DESPITE EVERYTHING: CULTURAL RESISTANCE FOR A FREE PALESTINE

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The artwork featured in this dossier is made by cultural workers from around the world as part of a collaboration between Artists Against Apartheid and Utopix.

COVER

Kael Abello (Venezuela), *Símbolos de resistencia* (Symbols of Resistance), 2024. Courtesy of Utopix.

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If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze –
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself –
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale

– Refaat Alareer, 'If I Must Die' (2023)

On 14 October 2023, days after Israel unleashed its genocide in Gaza, the Palestinian writer and educator Refaat Alareer posted his poem 'If I Must Die' on social media.[1] Just over a month later, Alareer was killed in an Israeli airstrike on his sister's home in Shuja'iyya, in eastern Gaza City, along with his brother, his sister, and her four children. Though friends and colleagues had urged him

to leave Gaza, he decided to stay. This was his final act of *sumud* (صُمُود), the Palestinian concept of steadfastness and determination to remain on the land.

'I am the man I am because of the stories told to me by my mother and grandmother', Alareer said in a talk in 2015. 'Stories are also important in our lives as Palestinians, as people under occupation, as native peoples on this land, not only because… they shape us [and] make us the people we are but also because they connect us with our past, they connect us with our present, and they prepare us [for] the future'.[2] In addition to his own writing, Alareer edited and published several volumes by other Palestinian writers. In 2015 he founded We Are Not Numbers, a project that paired young Gazan writers with mentors abroad so they could tell their stories and counter the erasure of Palestinian history, identity, and resistance – a striking example of Palestinian cultural resistance and defiance in the face of an ongoing occupation.

Since the Al Aqsa Flood operation (Hamas' armed attack against Israel on 7 October 2023), the genocide in Gaza has been livestreamed for the world to see. As of October 2025, more than 67,000 Palestinians have been killed, more than 730,000 displaced, and countless maimed, wounded, and starved – all with the full backing of the United States.[3] The first three months of bombing alone resulted in an 11.5-year decline in Palestinian life expectancy, from 76.7 years in 2022 to just 65.2 years in 2023.[4] As of April 2025, the UN estimated that 92% of all residential buildings have been damaged or destroyed, leaving behind 50 million tonnes of rubble that will take decades to remove.[5] The unthinkable scale of

death, destruction, and deliberate starvation has led Palestinians to call this the 'second Nakba' – the 'Gaza Nakba'. The first Nakba (Catastrophe), in 1948, was an act of ethnic cleansing that seized 78% of Palestinian land, destroyed more than five hundred towns and villages, displaced more than half of the population – around 800,000 Palestinians – and led to the creation of the State of Israel.[6] From the 1948 Nakba to today's escalated genocide, the establishment and continued existence of the State of Israel have depended on the convergence of the Zionist project and Western imperialism.

However, imperialist patronage does not, on its own, secure consent and impunity – these must be achieved through other means. So, how does Zionism, as a settler-colonial project, fabricate the legitimacy to carry out a programme of such violence and barbarity? Nearly six decades ago, Ghassan Kanafani, a novelist and member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), sought to answer that very question. In his book *On Zionist Literature* (1967), he examined what he defined as 'all that has been written to serve the movement for the Jewish colonisation of Palestine either directly or otherwise'.[7] For Kanafani, to 'know your enemy' you must examine its cultural production. In the book, he explores how Zionist fiction falsified history for Western readers; why cultural institutions – including the Nobel Committee – rewarded reactionary authors such as Shmuel Yosef Agnon in 1966; how Western commentary came to echo Zionist narratives; and whether Western coverage of the 1967 war was the predictable outcome of a long campaign of cultural disinformation.[8]

For Kanafani, political Zionism – the movement to create a Jewish settler-colonial state in historic Palestine – required a cultural front to propagate its ideology through literary and artistic production. It is not a coincidence that the architect of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, was first a novelist: his book *The Old New Land* (1902), Kanafani says, marked the beginning of 'the Zionist literary character [marching] in lockstep with the Zionist political programme'.[9] In fact, a central task of the Zionist cultural apparatus was to dehumanise the Palestinian people in order to justify their displacement.[10] Kanafani documented how the Zionist novel, in particular, was key to this work, depicting Arabs as backward, barbarous, and disconnected from the land.[11] He wrote about how Zionist literature concocted and consolidated narratives that reverberate today, among them the claim of Arabs' 'mental and civilisational backwardness as an incurable disease', the notion that 'Arabs do not deserve a country', the idea that the lives of Arab children are 'useless as opposed to the morale of Jewish children', and the 'ludicrous association' that politically and emotionally transferred Nazi crimes to the Arabs in Palestine.[12] Zionist ideology and cultural production thus cast the Zionist project in a 'civilising role' against the supposed 'barbarism' of Arabs and Palestinians.[13]

In the decades since, these same dehumanising narratives have been recycled and deployed many times over by the Israeli state and regurgitated by mainstream Western media. In the months following 7 October, Law for Palestine compiled a database of over 500 cases of Israeli incitement to genocide.[14] On 9 October 2023, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant delivered what would become a defining statement of the genocide: 'We are fighting human animals,

and we are acting accordingly'. Four days later, Israeli President Isaac Herzog said: 'It's an entire nation out there that is responsible'. Galit Distel Atbaryan, member of the Knesset (Israel's parliament), called for the 'erasure' of 'Gaza from the face of the Earth' and for the death of the 'Gazan monsters'. Israel's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Avi Dichter unironically advocated for ethnic cleansing by saying, 'We're doing a Gazan Nakba 2023'. David Azoulay, the mayor of Metula, explicitly evoked the recreation of the Holocaust by stating 'The whole Gaza Strip needs to be empty. Flattened. Just like in Auschwitz'. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly called Palestinians 'monsters'. This endless list of incitements of ethnic cleansing long predates 7 October; the dehumanisation of Palestinians is a historico-cultural narrative that for more than a century has been used to justify their extermination with complete moral, political, and military impunity.[15]

The Zionist project has also been built on systematic cultural erasure. During the first Nakba, the plunder and looting of paintings, photographs, films, musical recordings, instruments, and other cultural artefacts were widely documented.[16] An estimated 70,000 books were stolen, many now held in Israeli archives, including the National Library of Israel.[17] This theft and destruction has continued over the past eight decades. Since 7 October, Israel has further targeted cultural centres and workers – an essential component of the project of cultural genocide. Among the dead are many of Palestine's painters, poets, writers, and sculptors, making the question of culture all the more urgent for the unfinished aspirations of Palestinian liberation.[18]

With that in mind, how can the Zionist settler-colonial cultural programme be resisted along a cultural front? What is the role of artists in times of genocide? Can cultural production humanise a people, rescue their history, and advance their struggle? To explore these questions and illuminate Palestine's rich liberation culture and its historical roots, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research interviewed contemporary artists and cultural workers in Palestine and the diaspora. This dossier is not a comprehensive survey of Palestinian art. Rather, it opens a conversation about the place of cultural resistance in Palestinian liberation. It examines how art and culture have been used to resist cultural Zionism and dehumanisation by remembering Palestine's past, bearing witness to its present, and imagining its future – one in which its people are free and free to return home. As Ibraheem Mohana, an eighteen-year-old Gazan artist who came into adulthood amid the genocide, affirmed, 'They started the war to kill our hopes, but we won't let that happen'.[19]

Aude Abou Nasr (Lebanon), *Gaza*, 2023.
Courtesy of Artists Against Apartheid.

Resistance Culture and National Liberation

Across anti-colonial and national liberation struggles, culture has been considered an integral weapon in the battle of ideas and emotions. Revolutionaries from Amílcar Cabral to Mao Zedong emerged from these struggles not only as military strategists and party leaders but also as poets and cultural theorists. Part of the national liberation Marxist tradition, Mao and Cabral – independently yet convergently – developed sophisticated theories of culture as a primary and indispensable front in the national liberation struggle.[20] For them, culture was the very terrain upon which liberation was to be won or lost.

For Cabral, who led the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), 'National liberation is necessarily an act of culture'.[21] His logic was clear: because imperialist domination is not merely political and economic, it 'has the vital need to practice cultural oppression'. It seeks to halt the historical and cultural development of the colonised. Therefore, resistance to imperialist domination must be a cultural act – a collective rather than an individual one. The liberation movement, he argued, is nothing less than the 'organised political expression of the culture of the people who are undertaking the struggle'.[22]

For both Cabral and Mao, cultural resistance was no less important than armed resistance. At the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Art and

Literature (a three-week conference that brought together China's leading writers, artists, intellectuals, soldiers, and party cadres), Mao declared: 'In our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people there are various fronts, among which there are the fronts of the pen and of the gun, the cultural and the military fronts'.[23] Similarly, in a series of talks given to PAIGC members in 1969 on the 'Analysis of Different Types of Resistance', Cabral highlighted 'cultural resistance' as one of four key fronts of struggle, alongside political, economic, and armed resistance. For both Cabral and Mao, culture was a primary and decisive battlefield, and the cultural army was just as vital as the people's army.

Similarly, the theory and practice of culture for national liberation were an integral part of the Palestinian struggle, particularly for Kanafani. In *Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine 1948–1968*, a foundational analysis of the literary works produced by Palestinian Arabs under Israeli occupation in the two decades after the first Nakba, Kanafani writes: 'Cultural resistance is essential and is no less important than the armed resistance itself'; it forms the 'fertile ground' for any successful armed struggle.[24] That same year, in 'Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine', published in *Afro-Asian Writings*, he outlined the characteristics of Palestinian resistance literature, which he also called the 'literature of combat' and the literature of occupied Palestine. He noted that it took about five years after the first Nakba for Palestinians to realise that 'they had lost not only their families and friends but their country as well'.[25] To recover their lost country, a struggle had to be waged on both the armed and cultural fronts. This banner has been carried by

generations of Palestinian artists both in their homeland and across the world.

In *Liberation Art of Palestine* (2001), renowned Palestinian-US artist and scholar Samia A. Halaby meticulously documents the development of a distinctly Palestinian artistic identity in the context of occupation, displacement, and resistance. She argues that this 'liberation art' is intrinsically linked to the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, with a unique iconography that includes symbols of sumud such as the cactus and the horse as well as themes of martyrdom and the right of return. For her, any 'good art' is 'political art', and liberation art is 'a practical art [that] needs to be clear and useful as a poster, leaflet, or banner'.[26] She discusses the inextricable link between art and liberation:

> The art of Palestine rests on the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Without that base, Palestinian artists would be an atomised collection of imitators of fashionable international styles, and many are. The liberation artists of Palestine are aware that they are fortunate to have a cause, and in fulfilling their duty to serve it, their art gains historical significance as a school with particular characteristics.[27]

The history of Palestinian resistance and liberation culture has been marked by political ruptures. These ruptures – the six 'declarations of war' on the Palestinian people, as historian Rashid Khalidi calls them in *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* (2020) – are:

1. the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which pledged British support for establishing a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine, paving the way for the British Mandate and Zionist colonisation;

2. the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which led to the first Nakba;

3. the 1967 Six-Day War – known in Palestine as the Naksa (Setback) – when Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights;

4. Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which expelled the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) from Beirut;

5. the First Intifada (1987–1993), the mass Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation; and

6. the Second Intifada, which began in 2000 and set the stage for the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

At each rupture, Palestinian artists and cultural workers responded with their craft and production. For Halaby, this history of liberation art 'rose with the uprising and declined with its recession'. Below we shed light on some expressions of Palestinian cultural resistance across these six ruptures.[28]

Olfer Leonardo (Peru), *Sabra y Shatila* (Sabra and Satila), 2021.
Courtesy of Utopix.

Remember

My roots were planted before time was born
Before history began
Before the cypress and the olive trees
Before grass sprouted

— Mahmoud Darwish, excerpt from 'Identity Card' (1964)[29]

The prominent actor and filmmaker Mohammad Bakri, who has acted in nearly fifty films and directed four documentaries in his forty-year career, recalls encountering and falling in love with cinema as a child in his hometown, al-Bi'neh. In his village, he remembers, they were 'without electricity – but there was cinema'.[30] Bakri is part of the Palestinian minority within Israel, one of the two million descendants of the 159,000 Palestinians who were not expelled in the 1948 Nakba. He traces the 'five seasons' of his own politicisation and creative work – similar to Khalidi's periodisation – back to the first Nakba, describing how that foundational event and the subsequent stories that he heard from his father and grandfather moulded his political consciousness. As he put it, 'to tell the story of my people, in fiction and in documentary… is my way of fighting. To protect my culture, my identity, and my humanity. No[thing] more'.

In *The Origins of Palestinian Art* (2013), Bashir Makhoul and Gordon Hon describe the first Nakba not as a singular historical moment but as an ongoing event of displacement, death, and loss

– a 'perpetual present tense in which historical events are still taking place'.[31] For Bakri and many Palestinian cultural workers, locating the 'origin' of Palestinian cultural resistance in the first Nakba is not only a personal but a highly political act – a way to refute Zionist claims to the 'promised land' as well as policies of cultural and historical erasure.

In *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006), Israeli historian Ilan Pappé uses the term 'memoricide' to describe the systematic erasure of the first Nakba from Israel's historical and physical landscape. Culture is thus weaponised to solidify the physical act of ethnic cleansing, denying the crimes committed and replacing the victims' history with that of the perpetrators. State-sponsored bodies, particularly the Jewish National Fund, have been instrumental in implementing this programme – from renaming towns, villages, streets, and landmarks with Hebrew names and imposing maps of 'ancient Israel' to planting forests that conceal the ruins of destroyed Palestinian villages.[32] These efforts aim to justify the Zionist foundational myth of 'a land without a people, and a people without a land'.

Against the backdrop of memoricide, preserving Palestinian art and cultural history is a form of resistance. For a people who have been geographically fragmented and dispersed – *shatat* in Arabic – origins are central to creating what the Palestinian postcolonial theorist Edward Said calls 'coherence'. According to Said, this cultural coherence is possible because Palestinians 'have been united as a people largely because [of] the Palestinian *idea* (which we have

articulated out of our own experience of dispossession and exclusionary oppression)'.[33]

In *Resistance Literature*, Kanafani highlights the Israeli policy of 'deliberate ignorance', which severed generations of Palestinians from their Arab heritage and national identity.[34] This programme of cultural alienation was achieved by degrading the quality of education Palestinians could receive – from restricting the resources available to Arab students to appointing unqualified or 'collaborator' Arab teachers – and by promoting a 'hybrid and trivial culture'. This left Palestinian Arabs with two choices: emigrate or assimilate.[35]

Born within the State of Israel a few years after the Nakba and trained at Tel Aviv University in theatre acting and Arabic literature, Bakri has had to navigate Palestinian, Israeli, and international cultural industries to make his films and has faced severe political and legal persecution. Since releasing *Jenin, Jenin* (2002), a documentary about the large-scale Israeli assault on the Jenin refugee camp during the Second Intifada, he has been haunted by legal battles. As he explained, 'The film was banned in Israel. I have been paying $1,000 a month to an Israeli soldier who claimed he appears in my film – for three and a half seconds. And I will keep paying for years to come… It is like the Middle Ages – like when they burned books'.[36] Despite the persecution he faces, Bakri continues to make films, defying the imposed binary of emigration or assimilation and insisting on documenting and bearing witness to the Palestinian people's ongoing resistance and aspirations for liberation.

Pablo Kalaka (Chile and Venezuela), *Under the Olive Tree*, 2023.
Courtesy of Utopix and Artists Against Apartheid.

Witness

> Our poems are without colour, without taste, without voice
> If they do not carry the lamp from house to house
>
> — Mahmoud Darwish on the function of poetry[37]

'The second season [of my politicisation] was 1967', Bakri recalls, during 'the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab world, when Israel occupied Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem'. As a fourteen-year-old boy, he remembers seeing his father cry; later, he understood that his tears were for the 'new catastrophe of the Arab world and the Palestinian people – [for] the first generation of refugees [that] was created in 1948 [and] the second [that was] created in 1967'.[38]

The well-known political cartoonist Naji al-Ali was part of that first generation, expelled from his village of al-Shajara during the first Nakba. In 1961, Kanafani first published al-Ali's work in the Arab nationalist movement magazine *Al-Hurriya* (Freedom), which he edited. A few years later, while working for a Kuwaiti newspaper, al-Ali began drawing Handala, a character that would define his career.[39] Eternally a ten-year-old boy – the age when al-Ali was forced into exile – barefoot, and in tattered clothing, Handala is always drawn facing away from the audience. With his arms crossed behind his back, he bears witness to the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people but also to their unwavering resistance, the

promise of return, and a free Palestine. Named after a deep-rooted, resilient desert plant, Handala embodies sumud. The more than forty thousand cartoons al-Ali drew in his lifetime are a testament to this steadfastness.

The events of 1967, and the failure of pan-Arab bourgeois nationalism to confront Zionist expansionism, inspired a wave of mass cultural resistance and a revival of Palestinian culture. As Rashid Khalidi notes: 'Writers and poets both throughout the Palestinian diaspora and living inside Palestine – Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, Fadwa Touqan, and Tawfiq Zayyad, together with other gifted and engaged artists and intellectuals – played a vital role in this renaissance, culturally and politically'.[40] The occupation turned culture into a key front in the struggle, ushering in a new era of militant theatre.

'Theatre in Palestine is new, in general', says Amer Khalil, co-founder and director of El-Hakawati (later known as the Palestinian National Theatre) in Jerusalem. In an interview with Tricontinental, he explained that 'In the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, people used to make theatre related to social work. But after the war of '67, a whole movement of intellectuals, artists, educators, [and] university students started a theatre movement to liberate Palestine… and the theatre movement really became militant'.[41] Beginning in the late 1960s, Palestinian theatre also professionalised and built the capacity to train directors and actors – even amid extreme repression. As one theatre critic wrote in 1976, 'No theatre group has ever performed without having one or two of its members in jail'.[42]

In the context of rising censorship and disruption by the occupation authorities, which were set on obliterating anything deemed 'national' (i.e., Palestinian), theatre took on an important role. Through the clever use of symbolism and allegory to allow for multiple interpretations, Palestinian playwrights developed a 'special language [that] served as an artistic code between the theatre and its audience… to convey messages of nation-building'.[43] 'Culture has always been targeted', Khalil added in the interview, 'Theatre spaces attacked, artists threatened. Why is culture so dangerous? Because words change people. Stories make people think. And when people think, they start asking questions – about how they live, why they live that way, what life could be. That's why culture is dangerous – it moves people'.[44]

The El-Hakawati troupe, meaning 'storyteller' in Arabic, was formed in 1977 to do just that – to tell stories, move people, and change reality. The troupe brought together Palestinian students from the 1948 occupied territories with artists and intellectuals from occupied East Jerusalem in defiance of the Zionist fragmentation of the Palestinian people. For its first six years, El-Hakawati took theatre to the people, travelling to schools, cinema halls, village squares, and refugee camps before finding a permanent home in a derelict cinema in 1983, where it operates to this day. The troupe has been essential in telling the stories of Palestinian life and resistance, even becoming the first Palestinian theatre group to perform internationally.[45]

The 1980s were bookended by two important ruptures: the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the First Intifada (1987–1993). These ruptures, alongside waning support for armed struggle as the primary path to liberation, had a significant impact on cultural

resistance. It was in this environment that the Jewish Israeli activist Arna Mer-Khamis founded the Stone Theatre in the Jenin refugee camp in 1987, in reference to the stone-throwing by children during the First Intifada. In 2002, at the height of the Second Intifada, the Stone Theatre was destroyed during a massive Israeli invasion of the camp. Out of the rubble rose the Freedom Theatre, founded by Arna's son Juliano, which carries on the Stone Theatre's methodology of using theatre to process trauma, assert identity, and engage in resistance. Today, the theatre is run by Mustafa Sheta, who participated in the Stone Theatre as a child. In an interview with Tricontinental in July 2025, shortly after his release from fifteen months of detention in an Israeli prison, he explained that 'Art isn't separate from the national movement; our work is an extension of that movement – rooted in dignity, storytelling, and resistance'. The Freedom Theatre, he told us, sees its role as training actors who are also community organisers: 'Our graduates aren't only performers – they are agents of change'.[46]

On 4 April 2011, Juliano was shot five times by a still-unidentified gunman. The troupe responded with *While Waiting* (2011), a remaking of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) that reflected on the yearning for freedom and statehood, and on never giving up.[47] Shortly before his murder, Juliano had called for a 'cultural intifada', which the Freedom Theatre embraced: 'We believe that the third intifada, the coming intifada, should be cultural, with poetry, music, theatre, cameras, and magazines'.[48]

Tings Chak (China), *Palestine Will Be Free*, 2024.
Courtesy of Utopix and Artists Against Apartheid.

Imagine

> We, who have no existence in 'the Promised Land', became the ghost of the murdered who haunted the killer in both wakefulness and sleep, and the realm in-between, leaving him troubled and despondent. The insomniac screams: Have they not died yet? No, because the ghost reaches the age of being weaned, then comes adulthood, resistance and return. Airplanes pursue the ghost in the air. Tanks pursue the ghost on land. Submarines pursue the ghost in the sea. The ghost grows up and occupies the killer's consciousness.
>
> — Mahmoud Darwish[49]

The nature of Palestinian cultural work shifted in the 1990s with the Oslo Accords.* As Amer Khalil explained, with the so-called political solutions presented by the accords, the theatre world – like other cultural fields – began to pivot away from the militancy that had marked the earlier period. Kaleem Hawa, a poet, literary scholar, and organiser with the Palestinian Youth Movement, explained in an interview with Tricontinental that 'After the Oslo Accords,

* The Oslo Accords were a series of agreements signed between Israel and the PLO in the mid-1990s that established the Palestinian Authority and gave it limited self-governance in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with Israel retaining effective control over borders, airspace, external trade, movement, and security, and complete control over more than 60% of the West Bank. Together with the Paris Protocol, this framework integrated the Palestinian economy into Israel's customs and fiscal regime.

many Palestinian social and cultural institutions were vitiated by Zionism and hollowed out by the compradorisation of the Palestine bourgeoisie, becoming no longer fit for purpose'. In this context, Hawa emphasised the need for a revolutionary culture as the 'most important ligament' between generations. 'Palestinian youth [have] turned to video production and capsule-like diaries on social media to narrate their collective social experience, which includes alienation and steadfastness. And our elders have had to struggle against a concerted drive, from their own Arab governments no less, to make them forget all that they know and [have] learned'.[50]

For Palestinian artists and cultural workers, the period following the Oslo Accords ushered in a crisis regarding the very concept of resistance culture. With increased global recognition came new challenges: navigating institutionalisation, the cooptation of cultural production by and dependence on international donors, the separation of Palestinian art and culture from the people's concrete realities, and the illusion of a 'peace process' on the horizon. The post-Oslo era also generated profound disillusionment with the traditional political leadership, pushing contemporary Palestinian artists and cultural groups toward a critical, independent stance, which in turn reflected a broader fragmentation of the national project.

In this context, satire and humour become tools of resistance. As Samer Asakleh, the songwriter and oud player of the Palestinian band Darbet Shams (Sunstroke), explained to Tricontinental, 'Sometimes, political topics are too sensitive – like peace agreements or regional normalisation deals. Satire becomes a way to talk about them without immediate censorship or repression and open

conversations that would otherwise be shut down'. Referring to his song 'Do You Condemn Hamas?', which he wrote in the aftermath of 7 October, Asakleh said, 'The lyrics are sarcastic – [the rhetorical question] ask[s] if you have emotions only if you condemn Hamas. Audiences laughed, but then they reflected. Some came up to me later and said, "We laughed at ourselves, and we started to think more deeply about the question"'.[51]

Like many cultural groups of their generation, the band reflects a political conjuncture very different from that faced by musical groups of a previous era. Lead vocalist Hanan Wakeem added, 'There was a time when political parties in Palestine had their own bands. In the 60s and 70s, groups like Fatah had entire cultural wings with singers and dancers, often tied directly to the movement. That's mostly gone now. Some artists are still informally affiliated with parties, but it's not like before – there's no longer a strong cultural infrastructure built by political movements'.[52]

The Antidote of Internationalism

In a context of depoliticisation, commodification, and fragmentation, artists increasingly rely on financial support from international organisations, risking further political cooptation. An antidote to this global trend is the revival of internationalism and revolutionary imagination – nowhere is the call for internationalism clearer than in the cultural responses to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Artists Against Apartheid, a network of over fifteen thousand artists from across the world, was founded in October 2023 by artists and cultural workers who saw a deep need to mobilise for Palestinian liberation. Members Hannah Craig and Tahia Islam describe the network: 'Inspired by the revolutionary artists who used their practices in the struggle against the South African apartheid system, we built this network knowing that as artists we have a unique responsibility to use our voice and artistic practices to protest apartheid and amplify the just cause of the Palestinian people and their resistance against occupation and oppression'.[53]

Similarly, Utopix, an internationalist design and communications collective largely based in Latin America and the Caribbean, has brought together more than eighty artists across twenty countries to produce over a hundred posters on Palestine over the past year, which are available to download for free and exhibited worldwide.[54] David Jacob Carmona ('Rasan Abu Apara'), a Chilean-Palestinian graphic designer and member of Utopix, sees Palestinian liberation as 'represent[ing] a wider struggle with the peoples of the world,

from the peoples in Africa who are under Western neocolonialism or the Walmapu in Chile. Art must break silences and educate with the truth… It is a trench, a weapon for struggle. In other words, art must speak to and seek to transform the real world'.[55]

Revolutionary art and culture do more than break the silence or bear witness to the atrocities of imperialism and colonialism: they have the responsibility – and capacity – to imagine a future not yet born. Exhibitions have played an important role in fostering this internationalist imaginary. In 1978, the Plastic Arts Section of the PLO's Unified Information Office organised the *International Art Exhibition for Palestine* at Beirut Arab University. As documented by Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti in *Past Disquiet* (2018), the ambitious project was part of the PLO's efforts to 'commission, fund, and promote the production of posters, art, cinema, theatre, dance, music, and publications; to organise, preserve, and exhibit folklore and cultural traditions; and to galvanise international support for the Palestinian struggle in the world of arts and culture'.[56] The goal was also to forge a sense of nationhood among Palestinians and mobilise international solidarity. As Khouri and Salti wrote, 'If houses were usurped, the record of having had a home would remain alive in a poem and song; if the land was removed from sight by distance, its depiction would retain its visibility in myriad forms'.[57]

In this spirit, artwork donations for the exhibit were solicited from across the world. The idea was to imagine a future museum in a future Palestinian state, where solidarity works would become the very building blocks of the institution. Despite Israeli tanks rolling into southern Lebanon in an operation involving some twenty-five

thousand troops, the exhibition opened on 21 March 1978 with contributions from Claude Lazar (France), Gontran Guanaes Netto (Brazil), and Bruno Caruso and Paolo Ganna (Italy), among others.[58] In June 1982, as Israel began its full-scale invasion of Lebanon to drive out the PLO, the organisation's archives – including documents and plans for the museum – were destroyed.[59]

Renowned Chilean artist Roberto Matta, who contributed to the PLO exhibition, had donated to a similar project in Chile a few years earlier. This project, the Museo de la Solidaridad (Museum of Solidarity), was initiated by Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1972 – a year before the US-orchestrated coup that overthrew his government – and called on international artists to donate works in support of the 'vía chilena al socialismo' (the Chilean socialist path). Many of the 674 works were forced into exile, some of them safeguarded in Cuba alongside leftist artists, intellectuals, and militants. In 1975, the project re-emerged as the Museo Internacional de la Resistencia Salvador Allende (International Museum of Resistance Salvador Allende), a dispersed network operating across Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, before returning to Chile in 1991 as the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende (Museum of Solidarity Salvador Allende).[60]

From Palestine to Chile, these museums are some of the many internationalist efforts that have played an essential role in cultural resistance, defending socialist and revolutionary struggles and imagining a future nation for a people denied statehood. The struggle for a free Palestine is not a struggle of Palestinians alone; it is part of a worldwide struggle against imperialism and colonialism.

As Kanafani wrote in *The Revolution of 1936–1939 in Palestine*, 'Imperialism has laid its body over the world, the head in Eastern Asia, the heart in the Middle East, its arteries reaching Africa and Latin America. Wherever you strike it, you damage it, and you serve the World Revolution'.[61]

Ilga (Palestine and Chile), *Palestina resiste* (Palestine Resists), 2016.
Courtesy of Utopix.

Culture Is Life

Mohammad Bakri considers the ongoing genocide in Gaza to be the fifth season of his politicisation. Although it has been broadcast on mobile phones and computer screens around the world, Bakri insists 'that's not cinema'. For him, 'cinema must make you ask, think, understand, and draw a conclusion'. He reflects on a question that a resident of the refugee camp asked him in his documentary *Jenin, Jenin*: 'What can your camera do when the whole world does nothing to help me?' Thinking about today, he says, 'The same is happening in Gaza. What can a camera do for starving people? My camera can't bring them bread'.[62] That question of what art can do in the face of such atrocities confronts every artist and cultural worker.

Wakeem of Darbet Shams recalls the impact of the genocide on Palestinian artists: 'The early months were marked by total shock. Many artists couldn't sing, move, or create'. This was not only because of heightened repression – many no longer knew what art could or should do. 'There were constant questions about the role of art in a time of genocide', Shams continued. 'Is it appropriate to make music at all? If the song isn't about the war, should it even be shared?'[63] Under such conditions, what are an artist's responsibilities, what are the limits of art and culture, and what does cultural resistance look like?

In this fifth season of politicisation, Bakri's sober words remind us that culture is a powerful and necessary weapon for liberation and a defiant expression of life itself. They call on us to continue raising

the banner of Palestinian liberation and to humanise the Palestinian people and their struggle with every song, every painting, every film, every dance, every poem, every novel, and every cultural weapon at our disposal – despite everything:

> Culture is life. Culture is roots, and history. Culture is humanity. If we lose culture, we lose our identity. We lose our life. There is no meaning without culture. There is no meaning to life without love. Culture is love. I will not permit them to take my love away from myself. My culture. This is my heart. This is my people. These are my memories. This is my childhood, when I walked without electricity and without water. The songs that I heard. The food that I ate. The air that I smelled. The mountain that I climbed. The sea that I swam in. This is my culture, my existence. Nobody will take that from me. So I will continue making films. Despite everything.[64]

shenby g (United States), *The World Stands with Palestine!*, 2023.
Courtesy of Utopix and Artists Against Apartheid.

Notes

1 Alareer, 'If I Must Die'.

2 Alareer, 'Stories Make Us'.

3 UNRWA, 'UNRWA Situation Report'.

4 Prashad, 'Life Expectancy Falls in Gaza'.

5 UN Web TV, 'Searching Gaza's Missing'.

6 Prashad, 'The Palestinian People Are Already Free'.

7 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 1.

8 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 4.

9 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 53.

10 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 83.

11 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 69.

12 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 69, 83, 84, 90, 99.

13 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 69, 91.

14 Law for Palestine and Al-Haq Investigates.

15 Law for Palestine.

16 See Adam Raz, *Loot*.

17 Hatuqa, 'Israel's "Great Book Robbery" Unravelled'.

18 Sheehan, 'These Are the Poets and Writers'.

19 Chak, 'War to Kill Our Hopes'.

20 Tricontinental, *Dawn: Marxism and National Liberation*.

21 Cabral, 'National Liberation and Culture', 6.

22 Cabral, 'National Liberation and Culture', 6.

23 Mao, 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum'.

24 Kanafani, *Resistance Literature*, 9–10.

25 Kanafani, 'Resistance Literature', 69.

26 Halaby, *Liberation Art*, 45.

27 Halaby, *Liberation Art*, 54.

28 Halaby, *Liberation Art*, 32.

29 Darwish, *Select Poems*, 96.

30 Bakri, interview.

31 Makhoul and Hon, *The Origins of Palestinian Art*, 10–11.

32 Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 226–229.

33 Said, *The Question of Palestine*, x, 42.

34 Kanafani, *Resistance Literature*, 19.

35 Kanafani, *Resistance Literature*, 22–25.

36 Bakri, interview.

37 Kanafani, *Resistance Literature*, 74.

38 Bakri, interview.

39 Totry and Medzini, 'The Use of Cartoons', 25.

40 Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 107.

41 Khalil, interview.

42 Snir, 'Palestinian Professional Theatre', 11.

43 Snir, 'Palestinian Professional Theatre', 7.

44 Khalil, interview.

45 'Founders of El-Hakawati Theatre'.

46 Sheta, interview.

47 Mee, 'The Cultural Intifada', 174–175.

48 Mee, 'The Cultural Intifada', 168.

49 Hamdi, *Imagining Palestine*, 1.

50 Hawa, interview.

51 Asakleh, interview.

52 Wakeem, interview.

53 Craig and Islam, interview. To view the poster collection produced by Artists Against Apartheid, visit their website: https://againstapartheid.art/downloads.

54 To download the posters, visit their website: https://utopix.cc/bitacora/eyes-on-palestine/.

55 Carmona, interview, our translation.

56 Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 28.

57 Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 30.

58 Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 31.

59 Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 34.

60 Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 46.

61 Kanafani, quoted in *The Revolution 1936–39 in Palestine*, xiv.

62 Bakri, interview.

63 Wakeem, interview.

64 Bakri, interview.

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