

Palestinian artist victims of the Israeli slaughter in Gaza: An actor, a painter, a writer and a muralist

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The Israeli onslaught on Gaza has cost the lives of some 10,000 Palestinians, thousands of them women and children. The world is witnessing an eruption of imperialist barbarism, implemented by the Netanyahu government of fascists, but encouraged, financed and armed by the Biden administration and its Western allies. A virtually defenseless population is being pulverized by the most modern weapons of destruction.

Every life is valuable, every one of the Israeli killings of civilians a crime. If we focus here on the fate of a number of Palestinian artists, it is in part because something about their lives and deaths is known, and therefore can be conveyed to a wider audience. Their murders only underscore the tragic and horrific character of the deaths of thousands of those whose lives and accomplishments a broader public will never know.

In late October, Inas al-Saqa, a Palestinian actor and playwright, was killed in Gaza City when the building in which she was sheltering with her five children was hit by an Israeli air strike. Three of her children died in the attack, the two others were seriously injured.

According to the Middle East Eye, “Alongside 500 others, the family had initially sought refuge at Gaza’s Orthodox Cultural Center but were later told to evacuate the structure by the Israeli army. Eventually, Israeli air strikes would level the building on 31 October. After leaving the centre, Saqa went to a friend’s apartment and it was there that she was killed.”

Breaking News Network reports that “Saqa was known for her passion for the arts and a drive to inspire children through theater. From conducting workshops with the Ishtar Theater in Jerusalem to collaborating

with the Swedish Academy, Inas’s influence transcended borders. She was known for her works, ‘Something is Happening’ and ‘The Bear’, which were not just performances but narratives that embodied the spirit of a people caught in the crosshairs of conflict.”

Saqa played the title role in the 2014 Palestinian film *Sara* (2014), directed by Khalil al-Muzayen, which deals in part with the issue of “honor killings” in the Arab world. More than that, the somber and complex film treats life in Gaza. Images of poverty and destruction occur throughout. An even more violent “third Gaza war” in the future is predicted. Israeli bombings play a significant part in the film. Saqa makes a strong impression. *Sara* is available for streaming from Vimeo.

Notes for the film explain: “The film tells a different story about Gaza, which suffers from other things beside heroism, whose people do other things beside die and are hurt by ordinary causes. They dream, love, hate, prevail, fail, make mistakes and break, like all other human beings.”

Saqa also appeared in the film *The Homeland’s Sparrow*, which was produced in Gaza and directed by Mustafa al-Nabih. She also worked with children to teach them about the theater.

According to the Middle East Eye, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture released a statement mourning Saqa and her children. “She had previously produced many plays and theatre workshops with children and had also participated in various community activities,” the statement read.

Khaled Juma, a prominent poet based in Ramallah, expressed his grief on Facebook, confirming the death

of Inas and her children. “Today, my friend, the curtain has fallen ... and the theatre’s stage has darkened,” he wrote. According to the same source, “Saja Elyan, a friend of Saqa’s daughter Ritta, shared her disbelief on social media, writing: ‘It’s truly heartwrenching. Ritta is in intensive care. Please keep her in your prayers, and may God grant her the strength to endure this immense loss. I’m writing, but I can’t comprehend this. How long, oh God?’”

Saqa’s last Facebook post was on August 27, writes the Middle East Eye, and in it she spoke of her experience of surviving Gaza’s past horrors, not knowing the fate that was to befall her in October. “Sometimes you look back and take a glimpse of your past ... only to discover that you’ve come out alive from a massacre,” she wrote.

Hyperallergic reported recently on the death of 38-year-old Palestinian artist Heba Zagout. She was killed with her two young children in another Israeli airstrike. Her sister confirmed her death on Facebook.

“Zagout studied fine art at Gaza’s Al-Aqsa University,” commented *Hyperallergic*, “and was trained in graphic design. She amassed a large following on social media for her vibrant paintings of Palestinian landscapes and people, especially her depictions of scenes from Gaza and Jerusalem.”

“I tried to express the negative feelings, emotions, and tensions that occur in Gaza,” she said about her work in an interview that was released some two weeks before her death. “I consider art a message that I deliver to the outside world through my expression of the Palestinian cause and Palestinian identity.”

Zagout worked as a public school teacher and was previously employed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

In “Beyond the numbers: the life and legacy of Heba Zagout,” Jana Shkhashir wrote in *Savoir Flair*, “Born in the Al Burejj refugee camp in Gaza, Heba grew up surrounded by the stories of her ancestors, which ultimately sculpted her love for painting and storytelling through art. Her paintings, intricate and full of life, encapsulated the daily life, architecture, and nature of Palestine, serving as a visual plea for the preservation of Palestinian identity.”

The article asserted that Zagout “not only honed her skills as an artist but also took on the mantle of an educator, teaching art to primary school children in

Gaza. Her dual role as an artist and a teacher became a beacon of resilience and hope, as she balanced her artistic pursuits with her responsibilities as the primary breadwinner for her family.”

An Israeli airstrike on October 13 “extinguished a life dedicated to art, education, and family.”

Writer Hiba Abu Nada was killed October 10. She was a poet, novelist and teacher, born in Saudi Arabia. She received a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry from Islamic University, Gaza, and a master’s degree in clinical nutrition from Al-Azhar University. Her novel *Oxygen is not for the dead* won second place in the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2017.

The *Literary Hub* writes that Nada was “a beloved figure in the Palestinian literary community.” In her final tweet, written in Arabic on October 8, the author wrote: “Gaza’s night is dark apart from the glow of rockets, quiet apart from the sound of the bombs, terrifying apart from the comfort of prayer, black apart from the light of the martyrs. Good night, Gaza.”

Nada was killed in her home south of Gaza City by an Israeli airstrike. She was 32 years old.

On social media, Ahmed From #Gaza reported on the death of muralist Muhammad Qariqa, “a dear artist friend.” This is a YouTube video of the artist less than a day before he died.

The mass murder and devastation continues. The criminals will be remembered.



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