

POLICY PAPER


مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية
Institute for Palestine Studies

ISSUE: 030 | 26 Jan. 2024

The Women of Gaza during the Current Genocide: Women, War and Resistance

* Madlin al-Halabi



(Anadol)

Introduction

With the start, on October 7, 2023, of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, that Zionist colonialist state has striven to target all components of Palestinian society, overriding all humanitarian and ethical considerations, so that the criterion for targeting is basically Palestinian commitment and identity. This is so because the state of Israel is a colonialist regime founded upon the principle of genocide. That principle operates on several levels, the most salient of which is perhaps physical genocide through increasing situational and local violence or through a campaign of forcible eviction and collective massacres, in addition to measures taken to choke the daily lives of Palestinians.

These Israeli policies have left a great impact on women and other marginalized groups, on the assumption that women suffer from imperialism more than men ¹ and have thus suffered most from the ongoing genocidal war on Gaza, where more than 7200 women have been martyred from a total of 25,700 while as of this moment 4700 women and children are missing². Added to all this are injuries directly sustained through intensive bombardment, there is in Gaza 1.10 million women comprising almost 49.3% ³, including 546,000 of childbearing age (15-49). More than 2784 women have become widows and new family heads after losing their partners. Each hour, two mothers are killed, and every two hours seven mothers are killed while this genocidal war persists.

*“More than 7200 women have been martyred
from a total of 25,700 while as of this moment
4700 women and children are missing”*

These figures show that the effects of this genocide have largely impacted women who give birth to the new generations and play a central role in the struggle for Palestine by birthing and nurturing future Palestinian generations. In turn, this has imposed diverse roles upon the Palestinian woman as a victim, a resistance figure and a mother striving to obtain the essentials of life. These essentials are used by the colonialist state as an instrument of war against the Palestinians in Gaza.

This paper aims at throwing light on the daily suffering of women amidst this genocidal Israeli war being waged on the Palestinian people of Gaza since October 7 last.

Historical background

Palestinian women live under a colonialist regime long intent upon the killing of Palestinian women, regarding them as an enemy who bear in their wombs future Palestinian generations and are capable of persistent resistance through re-forming the “family” as the basic and traditional unit of Palestinian society. Hence, they must be decimated and their bodies violated, leading the colonialist regime to devise a system of racial and social violence aimed against gender and feminism. This was made clear in a statement by Ariel Sharon who stated: “Palestinian women and children are far more dangerous than the men since the existence of a single child means survival for several generations to come.”⁴ Thus, in the massacre of Dayr Yasin in 1948, women’s bellies were cut open as was the case with the women who were picking olives in the massacre of Kafr Qasim, in addition to the colonialist violence done to women throughout recent years which targeted all aspects of their lives through detentions, murder, and denial of their economic and social rights. This comes on top of a system of male predominance based upon gender inequality. This has imposed upon women a number of challenges and difficulties arising from changes in the roles played by women inside society and resistance to repression by a colonialist regime.

*“Palestinian women live under a colonialist
regime long intent upon the killing of
Palestinian women”*

Since June, 2007, when Israel first enforced a policy of siege and closure on a specific geographical region, the women of Gaza have suffered much hardship, presenting them with new challenges in a complex situation where economic and social burdens have multiplied and where poverty and unemployment have steadily risen. A gap of 11.1 % has been recorded which separates families headed by women, reaching 30.6 % as opposed to 41.7 %⁵ of families headed by men. During earlier wars on Gaza, there were more than 1000 widows struggling to support their families, their husbands having been martyred in these wars.

Gaza's women as they face genocide

In classifying colonialist wars, wars waged to suppress rebellions are commonly called “feminist” since they basically target a population and their social structures, transforming every city quarter into a battlefield and a central targeting objective.⁶ This means that traditional structures of life such as residential areas, hospitals and schools, considered relatively safe and “feminist” spaces, have now come to witness the killing fields and genocide of Gaza's women.

In wars waged to suppress rebellions, it is assumed that women are essential in peace-making since they are less violent, more compassionate and more prone to accept toleration and dialogue, rendering it easier to include them in peace building projects,⁷ which in turn makes it easier to dismember and disorganize the social infrastructure of a society in a state of resistance. With the start of the land campaign and the storming of residential quarters and homes, Israel once again resorted to its policy of arresting the men and overlooking women and children in an attempt to undermine their role and steadfastness by engaging them in dialogues designed to wean them away from the resistance movement, or else forcing them to do so through armed threats, photographing them and blackmailing them, or through trying to convince them that Israel will grant them security. The women, however, have refused to submit to them or obey their orders and this has led to arresting them, killing them, kidnapping their children, and killing their husbands and families. This is especially true of northern Gaza and its remaining population who stay on as an expression of defiance, rejecting the forcible eviction schemes set in train by the occupying state.

With the start of Israel's targeting of Gaza on October 7, Gaza's Ministry of Health began publishing the figures of victims, most of whom, it turned out, were women and children. According to Ministry figures as of January 24, 2024, 70% of the total victims, including the martyred and the wounded, are women and children, deliberately singled out inside their homes or their places of shelter such as hospitals, schools and so forth. A statement by a journalist, Maha Abu'l Kas, runs as follows: “Houses near to mine were targeted without any prior warning, and my family and I were wounded. My PRESS jacket and helmet were buried under the rubble, but then I left to continue my press coverage.”⁸

“With the start of Israel’s targeting of Gaza on October 7, Gaza’s Ministry of Health began publishing the figures of victims, most of whom, it turned out, were women and children”

According to the Euro-Med Monitor, women, some of whom were elderly, were summarily executed on the battlefield in northern Gaza⁹ during the land invasion and snipers spread out, tearing holes in walls of houses. A direct-witness account affirmed that Israeli snipers targeted a woman as she was preparing a meal inside her house in the Yarmuk quarter. That woman states: “I was at home thinking it was fairly safe. I didn’t even go up to the roof to light a fire to cook the food, fearing the snipers and the shelling. Instead, they deliberately targeted me just as I was spreading a plastic sheet for my children to eat upon.”¹⁰ Likewise, a woman was targeted with a tank shell as she fled the quarter of Al-Daraj in central Gaza after several shells had landed on Al-Iwa’ school. The woman was killed instantly.¹¹

These feminist wars are not confined to targeting the body but seek also to target the “contours of a society” to include social relations and traditional societal structures, e.g. “kinship ties.” This ongoing war has produced a large number of widows and orphaned females. In a testimony given for a project called “Women’s voices from Gaza” Du`a Badawi stated: “We live a life where all whom one loves are being killed one after the other, or else you yourself are wiped off the face of the earth along with all your immediate family. In the end you might perhaps survive with half a body, half a soul, half a heart.”¹²

“These feminist wars are not confined to targeting the body but seek also to target the “contours of a society” to include social relations and traditional societal structures, e.g. kinship ties”

All these things have imposed on women new social roles as providers for family and children, protecting them, and feeding them in circumstances where all this is immensely difficult. This is in addition to the heavy loads they bear which do not suit the nature and physique of women and where all that supports life is lacking, such as chopping wood to heat food, standing in endless queues to obtain water and the perils they expose themselves to in order to keep their families alive. It is commonly accepted that in war-torn societies women are always the first to suffer and are expected to be as calm as possible in order to preserve family stability.¹³ In this regard, Maha Abu'l Kas states: “The trembling and terror that we and our children experience is totally abnormal to the point where we can no longer pretend before our children that we ourselves are normal and unafraid, because this time it is different.”¹⁴ This is to say nothing about a large number of women who perform these tasks while being injured or having lost their children or families in the war. This is shown in an interview conducted with a woman who stayed in northern Gaza after the martyrdom of her husband. She stated: “I suffered medium burns to my hand when a neighbor’s house was shelled and my husband was martyred, but I am nevertheless forced to stand in a queue to carry water to a shelter station at the Fahmi al-Jirjawi School in central Gaza, to give water to my four children.”¹⁵ In a testimony made to the journalist Samar Abu'l `Awf, another woman stated: “Afraid, I approached the shrouded body and when I opened it I recognized her and said: ‘You are my first joy and eldest child and from your lips I first heard the word “Mama!” I promise to bring up your kids the way I brought you up.”¹⁶

The occupation regime practiced a policy of targeting women’s bodies, homes and families through “campaigns of eradication” after having denied them all that enables them to lead normal lives or perform their tasks as fighting mothers who face that war of genocide by protecting their bodies and their families. They do so by resorting to diverse means of survival,

such as substituting wheat for flour, using an open fire to cook and other primitive measures, in addition to other cooperative activities undertaken by women and by society's basic structures. Women thus come to occupy a new status in this confrontation as mothers of a prisoner, a martyr or an injured person, unlike the image that the colonialist occupation wishes to impose upon them as women who can do nothing, given the bitter hardships enforced upon them.

“The occupation regime practiced a policy of targeting women’s bodies, homes and families through campaigns of eradication”

Women and the spaces of evacuation

The occupation regime drove thousands of women and girls out of their homes and forced them to walk about twenty-two kilometers amidst intense firing in the direction of southern Gaza, which the Israeli army alleged to be a safe area. The space to which they were forced to evacuate added further burdens and challenges to the women who now found themselves not only living under inhuman conditions but also lacking all traditional means of protection.

“The occupation regime drove thousands of women and girls out of their homes and forced them to walk about twenty-two kilometers amidst intense firing in the direction of southern Gaza”

Evacuation to new spaces has changed the status of women whether inside her family or in their wider social context due to being forced to perform new tasks imposed upon them and

after having lost control over their children and their own privacy due to evacuation, a matter which has destroyed to some extent both societal and family boundaries.

The massive overcrowding, greatly exceeding the capacity of evacuation centers, whether in streets, schools or homes of relatives, has placed enormous pressure on women at various points such as forcing women to wear the *hijab* at all times or reduce their intake of food and drink as much as possible to avoid using the latrines or standing in queues before strangers,¹⁷ and often sleeping on the ground to allow their children to sleep on whatever mattresses or items of clothing are at hand. This was confirmed by a four-month pregnant woman forced constantly to sleep or sit on the ground when no place was found for her and her family in a school in Dayr al-Balah.¹⁸ In her testimony the legal activist Haya Abu Nasir states: “We do not have even the clothes that can protect us from the bitter cold. We imagined that our absence from our homes would be temporary, but it has now lasted 43 days. The bags we carried to suffice us on our journey to find shelter we now need to have them suffice us for long and hungry weeks to come.”¹⁹

These circumstances have also forced women to take medicines that stop their menstrual cycles due to lack of sanitary napkins, and this has negatively affected their health and caused them bodily pains. Their bodies and their gender have been prime and systematic Israeli targets as part of Israel’s colonialist logic of genocide and expulsion²⁰. This was affirmed by three sisters who sought refuge in the Dayr al-Balah region but found no sanitary napkins during their repeated menstrual cycles, forcing their mother to use rags to be washed in water and whatever tiny quantities of detergent available, and then reusing these rags for each of them²¹.

But their hardships are not limited to these instances. Pregnant women have been experiencing extremely difficult conditions while giving birth, without anesthesia and without any proper health care or sterilization. A woman who was forced to deliver in a corridor in the Kamal `Udwan Hospital as that hospital was being besieged, and to do so without any regard to her privacy and her critical condition, testified: “I gave birth while I was hearing the sounds of bullets and artillery shells in every wing of the Hospital and never expected I or my baby would survive. I carried my baby and ran into the streets amidst Israeli tanks stationed in the town of Jabaliya in northern Gaza, and this happened just two hours after giving birth following the Israeli army’s assault on the Hospital.”²² In a post on Facebook, `Alya’ al-Khalidi from Gaza states: “Despite the fact that twenty days have elapsed since the birth of my first child, I have been unable to bathe or care for my baby’s cleanliness. The baby is still in the same condition in which he was born, and I cannot find a single place or some water to clean him from what has been sticking to him since his delivery.”²³

“Pregnant women have been experiencing extremely difficult conditions while giving birth, without anesthesia and without any proper health care or sterilization”

Even women workers in the public domain were targeted, such as journalists, teachers, and hospital health workers. For example, the nurse Wafa' al-Biss had her house directly targeted²⁴. A clinical psychologist, `Aliya Abu Maryam states: “I’ve been working as a clinical psychologist for 5 years and there was not a single day when I did not treat women subjected to violence. In every war I try my best to offer support through the mobile phone and have lost specialist colleagues I’ve been working with for the past three years.”²⁵

“Even women workers in the public domain were targeted, such as journalists, teachers, and hospital health workers”

The road to expulsion and death

A large number of women were arrested as they walked down Salah al-Din Street southwards, where they were subjected to brutal treatment. They were arbitrarily stopped at the Netzarim checkpoint and made to stay for long hours in a deep ditch, with weapons pointed at their heads. This was confirmed by a specialist doctor summoned by a soldier who stopped her capriciously as she was crossing that checkpoint. Having ascertained that she belonged to the medical staff besieged in al-Nasr Children’s Hospital, he arrested her in front of her family and forced her into a deep and filthy ditch while threatening to kill her and mutilate her body²⁶. Some women have been forced to leave their families or some of their children behind in besieged areas and in northern Gaza, losing all contact with them. This is especially the case

with divorced women whose children live with their former husbands²⁷. In this regard, Ala' al-Qatrawi posted an appeal on Facebook to have news of her three children besieged in Khan Yunis following their father's arrest and stated: "The cruelest thing of all in this war is for a mother to lose all maternal instincts, being unable even to know where her children are, let alone protect them."²⁸

According to figures published by the Department of Prisoner Affairs²⁹, and during the period from the beginning of the land assault until mid-November, 2023, the occupation regime has arrested some 142 women in various camps and prisons, including Damon and Hasharon. Among them were children, suckling mothers, and the elderly. Some were forced to abandon their children in the street or with total strangers. Many were robbed of their valuables and money and forced to abandon a great many of their necessary belongings such as clothes and bedding³⁰. A number of other women were arrested for refusing the abduction of their children by soldiers of the occupation regime or else were killed.³¹

“A number of other women were arrested for refusing the abduction of their children by soldiers of the occupation regime or else were killed”

Conclusion: the future of Gaza's women after the war

With the ending of the war on Gaza, and the absence of health care, a grim and complex future, replete with health and psychological challenges, awaits women. It is expected that cases of nervous tension and depression will increase alongside a severe lack of health care. The war may also impact the chances of work and education for women, necessitating a sustained effort to rebuild the economy and strengthen social networks. Women need urgent medical and psychological care programs in order for them to overcome the aftereffects of war and improve the quality of their lives, with special attention paid to women's rights and combatting sexual violence.

This latest genocidal war on Gaza has shown that the condition of women before and after it is fraught with difficulties. They have been the principal victims of deliberate and violent

targeting launched by the Zionist occupation regime. This racist targeting of Palestinian women and the flagrant violations of their rights clearly demonstrate how their identity and bodies have been subjected to horrendous torment.

The colonialist regime has long striven to “politicize” women’s bodies and to target their gender as part of its colonialist project. In genocidal wars, the targeting of women’s bodies and transforming them into a gendered battlefield has been an effective tool to achieve political and colonialist objectives. This includes subjecting women to physical and psychological torment and to barbaric sexual assaults, thus creating an environment of terror and inhumanity which severely impacts their lives and privacy.

The occupation and the ongoing conflict has now spread to the deliberate targeting and disfigurement of women’s bodies after having subjected their gender and material feelings to military violence, siege and constant bombardment. Their identity and gender have been exploited as a way of disrupting their national identity and dismembering the social infrastructure of resistance.

Rachael Hill, "Decolonizing Women", Khan Academy: ¹

<http://tinyurl.com/4kj7433m>

² وزارة الصحة الفلسطينية - غزة، موقع فيسبوك:

<https://2u.pw/aOeaQds>

³ موقع الأونروا الإلكتروني:

<https://www.unrwa.org/ar/what-we-do/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%A9>

⁴ سهاد ظاهر ناشف ونادرة شلهوب كيفوركينان، "الرغبات الجنسية في آلة الاستعمار الإسرائيلية الاستيطانية"، "مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية"، العدد 104 (خريف 2015).

⁵ جهاز الإحصاء المركزي الفلسطيني:

<https://2u.pw/vulzNv>

⁶ لالي خليلي، "الجندر وحروب مكافحة التمرد"، في "النسوية العربية: رؤية نقدية" (بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، 2012).

⁷ عنان الحمد الله، "موجز في الحروب الاستعمارية والنوع الاجتماعي 'الجندر'"، 2017/10/9:

<http://tinyurl.com/3pw7rn8d>

⁸ شهادة للصحافية مها أبو الكاس منشورة ضمن مشروع "أصوات النساء في غزة" لمعهد دراسات المرأة في جامعة بيرزيت، موقع فيسبوك، شوهده بتاريخ 23 كانون الثاني/يناير 2024:

<https://2u.pw/Jg9VjDY>

⁹ المرصد الأورومتوسطي لحقوق الإنسان، "شهادات صادمة عن تصفيات وإعدامات ميدانية بغزة والصليب الأحمر مطالب بالقيام بمسؤولياته"، 2023/12/20:

<https://2u.pw/E2C0C2c>

¹⁰ مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة نزحت من حي الشجاعية إلى منطقة اليرموك وسط غزة، بتاريخ 14 كانون الثاني/يناير 2024.

¹¹ مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة نزحت من منزلها في شارع الشفاء غرب غزة إلى منطقة حي الدرج ومن ثم إلى منطقة تل الهوى، بتاريخ 7 كانون الأول/ديسمبر 2023.

¹² شهادة دعاء بدوي ضمن مشروع "أصوات النساء من غزة"، لمعهد دراسات المرأة في جامعة بيرزيت، موقع فيسبوك، شوهده بتاريخ 23 كانون الثاني/يناير 2024:

<https://2u.pw/G65b9au>

¹³ مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة فلسطينية من مخيم الشاطئ كانت تعمل معلمة لغة عربية في وزارة التربية والتعليم في غزة قبيل حرب الإبادة، بتاريخ 2 تشرين الثاني/نوفمبر 2023.

¹⁴ شهادة للصحافية مها أبو الكاس، مصدر سبق ذكره:

<https://2u.pw/84hSyzg>

¹⁵ مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة فلسطينية من مخيم الشاطئ، مصدر سبق ذكره.

¹⁶ شهادة لسيدة أدلت بها للصحافية سمر أبو العوف، منشورة على فيسبوك، شوهده بتاريخ 24 كانون الثاني/يناير 2024:

<https://2u.pw/84hSyzg>

¹⁷ مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة نزحت مع عائلتها من منطقة حي النصر نحو دير البلح جنوب قطاع غزة، بتاريخ 20 تشرين الأول/أكتوبر 2023.

¹⁸ المصدر نفسه.

¹⁹ شهادة هيا أبو ناصر منشورة ضمن مشروع "أصوات النساء من غزة" لمعهد دراسات المرأة في جامعة بيرزيت، شوهده بتاريخ 24 كانون الثاني/يناير 2024:

<https://2u.pw/dx3HDCn>

²⁰ المصدر نفسه.

²¹مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة نزحت مع عائلتها من منطقة حي النصر نحو دير البلح، مصدر سبق ذكره.

²²مقابلة هاتفية مع سيدة من مخيم جباليا، نزحت أثناء حصار بلدة جباليا إلى منطقة الصناعة وسط غزة، بتاريخ 26 كانون الأول/ديسمبر 2023.

²³علياء الخالدي من غزة، منشور على فيسبوك:

<https://2u.pw/MuUvK0Q>

²⁴"مسعفة بمستشفى كمال عدوان: الاحتلال منعنا من علاج المصابين"، "الجزيرة نت"، 2023/12/16:

<https://2u.pw/5NQISoU>

²⁵مقابلة لعالية أبو مريم منشورة ضمن مشروع "أصواء النساء في غزة" لمعهد دراسات المرأة في جامعة بيرزيت، موقع فيسبوك، شوهد بتاريخ 23 كانون الثاني/يناير 2024:

<https://2u.pw/iHpqh6M>

²⁶مقابلة هاتفية مع طبيبة امتياز عام في مستشفى النصر للأطفال، بتاريخ 26 تشرين الثاني/نوفمبر 2023.

²⁷ملاحظة من الباحثة في مجموعات وقنوات الأخبار والمناشدات المحلية.

²⁸ألاء القطراوي، في مناشدة لها عبر فيسبوك في محاولة للاطمئنان على أطفالها الثلاثة الذين تحاصروا في منطقة السطر الشرقي - خانيونس، عقب اعتقال والدهم.

²⁹هيئة شؤون الأسرى:

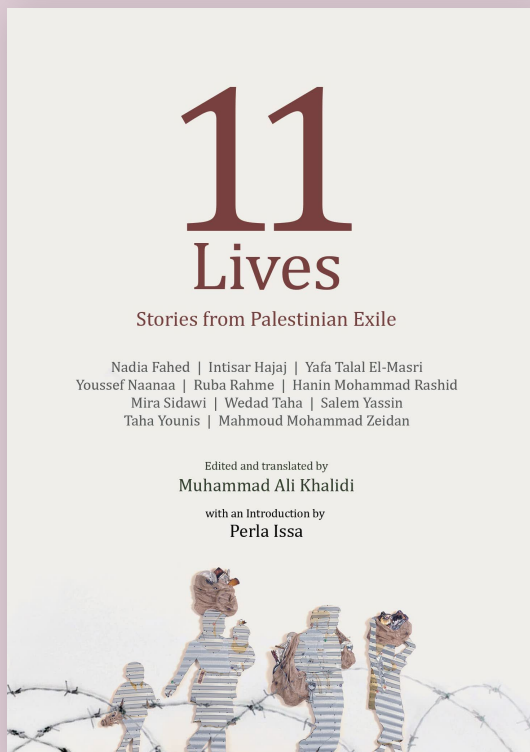
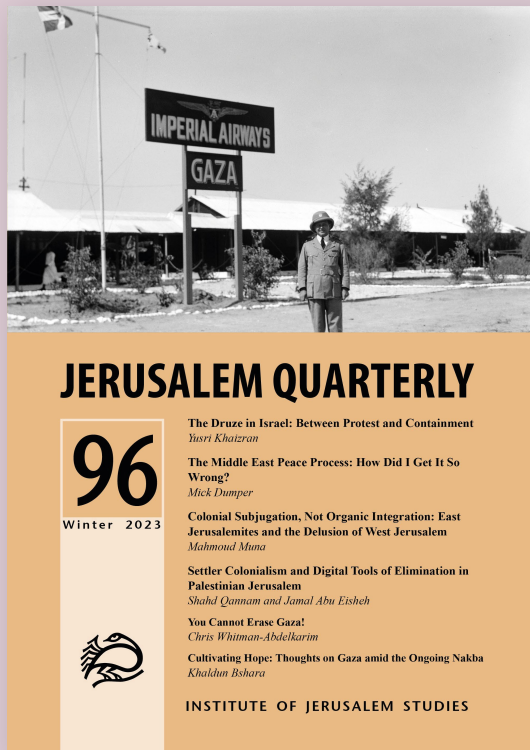
<https://2u.pw/yMCq0Sx>

³⁰مقابلة هاتفية مع طبيبة امتياز عام، مصدر سبق ذكره.

³¹شهادة نشرت عبر مواقع التواصل عن اعتقال سيدة وزوجها من حي الزيتون عقب اختطاف أطفالها أمام أعينها.

Latest Issues from The Institute for Palestine Studies

www.palestine-studies.org/en/Books
www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals



* Author's Bio

Madlin al-Halabi, Madelene Halabi is a researcher at the Institute for Palestine Studies.

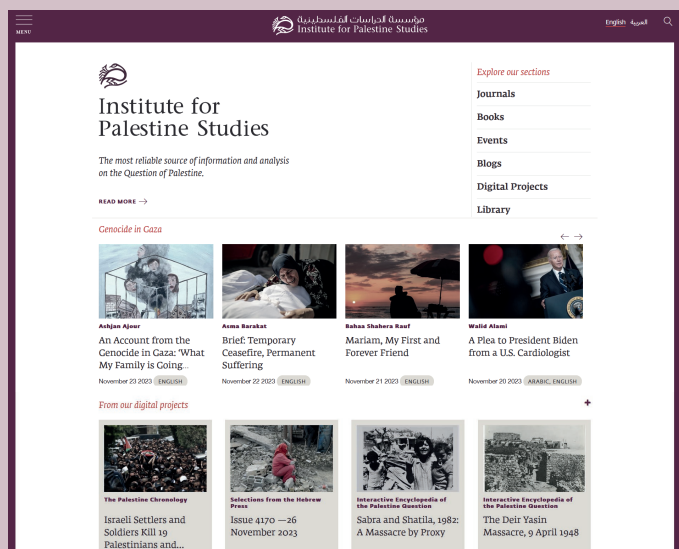
From her Articles:

[Between Brutality and Steadfastness: Challenges of Displacement in Gaza](#)

Institute for Palestine Studies

Founded in Beirut in 1963, is an independent nonprofit Arab research and publication center, which is not affiliated to any political organization or government.

The opinions expressed in its publications do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Institute for Palestine Studies. The header includes the logo and name in Arabic and English. The main content area features a section titled "Genocide in Gaza" with four article cards. Each card includes a thumbnail image, the author's name, a brief title, and the publication date. Below this is a section for "From our digital projects" with four project cards, each featuring a thumbnail and a title. A sidebar on the right lists various sections like Journals, Books, Events, Blogs, Digital Projects, and Library.

Institute for Palestine Studies, Anis Nsouli st. - Verdun, Beirut - Lebanon