

WHAT IS SCHOLASTICIDE?

The term scholasticide was coined by Professor Karma Nabulsi, a Palestinian scholar of humanitarian law. Nabulsi first used the term first in 2009 to describe the “systematic destruction of Palestinian education by Israel.” In coining the term, Nabulsi sought not only to describe a moment in time, but also a pattern she identified of Israeli colonial attacks on Palestinian scholars, students, and educational institutions going back to the Nakba of 1948.

Recognizing “how important education is to the Palestinian tradition and the Palestinian revolution,” Nabulsi noted that Israeli colonial policymakers therefore “cannot abide it and have to destroy it.”



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Check out this toolkit by Scholars Against War entitled, “International Actions Against Scholasticide” which includes advice on how to organize events on scholasticide and how to pass motions in your faculty and student unions.



PHOTO CREDIT

COVER: Gaza municipal library, December 1, 2023 Photo via Gaza municipality
SCHOLASTICIDE: Al Azhar University, Gaza Photo by Omar Ishaq
INTERIOR: Al-Aqsa University, 2024, Photo AFP via Getty Images

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Damage and Risk Assessment of Cultural Heritage under Attack in the Gaza Strip” bit.ly/gazacultural

“History of Palestinian Libraries and Archives Under Israeli Occupation (1948-1993)” *Progressive Librarian* 48, pp. 7-30: bit.ly/gazalibraryhistory

“Israeli Damage to Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Gaza, October 2023–January 2024” bit.ly/archivedamage

“I was forced to burn my books to survive in Gaza.” bit.ly/burntosurvive

LIBRARIES IN GAZA

2023-2025

The Destruction of an Ancient Legacy and an Assault on Education & Cultural Heritage



HISTORY IN GAZA

Gaza is home to one of the oldest highways in history, used by Ancient Egyptian, Roman, and Muslim rulers alike. Today, it is Gaza's main road: Salah al-Din. Since ancient times, Gaza has served as an economic and cultural link between Egypt and Syria, as well as between north Africa and southwest Asia.

OBLITERATING HISTORY

The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Porphyrius was built in the 12th century. Housing a library, it remained active as a home of study and worship until an Israeli airstrike decimated it in December 2023. Over 450 Christian and Muslim Palestinians had sought shelter there, and 18 people were killed in the airstrike that also damaged the nearby Kitab al-Wilaya Mosque. Muslim religious institutions, like mosques, schools, Sufi lodges, hostels, and soup kitchens, have dotted Gaza's landscape for centuries. Historically, these institutions were sustained by charitable endowments, called awqaf, which were the mainstay of public services in Muslim societies.

Gaza's largest mosque, the Umari Mosque in the Shuja'iyya neighborhood, dates back to the 7th century. Mamluk sultan al-Zhahir Baybars (d. 1277) gave over 20,000 books to the Umari Mosque. Libraries were an essential feature of the Arab-Islamic civilization of which Gaza was an integral part.

An Israeli airstrike destroyed the Umari Mosque on December 8, 2023. Israeli forces had destroyed the Central Archives in Gaza City a week earlier, engulfing centuries of records including a host of awqaf records documenting the region's rich cultural heritage.

ISRAELI ASSAULT ON PALESTINIAN EDUCATION

For many Palestinians in Gaza, education has long been the only way to imagine a future beyond the violence and indignities of military occupation, assault, siege, and international isolation. Before October 2023, Gaza was home to 12 universities. These universities housed many different departments, research labs, and health centers, each with libraries of their own. All have since been destroyed by Israel.

Gaza was also home to a dynamic collection of private and specialist libraries and bookstores. Gaza's most famous bookstore, the Samir Mansour Bookshop, was reduced to rubble in a 2021 Israeli assault. It was rebuilt and reopened for business before being destroyed yet again by Israeli bombs in mid-October 2023. The Edward Said Library, Gaza's first English-language library, was established in 2016 by Pulitzer Prize winning poet and essayist Mosab Abu Toha, and destroyed in January 2024. Along with destroying the Edward Said Library, the airstrike killed Do'a Al-Masri, librarian of its Gaza City branch, alongside her family.

In 2020, Abu Toha had already asked an ALA meeting in Philadelphia for solidarity with libraries in Gaza.



DEVASTATION OF SIEGE

Read below excerpts from "I was forced to burn my books to survive in Gaza" by writer and medical student Hend Salama Abo Helow from northern Gaza.

"When we were children, my siblings and I regularly spent our pocket money on new books. Our mother had instilled in us a passionate love for books. Reading wasn't just a hobby; it was a way of living...

Our home library became our friend, our solace in both war and peace, and our lifeline on those dark, haunting nights lit only by bombs... we would discuss the works of Ghassan Kanafani and recite the poems of Mahmoud Darwish...

In October 2023, the blockade on Gaza was tightened to an unbearable level. Water, fuel, medicines, and nutritious food were cut off. When gas ran out, people started burning whatever they could find: wood from the rubble of homes, tree branches, trash... and then books...

I was forced to burn my treasured collections of Mahmoud Darwish's poetry; the books of Gibran Khalil Gibran; the poems of Samih al-Qasim, the voice of resistance; the novels of Abdelrahman Munif that I held dear; and the Harry Potter novels that I had spent my teenage reading. Then came my medical books...

I managed to save 15 books. These are history books about the Palestinian cause, the stories of our ancestors...

Existence is resistance; these books are my proof that my family has always existed here, in Palestine...

READ THE FULL PIECE AT bit.ly/burntosurvive