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Genocide Beyond Bodies:

How Education in Gaza Becomes a Battlefield for Memory, Identity, Space, and Future (2023–2025)

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Author's disclaimer:

I used **Artificial Intelligence** tools to translate ANNEXES I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII from the original texts in Arabic to English. After that, I edited and reviewed the document myself to the best of my capacity.

Abstract

Cultural genocide and cultural resilience go side by side, shaping the lived realities of Palestinians under Israeli systematic subjugation. In Gaza, the deliberate targeting of education, educational institutions, personnel and students as well as targeting Palestinian cultural practices seeks to erase Palestinians' collective identity. Yet, the very same spaces (schools, remaining homes, mobile tents and community networks) become sites of resistance that preserve and transmit the Palestinian cultural knowledge and heritage.

By examining this dual process of cultural genocide and cultural resilience, I will analyse how communities maintain their identity and continuity despite ongoing attempts at cultural erasure, making cultural resilience both tangible and deeply significant.

This study aims to examine the systematic targeting of the education sector by the Israeli occupation in Palestine and how it constitutes a tool of cultural genocide. It also looks at how cultural resilience manifests in the face of this colonialism based on the logic of elimination. Although historically and across the globe, as well documented in several contexts such as China, Canada, Bosnia, and Rwanda, the use of the education system as an instrument of cultural genocide, there is a significant gap in the literature in studying Palestine in general and Gaza in particular regarding this crime. Most existing research focuses on physical destruction, trauma, and well-being, and the studies that extend to investigate genocide from culture, identity, and intellectual continuity perspectives are much less in terms of magnitude or depth. My Research draws on Raphael Lemkin's *Cultural Genocide Theory* (1947) alongside *Settler-Colonial Theory* (Patrick Wolfe, 2006), and *Sumud* (resilience) approach (Sazzad, 2015) in addition to Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics (2019), and Rob Nixon's theory of Slow Violence (2011).

In this research, I argued that Palestine represents a *par excellence* example of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Palestinians are dehumanized, othered, and rendered unworthy through narratives that construct the Jews as intellectually and morally superior. This binary of "us" and "them" enables the justification of intense violence, including the denial of Palestinians' very right to life. Thus, genocide becomes framed as both necessary and permissible within this civilizational logic of superiority.

I used *online* semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, parents, and officials living in Gaza Strip (and some of them outside Gaza) as tools for data collection and analysis. The study also provides a critique of international responses that looks at cultural genocide as a side effect of the ongoing Israeli crimes. Drawing on 81 qualitative interviews I show how direct, slow, and structural violence converge in Gaza, through the bombing of schools, universities and archives, the suppression of identity, and the long-term siege. Yet, I look at how Palestinians transform education into an act of cultural resilience and "sumud." Despite immense loss and disconnections, education continues to be a powerful tool of defiance, preserving collective memory and asserting the right to exist.

Keywords

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Background

Since 2007, the Israeli occupation has imposed a tight illegal air, sea, and land blockade on the Gaza Strip. The blockade, in addition to the recurring wars (2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021), are collective punishment of civilians, impacting every aspect of life in Gaza. Severe restrictions on people and goods movements have been imposed, preventing essential goods from entering the strip, which led to an increase in the poverty level. In 2022, almost 80 % of Gaza's population was dependent on humanitarian assistance (Dujarric, 2022), and the unemployment rate reached 45% (PCBS, 2022). The blockade also undermined the local economy and reduced the GDP by 26% in 2022 (UNCTAD, 2024).

Since Israel announced the war against Gaza in October 2023, the situation has become more devastating. According to the UNRWA (2025:3), "at least 1.9 million people, or about 90 percent of the population, across the Gaza Strip were displaced during the war. Many have been displaced repeatedly, some 10 times or more." According to the UNDP chief, Gaza lost 60 years of development which needs to be rebuilt (Matthews, 2025), and the estimate is that there are about 42 million tons of rubble strewn across the Gaza Strip after over two-thirds of the infrastructure was destroyed by Israeli airstrikes and ground incursions (UNDP, 2024). The United Nations estimates that more than $53 billion will be required to rebuild Gaza and end the "humanitarian catastrophe" (France 24, 2025). Between 7 October 2023 and 19 January 2025, at least 47,540 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli occupation (OCHA, 2025), and the Amnesty International investigation concludes Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza (Amnesty International, 2024)[1]. According to Amnesty International, genocide is "any one of a number of acts aimed at the destruction of all or part of certain groups of people; it is this intent that distinguishes genocide from other crimes against humanity" (Amnesty International, 2021b:1).

The tight blockade and the recurrent wars over the last two decades, in addition to the current genocide, took a toll and severely impacted the education sector as well. The Israeli occupation restricted essential education resources such as digital tools, books, and the needed materials for school and educational institutions, in addition to the movement restriction on the students and academics. The recurrent wars made the situation even worse and led to the systematic destruction of schools, universities, and educational organizations. For example, in the 2014 war, at least 83 schools were damaged (UNRWA, 2014). The recent targeting to kill children and to destroy their learning premises led to an unprecedented level of destruction. As the education cluster (2025: 1) stated[2],

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[1] I used the latest figures published by various international agencies on the events following the 7th of October 2023. A date in which Hamas entered the Gaza strip surrounding colonies to capture a number of soldiers so that to exchange them with thousands of Palestinian children, women and elderlies who were imprisoned for decades by Israel.

[2] "Education cluster" is the name of an international organization. It defines itself as follows: "The Global Education Cluster works towards a predictable, equitable and well-coordinated response addressing education concerns of crisis affected populations by reinforcing capacities of cluster staff and partners, providing timely remote and

"[t]he learning loss and destruction of the education system in Gaza are unprecedented, exacerbating the already critical mental health crisis among children and youth. Approximately 95.2% of 564 school buildings in Gaza have suffered damage, with nearly 88% needing significant reconstruction before functioning again. The statistics reveal that by 31 December 2024, the Israeli occupation killed 12,035 students and 492 education workers."

The systematic targeting of education infrastructures and institutions, killing, arresting, and displacement of thousands of students, professionals, and academics, highlights the crucial question about the long-term impact of these actions on the Palestinian's intellectual and cultural continuity.

1.2 Education In Palestine

Despite the Nakba caused by the establishment of Israel on Palestinian land in 1948 and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, Palestinian society has managed to build one of the highest education rates in the region and the world, to the point that Palestinians have been described as "Best Educated Refugees" (Irfan, 2023). This remarkable achievement by Palestinians, completely refutes the Israeli racist propaganda, which claimed intellectual and educational superiority versus a manipulated image of Palestinians as an "inferior" group. Thus, imposing a negative stereotype of Palestinians in the Israeli curricula, and emphasizing "Jewish superiority" (Rabee, Odeh and Alam, 2020).
Even then, illiteracy rates among Palestinians are among the lowest in the world. While the illiteracy rate for individuals aged 15 and above in refugee camps in Palestine reached 3.3%, before the genocidal, the illiteracy rate in Gaza did not exceed 1.9% (PCBS, 2024). The illiteracy rate in Arab countries that do not suffer occupation or siege in 2016 was 24.8%, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (IMEMC, 2018). The global average is approximately 13%, according to UNESCO (2024). This means that Palestinians are clearly outperforming their counterparts in the region and the world.

Moreover, Palestine leads the way in gender equality in education in the Middle East, boasting one of the highest female literacy rates in the world, reaching 99.6% in 2020 (UIS, 2025). Furthermore, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestinian female students comprise 61% of the total student body in Palestinian higher education institutions (Wafa, 2022).

The Palestinians' insistence on education can be understood in light of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which is one of the most important forms of symbolic power that reproduces social status after the deprivation of material resources (Bourdieu, 1986). The Palestinians were deprived of their land in the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba, and hundreds of thousands were displaced to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and neighboring countries. They had no option but knowledge as a means of survival and creating symbolic capital that could not be taken away. As Bourdieu elucidates, "Cultural capital can exist in three forms: embodied,

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direct field support, strengthening robust assessment, analysis and advocacy." Here is its website: https://reliefweb.int/organization/education-cluster

objectified, and institutionalized… it is a major instrument for the reproduction of social structures and power relations" (Bourdieu, 1986:243).

Accordingly, education was an actual practice of resistance and a symbolic weapon in the face of colonial hegemony and attempts to eliminate their existence.

The UNRWA began its work in 1950; it established schools in refugee camps and provided basic educational services to the displaced Palestinian children. Although its primary goal was to employ refugees, the Palestinians' insistence on education was decisive in the UNRWA's focus on education as a priority and as an alternative approach (Irfan, 2021). This gave the Palestinians a tremendous advantage in the 1950s onward that qualified them to compete in the Arab labour market where they work as doctors, engineers, teachers, and businessmen, and built their professional lives in a way that differed from UNRWA's plan, which sought to employ them instead of educating them (Irfan, 2021).

As a result of the occupation of the rest of Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank) in 1967, Israel completely controlled the Palestinian educational sector. This control began with the curriculum, which was kept frozen and unrevised. Israel refused to establish new schools or even maintaining existing ones. Israeli control also included hiring teachers according to criteria unrelated to education (e.g. the demand for security clearance), and implementing a deliberate policy of neglect so that Palestinians are kept educationally weak (Broco and Trad, 2011).

However, this policy did not deter the Palestinians, who established their first local university in the 1970s: Birzeit University. This was followed by numerous other universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Today, the number of higher education institutions in Palestine has reached 53, divided between the West Bank (35 universities or university colleges) and the Gaza Strip (17 universities or university colleges), in addition to an open university with centers in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. These institutions enroll approximately 226,000 students and employ around 17,000 staff members, including about 9,000 academics and educators (Fobzu, 2025). The emergence of higher education under occupation was a prominent manifestation of Palestinian resilience in the face of negligence and despite Israeli policies that block Gazans from studying at West Bank universities and vice versa, and even prevent the recruitment of foreign teachers to work in and develop Palestinian universities (Ibid).

Comparing the situation in the Gaza Strip to that of the West Bank, educational indicators show that Palestinians in Gaza outperform their counterparts in the West Bank, despite the suffocating siege imposed by Israel. As previously mentioned, the illiteracy rate in Gaza is lower than in the West Bank. Furthermore, the gender gap also favors Gaza, with a higher percentage of educated women in the Strip than in the West Bank (PCBS, 2024). This is likely due to an emerging local culture that admires education to extra extent. Given the high population density in the Gaza Strip, where most residents are refugees, education represents almost the only chance for survival. No matter how impoverished families may be, they invest in their children's education as a way to prove themselves amidst the siege and repeated wars. Education can also be seen as linked to dignity, because it represents a bet on the future and greater opportunities for survival in the face of exclusion. This is facilitated by the fact that UNRWA schools accommodate both genders equally and free of charge. According to the latest

statistics before the genocide, the number of schools in the Gaza Strip was 796 (442 governmental schools, 284 UNRWA schools, and 70 private schools) (PCBS, 2023). In higher education, the Gaza Strip has six accredited traditional universities, in addition to 11 university colleges (Al-Mqadma, Dittli and Belotti, 2024).

This defining feature, which has made the Palestinian people a fully educated nation, was also the reason why the Israeli war machine targeted the education sector and all its institutions. Approximately 95% of these schools, universities, and educational infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip were destroyed, and about 625,000 students were left without access to education (Alarabeed, 2025). More than a thousand academics and faculty members, along with several university presidents, were also targeted (Talebi, 2024).

The attack on the education sector in Gaza has been stressed by the UN expert as a systematic pattern, not isolated incidents, and they warned that the aim is to destroy the foundation of Palestinian society (OHCHR, 2024). In their policy briefing, "Friends of Birzeit University" (2025: 9) stated:

> "Killings and assassinations of university and school teachers, students, staff, and administrators. By targeting Palestinian scholars, Israel is not only killing individuals but also dismantling the intellectual foundation necessary for Palestinian self-determination, cultural preservation, and knowledge production."

It is worth noting that the Israeli occupation in the ongoing genocide in Gaza has killed (until January 2025) an estimated 12,800 students, 760 teachers and educational staff, and 150 academics and researchers (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2025). A policy briefing stressed that the killing of Palestinian academics is part of a long-term plan of aggression on knowledge production and cultural heritage in Palestine; these affect the fabric of Palestinian national identity and destroy the foundations of intellectual and academic life (Friends of Birzeit University, 2025). So, destroying schools not only prevents the students from receiving their formal education but also destroys a fundamental tool that Palestinians use to understand their culture, identity, and history. The battle for education remains an integral part of the resistance waged by Palestinians against the occupation, and a continuous testament to the falseness of racist Israeli claims against the Palestinians.

1.3 Cultural Genocide as an Assertion of Epistemic Superiority

Palestinian educational excellence represents a disproof of and a challenge to the Israeli occupation's narrative that portrays Palestinians as "backward" or inferior human beings. The recent war is the peak of systematic practices over many decades aimed at targeting education, combating Palestinians' national aspiration, censoring curricula, and forcefully closing schools and universities.

It is worth noting that the Israeli state and its public discourse articulate a dual narrative of Jewish exceptionalism: 1- By positioning itself explicitly as the political embodiment of world Jews, as the State of Israel "Jewish State" proclaiming itself the national home of the Jewish people. For example, in its 1948 Declaration of Independence it states: "We … declare the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1948:1). 2- This

narrative is magnified by widely circulated claims of Jewish intellectual, scientific and financial achievement (Scottthong, 2008).

Against this backdrop, the Israel's policies toward Palestinian education function as a form of cultural erasure (or "scholasticide"). By murdering Palestinian teachers, students, destroying institutions and knowledge systems, the policy of cultural genocide serves not merely as collateral damage from war but as a strategic process of asserting Jews' superiority and right to dominate. In doing so, the narrative of Jewish exceptionalism is sustained and legitimised while the Palestinian "Other" is treated as inferior, or unworthy of full intellectual life. As Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared, "We are fighting against human animals" (Aljazeera, 2023).[3] This interplay of ideological narrative and material destruction renders the policy of targeting Palestinian educational infrastructure not only a matter of military strategy but of cultural genocide, with the destruction of knowledge, identity and future generations as its objective.

1.4   Justification and Relevance of this research

The question posed by this research lies in its exploration of how education can become a field for **cultural genocide and cultural resilience**. It extends beyond describing the destruction of the educational infrastructure and listing the number of Palestinian victims, whether students or teachers. All of these facts can be found in the reports of the United Nations and relevant human rights organizations. My research aims to answer a different question, which has not been sufficiently raised and has not received enough attention in the related literature on the Palestinian context. That is connect **theoretical perspectives** with **lived testimonies**, which is crucial for testing the theory in the real world.

I aim to fill this gap by collecting dozens of living testimonies from diverse groups related to education in Gaza. Also, I will provide numerous comparative examples from China, Canada, Bosnia, and Rwanda where targeting of educational identity was inseparable from systematic attempts to erase identity, the same thing Israel is doing in the Gaza Strip. Briefly, one may include the suppression of Indigenous languages and the residential school systems in Canada and Australia, designed to "kill the Indian in the child" and cut transmission of cultural identity (Woolford, 2015; Moses, 2010). Likewise, British and French colonial regimes commonly labelled the knowledge of colonized nations as superstition based on ancient magic, but privileging European science and its ability to "develop" the colonized societies (Said, 1978). These practices demonstrate an *"epistemic violence",* i.e. the denial of an indigenous people's capacity to produce legitimate knowledge (Spivak, 1988, Santos, 2007). In recent years, as Amnesty International documented (2021a), China's re-education camps targeting Uyghur academics and religious teachers. Therefore, situating Israel's attacks on Palestinian education within this field features its continuity with colonial traditions of erasing Indigenous knowledge to maintain political and moral superiority. Policy-wise, this study will contribute to propose more holistic responses by the UN, INGOs, and human rights organizations stressing that the destruction of culture is fundamental, not a secondary indication of genocidal intent.

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[3] Al Jazeera English**.** (2023, October 9). *Footage posted on Instagram* [Instagram Reel]. *Instagram.* Available at: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyLcHAzs7uo/?hl=en (Access 28 Oct. 2025)

1.5   Relevance to development studies

This study contributes to critical debates in Development Studies by interrogating how education systems are exposed to extreme violence under settler-colonial conditions. The case of Gaza challenges conventional understandings of education as a neutral driver of development, revealing instead how it becomes a site of cultural genocide and, simultaneously, cultural resistance. In doing so, the study situates development studies as a field implicated in, rather than separate from, structures of domination and resistance.

Moreover, my research focuses on the systematic destruction of the cultural and educational foundations that enable human development. It is well-argued that Human development is not only about economic progress but aims at the widening of people's capabilities to live meaningful, self-determined lives (Sen, 1999). As Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues, individuals live in interdependent structures, such as families, schools, communities, and cultural institutions, that jointly nurture their potential capabilities. When these structures are deliberately targeted, as in the war on Gaza, the conditions for human development fall.

The destruction of educational institutions constitutes not only material demolition but an attack on the actual ecology that supports human existence and collective culture. In this way, my research situates the cultural genocide in Gaza within field of development studies, exposing how epistemic and cultural erasure hinders the fulfilment of human capabilities and thus the key purpose of development itself.

1.6   Research Problem

Schools and universities in Gaza don't just teach academic subjects; they are also places where young people learn about their history, language, and identity. When these institutions are destroyed, that transmission of knowledge is broken. This creates a gap in people's understanding of their past, present and future. Many scholars (e.g. Pappé (2006), Khalidi (2020), Erakat (2019), Judith Butler (2012), Said (1992) have argued that Israel is reproducing the colonial and genocidal logic that most of its population have suffered from. In the sense that they are reproducing the genocidal logic of the Nazi. In other words, they became the killers, exactly as Mamdani described in his "When Victims Become Killers" (2001).

Although the notion of "Victims Become Killers" is so attractive for research, but the limited space of this study won't allow me to dig deep into it. My focus is on how colonial Israel's destruction of educational infrastructure, restrictions on cultural education obliterate the process of transmitting knowledge of history, language and Identity. I want to explore how this could be considered a form of *cultural genocide*, and what it means for the future of Palestinian identity. I also look at also how does *cultural resilience* of Palestinians in Gaza, whether they be students, parents or educators as well as national or international institutions manifest in the face of this colonialism based on the logic of elimination.

1.7   Research objective

To theoretically and methodologically contribute to the study of the genocide in the Gaza Strip, but from the perspective of education and culture, considering that destroying culture is not a

side effect of this war, but rather a fundamental cornerstone of it's deliberate and planned method. Although Gaza constitutes only about 1.3% of the size of historic Palestine and 7.7% of the remaining Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza) (Abu Sitta, 2016), the genocidal war on it reflects a broader strategy to erase Palestinian identity and suppress its cultural and political influence in the struggle against Zionism. I also aim to influence the policy-makers to include **culture** in the definition of genocide. I aim to achieve the following research objectives:

1.8 Research question (and sub-questions)

A: How can the systematic targeting of the education sector in the Gaza Strip become a form of cultural genocide? **B:** How does cultural resilience manifest in various innovative actions by the Gazan people?

Sub-questions:

1. Genocide related sub-questions:
   a. How the genocide **impacted knowledge production and students' access to their schools**/universities? *(Measured by the displacement, arresting, or killing of teachers and academics as well as students' school enrolment rates, access to books).*
   b. How this **denial of access impacted the students' sense of cultural identity**? *(Measured by perceptions of identity, and the role of informal education spaces in sustaining cultural continuity).*
2. Resilience related sub-question:
   a. What approaches have Palestinian educators and communities applied to **keep education and cultural identity** despite the ongoing genocide? *(Measured by educational initiatives, alternative learning methods, and community-led efforts to protect cultural expression.).* I will identify the individuals who have outstanding cases to get answers to this question as to how their work could be interpreted as "cultural preservation" and or being saviours of Palestinian culture (language, memory and many other aspects belonging to the category of culture) for future generation.

1.9 Limitations of the Research

Considering the research method (semi-structured interview and literature review including using national and international reports and studies from various backgrounds), this paper cannot claim to be representative of how Gazans experienced cultural genocide and resilience. Instead, it offers situated insights into how such processes are lived and experienced. Due to space limitations, the study excluded other dimensions of Israeli brutality, savagery, starvation, large-scale killings and infrastructural destruction.

1.10 Organization of the Paper

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 has provided an overview and background to the research problem. It offered a justification and relevance to development studies. Chapter

2 presents the methodological rational and the challenges of online fieldwork on a place experiencing genocide. This chapter also presents the ethical considerations and my positionality as a Researcher. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework in which I present Lemkin's theory of cultural genocide and Wolf's theory of settler colonialism in addition to Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics as well as Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence. I also introduced the Palestinian concept of "Sumud" (resilience). Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting and analysing how different Gazan social groups experienced genocide and how, each by their capacity and innovation resisted it. In addition, the chapter makes a comparative presentation of the cultural genocide experienced by other nations, such as Iraq, Bosnia, China, Canada, and Rwanda.

Finally, the study concludes by a number of remarks by reflecting on the research question and findings and paying attention to the theoretical and methodological contributions of the paper.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

2.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach used to understand the reality of education in Gaza Strip and how cultural genocide experienced by the concerned people. I relied on remote interviews via digital communication platforms, targeting a sample representing different groups from the educational field, including students who lived through the genocide and others who were able to rescue themselves by completing their studies abroad, parents, teachers, and officials in the Ministry of Education, as well as employees working for relevant UN agencies and INGOs that work in the field of education in the Gaza Strip. This chapter aims to build the methodological framework resulting from this selection, addressing how and why I chose this sample, the method of data collection I used, data processing mechanisms, and the methodology for analyzing the data, with details of the ethical considerations that were a major focus of the research process. I will also present my own reflexivity working remotely but had lived this genocide and had experienced many practical and psychological difficulties while collecting data under extremely difficult conditions.

2.2   Methodological rational

I chose a qualitative methodology for my research, using semi-structured online interviews as the primary tool for data collection. This is because my research seeks to explore and understand how genocide is experienced, what perspectives and meanings could be derived from the students, parents, teachers and other officials in Gaza who are under systematic attack on them and their premises. Since it is impossible for me to go to Gaza or meet these people in person, I used multiple digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, to conduct the interviews, and sometimes via phone calls when the internet was unavailable (to them).

This method, although exhausting, provided me with the opportunity to directly access the participants without intermediaries. I relied on my personal network of people I know in Gaza, as well as my professional network, having worked there for years as a lawyer. Indeed, it was not possible to rely solely on my personal network, therefore, I followed the "snowball" method, in which some individuals in the interviewed group (see table no. 1) nominated potential participants. The sample included in the study consists of 81 participants from various backgrounds, divided into six categories to ensure representation of various aspects concerning the education sector.

Source:

A reasonable question may arise regarding how I was able to interview 81 participants within such a challenging and limited timeframe. The explanation lies in the unique social and spatial characteristics of Gaza. Geographically, Gaza is a very small territory (see the red spot on the above map of historical Palestine) with 41 km long, and 6-12 km wide, and has a total area of 365 km) in which over two million people cramped. Under normal circumstances, travelling by car from the north to the south takes around 40 minutes, and from east to west no more than 6 minutes (Anera, n.d.).

Socially, the majority of Gazans are peasants forcefully displaced from their original villages during the 1948 Nakba, while the indigenous Gazans historically consisted of peasants. Both now inhabit this densely populated and resource-scarce region, which, in the 1950s, was already described as a concentration camp (Abu Al-Naml, 1979). The result is a tightly knit social fabric in which familial and communal ties extend across the entire Strip. It would not be an exaggeration to see that a person regularly encounters acquaintances when walking through almost any area of Gaza.

From a sociological perspective, this dense social interconnectedness facilitates research access. Establishing contact with participants is often mediated through professional, personal or familial networks, which significantly reduces barriers to recruitment. Moreover, during periods of relative calm amidst the ongoing genocide, daily life is largely unstructured due to the absence of formal, regular working hours. Consequently, engaging in conversations or interviews with someone interested in the Gazans experiences is often perceived by participants as an act of recognition, an affirmation of their humanity within profoundly dehumanizing circumstances.

The following table shows the distribution of participants into categories. Please look at the **Seven Annexes** that I have added at the end of the paper for they include much more details about each group and individuals in terms age, employment, degree of schooling, where they live in Gaza Strip (or outside it) during the interview, etc. The Annexes also include all the

interview questions and the detailed answers by each member of every group. Indeed, we were communicating in Arabic but **I used AI tools to translate the material to English**.

Table no. 1

No.	Category	Description of Participants	Number of Participants	Male	Female	
1.	Students inside Gaza	School and university students who lived through the bombing and displacement within the Gaza Strip during the genocide.	21	12	9	Levels of schooling: 17: high school 4: university
2.	Students outside Gaza	Students who were in Gaza during the genocide and then left to complete their education abroad (prior the closure of Rafah crossing due to the Israeli ground offensive)	8	3	5	Degrees: 3:BA 3: MA 2: PhD
3.	Parents	Parents of schoolchildren in Gaza who have been faced to live the experience of teaching their children during the genocide.	9	3	6	Employment: 4: employed, 5: not employed
4.	Teachers and academics	School teachers and university professors from various governorates of Gaza.	24	11	13	Teaching levels: 11: elementary 3: secondary 4: high school 6: university
5.	INGOs and UN employees	Workers in international and humanitarian organizations involved in the	12	5	7	Seniority: Senior: 3 Admin.: 5 Operational: 4

6.	Palestinian Ministry of Education Officials	Officials at the Palestinian Ministry of Education working in the Gaza Strip.	7	5	2	Seniority: Senior: 1 Admin.: 2 Operational: 4
		education sector in Gaza				
	Total	**Total number of participants from all categories**	**81**	**39**	**42**	

As shown above, the total number of participants is eighty-one (81). I sought to ensure a gender-balanced distribution between males and females as much as possible (out of the 81 participants, 39 were males, and 42 were females). Age distribution was also taken into consideration. Most of the students I interviewed were in high school (approximately 16 -18 years old), or university students (approximately 18–25 years old) and from a variety of specializations. The questions directed to them dealt with their practical experience in light of the attack on education and the impact of this on their lives and identity.

While the questions directed to teachers and academics (25-60 years old or sometimes older- the exact ages are specified in the relevant annex) focused on the resume of education in light of the systematic destruction of educational institutions, and their initial plans when their relationships with students were suddenly eliminated. As for in the Palestinian Ministry of Education officials, the questions directed to them mainly focused on the extent of their interventions during the genocide; their initiatives in partnership with international organizations; how they dealt with students' archive; how they dealt with certificates of students who already lost their homes; how they dealt with certificates buried under the rubble of students' homes. As for the families (mothers, fathers, and sometimes uncles of students if both or one of the parents were martyred), their questions focused on their perspective re their children's studies and future; their role in motivating them, considering that they have become the only alternative to schools, and how to confront their children's questions about their future, and so on.

2.3   Challenges of online fieldwork in Gaza

Completing 81 interviews was extremely challenging, not only because of the long hours I spent conducting the interviews, but also because many of the interviews were interrupted due to sudden loss of connectivity or internet outages. The duration of the interviews varied due to the conditions on the ground in Gaza. Some interviews lasted around ten minutes, while others extended up to forty minutes or more when network stability allowed and participants were in relatively safe conditions. Therefore, there was no fixed length or rigid procedure for conducting the interviews, since flexibility was vital to adjust to participants' conditions. Under these circumstances, I used a mixture of audio recordings (when technically possible) and note-taking.

2.4   Ethical consideration

Throughout the research process, I maintained strict ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and sensitivity to participants' safety and emotional well-being. The protection of participants has always been superior to data collection. I know that the participants' willingness to share their experiences under such dangerous conditions meant an extraordinary act of generosity and courage, without which this research would not have been at all possible.

Regarding transcribing the recorded interviews, they were in Arabic, then I worked on selecting those relevant to my research and began cleaning the data. This resulted in dozens of pages that are rich with testimonies and personal experiences. The goal was not simply to sort through consistent or relevant data, but rather to uncover deeper patterns and seek answers to the research question.

When looking at the Annexes, one sees a discrepancy in the number of answers among participants. Some questions have twenty answers, while another question has only eighteen or seventeen answers. This discrepancy is not an error in counting the number of participants. Rather, it is a direct result of the *ethical requirements* that I have imposed on myself since the beginning. I gave the participant absolute freedom to refrain from answering any question that he or she does not feel comfortable with, in line with interview literature that always prioritizes the safety of the person being interviewed (Seidman, 2019). Further, I encountered many difficulties that I explained in detail above, which can be summed up in a sudden disconnection due to poor network quality, a sudden explosion near the area where the participant is located, or the participant's phone battery running out without the possibility of charging it. Therefore, I was forced to shorten the interview and limit myself to some questions only. Sometimes I would call back later to complete the interview, while other times this was completely impossible, so I settled for what I obtained during the first interview. The goal is not the number of responses per se, but rather the quality of the information and their relevance to my research (K, Vd, and Ad, 2016). Therefore, I was keen to be highly transparent regarding this matter, consistent with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR), which stipulate reporting "units of study", "clarifying the level of participation", as well as the "trustworthiness and limitations of findings" (O'Brien et al., 2014:1247).

2.5   Thematic Analysis methodology

I use a thematic analysis approach, through which participants' responses are organized into themes consistent to the theoretical framework of the study. This permits for an analysis of the data that is both based on participants' viewpoints and theoretically informed. For this, I am using the Thematic Analysis methodology as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Stevens (2024), after categorising it through the six basic steps, I was able to extract the main themes and prominent axes from the data I collected, which were as follows:

1. Familiarizing Yourself with the Data
2. Generating Initial Codes
3. Searching for Themes
4. Reviewing Themes

5. Defining and Naming Themes
6. Producing the Report

Blow, I explain in detail how I went through the process:

From coding to theme building:

This process includes systematic coding, theme generation, review, and naming (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I have been committed to analysing the interviews after transcribing them and recording initial observations, impressions, and semantic repetitions. This was followed by open coding derived directly from the participants' language. I assigned keywords that expressed the ideas presented in each question, carefully capturing even minor details. This generated a large number of codes, prompting me to analyse them rather than simply list them. I interpreted and linked them to the theory and the research question.

When similarities and repetitions emerged, I combined codes expressing the same meaning, even if the participants had different perspectives. For example, if:

a. One participant spoke about the bombing of their school, and
b. another about the targeting of the tent where they were, preparing it as an alternative to school,
c. A teacher talking about his destroyed personal archive,
d. His search for shelter instead of teaching, and
e. Ministry officials talking about their inability to provide an alternative education mechanism in light of repeated targeting…

I find that all of this is brought together by one framework, from which a theme related to the *disruption of educational identity* can be extracted. I put a temporary name, then I come back to review it later in light of other interviews, while adhering to the standard of internal consistency and connection to the research question and the theoretical framework. If there is a need to support this theme with direct quotes from the testimonies, I would add these quotes to enrich the theme.

This wouldn't have been possible without keeping a special notebook for analysis and recording, where I kept the dates and content of the interviews, as well as the possible symbols that could be extracted. My reliance on manual tools like a notebook and pen gave me greater flexibility in navigating between testimonies and a deeper memory of their content. This enabled me to connect meanings and contexts and constantly review the emerging thematic labels.

This resulted in my notebook being filled with lines and notes, such as whether a particular quote supported a theme, or whether some themes shared similar meanings, leading me to find it better to combine them for greater depth and coherence.

Thus, the transition from codes to themes involved a cumulative analysis closely linked to the research's theoretical framework. It wasn't merely a descriptive presentation of participants' testimonies without exploring deeply the underlying patterns and meanings. Comparisons were drawn between testimonies that shared similarities in meaning and context, not just in wording, to find common threads. This process allowed me to discern the initial outlines of my

framework. This framework adhered to all six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in thematic analysis: repeated engagement with texts, generation of initial codes, theme formation, review, and naming, culminating in writing and interpretation. The goal was to ensure that the work accurately reflected the perspectives of the 81 participants.

However, the nature and specificity of the research, given the complex educational landscape under genocide, necessitated interviewing members of the groups connected to the education sector, rather than relying on a single group. Therefore, I sought to get insight from all segments related to education in Gaza: from students to parents, to teacher, to experts, all the way to the Ministry of Education officials.

It was essential to achieve data triangulation, as Patton (2002) describes it, to analyse the experience of Gazans with cultural genocide more broadly and deeply, and to produce more integrated and reliable results. Patton emphasizes this by saying, "[t]he validity, meaningness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (Patton, 2002:245). Therefore, I only stopped conducting interviews after I noticed that the basic ideas were beginning to be repeated and becoming similar without any qualitative additions from the participants.

2.6 Ethical Considerations (Informed Consent and Protection of Participants)

I have formally filled and obtained the mandatory ethics clearance from the ISS and approved by my supervisor. Ethical considerations were of utmost importance during fieldwork. In addition to ethical and academic considerations, the participants and myself faced security challenges. Israel eavesdrops on the phones of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, with the help of companies such as Microsoft and others (Al Jazeera, 2025).[4] I took several precautions to minimize risks for participants. Sensitive or politically identifiable information was avoided at all costs during calls, and the focus remained on participants' experiences in the education sector rather than on political commentary. To ensure confidentiality, all recordings and notes were immediately anonymized by removing any personal identifiers and stored on encrypted, password-protected devices accessible only to me.

I was very careful at the beginning of each interview to explain the purpose of the interview and emphasize that participation was completely voluntary. I also made it clear also that participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and refrain from completing it. Participants were also completely free to refrain from answering any question they felt uncomfortable with.
After obtaining informed consent from all participants, depending on their circumstances, I

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[4] Immediately after learning about the cooperation between Israel and Microsoft, participants were informed to exercise utmost caution and avoid disclosing of any information that could compromise their safety. I did that by reading aloud the paras of Aljazeera news on the subject.

began the interview. I was careful to ensure that all private and personal information remained confidential, even when transcribing the interview transcripts and presenting the results.

It is natural that not all participants responded to all or some of the interwire questions. Some preferred not to answer certain questions, while others chose not to complete the interview, either because they were busy with more important matters, which is completely understandable, or because they were afraid of being targeted by the Israeli armed force as a result of wiretapping.

Given the highly sensitive nature of my research, and the potential for painful memories it might create in the minds of participants, I followed the *Do No Harm principle (Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2011)*, avoiding any possible pressure on participants to answer questions that would bring back these painful memories. I listened to them when they expressed their feelings and pain, even if they were unrelated to the research topic. I was, after all, one of them, and it was my duty to listen to them and empathize with their suffering, in addition to my academic role in collecting data. This was indeed a difficult task, but I believe I accomplished it well.

Doing interviews by phone, however, presented limitations. The lack of visual interaction prohibited me from observing their facial expressions or other non-verbal indicators of distress, reducing the ability to fully assess participants' emotional state. While participants were free to skip questions or terminate the interview at any time, such measures could not entirely mitigate potential emotional strain. Given the dangerous setting and the most obvious limited availability (or in fact absence) of mental health services, systematic follow-up or referral to counselling was not possible. Yet, ethical considerations, including prioritizing their safety, ease, and autonomy, remained essential throughout my research process.

2.7   Position of the Researcher (Reflexivity)

As Palestinian, I have personal knowledge of the suffering of education under siege and war. I spent my entire high school and university years under siege and repeated wars, which gave me the ability to understand the participants' statements and grasp the significance of their answers within their cultural context. However, this also required me to be reflexive, to avoid bias in analysing the testimonies.

I was careful not to project my own perspective onto the results of the analysis, adopting absolute transparency as much as possible in following the coding and review process, so that I could be fully confident that the conclusions I would reach would be as accurate as I could apply. Was there a boundary between the insider-outsider self during the fieldwork? I am a full insider. I did this research with firm commitment to my people, bearing witness to their experiences and strengthening their voices with integrity and rigor.

2.8   My personal journey: Reflexivity and Voices from the Field

2.8.1   Voice in Time of Disconnection

Reaching out to people in Gaza and talking to them, despite the fact that since I left Gaza, I have never stopped getting in contact with them, was psychologically difficult and painful for

me. I was not talking to them just as one of them, but as a researcher, searching for information about their experiences and reflections.

You would find me calling a student to conduct an interview, and as soon as we start the conversation, he or she would say, "Please contact me on my mother's phone as my phone's battery is about to run out and I do not have a way to charge it." This is expected as the Gaza Strip has been without electricity since the beginning of the genocide. Or you would find me starting a conversation with one of the students' mothers, and suddenly a massive explosion takes place interrupting us forcing her to end the call. She does not end it" formally" by saying "sorry." or "talk to you later.", for example, but rather by starting to cry, searching for her children to check on them. She would remember later on that she ended the call suddenly, and would start apologizing by saying, "Pardon me, I had to check on my family. The bombing was very close. We can continue what we have begun now."

These moments were part of almost every call I had. It is true that these moments were part of Gazan's "ordinary" life and cannot be referred to as exceptional moments; however, they were the heart of the experience.

My conversations with students and teachers helped me gather stories from various backgrounds: students who are still in Gaza, students who were forced to leave Gaza in very harsh circumstances, parents who are trying to protect their children's education amid displacement and hunger, teachers and academics suffering the loss of their students, institutions, and officials from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and international organizations like UNRWA and UNICEF trying to capture an image of a sector which has been collapsing.

2.9   Conclusion

The qualitative methodology I adopted enabled me to access diverse perspectives within the education sector. The sample was important in forming a proper analysis, despite the significant challenges I experienced particularly in making calls due to the unstable internet connection in the Gaza Strip, the targeting of telecommunications networks, and the deteriorating security situation, as people were frequently forced to flee their places. I was careful to accurately represent the participants' views while adopting a rigorous, reflexive ethical position based on respecting their dignity and maintaining their security and confidentiality, which provided an appropriate foundation leading to an answer to my research question.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

3.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I present a variety of theoretical approaches to help provide a deeper understanding of how targeting education in the Gaza Strip is considered a form of cultural genocide. Lemkin's theories of cultural genocide and Wolf's theory of settler colonialism made a significant contribution to understanding the causes of the structural destruction of education as part of the subjugation of Palestinian society and the attempts to erase Palestinian identity. I also used Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, through which I show how the occupation works to eradicate culture through the destruction of education. The use of Mbembe's concept helped me understand that the right to life and right to education are tightly linked in the sense that the survival of Palestinians is conditional upon their compliance with the Israeli terms. Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence was also of great importance in shedding light on the occupation's strategy of gradual, hidden destruction, leaving its disastrous long-term effects on the Palestinian cultural and social fabric. In addition, I used the concept of Palestinian "Sumud" to analyse how Palestinians are fighting for their education and the reasons for their attempts to challenge erasure and destruction. In doing so, I have presented a comprehensive framework for studying education as a field of destruction and resistance at the same time.

3.2   Cultural Genocide Theory by Raphael Lemkin

One of the goals of this study is to focus on the systematic destruction of the education system in Gaza, which aligns with *Raphael Lemkin's Cultural Genocide Theory*. The theory shows how genocide extends beyond the physical extermination of a people to erase the culture, language, as well as their intellectual identity.
In his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944), (1946:79), lawyer Raphael Lemkin that:

> *"Genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social-institutions, of culture, language, national feelings: religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups."*

So, Lemkin first introduced the term "genocide," defining it as *"a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves." (Lemkin, 1944 in Irvin-Erickson 2019:30).*
The USHMM (2023:79) acknowledged this new vocabulary "to denote an old practice in its modern development, [that] is made from the ancient Greek word genos (race, tribe) and the Latin cide (killing)….".

Lemkin tried to incorporate his definition into international law, a process that was not achieved until 1946, when the United Nations recognized the act as a crime. In December 1948, the UN unanimously adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Vastenhout, 2023:2), where genocide was defined as, *"any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (United Nations, 1948:280)*.

Irvin-Erickson (2019:23) argues that *"by outlawing genocide, Lemkin sought to protect a world where national-cultural diversity would be allowed to thrive"*. Lemkin saw genocide as a colonial practice. For him, genocide is not simply a mass killing process, rather it is the destruction of a group's cultural and social foundations. As discussed by Schaller & Zimmerer (2005:499), genocide according to Lemkin (1944:79) has two phases: "One, the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor".

Agreeing with Lemkin, Dirk Moses states that cultural genocide is the major foundation in the process of national destruction, but he considered it genocide only when "it implies the destruction of their function" and subsequently threatens the mere existence of "the social group" which obviously exists as such due to its "common culture" (Moses, 2012:37).

Although Lemkin's theory is considered a pioneer in genocide studies and international law, it has not been immune to criticism from legal and political science experts, and even anthropologists and sociologists. Lemkin's theory has been criticized for being Eurocentric, making the concept of genocide a broad, vague legal concept influenced by the Western European experience, and ignoring the concepts and experiences of non-European peoples and the atrocities committed against them through systematic violence.

Although Lemkin mentioned indigenous peoples in his framework, Damien Short (2016) highlighted that his framework failed to reflect indigenous epistemologies and their conceptions of collective destruction. Also, Wolfe (2006) emphasizes settler colonialism's distinctive logic of elimination, which he feels Lemkin's original conception inadequately captures due to its Eurocentric orientation. Other scholars have criticized Lemkin's concept of genocide for focusing on rapid and overt acts of destruction, such as mass killings, while overlooking slower, structural processes of destruction, including continued deprivation and systemic impoverishment. Nonetheless, although Lemkin's theory has the above-mentioned limitations, it remains vital for it comprises an essential component of my theoretical framework, which will be supplemented by the theories in sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6.

3.2.1   Genocide vs extermination:

There is a need to distinguish between these two concepts: Genocide is the most heinous crime in international law, and although it shares many characteristics with *extermination*, the special intent in genocide is the distinguishing element between them. According to Article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, "'genocide' means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

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(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" (ICC, 1998:92). Therefore, the absence of a special intent in the crime negates its status as a genocide. While extermination is classified as a crime against humanity in Article 7 of the same Statute, as it focuses on the mass and widespread killing of civilians and its consequences, without requiring that the killing be directed at a specific group, which means that the focus of the legal distinction between the two concepts is Special Intent. This is the reason for the confusion that sometimes occurs between the two concepts, because proving special intent is the most difficult matter from a legal standpoint. On 29 December 2023 South Africa filed a case in the ICJ against Israel (Case no. 192) in which it accused Israel of committing crimes of genocide in Gaza (ICJ, 2024).

3.3   Settler-Colonial Theory – Patrick Wolfe

In this section, I will complement Lemkin's approach by Patrick Wolfe theory of settler colonialism in order to fully understand the motives behind Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip. Patrick Wolfe has provided an important theoretical approach for understanding the dynamics of settler colonialism and how it ultimately aims to remove the indigenous population in order to seize their land. He explains how "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event" (Wolfe, 2006:388), meaning that the goal is not temporary control, as Israel claims (Shafir, 2017), but rather the actual goal of establishing a new Jewish community after implementing a forced displacement plan, because this logic of elimination is the fundamental principle governing the colonizer (Svirsky and Ben-Arie, 2018). This is something that senior ministers in the Israeli government do not hide (Kershner, 2025). Wolfe called it the logic of elimination:

> *"[t]he logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that. In common with genocide as Raphael Lemkin characterized it"* (Wolfe, 2006:388).

Rather, it includes the destruction of the original social and cultural structures and the establishment of a new settler society on their ruins, citing Theodor Herzl, who, according to Wolfe himself, is the founding father of Zionism: *"If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct."* (Wolfe, 2006:388). This logic of elimination reveals how genocide can be structural and ongoing, rather than a specific, temporary event, because the settlers' methods of bringing about this genocide are different and variable. It may be in the form of direct killing, or through less severe, yet more impactful policies, such as the erasure of identity through displacement and cultural ignorance, which Wolff calls the negative aspect of elimination. The positive aspect for the settlers, is the replacement and construction of a new society on the land that the settlers were able to seize. We have witnessed all of these things at the hands of the Israeli colonizer, starting with the imposition of Israeli educational curricula on the Palestinians in Israel (Porter and Helm, 2025), or the prohibition of teaching Palestinian history or even the Arabic language to Palestinian students (Tahhan, 2022).

This theory provides a structural explanation for the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Israel is not a fleeting occupying force like others throughout history, not like France in its occupation of Algeria, or the British occupation of India, or the Dutch occupation of Indonesia. Rather, it is a settler entity that sees the Palestinians as an obstacle to its very existence. It does not see the Palestinians as a

people; it believes that this land has no people (Gold, Tal, and Salman, 2023). Therefore, the policies of Israel are directed towards a complete elimination of the Palestinians, and the measures it has taken since its establishment have all been in this direction, from the long-term siege, to the confiscation of lands, to the destruction of the foundations of life, to exile and displacement.

According to Wolf, *"the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, degree of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element"* (Wolfe, 2006:388). Thus, the elimination of the owners of the land is a prerequisite for the new settlers to survive. This is confirmed by the anthropologist Veracini (2010:8) in his book Settler Colonialism when he argues: *"settler-colonization is at base a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement."*

3.4   Necropolitics theory (or Colonial Control of Life and Death)

One of the most horrific observations in the genocide in Gaza is the fact that it turns death into a tool of governance and control over people. This requires a complementary theoretical approach to help understand how genocide can transform life into a tool of control. This is the concept of *Necropolitics*, developed by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe. This concept represents an extension and transcendence of Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which focuses on the control of sovereignty through the management of life and bodies and directing them towards achieving health and fertility (Allen, 2023). In his book of the same name, Mbembe analyses how sovereign practices control life and death, stating that:

> *"[t]he ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power"* (Mbembe, 2019:66).

This is deeply rooted in the Israeli colonial mindset and is echoed in statements by Zionist politicians who describe Palestinians as "subhuman," "cockroaches," "cancerous manifestation," "parasites," or "human animals" (Villar, 2024). Thus, this difference in the valuation of human life, and the devaluation of Palestinian life in particular, forms the basis upon which Necropolitics rests. In chapter 4, I make further elaboration on this theory.

3.5   Rob Nixon's Theory of Slow Violence

This theoretical approach helps to understand the forms of violence that occur invisibly and gradually, not as side effects of war, but rather as a deliberate and systematic strategy to undermine and destroy the cultural foundations of Palestinian society.

Rob Nixon says that: *"By slow violence, I mean violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all"* (Nixon, 2011:2). As Amira (2021:5) argues *"Slow violence is a debilitating mechanism that eventually deforms the spatial characteristics that made a place liveable. This process yields 'displacement without moving' as it leaves people stranded in disposable*

ecosystems, which once thrived. People remain in their places, deprived of the ability to lead on previous life styles."

In my opinion, the importance of this theory lies in its transcendence of the traditional concept of violence as an explosive event that occurs in the public eye. Rather, it encompasses silent, gradual violence that occurs out of sight.

Although it is an exhausting violence, it does not receive media or political attention, given that its immediate impact is not significant enough to attract attention. Nixon (2011) intended to apply this concept to environmental disasters that unfold slowly, but its application to cultural forms of violence or crimes of genocide practiced by the colonizer is very useful (Wakeham, 2021). Nixon developed the concept and identified characteristics and features to make it an analytical tool for understanding crises:

- ***Cumulative nature****:* It is not only an exhaustive process, but also an increasing one, with its catastrophic consequences being postponed for decades, as it can continue for long periods without deterrence, causing the damage it causes to worsen and multiply.

- ***Non-synchronous and dispersed****:* It spreads across time and space, and is not restricted to a specific geographic area, but rather spreads across vast geographic areas. Therefore, it is not easy to link cause and effect, making it difficult to identify the root cause.

- ***Absence from the scene****:* By its nature, it lacks the explosive moments that attract attention. It is more like silent violence that occurs in the background, and therefore does not provoke strong reactions, such as the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2006, and the creation of financial and livelihood crises, which contribute to the spread of the unemployment crisis (United Nations, 2010), denial of building permits and import restrictions, theft of electric generators, attacks on civilian infrastructure, targeting of agricultural facilities, and the destruction of olive and fruit trees (UNH TODAY, 2019).

3.6   The Concept of "Sumud" (resilience):

In this research, the data collection will be analysed using this local, vernacular, and cultural notion of resilience (sumud). Like any human reaction to the systematic destruction of cultural and intellectual life described above, it was necessary to create a new concept to resist this tyranny. Thus, the concept of "Sumud" emerged, which in Arabic means "steadfastness and stability". In this context, it translates as "steadfastness," but it goes beyond this simple meaning.

It is more than just survival; it has transformed into an existential strategy and a multifaceted practice of resistance. Academically, sumud is defined as: *"a socio-political concept and refers to ways of surviving in the context of occupation, chronic adversity, lack of resources, and limited infrastructure"* (Marie, Hannigan and Jones, 2018:20).

Researcher Jan Busse further developed the concept, describing it as: *"Sumud as a spatial quotidian practice which is primarily aimed at realizing a culturally scripted life project in the face of the Israeli occupation"* (Busse, 2022:583). This means that a Palestinian living under occupation turns his/her daily life into an act of cultural resistance, clinging to his civilizational project despite all the Israeli

brutality used to suppress him/her. Consequently, these ordinary daily practices transform into a clear, tangible social concept that carries a political goal in the face of the occupation, as a tool for shaping a comprehensive, sustainable Palestinian national identity that consolidates resistance.

The concept has evolved throughout the history of the Palestinian struggle against the occupation to express an approach of daily resistance as a strategy for remaining on the land and refusing surrender or displacement. It is a multi-dimensional and multi-level concept that ultimately aims to preserve existence and consolidate national identity. It manifests:

- o **Individual steadfastness:** This is embodied in the insistence on living and completing education under occupation (Saeedi, Jabali and Khalili, 2025).
- o **Family and collective resilience***:* through the networks of material, moral, and social support formed by the community to protect the population. Families provide safety nets for the displaced and displaced, providing food, drink, and care (UNDP, 2016), reflecting the strength of the bonds between Palestinian families and their determination to continue the struggle. This is crystallized in local voluntary initiatives aimed at rehabilitating housing units for displaced families (Culbertson et al., 2025).
- o **Spatial resilience:** This is embodied in adhering to the land and reproducing the Palestinian presence, despite all attempts at removal, and insisting on movement despite the barriers and checkpoints, with all the humiliation and suffering they entail, in a clear expression of the refusal to submit to the occupation's policy of slow displacement (Tawil-Souri, 2011).
- o **Cultural steadfastness***:* These are practices that preserve Palestinian identity in the face of attempts to erase and eliminate it. These practices vary in their methods, including reviving popular folklore, chanting traditional songs, collective celebrations, and writing murals. Murals are not merely visual art, but rather a political act that challenges the definition of public space. Murals played a pivotal role in the First Intifada of 1987 in unifying Palestinian discourse (Peteet, 1996).
- o **Educational steadfastness:** This is the most prominent manifestation of Palestinian steadfastness, as the educational process has transformed into an act of resistance, not only for academic achievement, but also as a symbol of the survival and protection of identity (Johannessen, 2022). Education is what ensures the continuity of the Palestinian national project and preserves hope for liberation and liberation from occupation.

Although the concept of steadfastness is not limited to education alone, it extends to all aspects of social and cultural life (Vasudevan, 2019). This is a clear indication of the Palestinian people's preservation of their national identity and heritage, passing them down across generations. This was emphasized by Edward Said when he described Palestinian culture as a culture of resistance and survival (Said and Barsamian, 2003).

The concept of academic resilience has recently emerged (Path, 2025), manifested in the insistence of Palestinians in Gaza to continue their education under bombardment and despite the destruction, by setting up "Educational Tents" where children gather almost daily to receive their lessons (Cathy, 2025). This has been documented as students sit on the crumbling floors of educational tents, or partially destroyed schools, receiving their lessons under extremely harsh

conditions (ABC News, 2025) (Please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djCpQz9qgQM).[5] This reflects what I previously emphasized: education itself is a real tool for declaring steadfastness, which can be viewed as a mechanism of resistance to cultural genocide in the sense defined by Lemkin. The insistence on opening educational classes amidst the rubble and transmitting knowledge amidst bombing and destruction, and in the complete absence of educational infrastructure, confirms that Palestinian society continues to build itself and truly embodies an act of resistance against policies of cultural genocide. Each educational session is a tool for rebuilding the national self in the face of colonialism.

3.7   Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined Lemkin's contributions on cultural genocide to help understand that targeting the core of collective identity goes deeper than the destruction of schools and universities, beyond the physical impact of their walls and buildings, but rather their destruction as a storehouse of memory and a fundamental pillar in the transmission of knowledge passed down through generations. Then I summarized Patrick Wolf's settler colonialism theory to understand how exclusion and attempts at removal are an ongoing and silently strategic structure, rather than a fleeting moment or a side event of war.

Mbembe's approach of Necropolitics, established how the mechanisms of occupying powers determine who is allowed to live and learn, and who is left to die. Integrating these theoretical frameworks, shows how geographical control over land can be an arm of hegemony over knowledge, in order to manage life and produce death. However, it was necessary to add a significant dimension by employing Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence, which analyzes how hidden and gradually accumulating violence can have profound long-term effects. In contrast, the concept of steadfastness "Sumud" was useful to analyse the cultural resistance practiced by Palestinians on a daily basis, with the aim of preserving cultural heritage and resisting attempts to erase national identity.

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[5] ABC News (2025). *Gazan children learning in makeshift classrooms after their schools were destroyed | ABC NEWS*. [online] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djCpQz9qgQM [Accessed 24 Aug. 2025].

Chapter 4: Testimonies of Loss, Disruption, and Resilience in Education

4.1　　　　　　Introduction

Cultural genocide and cultural resilience walk side by side in Gaza, framing main substance of this study. The systematic targeting of the education sector threatens the transmission of knowledge, identity, and social cohesion, illustrating cultural genocide. Simultaneously, Gazans' creative efforts to sustain learning, through informal, digital, and improvised methods, reveal acts of cultural resilience. This dual lens guides the analysis, integrating testimonies from six targeted groups to provide a holistic picture of education during genocide. The targeted groups all lived through the same experiences and were exposed to almost the same types of dangers, taking into consideration their different responsibilities.

I will classify the participants' answers into two parts: **Part I,** answers the R. question: *How can the systematic targeting of the education sector in the Gaza Strip become a form of cultural genocide?* And **Part II** answers the R. question *How does cultural resilience manifest in various innovative actions by the Gazan people?*

4.2　　　　Part I: Cultural Genocide in Education

4.2.1　　　Loss of Place and Meaning

School or university were never just walls; they were a daily ritual. At school, there was the morning assembly, the national anthem, the morning radio broadcast, and the flag salute. There was also the radio broadcast and the honouring of outstanding students. At university, there were inter-lecture sessions, graduation ceremonies, exam halls, libraries, as well as discussion groups with professors about various aspects of life and social life. None of this exists anymore. One teacher told me, "There is no more morning assembly or national anthem. In the morning, we begin counting those who were martyred the night before and those who remain alive."

This radical shift in daily routine embodies what Lemkin described as: *the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group* (Lemkin, 1947). These activities are not just a daily routine, but rather tools that reproduce national identity and belonging on a daily basis. When this routine, which produces a collective national identity, turns into a daily ritual in which its practitioners are busy counting martyrs, this is a radical reversal, from rituals of life to rituals of death.

The conversations with universities students were laced with bitterness. For example; one of the students said, "*The university was our second home. I never missed a lecture. When they bombed it, I felt like I had lost a part of my soul.*" Another student said, "*I was about to graduate. I was only one semester away from graduating. I had been dreaming of this moment, but they stole it from me.*" The destruction, shelling, and bombing were not only physical but also moral. The collapse of daily routines and the interruption of rituals rendered education soulless. Thus, the near-total destruction of schools and universities sends an unmistakable message that the students' futures are dispensable. This embodies Lemkin's concept of the destruction of national patterns (Lemkin, 1947) and Mbembe's Necropolitics, where power dictates who lives and who dies (Mbembe, 2019).

In modern history, there are similar cases, perhaps the most memorable of which is what happened in Bosnia in 1992 during the siege of Sarajevo on the night of August 25-26, when the Sarajevo National Library was targeted with the aim of destroying hundreds of thousands of volumes. It was exposed to Serbian army artillery fire, which prompted residents to form human chains to save the books, while Serbian army shells were even directed at the firefighters who, in cooperation with the librarians, tried to save what could be saved from the burning building (Loncarevic and Mann, 1994).

4.2.2   Erasing Memory and Archives

When speaking with officials at the Ministry of Education, they told me that thousands of paper records were burned during the bombing of the ministry building. One of the officials said, *"An entire archive of exams and student assessments disappeared. We had to request electronic copies from abroad if we could find them."* These are not just lost papers; they are a loss of collective memory. It is a form of *memoricide*, as Nur Masalha (2012) put it. The educational archive is the educational records of generations of students, and losing it means losing the connection between the past, present, and future. According to Masalha (2012), it reflects a deliberate colonial strategy to erase the trace of Palestinian presence with the goal of writing another people's history over it.

An academic working for the Ministry of Education told me, "*The central libraries in Gaza are gone. Even our research and studies, which we worked on for months and years, have been lost.*" This is exactly what Lemkin (1947) meant when he spoke of stifling human thought and depriving groups of the ability to continue producing and transmitting knowledge. The means of transmitting knowledge and meaning between generations have been erased, and libraries are not repositories of books; rather, as Lemkin (ibid) described it, they represent the collective memory and cultural identity of nations.

Historical parallels in this regard include the case of Iraq which represents a prominent example of one of the most horrific cases of epistemic genocide. During the war launched by the United States on Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi National Library and Archives were looted under the watchful eyes of American forces, who refused to protect them in clear violation of the Hague Conventions for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (UNESCO, 1954). And this is precisely what Rob Nixon (2011) meant when he spoke of *Slow Violence*, where the occupation deliberately and systematically destroys archives and libraries to destroy the knowledge structure of Palestinian society which is violence that occurs gradually and out of sight (Nixon, 2011), while the media focuses on direct killing.

4.2.3   Disruption of Educational Identity

The following testimonies reveal a profound disruption of educational identity, transforming students into precarious, displaced individuals whose sense of self as learners is erased. From the lens of Lemkin's cultural genocide (1947), this is precisely the intent of targeting education: to dismantle not only institutions but also the daily practices and social roles that reproduce collective identity. Schools and universities are not merely sites of knowledge transfer; they are ritualized spaces where national and cultural identity are enacted daily. Their destruction, combined with the disruption of students' ability to attend, interrupts the transmission of culture and knowledge,

fulfilling Lemkin's conception of cultural genocide as an attempt to obliterate the social fabric of the oppressed group.

The vast majority of students lost their identity as students. For example, a high school student told me, "*We've started to live as if we don't exist. We live in a state of utter emptiness. Two years of school have been lost so far, and a third is on the way. We don't know what awaits us: death or a dark future*." Another said, "*I'm now displaced for the thirteenth time. Every time I settle, the occupation's threats always order me to evacuate, and I'm forced to do so. These days, I should be moving between engineering sites as part of my university graduation project*." A third reflected: "*I don't know if I should study for the high school exams that I've been waiting for months, or if I should be busy searching for food with the rest of my family. How can I study while leaving them struggling to make ends meet without me sharing?*".

Mbembe's (2003) concept of Necropolitics frames these experiences as the production of "death worlds" in which life is subordinated to the logic of the occupier. Students' displacement, the impossibility of attending school, and the psychological burden of survival illustrate how the occupation regulates not only physical existence but also the possibility of cultural and intellectual flourishing. Education, which under normal conditions fosters hope and future-building, becomes a contested terrain where life itself is controlled.

I would therefore argue that under Israeli colonialism, *the right to life and the right to education are strongly and evidently intertwined* since the destruction of educational spaces and targeting teachers and students directly undermine the minimal conditions for survival.

Parents confirmed that they are unable to answer their children's questions when they ask: When will we return to school? One mother said: "*At the beginning of the war of extermination, I used to tell them, 'Don't worry, you will be back very soon.' Now, I don't know when or how they will return to school, even if the war stops. There are no longer schools to house the students, and the few schools that were not bombed have been turned into shelters for those whose homes were destroyed.* " This inability to answer is similar to *Mbembe's* (2003) description of *the* creation of impossible living conditions. The simple question has become an existential question about the possibility of living a normal life. This disruption of collective identity is a fundamental goal of the occupation, by transforming the idea of education into a vacuum and working hard to make students lose their sense of self as students, thus depriving the entire educational community of the most important tools for building its awareness and continuity as a learning community as a single unit.

The testimonies of students who travelled abroad to continue their studies demonstrate how displacement from Gaza extends beyond physical relocation to profound cultural and psychological dislocation. Students describe that they not only miss their homeland, but also share their feelings that they are unable to belong in their new educational environments.

The example of Kosovo immediately comes to mind. After the abolition of autonomy in 1989, the Milosevic regime imposed Serbian educational policies, expelling tens of thousands of Albanian teachers, banning the teaching of Albanian curricula, and even excluding the Albanian language from schools and universities. Albanian students were denied entry to official Albanian educational institutions (Llapi and Peterson, 2015). At that time, the Albanians created a parallel education

system in homes and mosques, run by teachers and the local community, with Albanian curricula taught in secret (Sommers and Buckland, 2004). They were thus able to preserve their national identity despite the loss of official legitimacy, just as the Palestinians in Gaza are trying to do.

4.2.4   Necropolitics or controlling education

We see that the systematic destruction, although it reached its peak in the current war of genocide, did not begin with it. Rather, it accumulated over time within the framework of *slow violence* expressed by Nixon (2011). From the first intifada in the late 1980s, to the second intifada at the beginning of this century, then the comprehensive siege that began in 2007, through the recurring wars, and finally the genocide waged by the occupation before the eyes of the entire world, starting in October 2023 and continuing until now.

Here, the concept of Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), shows how controlling education, determining who has the right to learn, what they learn, and under what conditions, makes education intertwine with life itself. Perhaps this is what Israel attempted to achieve in Rafah by establishing schools affiliated with its collaborators, offering curricula consistent with its own vision, which is, of course, far removed from the Palestinian national vision. It ignores the Palestinian presence and aligns with its own orientations as an existing occupation (Parker, Berger and Siham Shamalakh, 2025). This school is almost the only one operating in the Gaza Strip, specifically in Rafah, where the occupation's agents and collaborators are active. However, this school, which serves more than 100 students from kindergarten to seventh grade, does not adhere to the Palestinian curriculum, as we mentioned above. Rather, it educates students, according to the occupation's claim, on the values of pluralism and tolerance. The establishment of this school demonstrates that the right to life and the right to education are tightly linked; the survival of Palestinians is conditional upon their compliance with the Israeli terms.

In this context, I argued that Palestine represents a *par excellence* example of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Palestinians are dehumanized, othered, and rendered unworthy through narratives that construct the Jews as intellectually and morally superior. This binary of "us" and "them" enables the justification of intense violence, including the denial of Palestinians' very right to life. Thus, genocide becomes framed as both necessary and permissible within this civilizational logic of superiority.

Furthermore, Necropolitics is manifested in the Palestinian context in the following ways: by transforming schools and universities dedicated to education into collective shelters, people are forced into schools claiming that they shall be safe shelters for them, then they are targeted. Even the roads leading to these places are cut off and destroyed. People are managed through bombing, repeated displacement, and deliberate starvation. Thus, each new school day becomes an attempt to survive.

By emptying society of its intellectual, cultural, and educational elites, which cannot be considered a "side effect" of war, but rather an exercise of sovereignty over death itself. It is by eradicating cultural life itself and determining who teaches, who produces knowledge, and who preserves memory and archives, Israel powerfully illustrates its full control of the lives of Palestinians.

By targeting physical memory, Israel is attempting to destroy the cornerstone of Palestinian collective memory. This was documented by UNESCO, which conducted an assessment of the destruction inflicted on Palestinian cultural heritage during the war of extermination (UNESCO, 2025).

By disrupting the Continuity of Education in which the most lethal weapons are used to achieve maximum destruction, Israel is creating what he calls "*Death-Worlds,*" thus subjecting people to impossible living conditions, resembling "the state of the living dead" (Mbembe, 2019:38). According to Mbembe, the systematic cultural destruction is an integral part of *Necropolitics*, which includes disabling the enemy in a colonial context:

> *"Critical to these techniques of disabling the enemy is bulldozing: demolishing houses and cities, uprooting olive trees, riddling water tanks with bullets, bombing and jamming electronic communications, digging up roads, destroying electricity transformers, tearing up airport runways, disabling television and radio transmitters, smashing computers"* (Mbembe, 2019:82).

This systematic destruction of the cultural and cognitive structure represents what Raphael Lemkin called "cultural genocide." This prompted Mbembe himself to explicitly state that: "[t]he most accomplished form of power is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine" (Mbembe, 2019:80). Here, Patrick Wolf's framework *intersects* with Mbembe's, as both require each other. The *logic of elimination* requires *death-worlds* to strip life of its meaning and transform the assumed space of knowledge into fragile attempts at survival.

4.3   Part II: Cultural Resilience and Resistance in Education

4.3.1   Cultural Resilience: Innovating Alternative Education

Despite all the above-described challenges, which make mere survival an achievement, education continued, even through other means. Teachers often organized educational classes in tents: one teacher told me, "*We tried our best, in cooperation with international organizations, to organize short educational classes for students, but we faced severe security challenges. Therefore, we preferred to limit the educational tents to the displaced people in the camp, so that students would not have to travel from long distances.*"

A physics teacher took the initiative to explain lessons via *YouTube* to high school students, just as she did in school. Even if students had internet access, they could download the lessons and watch them offline. This initiative also inspired other teachers outside the Gaza Strip, who had better internet access and more tools to conduct live physics experiments for students to view.
One student told me, "*The teacher would gather us inside the tent, quickly explain the lesson, and then we go back home. I felt that life was still going on.*" The student's expressions are profoundly meaningful. The affirmation that life still exists, and that the students, despite everything they have suffered, yearn for a normal life, is a challenge to all attempts at eradication. Or, as Gerald Vizenor described it, "survival" (Vizenor, 2008).

As for the students who left Gaza, one of them told me, "*I took with me the only notebook I was able to retrieve from our house after it was bombed, and I began to tell my colleagues here stories about Gaza.*" Another student who left Gaza after receiving a scholarship for graduate studies told me, "*When my colleagues ask me about Gaza, I feel a pang of sadness. I don't like to remember what happened and is happening, but I feel it is my duty to convey to people outside Palestine what is happening inside, even if it is painful.*" Here we see how education becomes a bridge for conveying the narrative.

As for parents, some have created ways to motivate their children to study. One father told me, "*I used to play a game for my children. Whoever solved a math problem or memorized a poem, I would give them a piece of bread on top of their portion.*" Here we see the combination of the determination to survive and the pursuit of education, a dazzling embodiment of cultural resilience.

This is perhaps similar to what happened in South Africa during the time of apartheid rule, with different details but with the same insistence on the same goal. Black people faced the Bantu Education Act, which aimed to classify black people as only workers without considering any political, cultural, or academic aspects. It also aimed to perpetuate control over them and keep them in a continuous dependence (Phillips and Fisher, 1999). They confronted it with what is called People's Education, where they created alternative private and popular schools, and made education a political struggle against the apartheid system. Students raised a slogan that later became an inspiring slogan: "People's Education for People's Power" (Sisulu, 1987).

4.3.2   Education as a Symbolic Tool of Resistance

In Gaza, education has been transformed from an academic function into a political and symbolic act of resistance. This is not new and evidently, Gazan educators are recalling the same actions that they (or their parents) have practiced during the first intifada in 1987. At that time, when all schools were closed by order of the Israeli military commander, Palestinians resisted by practicing popular education at home (Wahba, 2024), as a spontaneous and revolutionary reaction (The Palestinian Museum, 2024) against the policy of ignorance that Israel tried to impose. Palestinian educators, invented new methods and approaches for education in cities and villages throughout Palestine (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2021).

In my interview with a university professor, when asked about how lectures are delivered under genocide, he said, "*We don't stop teaching, even if it's through audio recordings. We've created a portal for students to follow lectures and take exams. We do this to tell the entire world that no matter how many universities and educational institutions the occupier targets, we will remain.*"
A high school teacher told me, "*I have decided to give lessons almost daily, as circumstances permit, to every high school student, even if only one student comes to me.*"

4.3.3   Hope Pending Time

Many of the testimonies repeated one word: "*Tomorrow, when the war ends.*" But this temporary situation has become permanent, which is confirmed by the theory of Settler Colonialism and the Logic of Elimination (Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2010). Settler colonialism, in this case Israel, is not satisfied with controlling the land. Israel already controls the air, sea, and land of the Gaza Strip, but

it seeks to keep the indigenous population in a state of suspension and deprivation of hope (Wolfe, 2006), and to push them to emigrate through attempts at ethnic cleansing, which has become one of the goals of the ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023 (United Nations, 2024).

Sumud as Marie et. al (2018) show, functions at the individual, household, and community levels, in which Palestinians rely on their cultural practices and social networks to maintain life and dignity in face of systematic cruelty. In Gaza, families and communities continue to make room for learning in their partly-destroyed homes, partly-destroyed schools and partly destroyed mosques. When the majority of Gazans became displaced, tents became the main zones for living and schooling. As Özerol in his *Resilience Reflection on Palestinian Sumud* (2024) notes, "every act of teaching, studying, and rebuilding is itself a form of resistance," showing how regular households contribute to preserving identity and spreading hope.

The disruption to education is similar to what is happening in Ukraine due to the Russian-Ukrainian war. According to UNICEF, approximately 4.6 million children are out of formal education due to the ongoing war (UNICEF, 2025). In addition, at least a third of education facilities were damaged by February 2025. The similarity between the two cases remains: the education system is disrupted, and families are creating spaces for education.

4.3.4   Education as a Site of Resistance and Collective Memory

Education in normal circumstances is a routine process practiced peacefully by people all over the world, where knowledge is passed from one generation to another. But what if the situation is turned upside down, and schools are destroyed, teachers and students alike are killed, and books and libraries are burned?

This was put in theory by one of the most famous Palestinian writers of the modern era, *Ghassan Kanafani*, who was assassinated by the Israeli occupation in 1972 (Charif, 2008). Kanafani asserted that the cultural and political siege Palestinians are subjected to has pushed them to use the "*weapon of literature*" as a form of resistance (Holt, 2021). Palestinians apply exactly what Kanafani said, perhaps without realizing it: they are resisting culturally with the weapon of literature and knowledge, which the literary scholar Barbara Harlow called *"Resistance Literature"* (Fekete, 2017).

Thus, what Palestinians practice is transforming the process of transmitting knowledge in its traditional form into a tool of cultural resistance, emerging from the present and shaping the future, as Kanafani said (Idriss, 2021). For Palestinians, education is *"a gateway to the outside world and an essential component of resisting the dominance of Israeli settler-colonialism. For them, it is an emancipatory weapon."* (Alarabeed, 2025:1).

A history teacher told me, *"As a history teacher, I carry my notebook and go from family to family to tell them the stories of Palestine. I fear that our history will be lost if schools remain closed. I spend most of my time with the elderly, listening to them and documenting their memories."*

Here, the teacher insists on the urgent task of archiving the collective memory, just as does a teacher who spends most of his time teaching high school students who have already lost two years of their lives. He told me with determination that "*he and his colleagues never stop teaching, even if it is through audio recordings. We have created a portal for students to follow lectures and take*

exams. I have decided to give lessons almost daily, depending on the circumstances, to every high school student, even if only one student comes to me."

Perhaps this issue is not limited to professors or teachers alone, but also to students. One of them told me that the Israeli occupation bombed his house, so he moved with his family to his uncle's house, which was also bombed, so he took refuge in one of the collective shelters. Despite that, he said: *"There were no books left, so we started photographing book pages and sending them to each other on Telegram. I read them at night using candlelight."*

This in itself is a form of *digital resistance*. According to Lemkin (1947), cultural genocide aims to prevent human thought as it enhances national sentiment by targeting educational institutions and preventing cultural activities. The testimonies of Palestinians reveal that they are using the weapon of science to *reproduce culture and reinforce the concept of resilience*. The physics teacher described her work as a "*laboratory without walls*," in which she trained children in tents using simple tools to preserve their love of science.

We may find a similarity between the state of cultural resilience in the Gaza Strip and what happened during World War II, specifically during the Siege of Leningrad (1941–1944). Despite the siege and the suffocating atmosphere as well as the imminent threat of death, teachers and students insisted on continuing the educational process, even in shelters (Peri, 2019).

Education has become an existential act, not only to transmit knowledge, but also to affirm the Palestinian existence itself in the face of the occupation's attempts at denial and exclusion. It also reveals a shift in the role of the teacher himself. S/he is no longer merely a transmitter of knowledge, as s/he used to be, but has become the guardian of memory.

But one cannot stretch resilience to infinite limits. A law professor revealed that he has been teaching for a quarter of a century and has experienced many calamities, but none as harsh as the war today. *"I have no passion or physical or mental energy to teach. Our lives have been destroyed, and we've dropped from the top of Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization, back to the bottom, just seeking physiological needs. We're like primitive humans again, just looking for food."*

4.3.5   Forced Educational Motherhood and the Reshaping of Social Roles

In peaceful times, routine process of teaching is done at school. Parents may support it at home. Thus, a clear boundary of roles is set. But now in Gaza, one observes a forced shift in social roles. Mothers, who were supporters of education, have now become, perhaps the only, alternative to the devastated educational system. They become teachers, supervisors, and a counselor, all without the slightest psychological or even logistical support. Mothers, in other words, became active agents of resistance by explicitly assuming the role of educators, transforming their "private" sphere into a space of learning and mobilizing agency through education.

A side note here about women and the notion of public/private. The boundaries between these two spaces have been almost completely gone by war and displacement, rendering the distinctions irrelevant. The destruction of homes, the loss of safe spaces and the necessity to live in tents mean that the issue of "privacy" has disappeared. There are essentially no doors, no walled rooms, and no possibility of private space, even for the most intimate activities such as cooking, bathing, or using the toilet. Other aspects of private sphere that were used to be taken for granted are no longer so,

such as expressing grief or fear or love within the home or within the familial context. Experiencing trauma for losing a family member, a neighbour or even losing one's home become a public matter. One also cannot forget the 24-hour presence of Israeli drones in the Gaza sky, watching, surveilling and constantly threatening to kill for suspicion or even worse, for no reason at all makes the issue of privacy a fiction rather than a right. In Gaza, the private sphere is exposed to constant violence, transforming the most intimate space into public scrutiny, thus additional helplessness to the piles of vulnerabilities. I can go on recitation the issues facing Gazans in this regard but neither the focus of this study nor the word limit allows further engagement.

The shift in social roles of women may be merely an adaptation to the circumstances if it were an emergency. However, in light of the prolonged genocide, it is targeting the social fabric itself. A mothers complained to me, *"We can't be a substitute for school. There's no monitoring, no obligation to attend, or waking up early to salute the flag. There is nothing that can replace the school."* Schools therefore got a special significance here, extending beyond a mere physical space for educational activities as a life of community and places of solidarity. Therefore, the loss of school carries far deeper meaning.

Lemkin helps us understand the destruction of the social fabric: genocide doesn't necessarily involve the immediate annihilation of a nation, but rather a series of measures aimed at dismantling institutions in all their forms, destroying all culture, language, emotions, and even individuals (Luck, 2018). This situation imposes burdens on Palestinian mothers that exceed their capabilities. This perhaps intersects with Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, where the occupation exercises almost absolute control over people's daily lives, using multiple doses of violence, imposing patterns of existence that serve its ultimate goal of domination (Pele, 2020).

4.3.6   Digital Resistance: Memory and Emergency Archiving

In the resilience efforts of Palestinians in Gaza, I have observed a trend that goes beyond traditional archiving, which aims to preserve documents and cultural materials until after the crisis ends. This trend can be called "emergency archiving".

A high school student who left Gaza said, *"I took with me the only notebook I was able to retrieve from our house after it was bombed, and I began to tell my colleagues stories about Gaza."* Here, he tries to transmit memory and cultural identity. Students with access to eSIM cards were able to help their classmates who had lost their textbooks by photographing them and posting them on Telegram.

Archiving and the creation of digital libraries represent a bridge for the transfer of knowledge, as the physics teacher clearly expressed when she told me during my interview: *"I created a channel to explain physics lessons as I did in school."* According to Vizenor, this represents an active form of resistance and not merely passive survival (Vizenor, 2008). The advantage of this method of archiving is that it relies on individuals rather than central institutions, and it roughly mimics what the literature calls "cultural transmission networks" (Henrich and Broesch, 2011).

4.3.7   Confiscating Educational Spaces and Turning Them into Shelters

According to United Nations reports, approximately 97% of schools in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed, either partially or completely, since the beginning of the war of extermination on the Gaza Strip (M.I., 2025). This is a horrific number, especially that during this period until September 2025, 13,500 students were killed, while 785,000 were deprived of their right to education (PCHR, 2025).

Therefore, the destruction of this massive number of schools and transforming the remaining ones into shelters is a confiscation of the educational function itself, not just the building itself. Here, the place loses its symbolism as a constituent of cognitive identity, erases daily memory, undermines educational relationships, and transforms into a space of survival or an attempt at survival. This means a complete functional collapse of the educational space, with the deliberate engineering of the occupation.

This brings us back to Mbembe's concept of the politics of death, and the power that decides who has the right to live and where (Mbembe, 2003). School becomes a refuge, and even a refuge can be bombed (OCHA, 2024). Instead of being a safe educational space, school becomes a threatened space of survival. This is precisely what Mbembe explains: sovereignty that subjects life to the logic of death creates "death worlds" (Mbembe, 2003).

If we consider that colonialism, in this case, Israel, does not merely confiscate land, but also works tirelessly and continuously to disrupt the mechanisms of societal reproduction (Wolfe, 2006), then we are faced with a pattern that aims to destroy the conditions of cultural survival, not just direct killing.

4.3.8 The UN: a Gap Between Vision and the Actual Reality

International organisations treat the collapse of education not as a continuous dismantling of the educational infrastructure, but rather as a temporary interruption. Consequently, their focus is directed toward bridging the gap rather than addressing the *structural roots of the problem*. This logic could work in the case of natural disasters, such as an earthquake, flood, or tsunami, where the event is sudden and requires rapid intervention before recovery. However, in the Palestinian case, the matter is completely different. It is a colonial policy of systematic destruction that has been ongoing for decades. One of the results of dealing with this logic is the *normalization* of the temporary and the deepening of the temporary violence. As such, the victims in Gaza are viewed not as a group that has the right to education and a cultural future like any other human group, but rather as people in need of urgent emergency care. This humanitarian reasoning is likely to overlook the political and social aspects of the reasons that led to the occupation and the blockade, and thus leaves the education crisis without a radical and real solution (Fassin, 2011).

4.4 Conclusion

The testimonies of the interviewed Gazans reveal a dual reality: the Gaza education sector experiences targeted cultural genocide, yet Gazans demonstrate profound cultural resilience. Through education in tents, digital tools, storytelling, and parental engagement, they preserve knowledge, identity, and hope. Education has become both a site of erasure and a means of

survival. This chapter provides the answer to my research question: education is targeted as cultural genocide, while people's innovative practices manifest people's resilience.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research aimed at answering the dual question of how systematic targeting of the education sector in the Gaza Strip became a form of cultural genocide? And how does cultural resilience manifest in various innovative actions by the Gazan people? I relied on a qualitative methodology, that is online interviews with 81 participants in the education sector, from students, professors, academics, experts, as well as parents and even officials in the Ministry of Education and officials in international organizations. I used Lemkin's theory of cultural genocide, Wolfe's settler colonial theory, Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, and Nixon's theory of slow violence to explain how educational destruction functions as both cultural erasure and structural control. I complemented these with the Palestinian concept of sumud to illustrate how resilience preserves education, culture, and identity. Together, they provide a multi-dimensional lens to position "education" as both a site of destruction and a space of resistance.

The research outcome confirms how the targeting of education was a systematic practice of cultural genocide, not a temporary event or marginal consequence of the war. It also highlights a profound gap between the international view of the education crisis in the Gaza Strip, considered an emergency requiring urgent intervention, and the reality of the situation, which reveals a long history of systematic targeting, accompanied by persistent attempts to obliterate Palestinian educational identity. The interviews demonstrated an inspiring form of cultural resilience, where education, a fundamental right of people, has become a tool of resistance and defiance against the occupation, and a bridge used by Palestinians to connect the past, the present, and the future. The findings I have reached may be an additional attempt to enhance academic understanding of cultural genocide. I have also looked beyond the Palestinian case by citing numerous historical examples and illustrating how colonialism works to undermine the cultural identity of peoples.

The themes I have presented here, along with the historical examples, confirm that the targeting of education was never a coincidental event, or a byproduct of the genocide carried out by the occupation. Rather, it is a systematic process, with the deliberate intent of targeting the four pillars of education: the three most apparent elements of cultural genocide are present in Gaza: Systematic destruction of cultural institutions and practices (ruining our place: school and university as symbols of this place). Suppression or replacement of cultural heritage that is our memory (archives and libraries), and our identity (the student's sense of being and sense of self). And finally, the denial of transmission across generations (denying us a future: educational prospects and academic opportunities).

Perhaps the comparisons I have made reveal that targeting education is not a new thing, but rather a fundamental aspect of colonialism throughout history. In all genocidal plans, education was one of the most important goals of the colonizer. Therefore, Gaza is no exception; rather, it is perhaps the latest link in this long chain that aims to erase identity and obliterate memory through the bombing of places like schools, universities, and all educational institutions. However, Gaza's uniqueness in this chain is that all forms of violence have come together in it, despite its limited geographical area: Direct violence through bombing and destruction, slow violence through the erasure of memory and the destruction of archives, and structural violence through the siege that has continued for decades. All of these factors have made the Gazan experience unique and special.

What is also special about Gaza is that it faces a state that presents itself as the embodiment of intellectual and moral superiority. Within this framework, Palestinians are presented as the *Other,* less human, irrational, and undeserving of life. This hierarchy is reinforced through narratives that associate Jews with intellectual and moral supremacy. As such, the systematic destruction of life and infrastructure in Gaza meant to maintain this myth of civilizational superiority by contrasting it with the perceived backwardness of Palestinians.

Teaching in tents that are repeatedly bombed; recording lectures and broadcasting them on audio; transmitting memories through notebooks and papers that survived the bombing; and parents' invention of new methods (by linking education to food and motivating their children with an extra piece of bread if they succeed in accomplishing what was asked of them), all these approaches represent a form of existential resistance and cultural steadfastness that confirms that no matter how much the occupation tries to eliminate it, and no matter how many atrocities it commits, our experience confirms that the logic of survival and continuity will be victorious. Finally, amid their relentless killing and the cruelty of engineered famine, our existence alone defies them; it is resistance.

How do these conclusions relate to development studies? The findings show an essential intersection with the theoretical frameworks of development studies, as genocide creates a deliberate model of *de-development*, which keeps the Gaza Strip a place incapable of development and sustainability (Roy, 1987). I have done this by integrating several theoretical lenses and analysing the systematic targeting of the education sector as a primary target in the war, rather than just a service sector affected by the war. This raises central questions in the developmental debate about *de-development*, as analysed by Sarah Roy, considering that the war of extermination carried out in Gaza represents a systematic elimination of basic human capabilities. It deprives education of its value as a foundational freedom, as a necessary tool for living a dignified life and for achieving other capabilities such as political, vocational, and health rehabilitation (Sen, 1999).

If we look at this situation through Sen and Nussbaum's Capability Approach, destroying more than 95% of Gaza's educational facilities (PCHR, 2025) is not only about the loss of schools or classrooms. It is the denial of people's basic freedom to learn, to think, and to live with dignity. As Galtung (1969) would put it, this is a deep form of cultural and structural violence that attacks the meaning-making systems through which a community understands and reproduces itself. When people are prevented from teaching, learning, and passing on knowledge, this kind of violence keeps them marginalized and dependent.

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ANNEX I

Interview Questions

Questions for Students in Gaza During the Genocide

1. If you passed by the place where you studied before the war (your school or university), what would you feel? What do you see with your eyes, and what memories come to mind?
2. Is there a lesson or piece of information about Palestine that you always remember? Or something you felt was important at the time and now realize is even more significant?
3. What was the strangest way you tried to learn after schools and universities stopped? If you were to describe how studying looked, what would you say about it?
4. When you tried to study at home, was there someone who helped lighten your burden? Helped you find time and space to review your lessons? Or did you feel alone, considering everyone was busy with other matters?
5. If you saw your picture from before the war, what would you say to that person? Do you feel you are still the same, or has something inside you disappeared and won't return?
6. If you had the chance to relive just one minute from your school or university days, which moment would you choose and why?
7. When a school or university is bombed, what do you think they are trying to stop? Knowledge? Memory? Something else? Or is the bombing random with no distinction between a school, university, tower, cafe, or anything else?
8. Imagine how your life would have been if your education hadn't stopped. How might you be today? What do you feel was cut off just as you were about to finish, not only academically but in any other way?
9. If education had not stopped, or had only been interrupted for a limited period like previous wars, do you think you would still see yourself as Palestinian in the same way? Or would your identity have been shaped differently?

Questions for Students Who Travelled Abroad

1. On your first day attending school or university abroad, what did you feel was missing? Or what was the strangest thing about the classroom or hall?
2. When your new friends outside Gaza ask you "What happened in Gaza?", how do you explain it? Do you tell them about moments you experienced at school or university during previous wars, or do you avoid talking about war memories to not stir pain?
3. When you arrived here, in this new country, without any documents proving your academic progress or current level, what was the first obstacle you faced? How did you try to deal with it? Did anyone from the ministry or embassy assist you?

Questions for Parents

1. When you sat with your children during the war, was there something you made sure to keep saying? Like a story, a song, or some information you felt was more important than any lesson?
2. Do you feel you became a substitute for school? If yes, what is the hardest thing you face in this role? What do you feel you cannot make up for no matter how hard you try?
3. What did you tell your children when they asked, "Why did we stop going to school?" or "When will we go back to studying?"
4. Imagine a magical camera that could go back in time before the war and was inside your child's classroom. What moment would you want it to capture so you can keep showing it to your children after the war ends?
5. After schools have become shelters and most education happens in tents, what is the most important thing you could say to your child to motivate them to continue their education? How do you encourage them?

Questions for International Organization Staff

1. If you had to describe what happened to education in Gaza since the start of the extermination, how would you describe it? What word or phrase do you feel truly expresses the scale of what happened? And why did you choose that description?
2. Do your institutions use terms like "Scholasticide" or "cultural extermination" when talking about Gaza? If not, why?
3. Now that students have left Gaza and are effectively in temporary exile in countries like Egypt or Oman, these students no longer hear the morning anthem every day or hear anyone speaking in the Palestinian dialect they are accustomed to. Is there anything you can do to keep them connected to their homeland? Prevent them from forgetting their identity?
4. Do you view students who left Gaza as students who lost their schools, or as refugees like any other refugees? And what is the actual difference in how you deal with them?
5. If a student from Gaza comes to you without certificates or proof of study, what would you tell them? Do you have a way for them to continue their studies? Or do you tell them to manage on their own? If you have handled specific cases, please share the procedures you followed.
6. How do you imagine the first study session after the war ends? What should be said? What should we not forget to say?
7. In your opinion, if a Palestinian child from Gaza is 6 years old and has never seen a school in their life, what will they know about their country after 10 years? What will they have forgotten?
8. When you work with the Ministry of Education, do you discuss with them how education protects identity? Or is your relationship purely administrative? For example, in your last communication, what did you say about the meaning of school beyond its physical form?
9. If a Palestinian child from Gaza abroad asks you, "Why are there no Palestinian school textbooks here?" how do you respond?

Questions for Ministry of Education Officials

1. What is the most significant decision your ministry has made that you feel resisted cultural extermination? A small decision, but one that you feel prevented education from disappearing entirely.
2. With all the shelling, displacement, and outages of electricity and internet, what could you realistically do? Did you try something that didn't work, especially in Gaza city where there were months with no communication networks? Or what did you try but was destroyed by reality?
3. Did you implement alternative initiatives such as remote learning, or partnerships with international or local organizations to provide academic or cultural content? For example, if a displaced student came and was waiting for a scholarship and said, "I want to continue... but how?" what could you do? And what was beyond your control?
4. Did you modify curricula (e.g., removing or cancelling parts) or exam formats during the recent period? If yes, why? Was it only to reduce student burden, or because essay questions take too long to answer, and practically there was no time, leading you to use multiple choice and true/false questions? What did you have to remove or change that was hard to lose? Did you feel you lost an important story or meaning?
5. Do you have data on how many schools became shelters for displaced people? Or the number of students who couldn't continue their education despite the ministry's efforts? What number still shocks you deeply—not just a statistic on paper but a real source of pain?
6. Many things are buried under the rubble: curricula, certificates, memories... Do you think anything can be recovered? If not now, maybe in the future? And if the entire ministry archive is lost, what is the most important thing you wish had been preserved? A certificate? A document? Anything?
7. If an entire generation never attended school, which is practically happening, what will they know about their country after 10 years? What will they forget?
8. Have you considered documenting the stories of students and teachers who left or were displaced? Not just numbers, but stories? If not, what prevents this?
9. If you had to explain to a non-Palestinian child why our school is different from others, what would you say?

Questions for Teachers and Academics

1. If there was a book about you as a teacher, what would be the title of the chapter that talks about this period? What did you lose most when the school or university was gone?
2. Have you noticed a change in your relationship with the students you taught before the war? If yes, do you think one of the occupation's goals is to break social bonds? Please elaborate.
3. If the war ends and you are asked to return to teaching... do you feel you still have the same motivation, or has something inside you broken?
4. Schools and universities resumed shortly before the war; what was the last activity or event you held before the war? What do you feel was lost with that moment?

5. When you feel targeted as a teacher, what message do you think is communicated to your students? That you are a threat? That you shouldn't continue? Or that you continue regardless because Palestinians have no other alternatives?
6. Do you think there is still hope to preserve Palestinian culture and knowledge? For example, if you decide not to teach again, what do you think the students will lose? Or even Gaza? Please elaborate.
7. Is there something you wrote, edited, or planned, and now fear no one will teach it after you? If yes, please give an example.
8. Did you try to teach your students during the war? If yes, what were the main difficulties? Did you notice a difference in how your voice reached students depending on their location? For example, displaced students in safe places responded more than those under bombardment; what other factors influenced this? Did you notice differences in response between male and female students?

ANNEX II

Students' Testimonies/answers from Gaza

This Annex contains testimonies/answer from Palestinian students who were/are still in Gaza when conducting the interviews with them. They were discussing loss, trauma, and experiences of systematic educational destruction during genocide.

Translation Methodology

In this Annex as well as the following Annexes (III, IV, V, VI, VII), I made an effort to preserve the technical terminology and specialized terms and language used by the participants while maintaining the authentic voices and emotional experiences of their responses.
As some Arabic terms have no direct English equivalent, I tried to use the closest translation as an alternative. The responses reflect colloquial Palestinian dialect mixed with Modern Standard Arabic, which was rendered to maintain their original emotional impact and cultural specificity. Special care has been given to ensure the speakers' dignity while accurately conveying their suffering.

Gender	Number
Males	12
Females	**9**
Total	**21**

Type of School	High School Tawjehi	University
UNRWA	10	0
Governmental	5	0
Private	2	4
Total		
21		

Question 1: If you passed by the place where you used to study before the war (your school or university) today, what do you feel? What do you see with your eyes, and what do you see with your memories?

Responses:

P1: *"I feel nostalgia for it, I see myself standing at the radio reciting poetry, playing sports, I see teachers honoring us."*

P2: *"I feel pain, sorrow, ignorance, stupidity and backwardness, and I remember that school days were among the most beautiful moments of understanding, order and commitment, and that the friendship that was within school walls cannot be replaced, and that teachers and school were the most important part of our lives."*

P3: *"My school became a shelter for displaced people, there's no blackboard or classrooms, just mattresses and tents."*

P4: *"When I pass by I feel the spirit that was in it is gone, but I remember the morning songs and laughing with girls during break."*

P5: *"My Al-Azhar University was a big building, now it's rubble. With my eyes I see burned stones and ambulance crews, and in my memories, I see seats and students laughing and sounds of lectures."*

P6: *"I see how the place that tried to make me a person of ethics and knowledge, passed the same feeling as when someone sees a part of their personality became nothing."*

P7: *"No feeling, just some nostalgia."*

P8: *"I see that my memories became zero with the rubble, the building that made me was destroyed."*

P9: *"I'll feel choked and regretful, how the place I wished to leave as quickly as possible turned out to be one of the closest places to my heart, and one of the places I'll miss most. I should have appreciated it more. And I'll see myself leaving school with my friends laughing as usual, without a single real worry in this world."*

P10: *"There's disappointment, that we were learning and living our lives normally and suddenly everything went away and life stopped."*

P11: *"I feel sad when I see the university destroyed."*

P12: *"Pain and heartache."*

P13: *"I feel longing for our memories, but unfortunately what I see is displaced people sitting in it. In my memories I remember everything I went through at school, sweet and bitter, its teachers and students."*

P14: *"With regret and pain."*

P15: *"I studied at the Islamic University, now nothing remains of it except the facade. When I look at it, I see destruction, and in my memories, I see a library and friends planning their futures. I regret that I couldn't preserve anything."*

P16: *"I became ashamed to look at the school, I felt I used to hate it before the war, today I wish I could return for one day in it."*

P17: *"My brother's school became dust. Every time I pass by there, I replay the movie of my life before the war, our life was beautiful."*

P18: "I feel longing and nostalgia for the beautiful days I spent there, and sadness when I see all these memories destroyed and erased."

P19: *"I feel that education with us needs a lot to return like before."*

P20: *"I feel nostalgia, and I feel I miss my teachers and friends."*

P21: "The university was our second home. I never missed a lecture. When they bombed it, I felt like I had lost a part of my soul."

P22: *"My university was destroyed, half a building remains standing, people sat in it, when I walk from there, I feel dust in my throat, I take a look at the place I see ash and sand and iron instead of trees that surrounded the building."*

P23: *"The university gate is closed, I don't even try to look at it from inside, my cousins worked at the university when they renovated its buildings, I knew every detail in it, now it's rubble, may God take revenge on who was the cause."*

P24: "I was about to graduate. I was only one semester away from graduating. I had been dreaming of this moment, but they stole it from me. U can't even imagine what happened."

P25: "When my colleagues ask me about Gaza, I feel a pang of sadness. I don't like to remember what happened and is happening, but I feel it is my duty to convey to people outside Palestine what is happening inside, even if it is painful. So, whenever I pass by the university; I take pictures and share with my friends, maybe I could forget some of the pain."

> **Question 2: Is there a lesson or information about Palestine that you keep remembering? Or something you felt was important then... and today you feel is more important?**

Responses:

P1: *"Nothing specific."*

P2: *"Of course we keep remembering that Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem are a dream, but postponed, and that the issue of return and refugees must be solved. Today it became a bigger dream, but not impossible."*

P3: *"Talking about ethics and proper ways of dealing with society is not just an emergency idea or sentence that can be presented during a teaching class, but it is a curriculum that must establish an independent mandatory teaching subject."*

P4: *"The betrayal of the Sharif of Mecca to the Ottoman State and the destruction of the Middle East."*

P5: *"The lesson that stayed in my mind most is about the Nakba. We used to study it as if it was an old story, but the war made me feel that the Nakba is continuous, and that we must hold onto the land and identity."*

P6: *"That Palestine is not just stone, because stone returns, Palestine is a people built correctly."*

P7: *"The geography teacher used to talk about our right to freedom of movement and water. Today I knew that even reaching the internet became a dangerous journey."*

P8: *"When I used to hear about the Nakba, I felt the extent of the tragedy they went through and how difficult the matter was for them, and I wondered in my head: how could they endure and not commit suicide? Now just remembering the Nakba I consider it something simple compared to what we went through in this war. And I understood that when a person is put in a difficult situation, he automatically endures and lives in flight mode, doesn't think much, because if he thinks a little about the situation, he'll go crazy, so the mind shuts off."*

P9: *"The civics lesson that talked about Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque became for me the most important of my lessons; because I felt the occupation doesn't just demolish houses, it tries to erase our history."*

P10: *"Palestine will be victorious one day."*

P11: *"Palestine's geographical importance, but today I feel that attachment to the homeland is more important than anything."*

P12: *"All eyes are on Palestine and they won't leave it."*

P13: *"That the place doesn't matter, what matters is who's in it, and what happened was the opposite."*

P14: *"Its location and weather... and its moderate climate."*

P15: *"Without people there's no benefit from the homeland."*

P16: *"Once they told us that education is a weapon and I didn't believe it, but after they destroyed universities and schools, I was truly convinced that education is a weapon."*

P17: *"That our people were among the most educated peoples, but currently they might become among the most ignorant due to the destruction of schools, infrastructure, teachers and scholars."*

P18: *"You know Mahmoud Darwish's poem "On this earth is what makes life worth living," I used to see it as poetic exaggerations, today I memorize it by heart."*

P19: *"Honestly what I remember isn't from school, I remember my grandfather when he used to tell us about the country, I used to sit and argue with him and tell him if I were in your place in '48 I wouldn't have left my house, today I remember my grandfather, may God have mercy on him, and I say there are things stronger than humans."*

P20: *"I took with me the only notebook I was able to retrieve from our house after it was bombed, and I began to tell my colleagues here stories about Gaza. I was using it to write information and data that I collected. One of the most important pieces of information I remember and noted down is the size of Palestine before the occupation."*

Question 3: What's the strangest way you tried to learn after schools and universities stopped? And if you want to describe how studying became, what would you say about it?

Responses:

P1: *"I study with weak internet, in darkness and noise."*

P2: *"Teaching methods without schools are almost impossible, because school isn't a place, school is an entity and love and order we commit to, and punishment and reward, and officials who work day and night so we become fruitful trees. And studying became like food without salt and spices: tasteless, flavorless."*

P3: *"I used to go out with my mother to the remains of a demolished house that's a bit high just to catch a signal and download recorded lectures, but the road is dangerous and the internet is weak, and when the lecture reaches me, I find myself tired and understanding nothing."*

P4: *"Through part-time attendance, I felt it's an ineffective method that generates indiscipline, and insufficient to give everything that can be given in the academic stage."*

P5: *"I tried with ChatGPT as if it's my teacher, but it failed."*

P6: *"Distance learning, my opinion about it before Corona was that it doesn't bear fruit."*

P7: *"There were no books left, so we started photographing book pages and sending them to each other on Telegram. I used to print them on paper to read them at night by candlelight."*

P8: *"I sometimes used to go out at night to sit in the garden alone and light a candle and study with drones above me and the sounds of rockets never stopping. The situation was more frightening at*

night, but I had to do this because the place I live in is crowded with people, and there's no way for one to concentrate among all these people."

P9: *"Random studying."*

P10: *"The university made online classes, but internet cuts every little while. Studying became sometimes audio recording, and sometimes we organize classes inside tents. So honestly it became complete chaos."*

P11: *"Studying from video clips and courses, studying became difficult under war conditions."*

P12: *"Due to unavailability of books and internet, I used to contact a friend abroad, where he downloads the book on his end and photographs one page and I download it due to weak internet."*

P13: *"When I used to go out walking long distances to download videos to study them, because we had no internet. And I return to study with noise from everywhere: whether drones, bombing, large number living with them. And studying without books on the phone, so I also suffered from charging. Studying became tiring from all aspects, even no nutrition to be able to concentrate. You barely find a place to study."*

P14: *"Through nearby educational initiatives... there's no form of studying... no seats or classroom, no educational books or curriculum or time... under bombing and hunger... minimum information we learn to catch up and pass to the next grade."*

P15: *"I used to connect internet from the street to be able to follow up with my university and continue my education, and every day I charge the laptop for 3 shekels and buy internet paper (paper for 2 shekels)."*

P16: "Studying from online books on the phone."

P17: *"Online learning, if I want to describe it I talk about it as failed studying. Honestly there's no commitment and no understanding, and internet is also difficult in Gaza, it cuts every little while."*

P18: *"No specific method, there are classes that go down on YouTube, I connect from street internet and download them audio only because internet is slow, sometimes on WhatsApp group I find summaries from old years someone uploaded, but nothing like before unfortunately, we didn't realize how fortunate we were."*

P19: "The teacher would gather us inside the tent, quickly explain the lesson, and then we go back home. I felt that life was still going on. This was the strangest thing ever happened."

> **Question 4: When you were trying to study at home, was there someone to ease things for you? Or help you find time and place to review your lessons? Or did you feel alone, considering everyone was busy with other things?**

Responses:

P1: *"Mom helped me a lot and saved me time and effort, helped me a lot, didn't make me feel I needed anything, provided me with everything I need."*

P2: *"Of course parents try to provide all possibilities, support and place, but all this without schools has no value. And stories related to house basics and their availability were occupying our minds for sure, but we lost passion for studying."*

P2: *"I swear I was alone. Everyone busy with water and bread, no one free, and no quiet place. Even books aren't available, so it was very difficult to concentrate."*

P3: *"Somewhat there was an attempt at support, but it doesn't rise to what's required."*

P4: *"My mother used to insist I study."*

P5: *"I'm a Tawjihi student, when I used to get depressed, my sister gathers my cousins and they start encouraging me like a small party, to help me return to studying."*

P6: *"No, surely the tightness doesn't help studying, on the contrary the general atmosphere is discouraging from studying. It's not anyone's fault honestly."*

P7: *"Everyone was cooperative, and after a while there became rules for the place, I'm in, like forbidden to enter the room I'm in after a certain time to make sure I study well. And everyone suggests to me times when the situation is calm, or places away from noise. And I remember once the war was still in its beginning and intensity, and I as a Tawjihi student was desperate and sad because I felt the year will be lost, so all my cousins gathered in the room I'm in and started raising my morale and encouraging me."*

P8: *"I feel alone."*

P9: *"In the beginning my family tried to help me, but there's no electricity or charged laptop. After a while I decided to join a nearby educational initiative because home no longer works for studying, and also the initiative stopped."*

P10: *"My mother always told me the most important thing is your studies, as for the rest they were busy with other things."*

P11: *"My mom tries as much as she can to provide me with the suitable atmosphere... but with difficulty."*

P12: *"Mom and dad are always standing with me and helping me, but unfortunately they can't provide everything, and surely everyone gets busy with their things and I'm alone."*

P13: *"Honestly no, there's no time or mood or atmosphere prepared for studying. No one is free for the other... no tools, no laptops or phones or internet or textbooks. I found that committing and going to educational initiatives is better."*

P14: *"Of course my mother always helps me and always asks about my studies."*

P15: *"Everyone is busy."*

P16: *"No, I used to study alone because everyone is busy with other things."*

P17: *"God forbid you see this, at my brother's place there are two small children who wake up before the rooster, I used to wake up with them and go out to the house door to study alone before the whole house wakes up."*

P18: *"I'm staying at my cousins', we're all roughly the same age, we used to study together, and when it's time to go shopping we go out together."*

P19: *"My parents if they could provide me half an hour of concentrated studying, much thanks to them, they have a million things behind them, may God help them."*

P20: *"This is a very difficult question. I don't know if I should study for the high school exams that I've been waiting for months, or if I should be busy searching for food with the rest of my family. How can I study while leaving them struggling to make ends meet without me sharing? So I've never thought of someone to help me with my study and homework and was always thinking that I am the one who should be helping the family"*

> **Question 5: If you saw your picture before the war, what would you say to that person? Do you feel you're still him? Or is there something inside you that disappeared and won't return?**

Responses:

P1: *"I see a completely different person, I feel sadness and oppression from what happened to me. I see a cheerful child who loved to play and loved life, and now she lost her passion."*

P2: *"If I saw myself before the war, I can't believe I'm the same person. Interests changed, demands changed, daily activities changed, and I long for my old self and want to return to myself."*

P3: *"Don't be annoyed by everything, your suffering is just routine that can be easily fixed."*

P4: *"I'll tell him: escape from this shameful fate."*

P5: *"I tell my old self: stay happy with classes and crowds, maybe a day will come when you miss them. No, I'm not the same person, I lost my innocence and my sadness increased."*

P6: *"What disappeared from inside me is that I used to see myself as becoming a great lawyer, but now I want any job."*

P7: *"I'll tell her that your feeling of wanting to freeze time and live your whole life at age 16 was a feeling in place, as if I knew something black was waiting for me. I'm as I am, and nothing disappeared from me, on the contrary many things were added to my personality, whether positive or negative."*

P8: *"There's something inside me that disappeared and won't return."*

P9: *"I tell her: you used to be annoyed by exams, today I wish for just one lesson to forget war fear. Part of childhood disappeared forever."*

P10: *"I tell him: have hope in life and don't despair no matter the circumstances. I feel that after the war there are changes (maturity) noticeably, from laziness to fatigue and work."*

P11: *"I feel that who's in the picture is an ordinary person, now I became older than my age by years. I lost hope, and came to understand the meaning of steadfastness against my will."*

P12: *"I tell him: to the person I was in the picture, it seems you're living in blessing and you don't feel it."*

P13: *"I say: I missed you. No, I changed a lot in multiple aspects. What disappeared and won't return is fear of anything. I should have continued my life normally without fear, but war taught me there's nothing to fear. The worst things that could happen happened and we lived them and coexisted with them. Nothing is difficult for us."*

P14: *"Surely many things disappeared... they killed in us the spirit of life, passion, ambition and hope... and killed the future and erased the past... killed the routine we used to hate, and now we say: I wish it would return."*

P15: *"Surely my personality changed 180 degrees after the war in many aspects. In short, I was crushed by the war, and I want to return to before the war and live one day in it."*

P16: *"I'll ask her to thank her Lord for every moment of safety. I changed a lot; I used to fear exams, today I fear planes and bombing more."*

P17: *"The difference between heaven and earth in terms of maturity and arranging life priorities, and social status and place that changed."*

P18: *"I tell her: thank your Lord for the blessing you're in. I don't feel I'm the same person before and after the war. I feel I stopped getting sad when anyone dies, as if death is something natural. And my thinking also changed before and during the war."*

P19: *"When people from the south came and saw me, they didn't recognize me, my weight today is like my weight when I was in middle school."*

P20: *"Do you believe when someone shows me my picture before the war I hide my face, I don't want to feel regret, I was spoiled, if you see me today, you'd be sad for me."*

P21: *"I swear today from yesterday from last year from the one before, it's all gathered together, this is our luck in life, you don't know if God is pleased with us or angry at us, we don't know."*

Question 6: If you got a chance to bring back just one minute from school or university days... which moment, would you choose? And why?

Responses:

P1: *"I return to when I was reciting poetry in front of school and supervisors and my family to see their pride in me."*

P2: *"Every moment of school and university before the war was life and joy and purpose, and any moment is worth the world and what's in it."*

P3: *"University graduation of course because then the feeling is crowning the self for everything that passed in all study years."*

P4: *"The minute of morning lineup when we stand to sing the anthem. It was a moment that made us feel safe and belonging."*

P5: *"One minute is little, but if more I'd return to the canteen to buy falafel with hummus and salad."*

P6: *"University graduation celebration days because it was a moment of great joy, you feel you started achieving."*

P7: *"The moment when we're sitting at school during winter, and the weather is rainy and dark, and the teacher is absent because of weather conditions, and we gather as class students together talking and eating without carrying any worry in this world."*

P8: *"The moment we ran after the last class with our eyes shining with joy. I miss the word "let's go home" that was natural and became a wish."*

P9: *"I choose moments of honouring top students' ceremony. They were very beautiful moments full of joy."*

P10: *"I choose the first day at university because I felt I grew up and life opened before me."*

P11: *"Morning lineup while we run to catch the national anthem."*

P12: *"Break time at university; we used to laugh and share sandwiches. Today even food became difficult."*

P13: *"I choose to return to tenth grade days because they were among the sweetest periods in my life. I moved to a new school, met new people from different areas, knew the right teachers at this school whom I consider friends more than teachers. It was the sweetest period, and at the same time it was the World Cup, so I used to motivate myself like finish this subject to watch the match with my family and make atmosphere."*

P14: *"Surely I choose university days... because university is what polishes human personality, and the beginning of launching to the outside world and self-realization."*

P15: *"School trip to the municipal library on Wahda Street. That was the last time I read a book with my friends before the library turned to rubble."*

P16: *"I choose when I was at university and me and my friends sit together between lectures playing "PES" on laptop in the hallway, and after we finish, we go have breakfast at Zahran falafel and hummus and sit talking and laughing together. And end of day sometimes we go to restaurant for lunch like Floria or Chef and Reef."*

P17: *"Tawjihi results because then I felt all the effort I put over a year brought its result, and I saw joy in my eyes and my parents' eyes."*

P18: *"I choose the moment of receiving my ninth-grade certificate, because I was very happy that year and loved my teachers and friends, and I feel it's the best academic year in my life."*

P19: *"No specific moment, there are many moments, when we review exams together for example, and each one explains his answer to the other, or when we play pranks on each other, many beautiful moments there were, and when we remember them today, we love them more."*

P20: *"When I used to go on morning radio and speak in front of students and teachers, my teacher used to tell me your voice is for radio, try working in radio in summer."*

P21: *"The closest moment to my heart the day we presented the oath at Rashad Shawa Center, and the center was full of people, and my parents were there and my friends, it was a moment of pride, today here I am moving from place to place, and the university sent me a fine for master's fees I was late on."*

> **Question 7: Do you feel when they bomb a school or university, what are they trying to stop? Knowledge? Memory? Something else? Or is the bombing random and doesn't distinguish between school, university, tower, café, or anything else?**

> **Responses:**

P1: *"They try to stop our whole life. They want us to leave them everything that's ours and go leave our lives."*

P2: *"With bombing they stop the human, not just knowledge or memory. Like a freezing process for humans, and I wish it was freezing, it's going back years in age. If it hadn't happened, we would have finished: whoever his school and whoever his university, and we'd be in the best condition."*

P3: *"They try to destroy the future scientifically and morally by the absence of schools."*

P4: *"Everything... our lives."*

P5: *"Bombing universities aims to kill knowledge. In this war they destroyed all Gaza universities, it's clear they want to stop education and make us an ignorant generation."*

P6: *"They cut a big connection that was somehow. Some universities the general appearance from outside encourages students to come to university, like trees and places and beautiful building. This is their intention. Now distance learning broke the connection between universities and students."*

P7: *"Just knowledge. They want to erase memory. School isn't just classrooms, it has our memories and identity. When they demolish it it's like they erase our stories."*

P8: *"They know that no matter how much they bomb schools, it doesn't mean people won't return to learn as soon as the war ends. Being the most educated town in the world in terms of education percentage, their bombing of schools is nothing more than aiming for sabotage, destruction and execution of life manifestations, so people refuse to stay in this country under the pretext that it has no education, and that even if the war ends, things still need a long time to return like before."*

P9: *"They try to stop education, because education is a weapon that will be against them and we'll destroy them with it."*

P10: *"Targeting universities and schools is to create uneducated (backward) generations and obliterate knowledge."*

P11: *"They bomb the Palestinian child and his continuity in life."*

P12: *"What the occupation means is clear: they want to displace our generation and make us run after a bite of food instead of books."*

P13: *"They try to stop knowledge and create ignorant people who only think about food and money. A generation that doesn't care about knowledge or development, cares about itself and how it will live tomorrow. How will we return like we were?"*

P14: *"The bombing of schools and universities isn't random... and surely bombing universities, schools and all places of knowledge was deliberate and still is. Not just places... people. No thinker,*

scientist, doctor, physician, teacher, educator of generations, journalist, influencer, or person of knowledge and experience remained in this country without being targeted. They targeted the best sons of the country from scholars and thinkers. Places can be built, or places don't matter. But to build a human you need a lifetime... you need 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 years to make a new scientist or thinker or teacher or engineer or doctor or creator who affects the country and builds it."

P15: *"They want to return us to the Stone Age... ignorant uneducated. Because with knowledge everything is built, and they know this."*

P16: *"Intentional targeting to destroy and ignorantize people whose capital was knowledge."*

P17: *"They stop knowledge, because knowledge is what will defeat them one day. People who learn and understand and benefit the homeland, these people will liberate their country with their minds."*

P18: *"These Jews defeated the prophets, I swear I don't know what they want, they want us to die, we're sitting here dying, what more is there than this?"*

P19: *"They want to displace us, they want to take revenge on us, if that minister whose name I don't remember tells you we must kill children so they don't grow up and take revenge for their parents, what more confession do you want than this?"*

P20: *"We've been killing each other for years, and God promised us victory in the Quran and yes we trust in God."*

P21: *"We've started to live as if we don't exist. We live in a state of utter emptiness. Two years of school have been lost so far, and a third is on the way. We don't know what awaits us: death or a dark future."*

Question 8: Can you imagine how your life would be if they hadn't stopped your education? How could you be today? And what do you feel was cut off when you were about to finish it? Not just academically, anything else.

Responses:

P1: *"I would have understood studying and been able to comprehend studying, because it's difficult to study without school. I would have understood the middle school stage as the last stage in elementary."*

P2: *"Of course there are new 2005 Tawjihi graduates who finished, those like them finished two university years. And of course, all 2006 and 2007 Tawjihi didn't take it, if they had taken it, they would have gone to universities or prepared themselves for universities. And of course, the list of travel dreams is big."*

P3: *"I would have continued music studies. The war stopped me, and I was cut off from playing. I feel part of my soul was lost."*

P4: *"I was in third year engineering. If universities hadn't stopped, I could have graduated, but now I'm among 90,000 university students stuck without universities."*

P5: *"I would currently be practicing my work diligently, and perhaps I was an employee able to serve society better or at least with all I can. My practice was stopped, and I could currently be a practicing lawyer."*

P6: *"Maybe I'd have an idea about my future, but I was deprived of it."*

P7: *"I wanted to do a graduation project on artificial intelligence, but the project was lost. Today I work daily jobs to provide food."*

P8: *"A practicing lawyer in an excellent law office. I would have gained great experience and felt progress in my professional career."*

P9: *"I was supposed to be a scholarship university student, achieving the dream I've been dreaming of all my life, and currently in summer vacation, living abroad and surely feeling mixed feelings of pride and nostalgia. What was cut off is time. I was counting days day by day until I finish high school and leave Gaza, not knowing I'll sit another year in Tawjihi without achieving anything real."*

P10: *"It would be going normally and I'd be practicing my life simply."*

P11: *"I would be in third year at university and close to graduation. I feel I might be interning at a company and starting my professional life."*

P12: *"I was keeping up with the world and development... but unfortunately we're living the Stone Age."*

P13: *"My dream was to study Tawjihi, get a high average, enter university in a specialization I love and succeed in it and be good at it. What was cut off is this dream, but hope remains even if small that we return like we were even after years."*

P14: *"Surely it would be much better... and surely, I would have developed myself in many things and learned new skills. Maybe I would have finished IELTS for example... I was very much starting to plan many things. I was planning to get a driving license and finish IELTS and travel to do Umrah. Surely."*

P15: *"Honestly, I continued my education and didn't lose anything. My university made a plan and compressed semesters and I continued my education online. And of course, online is empty talk, and studying during war is empty talk, because you're distracted by a million things. And because nothing compensates for face-to-face education."*

P16: *"The opportunity I could take thank God put me in a better place and better education, and if not for the war I wouldn't have taken this opportunity."*

P17: *"Academically I would have been preparing for Tawjihi and studying seriously to get high average to become a doctor. As for other aspects, I feel my life would have been normal."*

P18: *"Please don't ask me this question."*

P19: *"I would have finished studies and worked at my father's company, today thank God I neither finished studies nor the company was bombed."*

P20: *"I would be abroad now, my brother traveled a month and a half before the war and I was going to follow him in late October, but the war happened and I can't coordinate travel, and here I am sitting, sometimes I say thank God I didn't travel, who would have taken care of my parents?"*

P21: *"Want me to tell you the truth? Nothing matters to me more than wanting to sleep peacefully, if the war hadn't happened, I would be sleeping now without any sound, I just want to go back to sleeping like before the war."*

P22: "I swear many dreams went away, don't remind me."

Question 9: If education hadn't stopped, or stopped for a limited period like all previous wars, do you feel you would have continued seeing yourself as Palestinian in the same way? Or would identity have been formed differently?

Responses:

P1: *"I feel it would be the same thing."*

P2: *"Of course we're proud as Palestinians, and the war made us proud of nationality, but we want to emigrate and leave the country to those who betrayed and destroyed it."*

P3: *"My Palestinianness has no fault in what happened, because I'm Palestinian doesn't mean I should be in a fragmented and useless educational journey. On the contrary, my identity is motivation for that."*

P4: *"I feel I would have remained Palestinian, but the war increased my pride in my identity. After my small city became a headline for news, I felt greater responsibility toward it."*

P5: *"Surely if the war was like previous ones, I'll feel nothing changed. But after what happened, I feel our life path deviated from its course a lot."*

P6: *"Believe me no matter what happens blood remains Palestinian. Interrupted education didn't change my identity but made me curse the world."*

P7: *"Everything changed from before: my view of myself and the amount I discovered I can endure changed. My pride in myself and my Palestinian identity increased, being the small city, I was living in and no one knew about, became one of the most mentioned cities in the world. My life goal changed and became exclusive to my city's interest in the future and how I'll contribute to reviving it from the beginning again."*

P8: *"Identity for us is a weapon; if education went normally, I might think about traveling more, but today I want to stay in the country and study in it."*

P9: *"Maybe holding onto land and identity would be much less than what it is now after the war."*

P10: *"Of course I would still be fighting with my weapon... my certificate."*

P11: *"I don't know, but what I feel is that because of what we used to study in schools and stories told to us about what used to happen before us, it strengthened steadfastness and holding onto the Palestinian cause in us. Knowledge is considered a big foundation. Not everything in war gets fixed. Knowledge is jihad. So I say if knowledge stopped before, it could change not just in me, but in a whole generation in terms of holding onto Palestinian identity."*

P12: *"Surely Palestinian but stubborn and I want my chance in life. But afflicted and used to wars and crises and forced to learn and struggle and work on myself and compete despite being Palestinian... and despite obstacles we have from wars and siege and others. Truly you feel that just for being Palestinian it's a curse outside Palestine and inside it. But I as a stubborn Palestinian insist on reaching my ambitions and dreams despite all obstacles."*

P13: *"I didn't understand the question honestly."*

P14: *"Surely it changed, and I felt our nationality is just a name without any back or protection or privileges or safety."*

P15: *"In my opinion my identity would have been formed differently."*

P16: *"Your way of thinking is formed in university and in discussions with professors and students and how you face challenges and how you prepare for elections in university, no university remained or elections, the only challenge today is how we find food."*

P17: *"What way do I see myself in? I today carry a water jug and walk in it more than a kilometer in streets where there's no place to put your foot, I'll never go back to seeing myself the same way."*

P18: *"My identity? My identity I hear about from Facebook, I find people living eating and drinking and going up and down while secure about their children and they tell me how I should behave and how I should be steadfast."*

P19: *"I used to believe the factions before the war, not much but I believed them and used to have many discussions with my friends on these topics, today I don't believe anyone and everyone who comes out to talk politics is a liar, I feel I'm a different person than before the war."*

P20: *"I'm now displaced for the thirteenth time. Every time I settle, the occupation's threats always order me to evacuate, and I'm forced to do so. These days, I should be moving between engineering sites as part of my university graduation project. Now all is gone. Everything is different."*

Cultural and Contextual Terms Requiring Explanation

Educational and Religious Terms:

1. Tawjihi - General Secondary Education Certificate: The Palestinian equivalent of high school graduation examination, crucial for university admission.
2. Al Ithaa Al Madraseyah - School radio/morning broadcast: Daily educational and cultural program presented by students.
3. Al Nasheed Al Watani - National anthem: Daily ritual in Palestinian schools symbolizing national identity.

ANNEX III

Testimonies/Answers of Gaza Students Continuing Education Abroad

This document contains testimonies from Palestinian students who experienced genocide in Gaza and had the chance to **leave Gaza** to continue their education. The content discusses trauma, displacement, and cultural alienation.

Gender	Number
Females	5
Males	**3**
Total	**8**

Type of School	Graduate	Postgraduate	Phd
Oman	1	0	0
Egypt	1	2	1
Europe	1	1	1
Total			**8**

Question 1: "When you first entered a school or university abroad, what did you feel was missing, or what struck you as unusual in the classroom or lecture hall?"

Responses:

P1: *"I didn't feel anything was missing, there was nothing strange."*

P2: *"We missed ourselves, our friends, our neighbors, the teachers and the school we lived in. Honestly everything in Gaza was easy, today we die a hundred times to get the smallest things."*

P3: *"I haven't experienced the feeling, but I imagine I'll feel rejected, like someone who came with a specific mission and wants to finish it as quickly as possible."*

P4: *"All people were strange to me and the place was strange."*

P5: *"There's no spirit to the place... I looked for my friends, my teachers, my principal... Palestine's flag... the Palestinian voice... there's nothing."*

P6: *"The first time I went to university was for registration (meaning not classes). I felt an unnatural alienation, I felt I really don't belong to this place to the degree that I walked out, and let mom complete the rest of the procedures for me. I wasn't accepting the idea of attending without my*

friends for the first time and in a place strange to me. Attending was and still is very difficult for me, generally the whole matter until now is very strange to me."

P7: *"The feeling of not belonging, and that everyone is comfortable and not carrying tomorrow's worries, and everything is provided for them. While children of my people the same age suffer a million times a day."*

Question 2: When your new friends outside Gaza ask you: "What happened in Gaza?" How do you explain to them? Do you tell them situations you lived through at school or university in previous wars for example? Or do you avoid talking about war memories so you don't stir up pain?

Responses:

P1: *"I tell them what happened. I can't explain it to you in a message, because what's on the ground is different from talking."*

P2: *"We don't stop talking and remembering everything in Gaza to everyone we see."*

P3: *"If I lived the feeling, I'll say I left behind me a group of rubble and homeless people, and education that needs years to return like before, and morals that need dozens of years to be corrected. In Arabic: Gaza will never return to its former state."*

P4: *"I explain to them, but mostly superficially."*

P5: *"As soon as they ask me, they see the shock in my eyes and their eyes widen... so they apologize... and I ask them that I'll tell you but gently."*

P6: *"Usually I don't prefer to talk about the war and its stories, because I don't like to remember beautiful Gaza this way. And I also try to forget. But I'm satisfied describing the war with a word or two, and after that I continue talking about my life before the war and my friends and our house and school and such."*

P7: *"I avoid talking, because it's impossible for words to describe. + Everyone asks out of curiosity, not concern. And if they were concerned, the most they can offer is to pray for you."*

Question 3: When you arrived here, and this is a new country for you, and you had no paper proving your studies or how far you've reached in your studies, what was the first barrier you faced? And how did you try to handle it? And did anyone from the ministry or embassy help you?

Responses:

P1: *"There were no difficulties I faced."*

P2: *"Of course we went to the embassy and private offices that drained all our lives and money and cost us a lot to get the official papers that were lost in destruction and bombing. And until today we still haven't gotten many important things from Gaza."*

P3: *"It was very difficult. I waited a year until I could enter university."*

P4: *"I wish my house was still there, and someone from my family still at home to photograph what I need from papers and certificates... but alas."*

P5: *"The first barrier was that my high school certificates weren't with me. They stayed at our house in Gaza, and with the evacuation rush we didn't manage to take them. Then we talked to dad, and he managed to get them from the ministry in Ramallah ready and certified. And when I finished Tawjihi of course I certified my certificates here at the embassy, and it wasn't difficult."*

P6: *"I didn't face this problem."*

Cultural and Contextual Terms Requiring Explanation

Educational and Administrative Terms:

1. Tawjihi - General Secondary Education Certificate: The Palestinian equivalent of high school graduation examination, essential for university admission.
2. Al Safarah - Embassy: Palestinian diplomatic representation, crucial for document authentication and student support abroad.
3. Ramallah: Administrative center of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, where the Ministry of Education maintains offices.

Emotional and Psychological Terms:

1. Al-Ghurba - Alienation/Estrangement: Deep feeling of displacement and not belonging, more profound than simple homesickness.
2. 'Adam Al Intimaa - Lack of belonging: Psychological state of disconnection from one's environment.

Social and Cultural References:

1. 'Alam Falasteen - Palestine's flag: Symbol of national identity missing in foreign educational environments.
2. Al sawt Al Falasteeni - The Palestinian voice: Reference to Palestinian dialect and cultural expression absent in foreign contexts.

Trauma-Informed Translation Notes

These testimonies reveal the complex psychological challenges faced by Gaza students in foreign educational environments:

- **Survivor's guilt**: Students expressing awareness that their peers remain in Gaza suffering while they have the chance to live and have educational opportunities abroad.
- **Cultural displacement anxiety**: Deep feelings of inability to connect with foreign educational environments.
- **Documentation trauma**: The additional stress of proving educational credentials when all records were destroyed.
- **Protective silence**: Some students choosing not to discuss their experiences to avoid recalling trauma events or re-traumatization or superficial sympathy.
- **Identity fragmentation**: Loss of cultural markers (Palestinian flag, dialect, familiar faces) that previously anchored their sense of self
- **Temporal disruption**: Students having to wait extended periods to resume education due to documentation barriers

ANNEX IV

Parent Testimonies/Answers who are staying in Gaza Strip

Gender	Number
Females	6
Males	**3**
Total	**9**

Geographical Location	**Number of Participants**
North Gaza	3
South Gaza	4
Outside Gaza	2
Total	**9**

Type of Employment	**North Gaza**
Employed	4
Not Employed	5
Total	**9**

Question 1: When you used to sit with your children during the war, was there something you made sure kept being said? Like a story, like a song, like information you felt was more important than any lesson?

Responses:

P1: *"We made sure to remind them that this land is ours, and that the war will end, and everything in Gaza will return. And that you must build it with your own hands, and that Jerusalem must be liberated, as God mentioned in the Quran. I always reminded them of the story of Prophet Noah. I used to repeat one sentence: Be patient and tomorrow you'll remember these days and laugh." And I reminded them that health and family are the most important thing. We used to sit at one table and laugh despite the scarcity of resources"*

P2: *"I used to tell my children the story of Prophet Jonah in the sea and how relief came after patience. I used to remind them of God's blessings and tell them they must thank God for simple things even if electricity was cut off."*

P3: *"We used to tell them about previous wars that passed over us and our memories in them, and encourage them not to be afraid, and that everything in life -- including war -- must have an end."*

P4: *"All the time I repeat Ghassan Kanafani's sentence: "Do you know what the homeland is, Safiya? The homeland is that all this should not happen..."*

P5: *"Be patient, our life will return better than before, and this cloud will be removed. And when you grow up, you'll remember how we lived this stage in our lives. And you must thank your Lord for His blessings always, and you must continue to tell the story we lived to your children in all its details. And we truly think of traveling, but it's a temporary period and we'll return to our homeland that will be built by your hands and your children's hands."*

P6: *"We used to tell them about stories of our people in displacement and the Nakba, and explain that despite the pain they lived through back then, they returned and stood on their feet. These stories gave us hope that war has an end."*

P7: *"The most important thing is family and family unity and our mental health. We used to try to make a dish we love with minimal resources, and despite the outrageous expensive prices we laughed. Despite scarce resources and famine, what connects us most is gathering at the dinner table."*

P8: *"At the beginning of the war of extermination, I used to tell them, 'Don't worry, you will be back very soon.' Now, I don't know when or how they will return to school, even if the war stops. There are no longer schools to house the students, and the few schools that were not bombed have been turned into shelters for those whose homes were destroyed."*

P9: *"I used to play a game for my children. Whoever solved a math problem or memorized a poem, I would give them a piece of bread on top of their portion."*

> **Question 2: Do you feel you became a substitute for school? And if yes, what's the hardest thing you face in this role? And what do you feel you can't compensate for no matter how much you try?**

Responses:

P1: *"We can never be a substitute for school. The hardest thing: lack of commitment, there's no supervision, no attendance and absence, no early waking up, no homework and no management. We can't compensate our children for real education because it became promotion with grades that aren't real.*

P2: *"We were forced to teach them, but it's hard to be strict. The war itself scares us, so how do we hide our fear and make them feel safe? This is something I can't provide no matter how much I try."*

P3: *"Yes, but we can't follow up with them on lessons they're missing. online learning is difficult and not always available, and children don't concentrate on it."*

P4: *"Honestly, I didn't think of being a substitute for school, maybe because they're not children. As for what we can't compensate for, it's the feeling of safety and stability, because the feeling of fear inside us is stronger than our ability to hide it. The situation we're in makes it difficult to make them feel stable."*

P5: *"Yes, we were forced to be a substitute. But online lessons are difficult, and internet isn't always available. Our children don't concentrate, and we can't explain like teachers. What we can't compensate for most is safety and psychological stability."*

P6: *"Certainly, what we can't compensate for is school life: our children's interaction with their teachers and classmates, through which they acquire experiences that are not just academic, but social too."*

P7: *"Not a complete substitute, because our children are older. But we can't fill the school's gap in character building. School gives them friendships and social experiences I can't provide at home."*

P8: *"No substitute for school. We miss the role of teacher and educational counselor. they cannot be dispensed with."*

P9: "Currently yes, substitute for school, I'm forced. But school doesn't just give knowledge. School teaches different skills. I can give information to the child, and the internet also gives useful information. But what you can't do instead of school is polish the child's personality and develop their skills and social abilities. Mixing with different students and the impact the teacher leaves and forming new friendships. all these are important things. Among the most important of these skills: developing the student's abilities to solve problems, adapt, and strength of personality."

Question 3: What did you tell your children when they asked you: "Why don't we go to school anymore?" or "When will we go back to studying"?

Responses:

P1: *"We used to tell them: it's a period and the war will end, and everything will return. We remained in a big delusion, but when famine spread in Gaza and we saw the largest amount of destruction that passed over the earth, and we saw an unjust world and corrupt merchants, we were left speechless."*

P2: *"They knew by themselves, they felt everything around them, and knew that the damned war is what deprived them of schools."*

P3: *"I remind them that this is a period and it will pass. I told my daughter: "True the world is unjust and many people died, but we must continue and be patient. God doesn't forget anyone."*

P4: *"I tell them: it's hard to predict such a thing. No one can determine when the war might end, and therefore you return to study normally."*

P5: *"I used to tell them: the war is what deprived you of school, and things will return when they calm down. But with the length of the war, I became unable to respond, and say: "May God relieve it.""*

P6: *"The war and they feel its presence more than us, whether in their fear of bombing or their displacement or demolition of their house. We used to try to ease life for them as much as we could, and reassure them that they will return to their school and their life."*

P7: *"Thank God and be grateful that you're still fine. Everything comes and goes. The important thing is that we're fine."*

P8: *"I was unable to respond. I just used to say: "May God save us, good will happen, God will relieve it.""*

P9: *"I tell them: thank your Lord that you're fine. True schools turned into shelters, but the most important thing is your safety. Today we protect your lives, and tomorrow we return to school."*

Question 4: Imagine there's a magic camera able to go back in time to before the war, and this camera was inside the classroom where your son or daughter was. What scene would you want the camera to capture so it keeps showing it to your children after the war ends?

Responses:

P1: *"The scene I most want the camera to document: the moment of honoring my children at school, and the sweet moments of participation in classrooms."*

P2: *"The sight of students interacting with the teacher while he's explaining the lesson."*

P3: *"My son standing and everyone clapping for him because he answered a model answer to a difficult question."*

P4: *"A class group photo of my son or daughter with their classmates they love. Although this picture missed many innocent children."*

P5: *"I wish it would capture the moment when the teacher was praising my son for his diligence and commitment to lessons."*

P6: *"A class group photo of my son with his classmates in the classroom. Unfortunately many of them were martyred."*

P7: *"His excellence in class, and the spontaneous laughter from the teacher to his students during explanation."*

P8: *"The scene when my son or daughter gets/got the highest grade in class and stands up and gets honored publicly, and the whole class claps for them. I used to feel proud, and they too used to be very happy when the whole class clapped for them."*

Question 5: After schools became shelter centers, and education became mostly in tents, what's the most important thing you can tell your son or daughter to continue their education? How do you motivate them?

Responses:

P1: *"That it's a temporary period, and you are the pioneers of the future. And no matter how much you travel and wander, the homeland is the warm embrace that will welcome you."*

P2: *"I encourage him that everything God willing will return like before and better. And if it doesn't return, God willing we'll make him study abroad."*

P3: *"That the war and what we went through despite its indescribable difficulty, remains an experience and will pass. But certainly, it gave us strength and ability to endure. And with it, any difficulties in life after this becomes easy and manageable."*

P4: *"That it's a temporary stage. The most important thing currently is that he learns. The place doesn't matter; the difficulties don't matter. But he must reach the goal he wanted to reach. On the contrary, the war we saw must be a new motivation to achieve the dream, not just for himself, but also for his homeland that needs him."*

P5: *"I motivate him that everything will return better. And I tell him to apply for scholarships at universities abroad. And I will agree to him traveling to study abroad even though I was refusing the idea of travel."*

P6: *"Hold onto your weapon.. what's happening is all because they are defeated by us and by our knowledge. Despite how much our country is besieged, we must continue to defeat them and hold onto our knowledge."*

P7: *"I don't get upset if he doesn't get high grades. I encourage him materially and morally."*

P8: *"I remind him that the most important thing currently is that he learns. The place and difficulties don't matter. Knowledge is our weapon, and the occupation bombs schools to deprive us of it."*

P9: *"I always try to make them feel safe and tell them positive things, but when I think of our situation, I feel depressed. We want real, permanent solutions, not temporary ones."*

Cultural and Contextual Terms Requiring Explanation

Religious and Cultural References:

1. Sayedna Younis - "Our Master Jonah": Reference to the Prophet Jonah's story in Islamic tradition, symbolizing patience during hardship and eventual divine relief.
2. An-Nakba - "The Catastrophe": The 1948 Palestinian exodus and dispossession, a foundational trauma in Palestinian collective memory.
3. Al-Quds - Jerusalem: The holy city, central to Palestinian national and religious identity.
4. Ghassan Kanafani - Palestinian writer and political figure, martyr of the Palestinian resistance movement, whose quote reflects the longing for a homeland free from suffering.

Educational and Social Terms:

1. Takreem - "Honoring": School ceremonies recognizing academic achievement, an important cultural practice in Palestinian education.
2. Al Kheyam- Tents: Temporary structures serving as makeshift classrooms during displacement.
3. Marakiz Al Ewaa - Shelter centers: Schools converted to house displaced families.

Emotional and Psychological Terms:

1. Al Aman Al Nafsi - Psychological safety: the emotional security children need for healthy development.
2. Al Istiqrar - Stability: Both physical and emotional stability that families struggle to provide during conflict.

Trauma-Informed Translation Notes

- **Protective mechanisms by parents**: Attempts to maintain normalcy and hope despite traumatic circumstances
- **Religious coping mechanisms**: Heavy reliance on Islamic narratives and concepts for psychological resilience
- **Anxiety regarding educational continuity:** Deep concerns about children's academic and social development
- **Memory preservation**: Desire to maintain pre-war positive educational experiences
- **Identity transmission**: Efforts to pass on Palestinian cultural and national identity during displacement
- **Intergenerational trauma processing**: Parents drawing on historical Palestinian experiences (Nakba) to contextualize current suffering

The testimonies show how parents are feeling stressed and guilty in terms of protecting children from trauma while acknowledging harsh realities they live in, revealing both the resilience and vulnerability of Palestinian families under the genocide. The frequent references to divine providence and historical Palestinian perseverance serve as psychological anchors in an unstable situation, while concerns about educational continuity reflect deeper anxieties about cultural and intellectual survival.

ANNEX V

Testimonies/answers of teachers & academics In Gaza

Gender	Number of Staff members
Females	13
Males	**11**
Total	**24**

Type (school teacher or university professor)	Number
Elementary Schools	11
Secondry	3
High School	4
Universities	6
Total	**24**

Geographical Location	Number of Participants
North Gaza	7
South Gaza	9
Outside Gaza	8
Total	**24**

Type of School	Elementary	Secondary	High School Tawjehi	University
UNRWA	2	3	6	0
Governmental	4	2	1	0
Private	1	1	0	4
Total				
24				

Question No. 1: If there were a book written about you as a teacher, what would be the title of the chapter about this period? And what did you lose the most when the school or university was gone?

Responses:

P1: *"War and Deprivation of Education".* *Because we didn't just lose our jobs, we lost schools and sources of knowledge. I feel like I lost a part of my heart.*

P2: "From the Lecture Hall to the Tent.". I'm a university professor at the Islamic University; now my family and books lie under rubble. I spend my time helping my family get water and food in the camp, while trying to read what's left of my academic references so my efforts don't go to waste. What I miss most is our normal daily routine: waking up early to go to school, breathing clean air, and watching the students. Today, we run to fetch water and food and live under tents.

P3: "A Lab Without Walls". *I teach science. The university labs were reduced to ashes. Now I train children in tents using basic tools to keep their love of science alive.*

P4: *These are actually many periods, and each deserves its own book. But they can all be gathered under one title:* **"Knowledge is the Pillar of Our Homes, Despite Genocide and Displacement."**

P5: *Chapter title: "Prosperity and Adversity: Struggle and Survival."* *The loss of the university as an academic structure, the loss of staff and researchers, and the loss of loved ones and friends. it's like erasing an entire life's timeline. That is adversity. Patience and faith in reuniting in heaven, God willing, that is prosperity.*

P6: "Memory Keeper": *As a history teacher, I carry my notebook and go from family to family to tell them stories of Palestine. I fear our history will be lost if schools stay closed. I spend most of my time with the elderly, listening to and documenting their memories.*

P7: *"War and Deprivation of Education"*

P8: *"The loss of life or the attempt to cling to it"*

P9: "Education Chapter Despite the Genocide". *We lost our world that was full of love and knowledge-sharing with our students.*

P10: *"The Burial of Education"*

P11: "Education Chapter Despite the Genocide". *We tried to teach under the harshest conditions, but the war consumed our schools, education literally happened under bombing. What I lost most was the sense that my educational mission was respected and protected.*

P12: *We lost education and upbringing… the war stripped away ethics.*

P13: "The Chapter of Confusion and Loss". *Because we lost our identity as teachers. We lost our normal lives: going to work, leaving the house in the morning, breathing clean air, seeing students and workers on the streets heading to schools and universities. We lost our morning gatherings with our colleagues. We lost our beloved students.*

P14: *"Loss". We lost the profession and job security, a terrifying phase of wandering.*

P15: "Silent Genocide in a Time of Betrayal and Apathy Toward Human Values."

P16: ***"Achievements and Challenges".*** *I lost my colleagues and students, they were martyred. I lost my classroom with all its memories.*

P17: *"Between Exhaustion and the Determination to Continue"*

P18: *"Sadness"*

P19: *"Loss or an Unknown Future"*

P20: *"The Nakba (Catastrophe)"*

P21: *"I'd call it **"The Holocaust and the Grinder."** What I lost most was my daily routine and my students."*

P22: *Chapter title: **"Death of Life".** I lost my identity and sense of self. I lost my passion and love for my subject.*

P23: ***"Scattered Dreams and Hopes".*** *What we lost most was moral education and students' understanding of Islamic teachings.*

P24: ***"Education Under Fire".*** *As a teacher in a government school, I followed up with displaced students in camps and explained lessons orally whenever we met. The rest of the time, I was cooking and collecting firewood—the war turned us into survival machines.*

> **Question No. 2: Have you written, edited, or planned something that you're now afraid no one will be able to teach after you? If yes, can you give an example?**

Responses:

P1: *"Of course. We always had future teaching plans, hoping our students would take the next steps in our field."*

P2: *"I made summaries and exam questions, which took a lot of time to prepare. Now I feel like it was all in vain. Even if schools reopen, maybe no one will benefit from them—many students were displaced or martyred."*

P3: *"In the north, nothing was spared by the destruction. Recently, people became solely focused on finding daily food, learning has taken a backseat."*

P4: *Prototypes of real, hands-on projects we had built before.*

P5: *"No. I tried to focus on the basics things so anyone can spread the knowledge if I was gone or unable to do.*

P6: *"Yes. Some online models that I spent months to learn how to develop them for my students."*

P7: *"Summaries, exam models, and more."*

P8: *"I had prepared a full educational center in cooperation with the Ministry of Education for a preschool class. It opened just days before the war. The center was bombed; everything is gone."*

P9: *"Yes, I had many plans to improve students' academic achievement."*

P10: *"Thankfully, there's a large group of learners in Gaza. I hope learning continues through us or new teachers. What's important is continuity."*

P11: *"A learning center was prepared and opened from preschool to grade 12."*

P12: *"Yes. The moral campus I try to keep active and try to activate in my students to be able to keep going despite everything happening.*

P13: *"Yes, my educational will. I'm afraid that few people will have the same perspective."*

P14: *"The final revision guide for literary-stream math.*

P15": *"Community initiatives and solutions people adopted to improve their lives. Sadly, we lost a lot in the war, especially values and principles like social justice and human rights. Many people lost their moral compass. It'll take years to rebuild those values.*

> **Question No. 3: During the war, did you try to continue teaching your students in any way? Voice notes, WhatsApp, recordings, direct contact? What were the main challenges?**

Responses:

P1: *"There were remote education initiatives, but communication was incredibly difficult."*

P2: *"I contacted them via WhatsApp to solve questions when internet bundles were available—but internet and power outages were major challenges."*

P3: *"Most of the teaching was electronic in the early months of war. But long internet cuts, martyrdom of students and teachers, disrupted it."*

P4: *"Yes, I used Zoom (live and recorded sessions) through the TESI initiative."*

P5: *"Yes, electronically, but communication was difficult due to students' lack of resources and psychological trauma."*

P6: *"I contacted them directly through WhatsApp for questions when the internet was available."*

P7: *"Yes, I tried via WhatsApp groups and educational meetups. But the heavy bombing made everything unsafe."*

P8: *"Yes, communication was very difficult."*

P9: *"Sometimes I gave face-to-face lessons in the camp, but noise and fear from drones made them short and shallow."*

P10: *"Honestly, I didn't teach or give lessons. I focused on emotional support for girls who lost family members. We heard about someone's death every day, no one was in the right mindset to study."*

P11: *"No teaching, just psychological support for some students who lost family."*

P12: *"Yes, main challenges were power cuts and weak internet."*

P13: *"I joined educational points and taught my students and others. I stayed in touch via WhatsApp and voice explanations."*

P14: *"Honestly, no. The fear and trauma we lived, and the smell of death everywhere, paralyzed us. Every day someone we know was martyred. The tents are extremely crowded, with no privacy. But I did try to teach my own children and those in the camp. One major issue was some students had very weak academic backgrounds, I had to reteach the basics. Also, we didn't have textbooks, so I had to write everything from scratch. Even notebooks and papers were scarce and expensive."*

P15: *"I didn't try—it was and still is very hard in every way: internet, time, devices."*

P16: *"Yes. The biggest challenge was the fear of students being bombed during lessons, and their fear of returning home to find their families gone."*

P17: *"I participated in an initiative for high school students that later became an educational center."*

P18: *"Yes, but the biggest difficulty was poor internet and frequent outages."*

P19: *"Yes, but poor or no internet was a huge barrier."*

P20: *"I continued online. Biggest challenge: the internet."*

P21: *"Yes. Major issues: 1) weak internet, 2) no electricity to charge phones/laptops, 3) difficulty recording lessons in overcrowded tents, 4) starvation drained us physically and mentally, 5) the war made teaching feel pointless."*

P22: *"Yes, I tried, but the repeated displacement, internet cuts, and financial hardship were huge obstacles."*

P23: *"We tried our best, in cooperation with international organizations, to organize short educational classes for students, but we faced severe security challenges. Therefore, we preferred to limit the educational tents to the displaced people in the camp, so that students would not have to travel from long distances."*

P24: *"We don't stop teaching, even if it's through audio recordings. We've created a portal for students to follow lectures and take exams. We do this to tell the entire world that no matter how many universities and educational institutions the occupier targets, we will remain. I have decided to give lessons almost daily, as circumstances permit, to every high school student, even if only one student comes to me."*

Question No. 4: Were there students who didn't receive your message in the same way? Why? Was it the internet, location, fear? Was there a difference in response between male and female students?

Responses:

P1: *"Of course, all these circumstances played a role in how my voice and message reached them. I don't think there was a major difference, there was engagement from both male and female students."*

P2: *"The weak and frequently disconnected internet was the main obstacle. The bombings and genocide played the biggest role as well."*

P3: *"Yes, location mattered, some students were in safer areas inside or outside Gaza, and others were displaced or under bombardment. The difference between the two groups is huge."*

P4: *"The multiple displacements had a negative impact; students kept moving from one place to another, so it was hard to follow up with the same group."*

P5: *"I don't think there was a gender-based difference."*

P6: *"There were clear individual differences; some students responded quickly, while others felt education was pointless under such conditions, especially the boys who had responsibilities like fetching water and collecting firewood."*

P7: *"Yes, lack of internet availability, difficulty in securing a place for teaching, and fear of bombardment, neither gender received enough education or learning."*

P8: *"Yes, there were many individual differences, and some students had no internet access at all."*

P9: *"Students told me they couldn't hear my voice because they had moved to overcrowded camps and lacked chargers and notebooks, so responses varied from one student to another depending on their conditions."*

P10: *"Yes, most of the girls couldn't hear my voice due to lack of internet access."*

P11: *"All the above-mentioned factors. As for the differences. I can't say much because the number of girls was lower."*

P12: *"No... the group I work with are 12th-grade science students."*

P13: *"Yes, fear and some parents not wanting their children to continue learning. Yes, there were differences in response, some students responded quickly, others only after long conversations."*

P14: *"I didn't try, the conditions didn't allow for it."*

P15: *"Yes, there were differences in students' responses due to their varying circumstances."*

P16: *"It could be fear, the center was far from their homes, or they didn't have internet access in my area."*

P17: *"Yes, not all students had internet or electricity. Some had lost family members and had to support their families. It's a time when concepts like equality and justice fade away especially since I teach girls."*

P18: *"Multiple displacements in different times and places negatively impacted this issue."*

P19: *"A huge difference... students are scattered and suffering major educational loss."*

P20: *"Definitely, students are human after all. Many were displaced and lost family members. "They're dealing with trauma and grief that weakens their belief in what they're doing because they don't even know if they'll live another hour or day.*

P21: *"Yes, all the factors you mentioned significantly affected my ability to reach my students. The vast majority stopped studying because they felt their lives were in danger and they could die at any moment. So, what's the point of learning?"*
But what was noticeable is that girls showed more interest, perhaps because boys had heavier responsibilities, fetching water, collecting firewood, standing in aid lines, etc."

P22: *"Yes, the difference definitely exists. The main reason my voice didn't reach them was the war."*

Question No. 5: *Did you notice a change in your relationship with the students you used to teach before the war? If there was a change, do you think one of the occupation's goals is to break down social bonds? Please elaborate.*

Responses:

P1: *"No doubt, there is a significant difference between before and after the war. Social bonds were heavily affected due to the fragmentation of the homeland and the difficulty in communication."*

P2: *"Relationships fluctuated and changed depending on where students and teachers were living. But overall, fear, lack of educational tools, and the absence of internet were the main reasons for long periods of disconnection."*

P3: *"Unfortunately, since the teaching was virtual and voluntary, and I'm a teacher from outside Gaza, I wasn't able to build a real relationship with the students.*
However, the students were grateful despite the war, and that means a great deal to us."

P4: *"The relationship actually became stronger and more connected."*

Question No. 6: If the war ends and you're asked to return to teaching…, do you feel you'd have the same motivation? Or has something broken inside you?

Responses:

P1: *"Our drive as Palestinians is always present, but the challenges will be much greater. God willing, our will and determination will remain strong."*

P2: *"Yes, because education in our country is the foundation and our main asset. The only true resource we have is our youth."*

P3: *"The motivation is even stronger to teach, God willing, despite the pain."*

P4: *"The war took away a lot, materially and psychologically, we are broken."*

P5: *"Same drive, even stronger, because rebuilding is necessary."*

P6: *"There is no motivation. The teacher has lost many loved ones, has no shelter, is starving, and his salary is being stolen by profiteers, hoarders, and thieves."*

P7: *"We'll go back to teaching and produce students even better than before. The war took a lot from us, but we won't allow it to take more. We must persevere in education."*

P8: *"I'll return to teaching with even more drive than before."*

P9: *"I used to love my subject and standing in front of my students... Now, I have no motivation to teach. Our lives have been destroyed, and we've returned to struggling for basic needs."*

P10: *"Yes, and stronger than before."*

P11: *"God willing, we will return and face all the challenges we've been through."*

P12: *"I still have motivation... because knowledge is our weapon... but many things inside me are broken."*

P13: *"It's not just one thing that's broken, but many things: No motivation, no passion for work, no ability to give as before. How could we, when we've lost so many teachers, students, and principals during the war? We are shattered inside, broken, destroyed. Even the schools that held memories of work and vitalit, we've lost them too."*

P14: *"What broke inside is immense, but there's also a bigger sense of responsibility toward our students, which pushes us to continue."*

P15: *"No, there's no longer motivation due to displacement and suffering."*

P16: *"We will definitely return to teaching with the same drive... but with pain, because it won't be the same students, or the same place, or the same team."*

P17: *"Teaching and academic work make me feel strong and alive, especially when I'm providing something of value."*

P18: *"Of course, many things were broken."*

P19: *"Yes, despite everything, the motivation is still there, and the sense of belonging to the teaching profession is still strong."*

P20: *"There's no motivation... we are psychologically and financially destroyed."*

P21: *"Same motivation, even more. The drive has doubled because the country needs all the faith and strength to rebuild our youth and lift up a generation that lost its time and future. My students, I need them too. They will bring back the inspiration and passion."*

P22: *"I have no passion or physical or mental energy to teach. I used to love my subject and standing in front of my students. Now, I have no desire to teach again. Our lives have been destroyed, and we've dropped from the top of Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization—back to the bottom, just seeking physiological needs. We're like primitive humans again, just looking for food."*

P23: *"This is the third place my family and I were forced to move to since we lost contact. I'm losing motivation day by day, but I believe If I have got the chance to teach again, everything will become better and I'll be motivated again."*

P24: *"Mornings at school were a great motivation for me. There is no more morning assembly or national anthem. In the morning, we begin counting those who were martyred the night before and those who remain alive"*

Question No.7: Schools and universities started shortly before the war—what was the last activity or event you did before the war began? What's the one thing you feel was lost with that moment?

Responses:

P1: *"One of the most important activities was welcoming new students at the beginning of the academic year."*

P2: *"The midterm exam period was the turning point. There were also many curricular and extracurricular workshops and events."*

P3: "We were doing the **s**chool broadcast (morning assembly). That was the last thing before the bombing. Discipline, order, and noble values disappeared with it."

P4: *"Our last moment was being with our dear student; teaching is the mission of prophets. We lost the ability to instill ethics, values, and ideals. We also lost social contact with fellow teachers."*

P5*: "I had established a fully equipped learning center, and I lost it in the war along with my home and everything else."*

P6: *"Field trips."*

P7: *"The last activity was a group breakfast for students, a warm day full of laughter. After that, not only was safety gone… but even breakfast became a miracle if available."*

P8: *"My students and I were planning new hands-on lessons, especially since I was responsible for school health. We wanted to organize health trips, first aid courses, and health seminars. Sadly, none of it came to life."*

P9: *"It was all about building and working, I was on a field trip with students to the Coca-Cola factory in Gaza's industrial zone."*

P10: *"I had just enrolled in a master's program before the war. I've now completed it."*

P11: "*The last activity was preparing an electronic and physical portfolio, which documented all my years of effort with images. I stored it in a small personal library at school. It was all lost due to a direct airstrike on the school. I rushed to the site and found displaced people inside the school. My papers, files, and books were scattered on the floor among rubble—some torn, some dirty, some missing. I gathered what I could and took it home. Now there's no school, no home We lost everything. What I lost most in that moment: life itself."*

P12: *"The start of the school year, each year has its own joy and preparations. We lost those special moments and the ability to celebrate."*

P13: *"The school broadcast. What was lost: discipline, values, and noble conduct.*"

P14: *"The activity was a celebration of the Prophet's birthday. Only the memory remains; the place and the people are gone."*

P15: *"Preparing to receive new students."*

P16: *"Joy."*

P17: *"The last activity was celebrating the Prophet's birthday."*

P18: *"We were preparing the first monthly test for the students and celebrating the honor students."*

P19: *"A nature walks with students. They were talking about their dreams and future. We were planning an environmentally friendly initiative. The future is gone now. We'll have to rebuild from scratch or from below scratch. Time, youth, and the people who would've celebrated our success, they're all gone. They deserved to live in a better Gaza.*

P20: *"We organized a group breakfast for the students on the last day before the war. The students were happy, filled with a sense of safety and life. Today, we've lost everything, not just safety, but even breakfast, which used to be something ordinary—now feels like a miracle if it happens."*

P21: *"We had an event in the university's library. My students and I used to spend unforgettable moments inside the library. The central libraries in Gaza are gone. Even our research and studies, which we worked on for months and years, have been lost."*

> **Question No. 8: When you're targeted as a teacher, what message do you think is being sent to your students? That you're a threat? That you shouldn't continue? Or that we must continue regardless, because as Palestinians we have no other options?**

Responses:

P1: *"Indeed, as Palestinians, we have no alternatives. This is our destiny, and all of us are exposed to various forms of aggression."*

P2: *"There are deliberate attempts to annihilate anything that contributes to learning and giving. I remember one of our detained colleagues who was assassinated in cold blood upon his release, returning home completely unarmed."*

P3: *"We continue regardless, because we're Palestinians and we have no other option. May God relieve our suffering."*

P4: *"Teachers carry a message, like prophets and messengers. Of course, we will be and will remain targets."*

P5: "We must continue to rebuild from scratch."

P6: "The enemy considers anyone with a degree, doctors, engineers, educators, a threat. We consider education a powerful weapon against the enemy, so we must not give it up."

P7: "Teachers are certainly considered dangerous, but teachers must continue their mission as much as they can."

P8: "We must continue and challenge all conditions. We are a people of giants."

P9: "We must continue the journey, because our message does not end."

P10: "We must carry on, no matter the conditions."

P11: "Continuing is crucial... but the quality of education is now nonexistent."

P12: "We continue regardless of what happens. Life doesn't stop, as long as we're alive and breathing, we'll keep going and fulfill our mission to our students."

P13: "From what's happening, it's clear: there are no alternatives. We must continue despite everything."

P14: "They are targeting knowledge, the Palestinian person, and history."

P15: "No, we must continue regardless of anything, because this is what is required of us. Our message must be delivered."

P16: "Because we're Palestinians, we have to keep going. It's part of our struggle to exist and preserve our identity."

P17: "We must continue, no matter what happens."

P18: "We must continue, our lifespan and time of death are written by a Merciful God."

P19: "They don't want people to raise awareness, influence others, or bring about positive change. They want us backward, ignorant, and regressive. Any form of culture, awareness, or dream threatens their existence because it comes with knowledge of history, identity, and truth. Anyone who becomes educated and aware will threaten their false narrative."

P20: "There's so much death around us; we stopped thinking about the message. People die every day, and we're just forced to keep going, normally."

P21: "We must continue."

Question No. 9: *Do you still believe there's hope to preserve Palestinian culture and knowledge? If you decide not to return to teaching, what do you think your students, or even Gaza, would lose? Please elaborate.*

Responses:

P1: *"Throughout our lives, we've lived through the First and Second Intifadas and numerous invasions. If we don't pass our experiences, struggles, and challenges to our students, they might think our reality is something new - when it's not. That's why our presence is essential to preserve culture, knowledge, and history, especially as historical landmarks disappear on the ground."*

P2: *"I believe the destruction of universities aims to erase cultural identity. That's why we must continue, otherwise, all our struggle will have been in vain."*

P3: *"We would lose everything. Knowledge is life, it's the reason we continue and survive among treacherous nations."*

P4: *"Gaza's students and researchers need someone to listen to them, and uplift them, not just now, but for the next five years. They need psychological relief and compensation before we teach them. They need refuge, safety, and reliable figures to revive our community's culture in Palestinian cities. They were, are, and will remain wonderful, God willing.*

P5: *"Gaza has already lost many academics, teachers, and students, and with their loss, Palestine loses the proper upbringing of good, ethical citizens capable of building a society free from crime, thuggery, and moral corruption."*

P6: *"Our culture, traditions, and Palestinian history."*

P7: *"My own educational expertise."*

P8: *"The student's future."*

P9: *"The loss is huge… because of the lack of transmission of knowledge and experience, and the absence of role models, all of which are critical for students."*

P10: *"Yes, there's hope… When I work in learning points, I see the students' love for learning and their schools they were deprived of. The classrooms are full, and parents keep enrolling their children until the very last day."*

P11: *"There is hope, for sure, if proper learning spaces and job security for teachers are provided, so they can live with dignity."*

P12: *"Gaza has lost everything beautiful and has become ruins, but with determination and the certainty of victory, we will rebuild the lost homeland."*

P13: "We'd lose the culture of a nation and a noble message that must prove our existence and right to this land."

P14: "Practical education is becoming more difficult with the lack of labs and training facilities. There will be a gap in this field."

P14: "Morals and knowledge."

P15: "Our Palestinian culture, traditions, and history. If we don't teach, future generations will forget their ancestors' stories."

P16: "There's always hope."

P17: "They would lose themselves... and a savage, ignorant society will arise, where the weak are glorified and the noble are humiliated, and the worst in character take prominence."

P18: "Of course, there is hope as long as there are people who want to bring about positive change and pursue growth and development."

P19: "We've lost everything. There's no longer a goal to fight for. Gaza is dead."

P20: "We will certainly preserve the culture."

ANNEX VI

Testimonies/Answers of International Organizations Personnel

Gender	Number
Female	7
Males	**5**
Total	**12**

Position	Females	Males
Senior Management	2	1
Administrative	3	2
Operational	2	2
Total	7	5
Grand Total	**12**	

Type of Institution	North Gaza	South Gaza
UN	3	2
INGO	5	2
Total		
12		

Interview Questions and Responses from International Organizations Personnel

Question 1: If you want to describe what happened to education in Gaza since the genocide began, how would you talk about it? What word or description do you feel really expresses the scale of what happened? And why did you choose this description?

Responses:

P1: *"Insistence on destroying education, and this is actually what is happening, even the schools that turned into shelter centers are being bombed, they don't want our children to learn."*

P2: *"What happened is genocide and direct targeting of the education sector. Israel knows that one of the foundations of the Palestinian people is high education rates that are among the highest in the world, so there was direct targeting of educational infrastructure from schools, universities and even educational cadres and university professors. This systematic destruction of educational infrastructure left tens of thousands of school and university students outside the education system, whose effects cannot be counted in the near and long term."*

P3: "Genocide in a time of hypocrisy and interests."

P4: "Complete collapse of educational infrastructure" or "systematic erasure of education": The reason: because it's not just buildings, universities and schools that were destroyed or damaged, but also thousands of students and teachers were martyred or displaced, and curricula stopped, and students were cut off from studying for long periods. This means there's not just temporary disruption, but there's loss of entire generations from their natural right to education. This description reflects that what happened is not a passing incident, but a deep shock that will leave a long-lasting impact on the future of all education in Gaza."

P5: "Educational genocide, ignorantization (tajhīl): What happened to the educational process from targeting kindergartens, schools, to universities from horrific destruction and direct targeting and blowing up of the material and moral infrastructure of education is direct targeting of education for all groups, and a deliberate attempt to ignorantize children and generations and occupy them in daily work and behaviors that did not exist before. Disrupting the educational process in this way does not limit its effect to losing academic knowledge only, but extends to destroying individual and collective development opportunities, and depriving society of qualified generations capable of contributing to reconstruction and making the future. Education in Gaza is no longer just a violated right, but has become a field for systematic targeting, which threatens the human and cognitive security of future generations, and makes rebuilding the educational system a top priority for any recovery or reconstruction process."

P6: "I say "educational genocide"; because schools and universities were targeted and thousands of students and teachers were killed."

P7: "Complete paralysis; 97% of schools were damaged or destroyed, and students lost years of their lives."

P8: "Knowledge vacuum" (al-farāgh al-ma'rifī): People's hope is broken and education is no longer a priority."

P9: "Cultural genocide: because destroying schools targeted Palestinian culture and knowledge, not just buildings."

> **Question 2: When you talk about Gaza, do your organizations use terms like "Scholasticide" or "cultural genocide"? And if not, why?**

Responses:

P1: *"Yes, correct, this term was used in our participation in various conferences, especially in the conference on rebuilding higher education in the Gaza Strip organized by Hamad Bin Khalifa University, where it invited various Palestinian universities whether in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, in addition to key players in the education sector and funders such as Education Above All Foundation."*

P2: *"I don't know."*

P3: *"The term "cultural genocide" is not used in the international institution I work through nor even by other international organizations that my work intersects with intensively. But on the personal or individual level, among many UN staff and especially local staff, there is deep awareness of the scale of systematic targeting we are exposed to as a people, systematic targeting of the educational or cultural system or identity as a whole and this awareness is supported by all evidence on the ground from destruction of infrastructure and clear targeting of educational or cultural organizations, targeting of human resources from academics, artists, thinkers and others. In addition to stealing heritage and cultural symbols, restricting intellectual and cultural movement, and targeting public spaces for cultural and media production from theaters, centers and libraries. These practices are not limited to Gaza. This methodology has been used for long years especially in Jerusalem and areas of direct Israeli control that enabled it to control educational curricula and even try to erase the narrative and collective identity of the Palestinian people.*
Why isn't all this reflected in the language used in reports and papers resulting from the work of UN organizations?
Unfortunately, UN staff are forced to adhere to certain language and terminology that must be used within official work channels. These terms must be legally approved, meaning they have a clear definition within the framework of a convention or legal document as part of international humanitarian law and be linked to internationally agreed standards."

On the other hand, international organizations here have political considerations that must be taken into account continuously. The responsible staff in high positions and decision-makers are chosen on bases that ensure their commitment to discourse that shows "neutrality" of international organizations, especially those working in the humanitarian sector without taking clear and decisive positions. Through following the different positions of these organizations in many conflict countries, we notice that it's acceptable for the humanitarian work coordinator in Iraq and Yemen, for example, to condemn armed groups decisively and clearly while the complexities of the political picture related to the genocide war in our region stem from the fact that Israel -- regardless of greatly shaking its image recently as a "democratic state that respects human rights" -- still has great influence and impact built on international interests and geopolitical blocs which prevents international organizations and decision-makers from criticizing it clearly."

P4: *"Until now, most UN agencies like UNRWA and UNICEF have not officially used the term "cultural genocide" or "Scholasticide" in their statements about Gaza. Usually, we use UN-approved terms such as: grave violation of the right to education, destruction of educational infrastructure, or attacks on schools."*

P5: *"Some of us use the term, and others don't know it or don't know if their institution officially adopts it."*

P6: *"In our official reports we make sure to describe the scale of the crime, but usage remains tied to organizational policies."*

P7: *"We sometimes focus on the concept instead of the term; we talk about destroying educational organizations and erasing culture."*

P8: *"There are staff who don't know the term "Scholasticide", and they settle for describing the educational catastrophe."*

> **Question 3: Now the students who left Gaza, practically became in temporary exile whether in Egypt or Oman or other countries, these students no longer hear the morning anthem of every day, nor hear anyone speaking in the Palestinian dialect they're used to. Is there something you can do to make them not lose their connection to their country? Not forget themselves?**

Responses:

P1: *"They remain in contact with their families in the country, friends, neighbors."*

P2: *"No one imagined that the war would continue for this duration. Everyone expected it wouldn't exceed two months. Different countries fulfilled their duty by evacuating the wounded and their companions, and for example in Qatar, all school-age children were enrolled in the Palestinian school, where the approved Palestinian curriculum is taught, while university students were enrolled in different universities in Qatar. But these initiatives remain insufficient to contain the general situation, where there are tens of thousands of students cut off from studying in the Gaza Strip until now."*

P3: *"They put pictures of Al-Aqsa and martyrs."*

P4: *"I think international organizations unfortunately play no role currently in promoting and protecting Palestinian collective identity and memory, especially for students outside Palestine. One of the projects I worked on recently aimed to "change the narrative related to Palestinian youth", meaning primarily working with youth and for youth, inside and outside Palestine, to unite and strengthen our identity and collective narrative and protect our heritage. But of course, these were limited attempts and couldn't reach outside the West Bank and Gaza significantly."*

I don't really have an idea if UNESCO is working in this framework, but I also don't think so. I think the greater responsibility falls on Palestinian ministries: Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, and our representations abroad, which have an almost non-existent role in supporting Palestinian students who left Gaza, to prevent their feeling of alienation and loss of collective memory.

I also believe this dilemma goes beyond the idea of identity and belonging. During the current war, children and adolescents were exposed to psychological trauma whose impact we don't yet clearly know, they lost their sense of security, and they lost their community protection network. There are many things that can be done to reduce the impact of this alienation, but with the current humanitarian crisis and according to emergency plans, targeting students outside Gaza is not

considered a priority. That's why there are currently - to my knowledge - no efforts being made by international organizations."

What can be done:

P1: *"Involving and integrating Gaza students abroad in the limited educational and cultural initiatives happening in Gaza, when internet is available."*

P2: *"Making cultural initiatives like artistic competitions that enhance our cultural and national symbols, and be inclusive for all students inside and outside Gaza."*

P3: *"Making events even if in digital space for students outside Gaza, to communicate and talk and have psychological support, and strengthen collective identity that shouldn't be limited by geography of place, but also stem from historical, cultural, civilizational heritage and collective memory."*

P4: *"Producing materials like short stories or videos or any creative content for the same purpose."*

P5: *"Making programs that create a communication system between students outside and inside Gaza continuously, could be as an idea "big brother" programs or peer support."*

P6: *"We are fully aware of the feeling experienced by the Palestinian student who was forced to leave Gaza. The idea of being away from his land, from his morning anthem, from his daily dialect, makes him feel loss of identity and belonging. In such circumstances, international organizations like UNRWA and UNICEF try to work on more than one track:*

- o **Complementary distance education programs**: *online platforms and digital curricula taught in Palestinian language and dialect so the student remains connected to his educational identity.*
- o **Cultural and group activities**: *Organizing clubs or student groups in host countries (like Egypt or Oman) where they meet with each other and share folk songs, stories, and even the morning anthem sometimes.*
- o **Psychosocial support**: *Sessions with specialists to help children and youth maintain their sense of confidence and belonging, and not feel complete alienation.*
- o **Involving the Palestinian community**: *Cooperation with local Palestinian associations to involve students in activities in Arabic and in the dialect, they're used to.*

Our main goal is that the student doesn't forget himself, doesn't forget Palestine, and feels that exile is temporary no matter how long it lasts."

P7: *"We see students who left Gaza as students first, but they are also refugees carrying trauma, so we provide psychological support and listen to their stories."*

P8: *"We put pictures of Al-Aqsa and martyrs in refugee schools and tell them stories about Gaza; to connect them to the land."*

P9: *"We distribute Palestinian stories and tell them about the country's heritage."*

P10: *"We encourage them to draw and write about their villages and neighborhoods, and this makes them remember Palestine."*

P11: *"We organize cultural activities in Jordan and Egypt; children sing Palestinian songs and learn folk proverbs."*

P12: *'We have established temporary learning spaces. We provide temporary classes, digital learning, and are trying to support students psychologically"*

Question 4: If a child from Gaza abroad asks you: "Why isn't there a Palestinian school textbook here?" What would you answer him?

Responses:

P1: *"We tell him: every country has its own education and books."*

P2: *"Currently in Qatar, all Palestinian children are enrolled in the Palestinian school and are taught the Palestinian curriculum."*

P3: *"From my personal experience, my children in Jerusalem don't take Palestinian curricula, I have other means to plant our identity in them, mainly through stories or extracurricular activities or summer camps."*

If we're talking about a student from Gaza who lived the horrors of war and was displaced, I go back and think that the idea of being deprived of education or cultural genocide is closely related to a psychological dimension that must be taken into account. Any answer I can give must give a sense of security and positivity even if simply. I can explain that identity is something we carry inside us and we can preserve. School books are very important, and curricula are something basically controlled by the state we're living in, because they're part of the system through which this state enhances the cognitive resources and identity of its people according to its ministries and policies.

Now in other curricula also the basic information and cognitive materials exist, sciences, history and geography exist. We can benefit from them as much as possible to create for ourselves an opportunity for a better future. As for the missing thing related to our identity, we can also take it for ourselves from other tools and platforms. Currently and more than any other time, our narrative and story in the world is very strong, there are always films and books and stories that we can read to our children."

P4: *"I know you miss your Palestinian book that you're used to opening every day at school. The reason is that the books you find here in the host country are different, because they follow the education system of this country, and we as international organizations must coordinate with the Ministry of Education in it. But we are working to provide you with Palestinian digital educational materials via the internet, and lessons provided by Palestinian teachers or people who know your original curriculum, so you stay close to your education and your country. The paper book may be difficult to reach this period, but the idea is that your Palestinian educational identity doesn't get cut off, and we are here to help you stay connected to it."*

P5: *"We explain that printing presses and books were destroyed, but your teachers will explain the material without a book."*

P6: *"We reassure him that curricula exist and we're trying to bring electronic and paper copies."*

P7: *"We tell him: books couldn't leave with us because of the siege and bombing, and we're working on providing them."*

Question 5: The students who left Gaza... do you see them as students who lost their schools, or as refugees like any other refugee? And what is the actual difference in the way you deal with them?

Responses:

P1: *"They completed their education in another place, better than obliterating and erasing our culture."*

P2: *"There is no difference, at least in Qatar. The state tries to help in any way and method, and there is complete embrace from Qataris and even from other nationalities. People here want to help in any way and form, and they do daily initiatives whether psychological support, in-kind, games with children, sports, entertainment, education and other initiatives."*

P3: *"Since I work in an institution that doesn't work primarily on formal education, it may be difficult to answer the question. I worked on education inside Gaza through youth initiatives. But I believe students from Gaza are officially viewed as "temporary" refugees, especially since no one has an idea -- even governments themselves -- what the plan is after the war. What's certain is that students won't have a near return to Gaza.*

But the reality of these students is different from previously displaced Palestinians, especially if we compare the same age group. The refugee students in Jordan whose grandparents and parents left Palestine, they were born there as refugees. They certainly have their challenges and special circumstances, but they are very different from the student from Gaza who left recently, and lived the successive wars in Gaza, and was uprooted from the land where he grew up. So, the experience and its psychological effects are different, and therefore dealing with Gaza students necessarily has

different considerations -- regardless of there being no real definition for them as new or different refugees.”

These considerations include:

P1: *“Psychological harm and loss they were exposed to and is still continuing until now.”*

P2: *“Students' detachment from their environment and place of upbringing.”*

P3: *“Uncertainty about the near future.”*

P4: *“Unavailability, in many cases, of clear legal status or identification documents, or official registration as a refugee.”*

P5: *“I see them as refugee students.”*

P6: *“We don't separate between the two identities. The Palestinian student who left Gaza is a refugee forced to leave his home, and at the same time he is a student who lost his school. We see him from both aspects together, because losing school is part of the refugee experience, he's living. The difference in our way of dealing:*

- o *When we deal with him as a student: we focus on his right to education, we provide him with alternatives to school (temporary classes, digital education, Palestinian teacher support, scholarships...).*
- o *And when we deal with him as a refugee: we focus on protection, housing, health care, psychological and social support, and ensuring he doesn't get cut off from his basic rights.*

Therefore, we don't choose one description and leave the other, but work on both together, so the student continues to feel protected as a human, and continuing as a student.”

P7: *“We see them as students first, and give them special educational programs.”*

P8: *“Special treatment because they lost their schools, we give them psychological support.”*

P9: *“We try to mix them with local students but preserve their Palestinian identity.”*

> ***Question 6: If a student from Gaza left without certificates or proof of study... if he comes to you, what do you tell him? Do you have a way he can continue his studies? Or do you tell him: sorry, figure it out yourself? If there are specific cases you dealt with, please tell us what procedures you did.***

Responses:

P1: *"A request is sent to the Ministry of Education and certificates are issued."*

P2: *"Cooperation was made with the Palestinian Embassy in Qatar, and the Palestinian Ministry of Education, where new passports were issued and school certificates were extracted through the Palestinian Ministry of Education, and we have cooperation with Palestinian universities to issue university certificates and authenticate them through relevant embassies and ministries."*

P3: *"We know completely that many students were forced to leave Gaza without certificates or school papers, and this is not their fault. When they come to us, we don't leave them to face their fate alone. The procedures we usually do:*

- ○ ***Case documentation****: We register student data (name, grade he was in, school he was studying at) through personal testimony or testimonies from parents.*
- ○ ***Student level assessment****: Sometimes we do a simple level assessment test to know which grade he should continue in.*
- ○ ***Coordination with education ministries in host country****: We try to ensure temporary acceptance of the student, even without papers, until we arrange his situation.*
- ○ ***Using digital copies****: In some cases, we could provide electronic copies from Gaza school records, or use Palestinian distance education platforms as proof.*
- ○ ***Special support for urgent cases****: For example, students who were on the verge of Tawjihi (general secondary) we work on finding exceptional solutions, like allowing them to take exams in other countries.*

P4: *"We try to get his data from the Ministry of Education or electronic records."*

P5: *"We give him a temporary document and contact schools in the asylum country to accept him."*

P6: *"We encourage the student to record his story with us to use it as support in university acceptance applications."*

P7: *"We ask universities or host schools to accept them exceptionally, confirming the war circumstance."*

P8: *"We try as much as possible that the student doesn't feel he lost his future; we communicate with international organizations to find scholarships or alternative programs."*

> ***Question 7: Can you imagine what the shape of the first class after the end of war could be? What needs to be said? And what should we not forget to say?***

Responses:

P1: *"It should be psychological relief and entertainment so students return to loving education and forget the war."*

P2: *"We have done various initiatives under the name "Education in Neighborhoods", which are initiatives that spread throughout the Gaza Strip. More than 100,000 Palestinian children cut off from education were reached through educational classes that combine play, entertainment and education, through creating multi-purpose tents. In addition, we currently work with partner organizations and the Palestinian Ministry of Education on holding Tawjihi exams when circumstances permit, and on providing 100 multi-purpose halls in the Gaza Strip to provide Tawjihi exams for more than 90,000 Tawjihi students in the Gaza Strip. In addition we receive many proposals for rebuilding the education sector in the Gaza Strip, like what we did after the 2014 war, where more than 90 educational organizations in the Gaza Strip were rebuilt and rehabilitated between kindergartens, government and UNRWA schools and universities affected by the previous war. We combined in this intervention the physical reconstruction of infrastructure, in addition to psychological support programs, employment programs, in addition to scholarships."*

P3: *"Sadness, pain and fear of the future."*

P4: *"After the war ends, students will collide with the reality that there was much loss. They will start to feel this loss and this difficult reality, and maybe for the first time they will start to comprehend the scale of what they lost. That's why it's important to talk about hope for a better future, it's important to understand the bigger picture that this is not a war born of the moment, this is a history of struggle and conflict over survival and identity. We must return to strengthening the idea of how important education is because it remains a weapon despite all circumstances, and how important the role of school is for rebuilding our human selves, and that hope remains present, and our holding onto education, culture and identity is our safety net. It's also important we listen to them: what shouldn't we forget?"*

P5: *"Psychological and social support must be integrated in every step and every detail with education in the first stages, not as something additional or secondary. There must be cross-sector plans, meaning linking education with health, protection, and food security, to ensure students don't leave school because they're hungry or because they can't find life basics. We must understand students and youth and the world too that they are not just war survivors or victims, they are the hope that we remain present."*

P6: *"The first class after war won't be an "ordinary lesson", it will be a human moment first and foremost. Students entering the classroom will come loaded with memories of loss and fear, and they need to feel safe before anything else. We imagine the shape of the class should be:*

- o ***Warm welcome***: *The teacher tells students "You returned to your natural place; school is your safe home".*
- o ***Space for expression***: *We let children talk about what they felt and lost, through talking or drawing or writing.*
- o ***Group activity***: *Maybe a song or simple game, that returns to them the feeling "we are together".*
- o ***Message of hope***: *We must confirm to them they are not alone, and that education will be the path to rebuilding their lives and their country.*

And what we must not forget to say: acknowledging their suffering, appreciating their patience and strength, reminding them that school is not just for lessons, but also a place for protection, friendship and rebuilding trust in life.

And what we must avoid: entering directly into exams or harsh curricula, or demanding they forget what happened quickly."

P7: *"We must start by talking about their feelings and experiences, and honor the martyrs, before we return to scientific subjects."*

P8: *"We let them write about their dreams, and confirm to them that school is safe."*

P9: *"We talk about the importance of education in Gaza's reconstruction, and don't forget what they went through."*

P10: *"We focus on solidarity values, and note that we can't start as if nothing happened."*

P11: *"We avoid drowning them in curriculum in the first class, we must give them hope and confidence before everything."*

P12: *"The first class must be psychological support and writing about their dreams; most important thing is to remove sadness and fear of the future and start building trust."*

> **Question 8: In your opinion, if a Palestinian child from Gaza is 6 years old and never saw a school in his life... after 10 years, what will he know about his country? And what will he be ignorant of?**

Responses:

P1: *"He will know wars and be ignorant of history."*

P2: *"Palestinian families have always maintained their identity whether inside Palestine or in diaspora. This doesn't negate that the war will have effects worth studying, but since this war is happening for the first time in modern history, whether in terms of duration, or killing rates, or systematic targeting, therefore I don't know exactly what will happen in the future."*

P3: *"This is the responsibility of his parents and the society he lives in."*

P4: *"Our history is full of displacement, refuge and disappointments, and in many stations we managed to preserve our collective memory even among generations born outside Palestine. Symbols related to our identity remained strongly present, and Palestinian language and dialect remained present in many families. This relates basically to parents and environment and the state the child lives in. Parents and home as an incubator -- if they remain present -- can transfer this memory and maintain the bond of belonging.*

But the bigger problem appears in the cognitive materials that usually school provides. If parents didn't strengthen this knowledge, the child will lose the opportunity to learn about our history in our Palestinian narrative, about our displaced villages, about our archaeological areas, about our cultural heritage, our writers and poets and songs, and about our customs and traditions and even details of our daily life.

The child after 10 years can know war and experience, what it did and what people lived, the shape of rubble, Palestine's flag, and his father and mother's stories about the land. But he will be ignorant of the historical sequence of events, the documented narrative, and the intellectual and cognitive tools that transform individual memory into solid collective identity. That's why there must be alternative tools, initiatives that enable students to acquire this knowledge."

P5: *"If a Palestinian child from Gaza is 6 years old and never entered school even one day because of war and displacement, after ten years his picture of his country will be very fragmented. What can he know? He will know Gaza through his first memory: family home, sounds of war, sounds of people, and Palestinian dialect. He will know Palestine through his family's narratives, songs and grandmother's stories, maybe from photos on mobile or from Palestinian community around him. He will know he has a stolen country, and that he has the right to return, study and live in it with dignity. What can he be ignorant of? Details of Palestinian education: morning anthem, school books, Palestine map in classroom. The simple daily experience of a child in school: lineup, homework notebook, teacher who teaches him to write his name in Arabic. History and geography in organized manner: he will hear about Palestine from people, but won't learn it as a complete school curriculum. Here's the danger of the situation: if he doesn't get organized Palestinian education, he will continue to carry identity through memory and emotion, but will lack the academic and cognitive foundation that protects his identity in the long term."*

P6: *"Without school, we can plant love for homeland through art and folk games."*

P7: *"If we don't provide him education, he might think Palestine is just a place of war."*

P8: *"He might hate to read its history, and this is dangerous."*

P9: *"He might be ignorant of the meaning of martyrdom and university, because he never saw a school in his life; and this is society's and state's responsibility."*

P10: *"He will carry collective memory of pain, but without education he might lose historical belonging."*

> **Question 9: When you work with the Ministry of Education, do you discuss with them how education protects identity? Or is the relationship between you purely administrative? For example, in your last communication between you, what did you talk about regarding the meaning of school not just its shape?**

Responses:

P1: *"We are now in emergency situation; these issues cannot be discussed. The most important issue is ending the war, and how work can be done during the war, and what are the plans after the war. Currently we cooperate with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and the UN Development Program on finishing the online platform for providing Tawjihi exams, providing tablets for students in Gaza to be able to take exams, and providing safe places through which these exams can be taken. Of course, we always talk with the Ministry about war effects on education, and how the Ministry can harness its resources whether teachers in the West Bank or even Palestinian universities in the West Bank for help."*

P2: *"From my experience with the Ministry of Education, the relationship is more administrative, also because we don't work on formal education. So the relationship is more related to initiatives in emergency situation, and curricula related to life skills."*

P3: *"The relationship with education ministries is not purely administrative. True there's a big part of our work about curricula, exams, teacher training, and infrastructure, but we also discuss the deeper dimension: how school protects identity. In our last discussions with the Palestinian Ministry of Education, we talked about: that school is not just classrooms and books, but a space for building belonging, especially after displacement and losing home. The importance of preserving elements of Palestinian identity in curricula and classroom activities: language, history, cultural symbols."*

P4: *"We stress that education is not just books but identity protection, and we ask them to add folk stories to curricula."*

P5: *"Our relationship is not just administrative; we plan together for cultural programs."*

P6: *"In the last meeting we stressed psychological support in first lessons."*

P7: *"We try to be partners, so we talk about the meaning of school as a second home for the child."*

P8: *"The last contact included confirmation of the necessity of preserving the student as a human, and school as a space for peace and psychological support."*

Technical and Specialized Field Terms

International Development and Humanitarian Terms:

1. Al Taloum Fi Al Harat - "Education in Neighborhoods": Community-based educational initiatives in residential areas.
2. Al Kheyam Muta'adedat Al Aghrad- Multi-purpose tents: Temporary structures serving various humanitarian functions.
3. Al Daa'm Alnafsi Al Ijtema'i - Psychosocial support: Mental health and social support services.
4. Al Taqyeem Al Mustamir - Continuous assessment: Ongoing evaluation methods replacing formal examinations.

5. Baramij Al Taa'loum Almukamil 'An Bu'd- Complementary distance education programs: Remote learning initiatives supplementing formal education.

- **Educational System Terms:**

1. Tawjehi - General Secondary Education Certificate: The Palestinian equivalent of high school graduation examination.
2. Al Menasah Al Elektronyeh - online platform: Digital infrastructure for educational delivery.
3. Al Ajheza Al Lawheyah - Tablets: Digital devices for educational access.

Identity and Cultural Terms:

1. Al Thakerah Al Jame'yah - Collective memory: Shared cultural and historical consciousness.
2. Shabakat Al Hemayah Al Mujtamaa'eyah - Community protection network: Social support systems within communities.
3. Al Howeyah Al Mutamaa'eyah - Collective identity: Shared sense of belonging and cultural identification.

Trauma-Informed Translation Notes:

These testimonies reveal critical insights into international humanitarian response to educational destruction:

- **Institutional constraints**: UN staff members acknowledging political limitations on terminology usage
- **Temporal displacement anxiety**: Concerns about students losing cultural connections during exile
- **Documentation challenges**: Difficulties maintaining educational records during genocide
- **Identity preservation strategies**: Efforts to maintain Palestinian cultural and identity continuity
- **Professional-personal tension**: Staff balancing institutional neutrality with personal recognition of systematic targeting

The testimonies document what international staff members call the systematic targeting of educational infrastructure while revealing the constraints they face in officially recognizing this as cultural genocide or Scholasticide, demonstrating the gap between professional recognition and institutional acknowledgment of systematic educational destruction.

ANNEX VII

Palestinian Ministry of Education Officials' Testimonies/Answers

Gender	Number of Staff Members
Females	2
Males	**5**
Total	**7**

Position	Number
Senior Management	1
Administrative	2
Operational	4
Total	**7**

Geographical Location	Number of Participants
North Gaza	2
South Gaza	3
Outside Gaza	2
Total	**7**

Question 1: What was the most important decision you made as a ministry, and you felt that you resisted cultural genocide with it? A small decision... but you feel it didn't let education disappear completely.

Responses:

P1: *"Continuing education despite the pain."*

P2: *"Encouraging the establishment of educational classes in tents and in shelters as much as possible."*

P3: *"Opening field schools here and there in places that haven't been bombed yet."*

P4: *"Initiatives and educational tents in cooperation with international organizations."*

P5: *"To continue with online learning and providing electronic services regardless of all circumstances."*

P6: *"Distributing printed learning kits for displaced children containing simplified materials, to ensure learning continuity."*

> **Question 2: With all the bombing, displacement, power outages and internet cuts, what could you actually do? And did you try to do something but it didn't work, especially in Gaza City which went months without even a network for communications? Or what did you try to do, but reality destroyed it?**

Responses:

P1: "We tried to make learning meet-ups where we follow up with students as much as possible."

P2: "Nothing because of continuous displacement, genocide and hunger."

P3: "We tried distance learning through social media, but violent bombing and continuous displacement and hunger made many students abandon education."

P4: "Every initiative we try to make, war destroys it. There's no communication network and no safe place, so most of our attempts didn't continue."

P5: "In some schools we tried to open temporary classes, but they quickly turned into shelters for families, so we were forced to close them."

> **Question 3: Are there alternative initiatives you worked on? Like distance learning, or partnership with international organizations or local bodies to provide educational or cultural content? I mean if a displaced student came expecting a scholarship and said: "I want to continue... but how?" What can you do for him? And what's not in your hands?**

Responses:

P1: "We worked on distance learning through social media and also face-to-face meetings in learning meet-ups."

P2: "No, I didn't have initiatives because of hunger and thirst."

P3: "Distance learning."

P4: "We distributed learning kits through UNRWA and UNICEF containing books and exercises for children."

P5: "We tried to organize cultural and awareness sessions in camps, but hunger and thirst prevented their continuity."

P6: *"There were initiatives for education via radio, and partnerships with local radio stations to broadcast lessons in mathematics and language."*

P7: "Some initiatives stopped due to lack of funding and poor living conditions; priority was feeding people."

> **Question 4: Did you change the curricula (deletion and cancellation for example) or examination methods during the past period? And if yes, why did the change happen? Was it motivated by relief only? Or because essay questions take a long time to answer, and practically we don't have the luxury of time, so the easiest solution was to resort to American system questions: choose the correct answer, and true/false questions and such? And what did you have to delete or modify, and was it hard to see it go? Did you feel you were losing an important story or meaning?**

Responses:

P1: *"Through social media, questions were chosen and true/false, but in forums there were essay questions."*

P2: *"Deletion from curriculum was done to relieve students."*

P3: *"The curriculum was reduced to suit the situation and difficult circumstances students are living through."*

P4: *"Some lessons were deleted from curricula to relieve students, because they couldn't study all subjects."*

P5: *"We postponed official exams and changed the question system to suit circumstances; long essay questions no longer had a place due to time constraints."*

P6: *"We deleted some topics in national education and religion because they need lengthy explanation, and focused on reading and scientific subjects."*

P7: *"During the past period we couldn't conduct final tests, so we relied on continuous assessment if student data was available."*

> **Question 5: Do you have numbers about how many schools became shelters for displaced people? Or about the number of students who couldn't complete their education despite ministry attempts to continue education? What's the number you still can't accept? Not a number on paper... a shocking number that truly hurt you?**

Responses:

P1: *"Most schools were lost and completely destroyed, and the remaining schools were shelters."*

P2: *"There are numbers, but unfortunately I don't have them."*

P3: *"Most schools were completely destroyed, and the rest turned into shelters. Exact numbers are difficult because communication is lost."*

P4: *"Estimates say that more than 188 UNRWA schools turned into shelters, in addition to dozens of government schools."*

P5: *"The number of students deprived of education is estimated at hundreds of thousands, but with continuous displacement there's no stable number we can estimate."*

P6: *"Many schools were completely destroyed, and few remained as temporary shelters, and this limits our ability to educate."*

P7: *"There's no official number; every day a new school is bombed, and reality shocks us and breaks our hearts."*

> **Question 6: Many things were buried under rubble: curricula, certificates, memories... Do you think we can retrieve some of them? And if not now, for the future? And another question, if all ministry archives disappeared... what would you most wish was preserved? Certificate? Document? Anything?**

Responses:

P1: *"Everything will return God willing. Certificates will return, but age won't return."*

P2: *"Everything can return God willing. Certificates can be reissued from ministry stores abroad, but the age that's gone won't return."*

P3: *"No, because the most important thing I'm looking for now is daily sustenance and shelter. "An entire archive of exams and student assessments disappeared. We had to request electronic copies from abroad if we could find them. "We managed to restore a large part of the databases from backups."*

P4: *"The most important thing we fear for is our students' certificates; destroying the archive means losing their future."*

P5: *"Some digital curricula are stored outside Gaza, we can retrieve them, but our paper archive is lost and will be difficult to compensate."*

Question 7: If a whole generation didn't enter school, and this is practically happening... after 10 years, what will they know about their country? And what will they have forgotten?

Responses:

P1: *"They will know the meaning of war and suffering, and know the meaning of tent life and humiliation, and know the meaning of courage, patience and strength because they lived it. They will forget that they are Arab or that they are Muslim."*

P2: *"That it was subjected to the most horrific massacres in history and genocide and holocaust, and still has hope to make change and hasn't lost hope in tomorrow."*

P3: *"They will grow up with strong oral memory about the crimes they lived through."*

P4: *"The responsibility here is on families and society to instill in them love of homeland and ancestors' stories."*

P5: *"This generation will be a witness to a crime against education; they know war more than school."*

Question 8: Did you think to document stories of students and teachers who traveled or were displaced? Not numbers, but stories. And if not... what's preventing this?

Responses:

P1: *"What prevents this is respecting others' privacy."*

P2: *"No, because of poor living conditions."*

P3: *"We can't document because of poor living conditions; there's no time to document stories while we search for water and bread."*

P4: *"It's not the time, and communication has many problems, but it can happen in the future."*

P5: *"We have initiatives to document stories of martyrs and wounded in education, but it needs stability and funding."*

P6: *"War conditions prevented movement to collect stories due to danger, so the project was temporarily postponed."*

Question 9: If you want to explain to a non-Palestinian child why our school isn't like any other school... what would you tell him?

Responses:

P1: *"Because our people aren't like any other people, because war with us is different from war anywhere else."*

P2: *"I tell him: this is our situation because of occupation and world's abandonment of us."*

P3: *"Because we aren't like any other country, not just since October 7, for more than 75 years."*

P4: *"Our schools are a home for upbringing before education; children sleep in them and eat in them because they're the only refuge."*

P5: *"I tell him: the teacher with us explains the lesson while fearing for his life, and despite this we try to plant knowledge in their minds."*

P6: *"Honestly: learning with us is attempts and patching; we build classrooms from tents where we teach children and dream of a real school."*

Trauma-Informed Translation Notes

This document shows the systematic challenges facing Palestinian educational administration during conflict:

- **Institutional inability**: Ministry officials facing challenges due to the lack of basic operational capacity.
- **Resource prioritization struggle**: conflict between educational goals and survival needs.
- **Documentation gaps**: Inability to keep records due to ongoing destruction and displacement.
- **Adaptation of polices under stress**: Emergency modifications to curriculum and assessment
- **Intergenerational impact concerns**: Fears about long-term cultural and educational continuity.