve the Palestinian nation. Across generations, women have shaped political mobilization, social organization, education, cultural preservation, and diplomacy, often operating within conditions of occupation and limited sovereignty. Emerging from both formal institutions and grassroots initiatives, their leadership reflects a continuous commitment to national identity and self-determination. My own trajectory forms part of this broader legacy of Palestinian women navigating structural and political challenges while advancing the national struggle.

Understanding Palestinian women's leadership within the Palestinian context requires acknowledging the realities of occupation, incomplete sovereignty, and the ongoing pursuit of self-determination. My trajectory has evolved within these conditions, shaped by the responsibility of representing the Palestinian nation while navigating complex political realities. The intersection of my political experience, academic engagement, personal history, gendered perspective, and my recent diplomatic mission has defined my approach to leadership, reflecting how agency is actively constructed through resilience, strategic engagement, and the deliberate advancement of national objectives.

Understanding how this leadership translates into diplomacy requires examining its political foundations. My political experience, including my role as a member of the Palestinian National Council (since 2018) and the Palestinian Central Council (since 2025), and as the former mayor of Bethlehem, has profoundly informed my diplomatic voice. These roles required navigating the complexities of representation within a national movement that operates under asymmetrical power conditions and fragmented institutional realities. In such settings, political participation is not only about decision-making but about sustaining legitimacy, preserving unity, and negotiating the boundaries between aspiration and constraint. My diplomatic practice has therefore been deeply rooted in political experience – not as an abstract credential, but as a lived engagement with governance, negotiation, and collective struggle.

Serving as the mayor of Bethlehem (from December 2012 to May 2017) and as the first woman elected to this position since the establishment of the municipal council in 1872, has provided me with a formative perspective on leadership under occupation. This role revealed how governance in such contexts requires continuous negotiation between responsibility and constraint. Municipal leadership involved addressing the daily expectations of citizens – including development, public services, infrastructure, and urban planning – while operating within a framework where authority was structurally limited by external control and restricted autonomy. Decisions that would normally fall within the sovereign scope of local governance were often shaped by restrictions beyond municipal reach, transforming governance into an exercise not of full autonomy but of strategic adaptation. In this environment, leadership became less about exercising sovereignty and more about managing its absence: sustaining civic life, preserving dignity, and ensuring continuity despite fragmentation. Governance under occupation required creativity and collaboration, extending alliances beyond traditional institutional boundaries to include international partners, civil society actors, and local communities. In this sense, my mayoral experience reflected a wider pattern within Palestinian women's leadership: transforming limitation into a space for strategic agency, and redefining leadership as the sustained work of safeguarding collective life while advancing the long-term aspiration for sovereignty.

My leadership experience highlighted the gendered dynamics of political leadership in Palestine, where public roles are shaped by both structural realities and social expectations placed on women. My identity as a Palestinian woman shaped how I navigated leadership spaces structured by gendered norms and assumptions. Political institutions are not neutral; they are shaped by embedded norms that determine whose authority is readily accepted and whose voice is subject to greater scrutiny. I was often positioned both as a symbol of progress and under heightened evaluation. Rather than perceiving this tension as an obstacle, I treated it as an opportunity to redefine leadership through trust-building, dialogue, and collaborative engagement.

Beyond institutional and gendered dimensions of leadership, my experience has revealed how deeply the personal and political intersect under conditions of occupation. Living under occupation is not an abstract concept; it unfolds within families, communities, and the intimate realities of daily life. As a mother of five and the wife of a political detainee, I encountered its impact not only through public responsibility but also through personal vulnerability and loss. The death of my husband (Johny Baboun) in 2007 followed years of resilience and national aspirations: Johny was detained for three years during the First Intifada, his workplace was destroyed by Israeli forces during the Second Intifada, and he suffered a brain stroke during the thirty-nine days of the 2002 siege of the Nativity Church, when a total curfew was imposed on Bethlehem and Johny was separated from us for 39 days, even though he was not inside the Church. This prolonged ordeal and immense pressure tested his strength beyond human limits, and he passed away way too young after a life defined by sacrifice and an unwavering belief that Palestine would one day attain justice. Our joint journey has marked my life and reshaped my understanding of leadership as the capacity to carry personal grief while remaining faithful to my collective responsibility, deepening my commitment to public service and affirming that true leadership must be rooted in empathy, resilience, and a deep sense of both human and national responsibility.

My academic work at Bethlehem University (1990–2010) in gender studies and literature laid the intellectual foundation for my diplomatic approach, equipping me with critical tools to interpret and communicate political realities. For me, knowledge production has always informed political action, shaping how narratives are constructed and conveyed. This perspective has guided a diplomatic practice rooted in historical memory, ethical positioning, and meaningful engagement – particularly relevant in Chile's context of an active Palestinian diaspora and strong traditions of justice and solidarity. This foundation was further strengthened through my role as the first Assistant Dean of Students at Bethlehem University (2000–2006), an administrative leadership position that extended beyond academic teaching into direct engagement with students' lived realities. The role involved supporting students through personal and collective challenges, understanding their capacities and aspirations, and fostering an environment that responded to their social and political context. This experience deepened my understanding of identity, resilience, and education under occupation, while developing essential skills in dialogue, mentorship, institutional responsibility, and conflict resolution that later shaped my political and diplomatic practice.

Serving as Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Chile since December 2022 has required navigating a complex diplomatic landscape marked by both significant challenges and strategic opportunities. The past two years – marked by genocide, displacement, and widespread destruction in Gaza alongside escalating developments on the ground – including the Israeli cabinet decisions of February 2026 regarding land annexation and their profound implications for the future viability of a Palestinian state – have intensified the responsibility to sustain and defend the Palestinian narrative within international discourse. This has involved consistent engagement with Chilean executive authorities, parliamentarians, political parties, multilateral representatives, media platforms, and civil society to ensure that Palestinian realities are accurately represented and firmly anchored in international legal principles. Defending the rights of my people has meant articulating a narrative that is grounded in humanitarian law, historical continuity, and the legitimate aspiration for self-determination, while safeguarding the political horizon for a viable two-state solution.

Simultaneously, Chile has offered a uniquely constructive diplomatic environment. The longstanding bilateral relations between Palestine and Chile – reinforced by Chile's recognition of the State of Palestine and sustained political dialogue – have provided an institutional foundation for deeper cooperation. Strengthening these bilateral ties has involved expanding cultural diplomacy,



Graduation ceremony at Bethlehem University.



Hanna (Johny) Baboun, Vera's late husband.



Presenting cridentials to President Gabrial Boric.



The oath before President Mahmoud Abbas upon appointment as Ambassador.



Mayor of Bethlehem (2012-2017).



Vera Baboun's children, their spouses, and grandchildren.

enhancing academic and economic engagement, supporting parliamentary diplomacy, and fostering governmental coordination on multilateral issues. The presence of one of the largest Palestinian diasporas outside the Arab world, combined with Chile's historical commitment to human rights and international law, has created opportunities to consolidate solidarity into structured cooperation. Through these channels, diplomacy has moved beyond reactive advocacy toward strategic partnership-building, transforming moments of crisis into opportunities to reinforce bilateral relations, mobilize international legal frameworks, and advance Palestinian representation within a principled and sustainable diplomatic framework.

My experience reflects not only a personal path but also the enduring legacy of Palestinian women whose resilience and political agency have shaped our national story across generations. In this context, leadership is neither symbolic nor peripheral; it is a deliberate act of persistence and transformation. As a Palestinian woman in political and diplomatic service, I carry both historical memory and future responsibility. This reality affirms that leadership is measured not solely by formal power but by the capacity to influence, build bridges, and uphold justice. The Palestinian experience demonstrates that voice itself constitutes power, and that principled, sustained leadership can shape international discourse even in the absence of full sovereignty.

SCAN
TO SHARE



H.E. Vera Baboun serves as the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Chile.

A SHARED MEAL
MEANS EVERYTHING



Gaza, Palestine, February 2026
Ibrahim Zaanoun, photographer

GIVE THIS RAMADAN
TO SUPPORT FAMILIES
IN PALESTINE, LEBANON AND JORDAN.

anera
WHERE HOPE FINDS A WAY

anera.org/ramadan-26



Keeping the Possibility of Justice Alive

On Making Films About Palestine

An interview with Carol Mansour and Muna Khalidi

Questions by Omar Dana



Filmmaker Carol Mansour.



Filmmaker Muna Khalidi.

OD: *Documenting Resilience: Much of your work illuminates the lives of Palestinians facing displacement and war. How do you use documentary filmmaking to capture both hardship and resilience, especially among women? We're curious how you balance depicting raw realities (bombardments, exile) with celebrating the hope and strength that persist.*

CM&MK: The occupation in Palestine has gone beyond anyone's worst nightmare. Each day brings a new layer of devastation that feels impossible to grasp yet quickly becomes a reality that we need to grapple with and resist. In Gaza, families are being erased. People are being burned alive and massacred. Thousands are displaced again and again, forced to flee with nothing. Families are torn apart, children orphaned, parents left searching through rubble for what remains of their loved ones. The most basic conditions for life – water, food, shelter, and medical care – are stripped away, turning survival itself into a daily battle. Palestinians are being displaced and killed not only in Gaza but also across the West Bank.

This is happening in front of our eyes, in front of the entire world, documented in real time and shared across screens. The scale of suffering is unbearable. What makes this even worse is the normalization of this criminality that is happening in front of our eyes. It has become part of our daily news. The intolerable has become expected. And yet, amid this devastation, people in Gaza and the West Bank are holding on to dignity, memory, and the insistence on existing.

No matter how dark the situation, we, as filmmakers, must never give up. As Palestinians in the diaspora, we do not have the luxury of silence, nor the privilege of turning away. We have a responsibility to tell the story. We cannot stop talking about the suffering, nor can we stop talking about the resistance. Even when the world seems so gloomy, it is our duty to create spaces where humanity is seen and heard. It is our duty to keep fighting in every way possible: through films that document and testify, through social media that amplifies voices, through conversations that challenge injustice wherever it appears. We may not be able to change everything, but we can refuse to normalize cruelty. We can insist on dignity. As long as we continue to tell these stories, we keep the possibility of justice alive.

OD: *Memory and Motherhood: Aida Returns follows the journey of fulfilling your mother's wish to return to Jaffa, intertwining personal grief with the collective Nakba legacy. What did making that film teach you about the role of memory and intergenerational trauma in Palestinian families, particularly between mothers and daughters? More broadly, how do themes of memory and loss shape your storytelling, and can remembering be a form of feminist resistance against erasure?*

CM&MK: Aida Returns[1] began long before I knew it was a film. It began as my attempt to capture my mother as she began to fade away. I started filming my mother in Montreal three years before she passed away. She had developed Alzheimer's disease, and during her illness and gradual deterioration I visited her 21 times over three years and filmed her almost daily. She had begun to lose her short-term memory, but she never stopped reminiscing and speaking about her homeland. Even as other memories faded, Yafa remained her favorite subject.

I never intended to make a film about her. I was simply trying to feel close to her. I filmed with no goal except to hold on to her presence and, perhaps, to protect her memories of Palestine from disappearing. As she was a first-generation refugee who was displaced as a young adult, I felt compelled to capture her lived memories of Yafa, before we lost her forever. Whereas this was originally a very personal endeavor, I later saw how it was also a documentation on film of the memories of an entire community.

The idea of a film came much later, when we were finally able to smuggle her ashes back home to Palestine. When Muna saw the video that Tanya sent of Aida's ashes arriving back in Palestine, she said: "This story no longer belongs to you alone. This is the story of every refugee and their wish to return home." I understood that this individual act of return was no longer exclusively our family's. We came to view it as a challenge to the imposed impossibility of return. It took on a dimension of "defiance," where we were determined to establish that resistance to injustice will always remain and can take different forms and shapes.

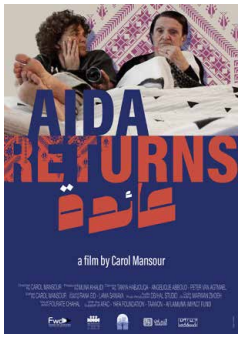
My mother lived 67 years in exile. I spent 55 years with her, absorbing her stories, her descriptions, experiences, and anecdotes of her homeland like they were my own. Between Palestinian generations, especially between grandmothers, daughters, and mothers, this becomes an act of survival against erasure; especially in a community where women are traditionally the keepers and tellers of stories. Along with inheriting her memories and those of all our parents who were displaced from Palestine, we also inherited – in every fiber of our being – the trauma they were subjected to. We are now passing it on to our children. This manifests differently for different people at different times. For us it manifests as an urge and a need to tell the story in order to document our memories and stand up to injustice. In that sense, memory is not only grief. It is continuity. It is resistance. And through cinema, it becomes testimony.

OD: *Women's Voices in Focus: In* Stitching Palestine*, you centered Palestinian women's narratives and creative expressions (such as embroidery) as a form of storytelling. Why is it important to you to foreground women's voices and perspectives in telling the story of Palestine? Are there particular moments from your films when a woman's testimony or art sparked a deeper understanding of the struggle?*

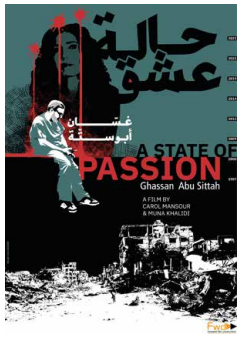
CM&MK: Stitching Palestine[2] began as a small project that aimed to create visuals to accompany an art exhibition by Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum organized in collaboration with Inaash Association in Lebanon. Centering Palestinian women and their experience was for us a strategic decision. We decided to move beyond the techniques, mechanics, and motifs of tatreez (embroidery) into exploring the significance of this very Palestinian form of cultural art and cultural heritage. We set out to examine issues of identity and belonging through the relationship between embroidery and Palestinian women as they play the central role as the creators of tatreez, the keepers of memory, and the storytellers in our community. Being interested in the intimate spaces of women, this presented an opportunity to have long and deep conversations with a number of amazing Palestinian women. We are often asked about how we chose the women, and why "poorer" "refugee" women were not more present in the film. Our choice of the women was deliberate. We wanted to portray and emphasize that issues of identity, of belonging, and the longing to return were shared among Palestinians across social, economic, political, and educational lines. So, we chose 12 strong and articulate women who, for the most part, did not conform to the prevalent stereotypes of a refugee woman or even a woman interested in tatreez.

By the end of the exhibition project, we found that we had in fact gathered scores of hours of interviews. When interviewing subjects for our films, we rarely ever ask straightforward close-ended questions and prefer to open a long discussion that allows people to talk freely and bring to the table whatever is important to the topic and to them. When we sat down to review the footage, we found that we had a treasure.

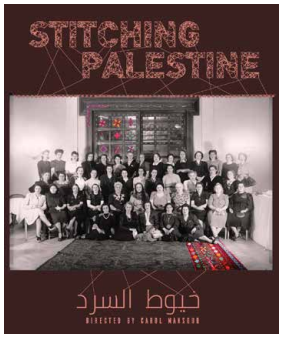
We felt privileged to have this rich material in our possession and were compelled to explore our findings further and deeper. And so Stitching Palestine was born as a long -form documentary film that we began to work on in our free time in 2013. It actually took us four years to complete the process of reviewing and editing and to pull it all together. This is when we started brainstorming with our close friend Sahar Mandour, herself a journalist specialized in Palestine and a novelist, to weave the film together. Through her text, that is emotive but not melodramatic, we "stitched" the



Aida Returns.



A State of Passion.



Stitching Palestine.

film together, building on common themes. Working together as a group of women, tackling issues that are faced by women, was an expectational experience and shaped how we have been approaching the majority of our work. Whether it is to actualize smuggling Aida's ashes or forming technical teams for our other films, we have found a lot of both personal and professional benefit in working predominately with teams of women. Especially since we often tackle what some refer to as "sensitive" topics.

One of the most striking moments for us while working on Stitching Palestine was the realization of the extent of pain mixed with longing that remains with women even after decades have passed and even when they are living what appears to be very comfortable lives on the individual level. It was striking to see that the depth and intensity of these feelings have not waned over time but have, if anything, become more rooted and solidified.

Centering women allows the story of Palestine to be told with greater sensitivity and depth. Their testimonies transform abstraction into intimacy, which results in the struggle not only being understood intellectually but also being felt on a deeper level.

OD: *Challenging Structures: As female filmmakers working across Lebanon and Palestine, have you faced structural challenges or biases in the film industry or society that might not be as pronounced for your male counterparts? How have you navigated or pushed back against these obstacles? Do you think that opportunities for women in documentary filmmaking have improved over the decades, and if so, how is that impacting the kinds of stories that get told?*

CM&MK: As documentary filmmakers based in Lebanon, we have not ourselves faced any major obstacles on the basis of gender. In fact, very often the contrary is true. Working on the issues that we tackle in our films, we believe that our being women has played a facilitating role. It allowed for a different kind of access, particularly to intimate, domestic, and emotional spaces that might not be as easily accessible to male filmmakers.

In many of the environments where we work, trust is paramount. Whether it is our approach, our gender, or our experience, we have always found that people trust us and open up easily without barriers. However, we do understand the obstacles and challenges that many of our Arab and Western colleagues may be facing in their work.

Opportunities have increased overall for women across countries and across disciplines as women stand up for their own rights and claim what is rightfully theirs. This has been reflected in seeing more and more women documentary

filmmakers especially among younger generations these days.

In the last few years and for our two last feature documentaries, we have chosen a slightly less orthodox way to secure funding. Aida Returns and A State of Passion[3] were largely funded through individual contributions from friends, colleagues, and a wider community. This has allowed us much greater flexibility and margins of maneuver and the opportunity to experiment without having to report to men in suits.

OD: *Global Impact and Solidarity: Your films have traveled to festivals and audiences worldwide. What has been the response, and do you believe that films like yours can galvanize international solidarity? Can you share any experience where a film screening or Q&A made you feel that connections were being made between Palestinian women's experiences and global feminist or human rights movements?*

CM&MK: Our films have been fortunate to travel widely, and what has moved us most is not only the critical response but also the emotional one. Audiences in very different parts of the world, whether in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, or Latin America, have been really engaged with the film, and we regularly receive notes and emails from people who have watched the films and share with us their thoughts and gratitude. We also receive screening requests from festivals, but more importantly from organizations, institutions, universities, human rights organizations, and activist groups. Many of these are feminist organizations or collectives with whom we always engage, and very often wave screening fees, because we believe in the interconnectedness of the struggle, and we have seen firsthand how films like ours galvanize solidarity in its various forms. We observe this with the level of engagement with the impact campaigns that can be found on our films' websites.

We are also extremely proud that we have quite a large following on Letterboxd, where regular audiences share their opinions and insights. Films alone cannot change the world, but they can open a door. Very often after a screening, we feel that people become interested in knowing more.

OD: *Inspiration and Future Stories: After decades of covering topics from refugee women's hardships to war surgeons in Gaza, what keeps you inspired to continue filmmaking? Are there emerging themes or stories about Palestinian women today that urgently need to be told? Finally, could you share a lesson or story from your career that encapsulates the strength of Palestinian women in the face of war and patriarchy?*

CM&MK: At the moment we are in the process of developing some ideas for a new documentary film project. It's in the very early stages still, and we are not yet able to articulate what the film will be about. We can only say this: The theme is of course Palestinian at the core. As we always center Palestinian women in everything we do, this will again be the case. Our three Palestinian-themed films have all highlighted the role of Palestinian women in standing up to oppression, colonialism, occupation, and the violence inflicted upon Palestinians everywhere.

We believe that documentary films should serve as tools for change, and so we hope to be able to again bring something new, also useful. As long as Palestine is occupied, this will always be our foremost priority.



Muna Khalidi and Carol Mansour being awarded.

SCAN TO SHARE

Carol Mansour is an independent documentary filmmaker who is deeply passionate about social justice and human rights issues and believes that film is an important medium that gives a voice to the marginalized. After ten years of working in television, she founded Forward Film Production in 2000 in Beirut, Lebanon. With over 24 years in documentary production, Mansour has covered the world from Sri Lanka to Lebanon to Yemen to Uzbekistan. She has achieved international recognition and honors for her films, with over one hundred film festival screenings and official selections worldwide. Her films on Palestine and elsewhere can be accessed via forwardfilmproduction.com.

Muna Khalidi holds a PhD in health policy and planning and has more than 34 years of experience working in the social and health development fields in Lebanon and the region. She has worked with various development and health organizations, assisting them in developing strategic plans, and designing and developing programs. In 2011, she started collaborating with Carol Mansour on the research and production of documentary films that deal with issues of social justice and human rights, bringing her experience in the academic, public, private, and NGO sectors to the documentary-making field.



Omar Dana is a policy advocacy and human rights expert, scholar, author, and storyteller from Jerusalem with over twenty years of regional experience across the MENA region.

[1] "*Aida Returns*: A Film by Carol Mansour," available at https://www.aidareturns.com/.

[2] "A Homeland the Size of a Planet: A Film by Carol Mansour," available at https://stitching-palestine.com/.

[3] "*A State of Passion*: A Film by Carol Mansour and Muna Khalidi," available at https://www.state-of-passion.com/.



The Women Who Refuse to Disappear

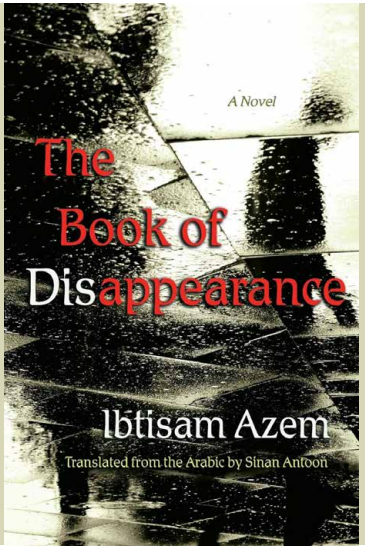
Feminist Echoes in Ibtisam Azem's* The Book of Disappearance

By Nadine Fitiani



Author Ibtisam Azem.

On Women's Day, it is worth recognizing that Palestinian women writers are not simply producing literature, they are preserving history. As they are documenting experiences that might otherwise vanish, they are archiving emotion, memory, and truth.



Ibtisam Azem's novel *The Book of Disappearance* (2014) is set in contemporary Tel Aviv and Jaffa. The story unfolds forty-eight hours after Israelis discover that all their Palestinian neighbors have vanished. Told through alternating narrators – Alaa, a young Palestinian man who had conversed with his dead grandmother in the journal he left behind when he disappeared, and his Jewish neighbor, Ariel, a journalist struggling to understand the traumatic event. Through their perspectives, the novel stages a confrontation between two memories. Ariel is a liberal Zionist who is critical of the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza but nevertheless believes in Israel's project and its national myth. Alaa is haunted by his grandmother's memories of being displaced from Jaffa and becoming a refugee in her homeland. Ariel's search for clues to the secret of the collective disappearance and his reaction to it intimately reveal the fissures at the heart of the Palestinian question. Yet the deeper one reads, the more one realizes that Azem is not simply imagining a fantastical disappearance. She is exposing the quieter, more insidious disappearances that have shaped Palestinian life for generations: the erasure of history, the silencing of voices, and the marginalization of those who carry memory forward. For Women's Day, Azem's novel offers a powerful entry point into a conversation about Palestinian women, not only as characters within literature, but as the guardians of memory, the protectors of identity, and the ones who refuse to disappear even when the world tries to forget them.

At the heart of the novel stands Alaa's grandmother, a woman whose memories of the *Nakba* form the emotional and historical backbone of the story. She is not a loud character who gives speeches or leads movements. Instead, she does something far more radical: She remembers. She tells stories. She insists on naming what happened, even when the world around her prefers silence. In Palestinian society, as in many societies shaped by displacement and political violence, women tend to become the guardians of memory. They carry the stories of villages erased from maps, of homes that no longer exist, of olive trees cut down, of loved ones lost. Their memories are not simply personal, they are political. They resist the narrative that Palestinians are a people without a past.



Azem's portrayal of the grandmother is a tribute to these women as she sheds light on how memory itself is a form of resistance, and that women are often the ones who keep that resistance alive. When Alaa disappears, his grandmother's stories remain. Her voice becomes the last surviving thread connecting the present to the past.

The central event of the novel, the sudden disappearance of all Palestinians, can be read as a metaphor for the many ways in which marginalized groups are erased. Feminist theory has long examined how women's labor, suffering, and contributions are made invisible. Azem extends this idea to the Palestinian context, showing how an entire people can be rendered invisible through political structures, media narratives, and historical revisionism.

Within this broader erasure lies a gendered one, as Palestinian women face a double disappearance – as Palestinians under occupation and as women within patriarchal structures. Their stories are frequently the first to be dismissed, their experiences the first to be overlooked, and their achievements are most likely to be underestimated. By centering the grandmother's memories, Azem pushes back against this double erasure. She reminds the readers that women's stories are not secondary; they are foundational. Without them, the collective memory collapses.

After Alaa disappears, his Israeli neighbor Ariel finds and reads his diary. This act –intimate, invasive, and morally ambiguous – becomes one of the novel's most powerful feminist and political metaphors. Ariel, a member of the dominant group, gains access to the private thoughts of someone from the marginalized group. He becomes the interpreter, the one who decides how to understand and frame Alaa's words.

This dynamic mirrors a long history of men interpreting women's stories, colonizers interpreting the colonized, and dominant groups claiming authority over the narratives of the oppressed. Feminist scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have long critiqued this dynamic "epistemic violence." In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," she argues that storytelling is a form of power, and that taking away someone's story is a way of depriving them of their agency.

Ariel's reading of the diary forces him to confront truths he had previously ignored. Yet even as he becomes more aware, he does not take action. He does not challenge the system, nor does he resist the opportunistic takeover of Palestinian homes. His awakening remains incomplete, a reminder that understanding is not the same as solidarity.

In contrast, the women in the novel, like the grandmother, do not need to read someone else's diary to understand injustice. They live it, they remember it, and they carry it in their bodies.

Writing itself becomes an act of resistance in *The Book of Disappearance*. Azem, as a Palestinian woman writer, participates in a long tradition of women who have used literature as a means of steadfastness and a challenge to erasure. Her work joins those of Sahar Khalifeh, Adania Shibli, Liana Badr, and many other Palestinian women authors who have insisted on telling stories that dominant narratives try to silence. Azem's novel is a reminder that storytelling is a political act and that women have always been at the forefront of this act, even when their contributions are not fully recognized.

Moreover, *The Book of Disappearance* teaches readers that disappearance is not always physical. It can be historical, political, or emotional; and sometimes it is the quiet erasure of women's stories, women's suffering, and women's strength. But it also teaches us that women refuse to disappear. They remember, resist, speak, write, and rebuild. Alaa's grandmother may not be alive by the time the novel begins, but her presence is sensed throughout the entire novel. Her memories shape the narrative as her voice guides Alaa. Her stories survive even when her people vanishes. This is the power of Palestinian women: They ensure that even in disappearance, there is continuity. Even in silence, there is memory. Even in erasure, there is resistance. In a world that tries to make Palestinians disappear, it is often Palestinian women who insist on remembering and who ensure that the story continues.

On Women's Day, it is worth remembering that books such as *The Book of Disappearance* invite readers to honor the Palestinian women who refuse to vanish, the mothers, grandmothers, daughters, writers, activists, teachers, and caretakers who carry the weight of history on their shoulders. Azem's novel is not just a story about disappearance. It is a story about what remains. And what remains, more often than not, is the work of women.

SCAN
TO SHARE



Nadine Fitiani, born in 1999 in Jerusalem, Palestine, is an alumna of Bethlehem University, where she studied English language, literature, and communication. Passionate about storytelling, writing, research, and cultural expression, she explores language as a tool for connection and identity. Her academic journey reflects a deep interest in literature and the power of words.

*Ibtisam Azem is a Palestinian novelist, short story writer, and journalist based in New York. She was born and grew up in Tayibe, northern Jaffa. She works as a senior correspondent covering New York and the United Nations for *Al-Araby al-Jadeed* newspaper. She has published two novels in Arabic: *Sariq al-Nawrm; Gharib Haifawi* (*The Sleep Thief: Gharib Haifawi,* 2010) and *Sifr al-Ikhtifa* (*The Book of Disappearance,* 2014). They have been translated into several languages, including English (by Sinan Antoon), Italian, and German.



From Gaza to Japan

Memory, Survival, and Solidarity

By Shahd Abusalama



Hiroshima's vigil.

As we confront the politics of erasure, impunity, and global complicity, and fight for representation, we can draw on solidarities across borders. Whether in Gaza or Hiroshima, through the preservation of memory amid survival and collective struggle, transnational solidarity becomes an act of resistance that challenges imperial and settler-colonial violence and impunity, urges accountability, and safeguards future generations.

I was seventeen when Israel waged "Operation Cast Lead" on Gaza. It was December 27, 2008, and I was in my final year of high school, sitting for mock *tawjihi* (high school graduation) exams, when it felt as though a door from hell had been flung open. For twenty-two days, Gaza was hammered from land, sea, and air, sealed off from international media and aid, reduced to a laboratory and testing ground for new and old weapons; bodies being annihilated while many worldwide were distracted by New Year celebrations.

That assault marked a turning point in my life, not because it was the first I had endured, but because I was old enough to understand the violence as part of a systematic ethnic cleansing campaign that has been ongoing since 1948. The Goldstone Report, that subsequently investigated the atrocities committed during this dark period, deemed Israel's deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure to be part of a broader policy that is unfolding to this day with impunity.

I was born a survivor to an uprooted family whose history mirrors the architecture of Palestinian dispossession across generations. I am the grandchild of *Nakba* survivors and daughter of a Palestinian ex-political prisoner who was born in 1952 and grew up knowing nothing but occupation. My mother gave birth to me in 1991 amidst a curfew and blackout imposed on Jabalia Refugee Camp, where the first Intifada had erupted in 1987. Married to a man haunted by multiple administrative detentions, my mother walked a kilometer to the Jabalia UN clinic, assisted by my grandmother Tamam, who carried a lantern in one hand and a white flag in the other, signaling to Israeli soldiers, "We are bringing a child in peace." This didn't protect them from harassment, including the soldiers pointing their guns at my mother's belly. I entered the world already marked as a threat.

By the time Israel waged Operation Cast Lead, we had survived two Intifadas, yet nothing had prepared us for that winter's brutality. Our home became a shelter for displaced families, including that of my childhood friend Alia al-Khatib. On January 5, 2009, her father Ali left to pick up some necessities for his family and check on his elderly parents, who insisted on holding onto their home in Jabalia, but he never returned; an Israeli drone strike killed him instantly, as documented by B'Tselem.[1]

Days later, our own home became unsafe. When our neighbor received a bomb threat, we ran into the street, barefoot, and waited at the home of neighbors nearby while fighting our worst fears: either being killed or wounded, no matter the protection measures we take, or watch our home collapse. It was psychological warfare; the bombing was never carried out. A ceasefire was declared on January 18, 2009, allowing us to return to our home.

Then came the most surreal demand of all: Return to "normal." Go back to school. Carry on.



Ali Salamah Diab al-Khatib, B'Tselem.



The wedding of the author's cousin Shareef in 2009,which was attended by the Japanese war photographer and journalist Rei Shiva, who in 2025 invited her to speak in Japan.

Israel then killed at least 1,417 Palestinians, mostly civilians, children and women. I comforted myself that my family did not suffer the devastating news of Ali or the horrific massacre committed against the Al-Samouni family, where I joined other local and international activists, volunteering our time to tend to their child survivors, providing English lessons, art classes, or whatever other distraction we could think of to comfort them and remind them that they were not alone. I remember asking myself: If I had been killed, would I have been reduced to a number, joining other statistics of fatalities that are forgotten as the list grows longer? A frame on a wall that fades out with the passage of time?

In 2009, Japanese war photographer and journalist Rei Shiva visited Gaza to cover the aftermath of Israel's Operation Cast Lead. My brother Majed was his fixer, which led to Rei living for about a month in our home on Al-Saftawi Street. I shared with him my ambitions to break free and leave Gaza's open-air prison to travel the world like him.

Refusing to die knowing nothing but a life under occupation, and unwilling to live adhering to colonial and patriarchal borders that were trying to limit my horizons, I obsessively sought to perfect my English, studying English literature at Al-Azhar University. Also, I began visiting the homes of those whose family members had been killed or detained by Israel, actively engaging in community organizations for their families' support. I started writing for international audiences through my blog, *Palestine from My Eyes,* reproduced by *Electronic Intifada*, weaponizing every tool to carve my people's silenced struggles into the minds and hearts of readers and urge action.

I achieved my dream of continuing higher education in the United Kingdom (2014 to 2024) but never anticipated that my decade in exile would culminate in an openly televised genocide. Jabalia Refugee Camp, where my extended family had held their ground since the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine, has been entirely obliterated in the fourth invasion of northern Gaza. Every home has been demolished, dozens of relatives on both my maternal and paternal sides have been killed, and the survivors have been driven into repeated cycles of uprooting and starvation. Many of them had clung to Gaza City, refusing to abandon their homes despite the relentless terror inflicted on the northern Strip following October 7, 2023. It was devastating beyond words to witness these steadfast survivors, the ones who had never left despite everything, being forcibly expelled into the unknown in the south in September 2025. Their right to return, rebuild, and attain justice remains firmly denied by Israel, even though the acknowledgment of the Palestinian Genocide has become official, as declared by former UNRWA Chief Spokesman Chris Gunness following the publication of a report by the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory the same month.[2] This pushed me to overcome my feelings of helplessness and turn them into a labor of love for the sake of our family survivors and others who are facing unprecedented dehumanization and silencing amid the international failure to hold Israel accountable.

Central to Israeli warfare is the consistent silencing of Palestinian counter-narratives, including the deliberate targeting of intellectuals, such as my teachers Huda Hamada, Suad Hamdona, and Dr. Refaat Alareer, as well as journalists and documentary filmmakers who, over the past decade, have worked to produce alternative images and testimonies from Gaza. This includes the killing of some of Gaza's most prominent and courageous media workers, among them figures such as Roshdi Sarraj, Anas Al-Sharif, Hossam Shabat, and Ismail al-Ghoul, and the repeated targeting of journalists like my cousin Mahmoud Abusalama, one of the last surviving prominent journalists in northern Gaza, who continues reporting despite significant risk and immeasurable loss, including the extermination of his sister Shrouq's entire family. As of October 2025, nearly 300 journalists and media workers have been killed, according to the Shireen Abu Akleh Observatory, among the many more than the officially announced 70,654 Palestinians who have been killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023. An unknown number of victims remain trapped beneath the rubble of the annihilated Strip, unreachable and uncounted.

Just as the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948 was accompanied by a systematic campaign of memoricide that aimed to erase the historical, cultural, and visual heritage of Palestinian presence, Gaza and its cultural field have been subjected to a comparable and ongoing process of annihilation. This is part of a broader strategy to reinforce hegemonic colonial narratives while undermining Palestinian claims to history, visibility, and political agency. As we experience erasure in physical and cultural terms, we must be acutely aware of the ways in which these practices aim to regulate how the Palestinian struggle is produced, circulated, and remembered; we must be part of the fight back and engage in the field of representation and knowledge production. For me, one such opportunity for engagement arrived with an invitation to visit Japan. From the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the Japanese Red Army that in 1971 joined the Palestinians in their struggle against Western imperialism at a heavy price, Japan had long occupied my imagination. But I never imagined that my encounter with Rei Shiva in Gaza during the aftermath of 2008/9 attack on Gaza would carry me, 16 years later, to Japan, amid a horrific genocide that is continuing with impunity despite an official ceasefire; the slower pace is no consolation for the people in Gaza that were dispossessed, bereaved, and remain deprived of aid in violation of the agreement.

Recognizing the importance of building bridges between our communities that defy American-Zionist hegemony, I was able to address the Japanese parliament against the backdrop of a so-called "ceasefire" following over two years of the latest Israeli genocide in Gaza. I also spoke at the United Nations University, Senshu University in Tokyo, and to various

local journalists. Eurasia World Film Week led me to various cinemas and cultural centers where I screened documentary films by filmmaker Mohammed Al-Majdalawi, my friend from Jabalia Refugee Camp with whom I collaborated on various projects since childhood, including *And Still They Dance* (2012) and *Forget Me Not* (2021).[3]

As I was weighed down by collective and personal pains from the past and present, Hiroshima was particularly triggering, though it might shock some to know that it also provided me with some comfort: The city stands as proof to people's unbreakable desire to rise from the ashes despite the United States' devastating atomic bombing of 1945. My visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum felt cathartic. Hiroshima is a tragedy that history has acknowledged, studied, and commemorated, whereas for the Palestinians, annihilation is an uninterrupted process that is extending from 1947 until now.

Experts suggested in October 2025 that Israel's bombardment of Gaza was equivalent to "approximately 13 Hiroshima-type nuclear bombs,"[4] dropped on a territory that is a fraction of its size but more populated. Sorata Watanabe, who grew up in the Hibakusha Community in Hiroshima, told me, "Comparing Gaza to Hiroshima is not fair anymore." Yet, Gaza has no memorials, no vow of "never again," no consensus on the crime, and no naming of the perpetrators.

Instead, criminals are being rewarded. During my visit, the news blared with Donald Trump shamelessly bragging about recognizing Jerusalem as "the true capital of Israel" and signing over rights and the Golan Heights



A painting by the author to honor Dr. Refaat Alareer following his assasination.

to Israel, claiming that the illegal annexation of the latter in 2019 made Israel richer by "trillions of dollars!"[5] His remarks, broadcast live from a Hanukkah reception at the White House, exposes how international law is undermined and impunity deepened through US backing. My presence and interventions in Japan also exposed the contradictions of the country itself. Israeli ambassadors' annual participation[6] in Hiroshima's memorial event to represent "the message that Israel seeks peace" normalizes the actions of a state that is founded on the dispossession and genocide of Palestinians, refuses to respect basic international nuclear weapons protocols, and fails to abide by human and humanitarian rights laws. It is a betrayal of the lessons that should be learned from "the mistakes of the past," as Hiroshima's Cenotaph reminds.[7] The United States was never held responsible for its crimes against humanity in Japan, or its devastating direct and indirect military interventions that followed elsewhere. The culture of imperialism and impunity became a precedent that openly lives on, including in Palestine.

Nonetheless, it was comforting to attend one of the nearby weekly vigils, where I met solidarity activists who consistently protest Japan's complicity in Israeli crimes, which has included calling for a comprehensive

military embargo in light of Japanese Robotics Company FANUC's link with Israel's largest weapons manufacturer, Elbit Systems.[8] While figures such as Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, and others responsible for annihilating Gaza portray the Strip as "uninhabitable" or a "wasteland," Hiroshima stands as a living rebuke to that lie. Gaza will rise – if we are allowed to rebuild.

SCAN TO SHARE



Dr. Shahd Abusalama is a Palestinian British scholar, author, and artist, born and raised in Jabalia Refugee Camp, northern Gaza, and now based in Barcelona. Her book Between Reality and Documentary (2025)[9] examines representations of Gaza refugees in colonial, humanitarian, and Palestinian documentary film. She has contributed to the films Light in Gaza (2022)[10] and Gaza on Screen (2023),[11] and writes for The Electronic Intifada,[12] The New Arab,[13] Declassified UK,[14] and others. A longtime member of Gaza's Al-Assria Dabke Troupe,[15] she co-founded Hawiyya Dance Company[16] in London in 2017.

[1] B'Tselem, "Fatalities: *All Data* [Explanation]: Khatib," listing "Fatalities data updated until January 31, 2026, except Gaza Strip, only updated until October 6, 2023. Data regarding fatalities inside Israel doesn't include October 7, 2023."

[2] YouTube, "The Palestinian Genocide: The Ultimate Evidence," Double Down News, January 20, 2026.

[3] For excerpts of the film shown at the award ceremony, visit YouTube, "Best Documentary Award, World Film Week, sponsored by Eurasia International Film Festival, Gaza n…," December 24, 2025.

[4] Alaa Shamali, "200,000 Tonnes of Explosives Dropped on Gaza, Equivalent to 6 [Modern] Nuclear Bombs," *The Canary*, October 8, 2025.

[5] YouTube, "President Trump Speaks at Hanukkah Event at the White House," Live from Fox News, December 17, 2025, minutes 29:30 – 33:00

[6] Michio Shimotaka and Michiko Tanaka, "Israel Ambassador Stares Straight Ahead at Peace Memorial Ceremony, Says "Honor to Be Invited," While Palestinian Representative Condemns Participation," The Chugoku Shimbun–Hiroshima Peace Media Center, August 7, 2024.

[7] "Cenotaph for the Victims of the Atomic Bomb (Memorial Monument for Hiroshima, City of Peace)," Hiroshima Peace Tourism.

[8] Frances Madeson, "Japanese BDS Activists Are Ramping Up Their Campaign Against a Robotics Company: Japan BDS Is Claiming a Special Responsibility to End Japanese Robot Maker's Complicity in Israel's Genocide in Gaza," TruthOut, July 8, 2025.

[9] Shahd Abusalama, *Between Reality and Documentary: A Historical Representation of Gaza Refugees in Colonial, Humanitarian and Palestinian Documentary Film*, I.B. Tauris, February 2025.

[10] Jehad Abusalim, "Download Now | *Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire,*" The Jerusalem Fund for Education and Community Development, Novermber 17, 2023.

[11] *Gaza on Screen*, oapen, 2023.

[12] *The Electronic Intifada*.

[13] "Shahd Abusalama," *The New Arab.*

[14] "Shahd Abusalama," *Declassified UK.*

[15] Al-Assria Dabke Troupe, "and still they dance سفراء القضية الفلسطينية," YouTube, October 8, 2013.

[16] Visit Hawiyya Dance Company's Instagram page at @Hawiyya Dabke.

Unleash

By Ahmed Masoud

You have the years ahead,
a sky full of stars to chase,
dreams glowing,
fuelled by possibilities.
So rest your worries aside,
bottle them and cast them into the forgiving sea
Let your voice travel through the wind,
speak for the silenced
shout for the unheard
forget the acne on your skin
the curl of your hair
let it swirl around in different directions
*
Do not glance back over your shoulder.
You hold the fight, the voice,
the whispered prayer that shields you.
So step forward,
Fierce, unafraid, unmistakably beautiful
unapologetically Palestinian.
*
Be the heart that never tires of beating,
the mouth that never forgets to speak,
the smile that warms a friend and startles a foe.
Walk upright and sing without restraint,
don't worry who can hear.
If they don't change with the beauty of your voice,
they will decay like a plant that missed out on the warm spring.
Dance to the trembling ululations
of mothers embracing their beloveds freed from prison bars.
*
Let the tears rest on your cheek like olive seeds.
One day, you will touch them
and remember
that you remained the change.
*
Revolt.
Rise.
You are the youth and the future.
You are the beauty and the storm.
You are the justice we are waiting for!

SCAN
TO SHARE



Ahmed Masoud is an award-winning Palestinian author living in the UK. His first novels, Vanished: The Mysterious Disappearance of Mustafa Ouda *and* Come What May *have received critical acclaim and have been translated into several languages. Ahmed is also a playwright and poet who has recently received praise from the UK's leading theater critics in* The Guardian.

Book of the Month I

The Foundations of Zionism

By Sabri Jiryis

Translated from Arabic by Fida Jiryis

Ebb Books, October 2025, 614 pages, US$27.99

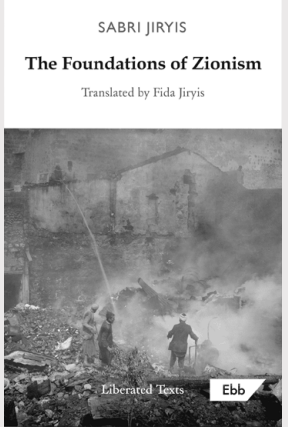


Translated into English for the first time since its original publication by the PLO's Palestine Research Center, this book extensively details the origins of Zionism and its development as an ideology and political project that has wreaked havoc in the Middle East and beyond over the last century.

The Foundations of Zionism chronicles the development from Zionism's origins up to the establishment of the British Mandate over Palestine in 1923, refuting many of the movement's own foundational myths – from its early relationship with the Palestinians to its exclusively religious character. Sabri Jiryis delves into Zionism's successive congresses and factional struggles, its settlers' early failures in Palestine and the formation of armed militias, and its temporary alliances with the Ottoman Empire before the movement eventually secured support from Western colonial powers, especially Britain. In a newly written conclusion, Jiryis reconsiders the Zionist project 100 years on from the Balfour Declaration and amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The importance of translating this book lies in the necessity of understanding the Zionist movement – especially its expansionist and exclusionary aspects – and the roots of the Arab-Palestinian conflict, particularly at this critical juncture for the Palestinian cause. Few Palestinian and Arab writers have addressed the history of the Zionist movement. The majority of sources are still by Jewish and foreign authors. This book presents a comprehensive Palestinian study by a leading scholar of Zionism in the region and refutes many of the erroneous assumptions put forward by Jewish and Western authors, without a reliable historical basis, to defend Zionism.

The book tells Zionism's inner story, beginning with its origins and spread, moving through its supporters and ideology at various stages, its organizations, parties, and institutions, and culminating in its efforts to control Palestine and the region, which reached their peak with the establishment of the State of Israel. To complete the picture, it was also essential to examine the international and Arab circumstances that enabled Zionism to achieve a significant part of its objectives.



Using Jewish and Zionist sources, mainly in Hebrew, the book traces the evolution of Zionism from a vague, limited religious idea to a political movement that arose in Eastern Europe in the mid-nineteenth century due to the specific circumstances of the Jews there. The author presents the movement's ideological and religious foundations and its development into a political expression that aimed to establish a "Jewish national home" in Palestine. He also documents the ideas and practices of the movement's key founders, including Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, Ber Borochov, Ahad Ha'am, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and others.

The book follows the development of the Zionist movement, drawing on documents, books, and diaries of its leaders and institutions, and its collaboration with the West after World War I, particularly with the victorious Allied powers, in order to realize its ambitions in Palestine. It focuses specifically on its close cooperation with the British government before and during the British Mandate, during which Britain provided numerous facilities that proved indispensable for the Zionist movement to achieve its goals.

The book also addresses a topic often overlooked in the history of this period: the resistance of the Palestinian Arabs themselves to these plans, from the outset, and their efforts to confront a course that they perceived as dangerous and that aimed to uproot them from their homeland.

About the author:

Sabri Jiryis was born in the village of Fassouta, in the upper Galilee, in 1938. After the Nakba*, he grew up under Israeli military rule and graduated as a lawyer from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in 1962. He joined the founding members of al-Ard, the first Palestinian political movement in Israel, and, in 1966, published his landmark book,* The Arabs in Israel*, in Hebrew. The book was translated into nine languages and became a seminal reference. In the 1970s, Jiryis left for Lebanon, joined the PLO within Fatah's advisory council, and became the director of the PLO Palestine Research Center and the editor in chief of its monthly journal,* Shu'un Filastiniyya *(Palestine Affairs). Jiryis published* A History of Zionism*, in Arabic, in two parts, the first in 1977 and the second in 1986. This is the first English translation, by his daughter, Fida, author of* Stranger in My Own Land *(Hurst, 2022).*

SCAN TO SHARE

Book of the Month II

An Odyssey of a City

The Story of Bethlehem City, Palestine Past and Present

By Khalil Shokeh

Paperback, 248 pages, £17.99

Buy on Amazon/Flipkart/Amazon.co.uk



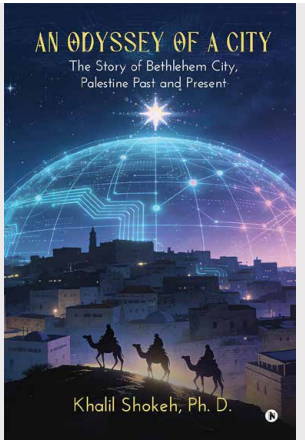
Bethlehem is more than a city – it is a living testament to layers of human history, faith, and resilience. First mentioned in ancient Egyptian records around 1350 BCE as a border town and resting place for travelers, Bethlehem has long stood at the crossroads of civilizations. From its biblical renown as the birthplace of King David and Jesus Christ to its role as a strategic outpost for the Philistines, the city has carried immense symbolic and cultural weight across millennia.

Today, Bethlehem remains a vibrant center of heritage and community life in the West Bank. Its skyline is marked by the Church of the Nativity, one of Christianity's holiest sites, alongside mosques, bustling markets, and modern institutions. Agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism sustain its economy, while its diverse population continues to navigate the challenges and opportunities of contemporary Palestinian society.

An Odyssey of a City traces Bethlehem's past and present journey, revealing how a city rooted in sacred tradition has adapted to the currents of history. It is a story of continuity and change, of faith and endurance, and of a community that has preserved its identity while engaging with the modern world. The book invites readers to see Bethlehem not only as a place of pilgrimage but also as a living city whose history continues to unfold.

Focusing on historical and socioeconomic aspects, the book sheds light on how an understanding of critical moments in time and important lessons learned from historical developments can benefit a new way of thinking regarding future development. Conscious of the many power grabs that have taken place in Bethlehem and Palestine, with the Israeli occupation remaining in existence since 1967, the book presents a novel approach to the reading of history. To this end, it analyzes military history, including historic wars and power changes, and presents data and information regarding socioeconomic, cultural, and religious developments and the role of ethnicity.

Perseverance during the British Mandate, dealing with the British civil administration and its army, has been followed by national persistence during the Israeli occupation. A discourse of Zionist practices and atrocities shows the extent to which they have greatly hampered the city's development. A review of Bethlehem City's development under the Palestinian Authority, including a summary of the development strategies implemented in Bethlehem, is followed by a description of general daily life in modern-day Bethlehem.



Bethlehem's experience under the Israeli occupation has been marked by a profound and aggressive political, social, and cultural devastation. Since Israel's capture of the West Bank in 1967, settlements, military infrastructure, and the separation wall have encircled Bethlehem, reshaping daily life and altering the city's historic character. Bethlehem's identity as the birthplace of Jesus and a global Christian pilgrimage site is overshadowed by the realities of occupation. The wall and settlements not only alter the physical landscape but also symbolically challenge Bethlehem's role as a city of openness and spiritual significance.

Bethlehem's situation illustrates the intersection of heritage and conflict: a city revered worldwide for its religious meaning yet constrained by geopolitical realities. Its story is not only about loss but also about resilience, as communities continue to preserve traditions, sustain cultural life, and advocate for justice despite the pressures of occupation.

Documenting Bethlehem's history ensures that the collective memory of its people, traditions, and resilience is not lost to time or political erasure. For young Palestinians and global readers alike, such a book provides a sense of identity and continuity. It allows future generations to understand the roots of their heritage, the challenges their ancestors faced, and the values that sustained them. Occupation, displacement, and globalization often threaten to fragment or silence local narratives. A written history becomes a tool of resistance, ensuring that Bethlehem's voice remains present in the global archive.

An Odyssey of a City shows how Bethlehem is not just a site of pilgrimage but also a city of endurance, creativity, and hope. Writing Bethlehem's history is a way of saying: We remember, we endure, and we pass this memory forward.

SCAN TO SHARE

Book of the Month III

The Palestine Folk Museum

The Untold Story (1926–2012)

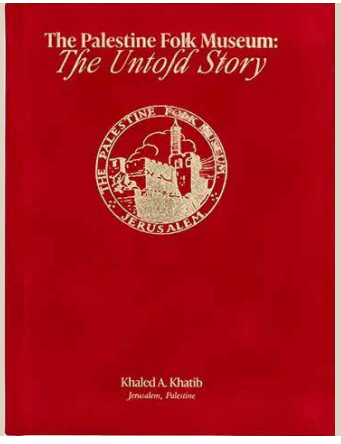
By Khaled A. Khatib

Kaph Books/Sharjah Art Foundation, 2023/2024, high-quality hardcover

Available via Sharjah Art Foundation at shop.sharjahart.org.







The book is a fascinating deep dive into a "lost" piece of Palestinian cultural history. It explores the history of a collection of costumes, jewelry, and everyday objects that was first assembled during the British Mandate era. It traces a turbulent path, with chapters titled Colonial Origins, Survival and Revival, and Perspective.

The Palestine Folk Museum was originally established in the 1930s by a group of mostly British citizens living in Palestine. The first meeting of the executive committee was held in 1935, following up on an idea that had floated around since 1926, when a number of individuals expressed a keen interest in Palestinian traditional life and heritage. An extremely modest, two-room exhibition was put together inside the centuries-old Muristan building inside Jerusalem's Old City.

The book follows the museum collection through periods of near-destruction and long dormancy, and concludes with the collection's eventual "repatriation" to its current home at the Palestinian Heritage Museum (PHM) that is part of the Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi Association in Jerusalem. PHM was officially reopened in 2012 in a magnificent nineteenth-century building inside the compound of Dar al-Tifl in East Jerusalem. In addition, the book draws parallels between the museum's colonial beginnings and the broader relationship between Palestinians, the British, and early waves of (Jewish) immigration.

The book's researched material is based mostly on retrieved old documents, log books, newspaper articles, and personal correspondence that was obtained from various sources and matched with available scripts and records in the PHM archives. As it turned out, a number of influential people were directly involved in shaping the Folk Museum during the ten or so years of its operation during the Mandate era, and up to its termination in 1948. British politicians, archaeologists, artists, scholars, consuls, and others worked together for that purpose over many years of political turmoil and instability. Local Palestinian Arab and Jewish notables and academics were also part of the team, each contributing in their own field of ethnographic specialty.

The book focuses on the years between 1917 and 1948, when Palestine was entirely under British Mandate rule. Through the Folk Museum story, the fragile local political climate at the time is touched upon, with special emphasis on the nonmilitary working relations between the British colonialists, the Indigenous Palestinian population, and the new Jewish immigrants.

The museum's story furthermore takes the reader through the twenty or so years of Jordanian rule, between 1948 and 1967, and the subsequent miraculous safeguarding and preservation of the original Folk Museum collection of close to 2,000 items throughout the critical years of the Israeli occupation.

The book also makes reference to Hind Husseini and the Deir Yassin massacre that led to the establishment of Dar al-Tifl orphanage and, at a later stage, the multi-sectoral landmark institution it is today in Jerusalem. The history and operation of the present-day Palestinian Heritage Museum is told within the context of the changing social climate in Palestine in the later years of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In short, the book is more than just a museum catalogue; it is a study of cultural preservation under occupation. It highlights how objects that had been gathered a century ago by colonialists have been reclaimed as vital symbols of Palestinian national identity and proof of deep roots in the land.

SCAN TO SHARE

Artist of the Month

Hatta Girls' Band

By Naseem Rimawi



Bala 3inwan band.

On a weekday afternoon in downtown Ramallah, the sound of a drum fill slips through the walls of the Palestine Music Space (PalMS). Inside, five schoolgirls lean into their instruments, negotiating rhythm and aiming for perfection. This is Hatta Band, one of Palestine's first schoolgirl rock bands. Zain Rami (16), Celine (17), Laila (17), Aseel (18), and Layan (17) came together through an open jam session at PalMS. For more than three years, these weekly jams have taken place at PalMS, a place where young people show up with curiosity and eagerness to learn, no credentials required. For these girls, their jam sessions were the first environment where being loud was not questioned, where holding a guitar or stepping up to a microphone felt possible.

From their earliest rehearsals, Hatta members have been mentored by Naseem Rimawi, the PalMS artistic director, and Ahmed Eid, its founder. The mentorship has grown alongside the band, evolving from guidance in ensemble playing and songwriting into a long-term relationship that is rooted in trust, listening, and artistic agency. Rather than shaping the band into a predefined sound, the mentors support the girls in discovering their own musical voice, encouraging experimentation and collective decision-making while building confidence.

Their song "Sowt al-Hurriyah"[1] (The Sound of Freedom) was written and performed as part of the Delia X Palestine Music Space Sessions project, which, since its release on all major music platforms, has achieved great acclaim. The melodic, raw song carries the struggle of Palestinian youth who are being shaped by the present moment, unafraid to claim freedom as both a personal and collective demand. The fact that it was written by schoolgirls holds significant meaning, and the fact that it was recorded and shared with the world could not have been more crucial in light of today's Palestinian reality.

Alongside Hatta, the bands Fantazya and Bala 3inwan (Without a Title) emerged from the same rooms. Like Hatta, they formed organically through jam sessions that were shaped by experimentation, collective listening, and spontaneity rather than rigidity and instruction. Their presence expands what participation looks like for young Palestinians, especially girls, in rock and alternative music, genres that had long been assumed to belong elsewhere or to someone else.

What binds these bands together is not just sound but also circumstance. Over the past couple years, PalMS has remained active through the escalating violence and genocide. Jam sessions have continued to pulse even amid the suffocation of daily life and the instability that overwhelms everyday conversation. In such a reality, gathering to play music is not a distraction; it is an act of continuous living. Writing songs has become a way to process fear, grief, and anger together, without having to translate those feelings into acceptable standardized language.



Hatta band in a training session with PalMS founder Ahmed Eid.



Hatta band in the 2025 PalMS X Delia Sessions.



Fantazya band in the 2025 PalMS X Delia Sessions.

Empowerment here is not framed as achievement but as practice. It can be seen in Zain counting the band in, in Celine insisting on her solo, in Laila, Aseel, and Layan shaping a song until it feels honest. It is present in Fantazya's newly released song "Hayne Hon"[2] (Here I Am), and in Bala 3inwan's refusal to define themselves too early, too narrowly.

Through Hatta, Fantazya, and Bala 3inwan, PalMS becomes more than a venue; it becomes a living archive of young people, especially girls and young women, insisting on presence. These bands are not exceptions; they are beginnings, and they signal the emergence of a Palestinian music scene beyond the traditional music genres, a scene that is increasingly shaped by young Palestinians. Hatta's members know that even in the harshest conditions, creation not only remains possible but is utterly necessary. It is a reminder that new futures often begin quietly, in spaces that are built on trust.

SCAN TO SHARE

[1] Available on YouTube under Hatta Band, "Sowt al-Hurriyah," including a short testimony by band members.

[2] Available on YouTube under Fantazya Band, "Hayne Hon," including a short testimony by band members.

The West Will Choke on Iran

The scene in Mineb, where the carnage at the Iranian girls' school took place on February 28, will probably remain the most horrid scene of the Western war on Iran. Iranian authorities have put the final death toll at 165 school girls, all aged between 7 and 12. While Western media reported the incident, there was no roar in the West. The cowardly Israeli and US authorities sought to distance themselves from the attack. *The New York Times* wrote that "thousands" attended the mass funeral whereas other reports claimed that the figure was close to 2 million. However, an investigation conducted by *Al Jazeera*, which incidentally has not been covering the war fairly, concluded that the targeting of the Iranian girls' school was likely "deliberate." Humanity failed yet again.

The war on Iran is déjà-vu. The whole charade of demonizing a regime and finding pretexts to topple that regime – whether through direct invasion or soft power – has always been a scam. Numerous countries have in fact been destroyed simply because their regimes did not acquiesce to American and Israeli demands. Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Somalia are among the countries that have been targeted and devastated under false pretexts. But in my opinion, the West will choke on Iran. Today, Iran is being targeted because it has vowed to support Palestine since the first day of its revolution in 1979.

Almost a week into the initial strike on Iran and the decapitation of Ayatollah Khamenei, along with more than forty Iranian officials, Iranian drones and missiles are still pounding Israel and American military bases all over the Arabian Gulf, as well as all US-related institutions, including American embassies. The United Arab Emirates, which most Arabs accuse of having played a sinister role in fragmenting Arab countries, was hit the hardest. The UAE port of Jebel Ali, the busiest port in the Middle East, was badly hit. Civil institutions, particularly those harboring American soldiers and personnel, were all targeted; but most importantly, the UAE's data centers, in which the country has been investing trillions in order to become a world leader in this sector, were heavily bombed. Although the UAE has so far been a safe financial haven and was on the way to becoming a leading destination for data centers, it now faces a bleak future.

In turn, the Americans and the Israelis are hitting Iran hard. But Iran is almost the size of Europe and has a population of over 90 million, as well as an almost inexhaustible pile of home-grown missiles. With the backing of China and Russia, Iran is absorbing the blows and pounding back.

The West will choke on Iran for various reasons; not least of which is the low stockpile of American ammunition. Back in June, when Israel almost ran out of defensive missiles, Netanyahu pleaded with Trump to stop the war. The missile technology that Iran possesses outmatches by far that of the West. The fastest Western missile is 6 Machs (speed of sound), whereas Iran has missiles that go beyond 20 Machs, and they're precision missiles. In fact, some analysts believe that this is the main reason why the West considers Iran a threat and wants to take it out. Also, most Iranians are rallying around the flag and supporting their government. The expected hike in gas and oil prices to unprecedented levels due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the shutting down of Qatar gas pipes will force the West to raise its white flag. Further, being on the defensive requires fewer forces to combat an invading power, not to mention that it grants the defender the impetus to resist. Lastly, history has often shown us that being more powerful will not inevitably lead to victory. Being committed to what you believe in is an unbeatable weapon.

Long Live Palestine.

Sani Meo
Publisher



This Week in Palestine
would like to sincerely thank the following amazing individuals who have contributed financially during the month of February 2026.

Unscrolled
Usama Tuqan
Bashar Abdel Hadi
Nader Barakat
Joannes van Velsen
Issa Alami
Nadia Tyson

Their contributions have not only made this publication possible but also strengthened the voice of Palestine that is being deliberately suppressed.



Lamar Elias

Palestinian Lamar Elias is emerging as one of the most promising young conductors on today's podium. She currently leads the Palestine Youth Orchestra, the Orchestre Symphonique Étudiant de Toulouse and Orchestre DEMOS Toulouse. A protégée of Sabrie Bekirova and Tugan Sokhiev, she was awarded the Paris Mozart Orchestra Prize at the prestigious La Maestra Competition 2026 in Paris.

Photo by Pauline Ballet

بنك فلسطين
BANK OF PALESTINE

فلسطينية . الك . لعيلتك . لشغلك
FELESTINEYA. FOR YOU,YOUR FAMILY & YOUR WORK

This Month, we celebrate women who Lead, Build &Transform economies

