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Journalistic Genocide: How Israel's occupation regime has dealt with Palestinian journalists in Gaza

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In the wake of October 7, 2023, the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian journalists in Gaza have raised a large list of real concerns and fears, the most prominent perhaps being the high instances of the targeting and killing of journalists, resulting in diminution of the number of journalists able to cover the news in Gaza and to transmit them to the world at large. This is precisely what the occupation intends to achieve, namely, to prevent the Palestinian narrative from reaching the world.

The intensive targeting of journalists and their places of work as though they were military targets, and across two consecutive years, requires a different explanatory framework connected to journalistic genocide, regarded as part of the crime of cultural genocide which in turn is part of collective genocide. In Palestine, this transcends the journalists themselves, valuable though their lives are, for what the Israeli occupation is aiming at is to clamp down on information, and threatens to impose a media blackout on the entire area of coverage, especially here in the besieged Gaza Strip. Defined thus, journalistic genocide targets not solely the narrow and besieged coastal strip known as the Gaza Strip, nor occupied Palestine, but also the right of people to access credible, free, independent and multiple information about one of the world's most important regions, currently subjected to the most vicious colonialist savagery, thus rendering it the subject of international concern and interest.(1)

Well-documented crimes targeting local journalists in Gaza, especially those directly captured on camera, acquire added importance especially as we know that the occupation regime which murders and targets journalists in all kinds of ways, simultaneously forbids entry into Gaza of any international press. This redoubles the importance of the role played by local journalists who work for local, Arab and international media as they cover ongoing events and help to convey the Palestinian narrative and as they transmit the voices of about two million Palestinian inhabitants suffering from famine, genocide and all manner of death and destruction.

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In forbidding access to Gaza for the international press, Israel is obviously afraid that its genocidal crimes will be exposed at a time when Israel’s propaganda machine works tirelessly to allege that no genocide is being perpetrated in Gaza. For that propaganda to succeed, it was imperative for Israel to prevent journalists from carrying out their tasks, using all means available, and hence murdering them to prevent their voices and images of the genocide taking place in Gaza from reaching the outside world.

Targeting policies and practices have a long history

What journalists in Gaza have been enduring in the past two years is nothing new. What is relatively speaking novel is the intensity and extent of that targeting policy. For if we go back in time in the history of the Israeli occupation, we will find that targeting Palestinian journalists began as early as 1948 when the occupation pursued a deliberate policy of targeting the Palestinian press in an attempt to reduce it to silence and to cover up the crimes being committed against the Palestinians.

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Ever since the Nakba of 1948, the Israeli occupation regime imposed a draconian security muzzle on the Palestinian press and those who worked in it, based on a policy of deliberate repression and laws inherited from the British Mandate period, especially the "Press Order" of 1933 and the emergency regulations of 1945, which strictly forbad the publication of any article or news item without prior permission of the military censorship. (2)

In addition to laws and regulations to repress Palestinian journalists, Israel has resorted to murder, detention, exile and home arrest as well as intense military censorship, all of which rendered freedom of the press to be a prime target of harassment and constraint. Outside Palestine too, the Israeli occupation targeted Palestinians, including journalists, e.g. in July, 1972, when a car bomb in Beirut killed the prominent journalist and writer Ghassan Kanafani and his niece, Lamis.

On October 9, 1981, the Israeli Mossad assassinated in Rome Majid Abu Sharar, a principal PLO spokesman, by placing a bomb beneath his bed at the Flora Hotel as he was taking part in an international conference of solidarity with Palestine. (3) On May 3, 1984, the journalist Hanna Muqbil, who had participated in creating the *Unified Palestinian Media* and succeeded Kamal Nasir, assassinated in Beirut, as editor of *Palestine: The Revolution,* was himself assassinated in Nicosia by the Mossad, using a gun with a silencer. (4)

These were neither the first nor the last such assassinations. If one follows the pattern of the best-known assassinations of Palestinian journalists from 1985 until the present day, one would observe an escalation in the targeting of journalists. Official figures indicate that, as of the year 2000 and right until the latest war on Gaza, several organizations, notably the *Committee to Protect Journalists* and *Journalists Without Borders,* have documented the killing of about 50 Palestinian journalists shot by the occupation army , most of whom were covering the Second Intifada (2000-2005) and earlier wars on Gaza. (5)

During the assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014, Israel killed 17 journalists after deliberately targeting their homes and places of work, a pattern repeated at diverse rates until May 11, 2022, when an Israeli army sniper shot Al-Jazeera correspondent Shirine Abu Aqleh as she covered Israel's assault on the Jenin Camp in central Palestine.

The number of kills kept mounting as also the number of documented instances of these acts, part of a policy pattern by the occupation regime aimed at hiding its crimes against the press and others, and in an environment of a total absence of accountability. (6) But the period following October 7, 2023, and the genocidal war on Gaza is the period which has witnessed the climatic targeting of Palestinian journalists. The latest reports by the Union of Palestinian

Journalists and the Government Information Bureau in Gaza indicate that 256 journalists have been martyred. (7) From October 7, 2023, and until the end of 2024, the Israeli army murdered 201 men and women journalists while 55 others have been murdered since the beginning of 2025. (8)

The targeting of journalists: indicators and objectives

The crimes committed by Israel's occupation regime against Palestinian journalists in the Gaza Strip indicate that the "killing of journalists is not a war strategy but a war crime." Across two years of a genocidal war, the Gaza Strip has become "a journalists' grave" where killing journalists is tantamount to killing truth and hiding it from the world at large. (9) In deliberately targeting journalists to prevent their coverage of events, Israel is not solely killing individuals but killing the truth itself, and is preventing the world from knowing about the collective genocide taking place in one of the world's narrowest inhabited regions. Thus, the duty to protect journalists is not simply a professional matter but a matter of basic human rights to do with information and access to the real facts on the grounds.

This ongoing criminal activity needs to be contrasted with the fact that the total number of journalists killed throughout the Second World War was about 70. (10) The staggering number of journalists killed in Gaza reaffirms our earlier contention that the occupation regime targeted that huge number in a tiny geographical region and across two years, solely to hide the facts from the outside world since these journalists have been in effect Gaza's eyes which have shown the world what is taking place. These ongoing crimes against Gaza's journalists represent a ceaseless attempt to subvert the Palestinian narrative and kill the truth itself while hiding Israel's crimes being committed daily against Palestinian civilians. (11)

Reports issued by international UN rapporteurs reveal in detail the massive acts of savagery perpetrated on Palestinian journalists by the occupation regime but without having any effect on the ongoing genocide or on preventing that targeting.

The result, as revealed by the numbers of journalists being ceaselessly targeted, runs completely counter to what is being called for in documented international reports. In August of this year [2025], for instance, even larger numbers of journalists met martyrdom. Thus, on August 25, four journalists were killed together: Muhammad Salameh, a photographer for *Al-Jazeera* Channel; Husam al-Masri, a Reuters photographer; Mariam Abu Daqqa, who worked for several international channels such as *Independent `Arabiyya* and Associated Press; and Mu`adh Abu Taha, who worked for the US NBC channel. All four were, twice, directly targeted at the Nasir Medical Complex in Khan Yunis, south of the Gaza Strip, a deliberate and fully

documented war crime. The murder of these four was preceded on August 11 by the murder of six journalists when Israel targeted the Press tent of *Al-Jazeera* Channel, near Al-Shifa' Medical complex: the two *Al-Jazeera* correspondents Anas al Sharif and Muhammad Qurayqi`; its two photographers Ibrahim Zahir and Muhammad Nawfal, together with two journalists, Muhammad `Ulaywa and Muhammad al-Khalidi.

Faced with these horrific numbers and rather than causing a drop in the rate of killing journalists, Israel's targeting has in fact escalated and assumed a collective dimension even though Palestinian journalists work in groups and in certain specific localities, wear the press uniform, stand behind their cameras and move in cars clearly marked PRESS.

The experiences of Gaza journalists can be summarized as follows:

1. **Targeted while covering events**

Legal reports reveal that around 42 journalists were directly targeted by the Israeli occupation while they were covering events in the field in Gaza. (12) Among the dead or injured some were freelance journalists and others worked for local or international agencies. Some were targeted while inside their press tents set up inside hospitals. The journalists had taken every possible precaution and security measure including wearing their press uniform and helmets that plainly advertised their role as journalists together with announcing their locations. Video clips document on air the targeting of journalists as they directed their cameras towards areas being bombed or else broadcasting live on local or international channels as they were conveying what was taking place to the world at large. (13)

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When Samir Abu Daqqa was killed by a rocket fired by an Israeli drone on Saturday, December 15, 2023, Wa'il al-Dahduh, a journalist at *Al-Jazeera,* who was injured in that same incident, gave the following account of what happened:

"My colleague, Samir Abu Daqqa, a photographer, and I accompanied a Civil Defense team, after having coordinated our movements and obtained the requisite permission, to cover the story of a family besieged in their house following intense Israeli shelling near the Farhana School in Khan Yunis. Having photographed the general area and the severe destruction, we arrived at a point not reached by any camera and, having obtained the requisite coordination, transmitted these images to the world. When we finished, and returning on foot from our assignment and some hundreds of meters distant from the place, something suddenly happened which felt like a heavy blow. I fell to the ground, dropping my helmet and mike. Pulling myself together and barely able to stand, I felt dizzy and unbalanced, expecting a second strike. I figured that staying where I was would not allow anyone to reach me so decided to leave the place despite my dizziness and the heavy bleeding in my arm. I pressed hard on one of my wounds and walked on till the end of that street and eventually reached a medical field unit which treated me on the spot. I told them we needed to go back to get our colleague Samir Abu Daqqa whom I had heard screaming in pain and estimated his injury to be in the lower part of his body. The medics were able to stop my bleeding and told me it was imperative to leave that place and that another team would be going out to rescue Samir and the rest."(14)

It should be added that, as regards that same crime scene, the Israeli army killed the press photographer Rami Budayr who worked in the Information Department of Civil Defense, together with two pf his colleagues while attempting to reach and save the life of Samir.

2. Deliberate targeting of journalists while with their families

The targeting of journalists while at home is yet another form of murdering journalists during this genocidal war on Gaza. Many journalists have been targeted along with their families either at home or in places where they were forced to seek refuge. Reports indicate that until April 2025, the Israeli occupation regime shelled 152 houses belonging to journalists, killing 665 family members and relatives. (15) Testimonies by journalists indicate that this targeting of families is a deliberate policy and not simply random shelling. Thus, journalists were targeted in their places of residence or refuge at times when they were not covering events, indicating a clear intention to silence and kill journalists along with their families.

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On January 2, 2025, an Israeli drone fired a rocket at Hasan al-Qishawi, aged 29, who worked as a journalist at the *Media* News Agency, just as he arrived at his house, near the Filastin roundabout in West Gaza. Qishawi and a passerby were killed. Qishawi’s brother, Hilmi , aged 38, testified that minutes before he and his brother had been in the street, then each went his separate way, Hasan homewards and he elsewhere. Hilmi then adds: “A few minutes later, no more than ten, I heard the sound of shelling but paid no heed, thinking this was just daily shelling but never imagining that it was directed at my brother Hasan, so kept going on my way. A little later, a friend called to let me know what had happened to Hasan, a shock from which I have yet to recover. I couldn’t believe what I heard, so hurried home in a frenzy only to discover that the information was true. I did not see Hasan who had been taken at once to the Baptist Hospital but saw a pool of blood at the entrance to our house and debris everywhere.” (16)

3. Random targeting

In the course of this war, Israel has murdered a large number of journalists through random shelling of various regions of the Gaza Strip. These journalists were killed either at home or in the street or marketplace or near public or civil buildings, or on the spot while covering events. The vast scale of destruction and their constant presence on the scene exposes journalists to a very high risk as compared to other civilians despite identifying themselves very visibly as journalists and wearing shirts and helmets clearly bearing the word PRESS, and despite operating in well-known press teams without carrying any weapon or being in any sense a military target. (17)

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On November 1, 2023, the journalist Bilal Jadallah, President of "Press House-Palestine" was killed when the car he was driving was shelled as he was driving on Salah al-Din street, east of Hayy al-Zaytun quarter in Gaza city. We still do not know whether his killing was the result of deliberate targeting or the result of an Israeli air raid which left behind a number of dead. Jadallah was a prominent figure and a pioneer in Gaza. His institution trained journalists and organized campaigns emphasizing freedom of opinion and expression, support for independent journalism, and offering legal defense of Palestinian journalists. (18)

4. Journalists targeted by snipers

The several instances when Gaza journalists were targeted by Israeli snipers indicate a deliberate intention to murder them because the sniper sees his victim clearly and kills that victim slowly and with careful attention to detail.

Thus, on Sunday February 11, 2024, an Israeli sniper shot and killed Yasir al-Qadi, a journalist at the *Kan`an* Press Agency while he was covering the people besieged in the Nasir Medical Complex: nurses and displaced families. Al-Qadi was targeted as he was moving with his camera from one medical department to another and died instantly. (19) An Israeli sniper also shot and killed `Asim al-Barsh, a broadcaster and sound technician at the government *Al-Ra'i* station. This assassination took place on November 20, 2023, in the Saftawi neighborhood in northern Gaza. (20) On Wednesday, 13 December 2023, an Israeli sniper on the roof of a building shot and killed the journalist `Ali `Ashur (aged 37) as he was covering the advance of the Israeli army into the Tall al-Hawa neighborhood, west of Gaza. (21)

5. Arrest, torture and forced disappearance

Targeting journalists was not confined to murdering them. It also included random arrests, torture and the forced disappearance of many journalists, especially during Israeli army land assaults on in northern Gaza and Khan Yunis. According to the Gaza Government Information Bureau, the occupation regime has, since the start of its genocidal war, arrested 48 journalists while the *Committee to Protect Journalists* has documented the arrest of 86 journalists and the disappearance of others while covering Israeli shelling and destruction. Other journalists were arrested at home even though the Israeli army knew them to be journalists once they had identified themselves. (22)

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6. Targeting by AI devices

In addition to the usual ways of targeting, the occupation regime has resorted to AI devices in its targeting of journalists. Press reports have documented the targeting or killing of more than 20 journalists since October 7, 2023, as a result of drone attacks. Seven of these journalists were at the time wearing press jackets that clearly indicated their identity. Authoritative reports reveal that the occupation regime used three programs called *Gospel, Lavender* and *Where's Daddy*. The program called *Gospel* is employed for specific and accurate targeting by following individuals as they are returning home or to places of work and are directly singled out. (23)

Over a period of four months, the Paris-based organization *Forbidden Stories* carried out, with the help of fifty journalists, a thorough investigation of the killing or injury of more than one hundred Gaza media personnel at the hands of the Israeli military. This investigation concluded that no less than 18 press teams were directly targeted, possibly by drones, in violation of the laws of war, thus controverting Israeli army claims that it did not deliberately target journalists. Of the 20 dead journalists, 4 were wearing press jackets. (24)

7. Destruction of infrastructures and equipment

Since the beginning of the genocidal assault on Gaza, it became obvious that the Palestinian press corps and its basic structures were being deliberately targeted. This included the destruction of agencies, press equipment and means of transmission, especially during the first three months of the genocidal war, reflecting a clear Israeli policy of preventing independent press coverage. (25) The Israeli occupation regime deliberately shelled residential towers housing press offices and radio stations in Gaza city, most notably the *Filastin* tower in the city center.

According to a documented report issued by the Union of Palestinian Journalists, 112 governmental and private media outlets were destroyed, including 25 news agencies, 21 radio stations, 15 TV stations, 3 transmitters, 6 newspapers, 13 press service agencies, with 15 demolished completely and 32 demolished in part. (26)

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The mounting cases of murder of journalists and destruction of their agencies has given rise to a new term, "journalistic genocide". This term refers to the deliberate targeting of journalists and their families, tracking their movements, demolishing their places of work and destroying their equipment, jamming their transmissions, preventing medical help from reaching the injured who are left to bleed to death, using AI devices to track and kill them or destroy their equipment, and terrifying those left alive among them. The objective is to arrive at total silence so that the genocide can proceed undetected by the media. (27)

In order to track the course of a genocidal war on journalists in Gaza, the researcher Basim al-Tuwaysi coined the term "Deep Cultural Genocide" to designate actions and practices designed "to deny one party to a conflict the chance to narrate its own narrative of events to the world, together with the means employed to effect this so as to facilitate and justify genocide…alongside cultural and material genocide involving destruction of cultural heritage, erasure of identity and cancelling history." (28)

Events in Gaza reveal that the occupation regime in its wars on Gaza moved from slow cultural genocide to a more intensive cultural obliteration as practiced in this war, which was not content merely to destroy Palestine's cultural heritage but aimed at the total silencing of the Palestinian narrative (29), and preventing it from reaching the world at large, hence the persistent targeting of journalists and their agencies since October 7, 2023, and until the present day.

This all took place even though journalists enjoy the same protection afforded to other civilians. Their deliberate targeting while at work is an egregious violation of international law and a war crime. The same is true of the deliberate destruction of press equipment, offices and transmitters which enjoy protection, unless used for military purposes, but are counted clear violations otherwise. (30)

The legal protection of journalists in conflict zones operates on various levels. The first level is that of international humanitarian law as per the 1949 Geneva Agreement and the first Additional Protocol of 1977. The second level has to do with international justice and recognition of the importance of the press who perform a public service and play a vital role in exposing atrocities. The third level is related to UN Security Council resolutions calling for protection of journalists (31) thus making the occupation regime accountable on two levels: individual criminal accountability before the International Criminal Court and the second before the International Court of Justice since the occupation regime is a UN state member. (32)

A policy-oriented conclusion

The current situation of Palestinian journalists in Gaza would indicate that the framework of international law, which in theory is supposed to protect journalists, affords a merely nominal protection given the absence of effective instruments that deter the aggressor and hold the murderer to account. (33) This induced the Palestinian Union of Journalists and other Palestinian and international legal organizations to call upon the UN Secretary-General, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, the International Union of Journalists the International Red Cross, Amnesty International, UNESCO and other governmental and non-governmental agencies to force the occupation regime to stop the targeting of journalists.

Given the intensity of Israeli targeting, all parties need to work with vigor at all levels. Thus, international organizations and criminal courts should adopt immediate steps to hold to account all crimes against journalists, to release all journalist prisoners, to reveal the fate of the disappeared, and protect civilians and journalists in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The Prosecutor-General of the ICC ought to quickly adopt practical measures to complete investigating crimes committed in Palestine, including the murder of journalists who daily put their lives in danger as they report the facts. The Prosecutor General of the ICC and an international investigative committee should visit occupied Palestine and adopt a clear and decisive position as regards Israel's crimes against Palestinian civilians, including journalists, these crimes being ongoing and unceasing.

Likewise, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression ought to take effective steps to investigate well documented crimes against journalists and the media in occupied Palestine and to enhance freedom of expression in conflict zones.

Again, the international community should be asked to bring serious pressure to bear on the occupation authorities to immediately allow foreign journalists and the international press to enter Gaza and obtain independent press coverage. Likewise, the situation in Gaza requires inviting all international bodies concerned with freedom of the press and human rights to constantly monitor and independently document violations done against the media, and to build a data base to bolster accountability. In order that no occupation regime escapes punishment, the need exists to establish an investigative and professional record of all the crimes and violations that have been committed, complete with evidence (images, videos, testimonies); the need to submit formal complaints to international bodies (UN, ICC and Human Rights Council); the need to appoint lawyers who volunteer to follow up cases of detention or repression of journalists; the need to prepare special interim reports of violations done against journalist; and the need to enhance diplomatic efforts to make the targeting of journalists more costly to the occupier, together with campaigns of pressure and solidarity to support Palestinian journalists and acquaint international public opinion with their targeting by Israel.

On the local and professional level, there is a need to provide journalists with professional protective equipment (helmets, protective jackets and clear PRESS identification). There is a need also to enhance training in field security, first aid, and how to deal with emergencies and deliberate targeting. An early warning system should be installed to alert to danger and military movements in war zones which quickly alerts journalists, plus the need for field protective and

digital devices to protect against the jamming of transmissions, together with the existence of digital copies of reports , especially those that directly document crimes, given the variety of targeting methods. Finally, there is need to enhance programs of psychological support and to keep them going.

Likewise, the need exists for secure platforms in which to store digital and visible evidence in accordance with standards of protecting and securing of legal evidence. Furthermore, programs need to be launched to finance the provision of protective material and digital devices and training journalists in their use. Also needed is to set up a unit bringing together unions of journalists with legal organizations and technical experts to document violations, prepare legal briefs and draw up lists of bodies and organizations that can promptly act to bring diplomatic pressure to bear when new violations are committed.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to set up a regional fund to help local journalists and cover the cost of protecting them, and to launch a platform of regional coordination to follow up cases of protection for journalists, to offer financial and logistical support to local press agencies, and to create programs of health and psychological insurance for journalists.

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On the international and media level, there is a need to launch international media campaigns which concentrate on the targeting of journalists and its results, and to build partnerships, local, civil and official, with international press unions to pressure the occupation regime and hold it to account. Contacts with parliaments and diplomatic missions ought to be enhanced to highlight Israel’s violations and to establish an annual international press award in the name of martyred Palestinian journalists to bolster international awareness of this issue. There is also a need to confront Israeli propaganda which strives to distort the activities of journalists in order to justify their targeting and murdering them, as also a further need to build a counter narrative with evidence from the field itself.

Finally, the protection of journalists and the punishment of their murderers is not merely a journalistic or legal requirement but is also an essential prerequisite for access to information, the achievement of transparency and accountability, and the prevention of violations and crimes committed against journalists anywhere in the world. As long as the international community maintains silence and does not hold Israel to account, this simply encourages Israel to keep up their murderous campaign. The long history of escape from punishment in crimes committed against journalists around the world makes the lives of correspondents and journalists more dangerous. This, in turn, necessitates the existence of practical policies and multi-lateral coordination that work seriously to raise the cost of targeting journalists and protecting the essential role of the press during wars and genocide. It might seem as though protecting Palestinian journalists and punishing those who murder them to be more like a dream. Yet the cost incurred in allowing this targeting to continue, the loss of courageous lives, the diminishing ability of journalists to cover events in the field, the weakness of legal documentation which hinders the presentation of evidence of violations before international courts, and an atmosphere of terror that restricts freedom of expression---all these things are more costly than to work to afford journalists protection and hold their murderers to account. Thus, lack of success in moving towards the punishing of criminals whose crimes will simply multiply indicate that one can only expect more journalists to be murdered in this ongoing genocidal war on Gaza, in essence a journalistic genocide. There is nothing more painful, more terrifying or more hopeless than this.

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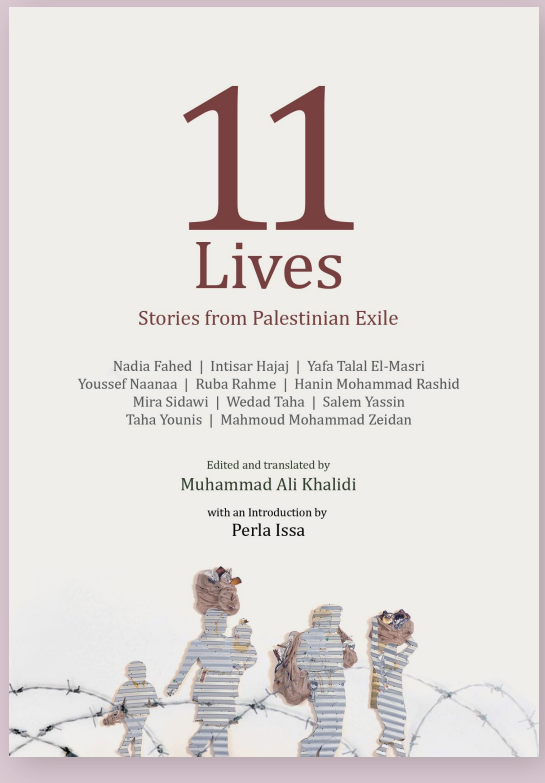
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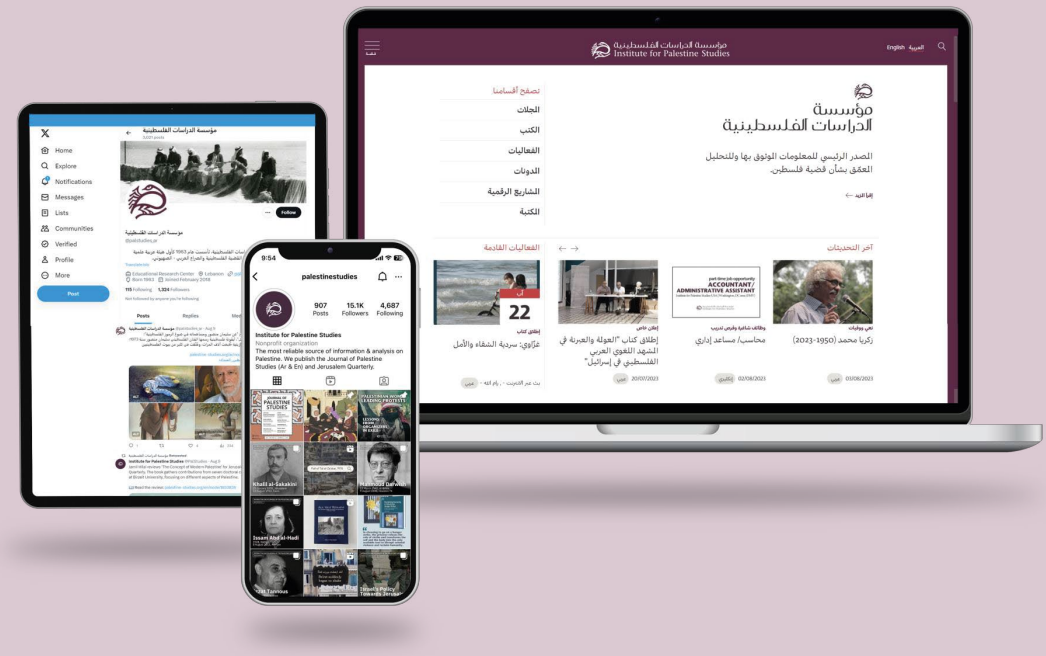




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