

How Israel Wiped Out a Generation of Gaza's Poets, Writers and Artists

The art community of Gaza, once a vibrant reflection of Palestinian resilience, is now grappling with the loss of voices crucial to its essence.

By [TRT World](#)

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More than two months into Israel's punishing military offensive in Gaza, a [report](#) by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture has yet another piece of tragic statistics: at least 28 Palestinian artists, intellectuals, and writers in Gaza have been killed since October 7.

They are among the more than 20,000 Palestinians killed in the besieged coastal enclave that has faced indiscriminate and incessant Israeli bombing after Hamas fighters carried out an unprecedented cross-border operation.

The report eloquently captures the profound impact of Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza's cultural fabric, offering a poignant narrative that underscores the gravity of the situation.

"The war on culture has always been at the heart of the aggressors' war on our people, as the real war is a war on the narrative to steal the land and its rich treasures of knowledge, history, and civilization, along with the stories it holds." says Dr. Atef Abu Saif in the report's introduction.

He emphasises that the essence of this war is embedded in an endeavour to erase those who persist in contributing to this rich cultural heritage.

In honouring their legacy and ensuring their efforts and works remain indelible, we present a trimmed list of Palestinian literary and artistic figures who was brutally killed by Israel in last

two months:

Heba Zagout

Image: Heba Zagout's art frequently centred on themes such as women, the homeland, nature, and the profound bond between mothers and children.



Visual artist and fine arts educator Heba Ghazi Ibrahim Zagout, aged 39, and her son were killed on October 13. In the days leading up to her tragic death, she recorded a video showcasing her paintings and passionately discussing her works, expressing her dream of organising an art exhibition to share her creativity.

Her art frequently centred on themes such as women, the homeland, nature, and the profound bond between mothers and children. Zagout, an alumna of Gaza's Al Aqsa University with a degree in fine arts, depicted scenes from the Old City of the occupied East Jerusalem, the revered Al Aqsa mosque, and the Church of the Nativity in Beit Laham—a significant site for Christians, marking the birthplace of Jesus.

Hiba Abu Nada

Image: Abu Nada was educated at Islamic University, Gaza, where she was awarded a bachelor's degree of biochemistry.



Hiba Abu Nada, a 32-year-old poet and novelist, was killed alongside her son in an Israeli airstrike in Khan Yunis on October 20.

The accomplished writer had garnered recognition for her contributions, including published collections of poetry and a novel titled "Oxygen is Not for the Dead," which secured second place at the Sharjah Awards for Arab creativity in 2017.

Her last poem was shared on X, formerly Twitter, just a few days before her death:

“Gaza’s night is dark apart from the glow of rockets, quiet apart from the sound of the bombs, terrifying apart from the comfort of prayer, black apart from the light of the martyrs. Goodnight, Gaza.”

Omar Abu Shaweesh

Poet, novelist, and dedicated community activist, Omar Faris Abu Shaweesh, was killed on October 7 during the shelling of the Nuseirat refugee camp in Gaza.

Distinguished for his commitment to youth causes, Abu Shaweesh co-founded several youth associations and earned accolades both locally and internationally.

Among his notable awards are the “Best National Song of the Year 2007” from the International Festival of National Song and Heritage in Jordan.

Furthering his impact, the Arab Youth Council for Integrated Development of the Arab League honoured him with the “Distinguished Arab Youth in the Field of Media, Journalism, and Culture” award in 2013.

Abu Shaweesh’s literary contributions were equally significant, with several collections of poetry and a novel, “Alā qayd al-mawt” (2016), to his name.

His legacy extends beyond his written words, reflecting a profound dedication to uplifting youth and promoting cultural richness of Palestine.

Inas al Saqa



Image: An influential figure in Gaza’s theatre scene, Saqa was among the pioneers in children’s theatre and an artist skilled in visual arts.

A renowned playwright, actor, and educator specialising in children’s theatre, Inas al Saqa was killed in a late October Israeli airstrike alongside three of her children—Sara, Leen, and Ibrahim.

Sheltering in a Gaza City building, the family was struck, leaving Farah and Ritta critically injured and in intensive care.

An influential figure in Gaza's theatre scene, Saqa was among the pioneers in children's theatre and an artist skilled in visual arts.

Saqa's cinematic contributions included roles in the 2014 film "Sara" and "The Homeland's Sparrow," both addressing significant societal issues and the Palestinian struggle. Beyond her acting, she was known for her cultural contributions, collaborating with theatre groups in Gaza.

Her last social media post serves as a haunting testament: *"Sometimes you look back to get a glimpse of your past... and you discover that you emerged alive from a massacre..."*

Yusuf Dawas

Image: Fluent in both Arabic and English, Dawas wrote extensively and produced videos discussing a range of topics, including his aspiration to travel and explore the world.



On October 14, Palestinian writer, journalist, and photographer Yusuf Dawas lost his life in an Israeli airstrike on his family home in northern Gaza.

Dawas, also a guitarist, actively participated in the We Are Not Numbers initiative—an organisation established in Gaza after Israel's 2014 attack, dedicated to fostering a new generation of Palestinian writers and thinkers to effect meaningful change in the Palestinian cause.

Fluent in both Arabic and English, Dawas wrote extensively and produced videos discussing a range of topics, including his aspiration to travel and explore the world—a dream shared by many young people in Gaza, especially given more than sixteen years of the blockade imposed on them by the Israeli occupation.

Mohammed Qaryeqa

The artist Mohammed Sami Qaryeqa, aged 24, was killed on October 18th. Known for his innovative approach, he integrated technology with art, depicting scenes from daily life.

His final social media post showcased [a video](#) of children playing in the garden of the Baptist Hospital in Gaza, just a day before it fell victim to an Israeli airstrike, leading to a tragic massacre with 500 martyrs and dozens of wounded.

Even in his last moments, Qaryeqa endeavoured to alleviate the anxiety and psychological stress faced by children and patients in the hospital through his art, reflecting his unwavering commitment to bringing comfort and solace in the face of adversity.

Nour al Din Hajjaj

Poet and writer Nour al Din Hajjaj was killed by an Israeli airstrike on his home in Al Shujaiyya on December 2.

Renowned for his literary contributions, he authored the play “The Gray Ones” (2022) and the novel “Wings That Do Not Fly” (2021). Hajjaj was an active participant in initiatives such as the Cordoba Association, and the Days of Theater Foundation.

His final message to the outside world was:

“My name is Nour al Din Hajjaj, I am a Palestinian writer, I am twenty-seven years old and I have many dreams.

I am not a number and I do not consent to my death being passing news. Say, too, that I love life, happiness, freedom, children’s laughter, the sea, coffee, writing, Fairouz, everything that is joyful—though these things will all disappear in the space of a moment.

One of my dreams is for my books and my writings to travel the world, for my pen to have wings so that no unstamped passport or visa rejection can hold it back.

Another dream of mine is to have a small family, to have a little son who looks like me and to tell him a bedtime story as I rock him in my arms.”

The listed names offer a glimpse into the untold number of artists, writers, and musicians shaping Gaza’s resilient arts landscape.

As another prominent killed Palestinian poet [Refaat Alareer](#) once reminded us, if he dies, we must live to tell his story:

If I must die, you must live to tell my story to sell my things to buy a piece of cloth and some strings, (make it white with a long tail) so that a child,
somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze —
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh

not even to himself —
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above,
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love.
If I must die
let it bring hope,
let it be a story.

*

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Featured image: Heba Zagout's art frequently centred on themes such as women, the homeland, nature, and the profound bond between mothers and children. (Source: TRT World)

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