

Researcher: The war in Gaza is wiping out Palestine's education and knowledge systems

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Gaza's education system has suffered significantly since Israel's bombardment and assault on the strip began. Last month, Israel [blew up](#) Gaza's last standing university, Al-Israa University.

In the past four months, all or parts of Gaza's [12 universities](#) have been bombed and mostly destroyed.

Approximately [378 schools](#) have been destroyed or damaged. The Palestinian Ministry of Education has reported the deaths of over [4,327 students](#), [231 teachers](#) and [94 professors](#).

Numerous [cultural heritage sites](#), including libraries, archives and museums, have also been destroyed, damaged and plundered.

But the assault on Palestinian educational and cultural institutions did not begin in response to the Oct. 7 attack. Israel has a long record of [targeted attacks](#) on Palestinian institutions that produce knowledge and culture. That history includes targeting and [assassinating](#) Palestinian intellectuals, [cultural producers](#) and political figures.

What is scholasticide?

The destruction of education systems and buildings is known as "scholasticide," a term first coined by Oxford professor Karma Nabulsi during the 2008-2009 Israeli assault on Gaza. Scholasticide describes [the systemic destruction of Palestinian education](#) within the context of [Israel's decades-long settler colonization and occupation of Palestine](#).

Recently, a group of scholars working under the name [Scholars Against the War on Palestine](#) broadened the definition to include a more comprehensive picture of what is happening during the current war. They outline the intimate relationship between [scholasticide and genocide](#).

They say scholasticide includes the intentional [destruction of cultural heritage](#): archives, libraries and museums. Scholasticide includes killing, causing bodily or mental harm, incarcerating, or systematically harassing

educators, students and administrators. It includes besieging, closing or obstructing access to [educational institutions](#). It can also include using universities or schools as a military base (as was done with [Al-Israa University](#)).

The magnitude of destruction has led them [to conclude](#): "Israeli colonial policy in Gaza has now shifted from a focus on systematic destruction to total annihilation of education."

As genocide scholar Douglas Irvin-Erickson says, the original definition of genocide as first drafted by [Raphael Lemkin in 1943](#) included the idea that "attacking a culture was a way of committing genocide, and not a different type of genocide."

The International Court of Justice

During the recent genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), South Africa argued that [Palestinian academics were being intentionally assassinated](#).

Legal representative for South Africa, Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh, [told the court](#):

"Almost 90,000 Palestinian university students cannot attend university in Gaza. Over 60 percent of schools, almost all universities and countless bookshops and libraries have been damaged and destroyed. Hundreds of teachers and academics have been killed, including deans of universities and leading Palestinian scholars. Obliterating the very future prospects of the future education of Gaza's children and young people."

[On Jan. 26, in a landmark ruling, the ICJ](#) ordered Israel to prevent genocide in Gaza.

Attempting to eliminate Palestinian futures

Scholasticide is not an event. It's part of a [colonial continuum](#) of attacking and destroying a people's educational life, knowledge systems and plundering material culture and cultural heritage.

The [targeted killing of the educated class](#) is intended to make it difficult for Palestinians to restore the political and socio-economic conditions needed to survive and rebuild Gaza.

This systematic destruction is at the core of the settler colonial "[logic of elimination](#)." It has also been applied to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, the United States and elsewhere. This [logic](#) drives a settler population to replace Indigenous peoples in their aim to establish a new society.

For example, this logic was exercised [during the 1948 Nakba](#). Thousands of [Palestinian books](#), manuscripts, libraries, archives, photographs, cultural artifacts and cultural property [were looted, destroyed or damaged](#) by Zionist militias. In 1948, [Palestinian schools were destroyed or damaged](#) or later appropriated for use by the new Israeli state.

Resistance: Palestinian history and culture

Despite the ongoing attempts to erase Palestinian history, culture and memory, Palestinians have found ways to resist their erasure. In the 1960s and '70s, [an anti-colonial revolutionary tradition](#), produced and influenced by intellectual and political thought, was strengthened.

It helped to create [infrastructures](#) for the survival, mobilization and development of the Palestinian people and their national movement. It cultivated transnational relationships of solidarity. It helped displaced Palestinians, separated across geographies, to preserve their identity and reorganize themselves politically.

The intellectual and political thought of this period was [passed onto](#) the generations that followed. It influenced educational and political programs, cultural development and practices of resistance. Especially during the First Intifada from 1987-1993. This enabled Palestinians to stay steadfast in their struggle against colonial violence across time and space. Palestinian education and culture form [the backbone](#) of the right to self-determination. This is why Israel frequently targets Palestinian education and culture.

Palestinians have endured [several periods of intense attacks](#) on their cultural and educational life. This includes the June 1967 war, Israel's 1982 [invasion of Lebanon during which a number of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's institutions were destroyed](#) and the First and Second Intifadas.

Following Israel's destruction of [the Palestine Research Center in Lebanon in 1982](#), Palestinian poet [Mahmoud Darwish said](#):

"He who steals land does not surprise us by stealing a library. He who kills thousands of innocent civilians does not surprise us by killing paintings."

The [colonial theft](#) continues unabashed. Cultural heritage has been [annihilated, damaged or plundered](#) in this war. During the bombing of Al-Israa University in January, Israel also targeted the National Museum. Licensed by the Ministry of Antiquities, the museum housed over [3,000 rare artifacts, which were looted](#).

Most academic institutions around the world remain silent about Israel's scholasticide. But others are speaking out. Globally, this includes [Librarians and Archivists with Palestine](#) and some [academic associations](#) and faculty groups. The ICJ's recent order to Israel to prevent genocide in Gaza may motivate other scholars and institutions to consider

breaking their silence on scholasticide.

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