

# Peace Building Opportunities in the Shadow of Scholasticide in Gaza?

Written by Akram Jamee, Fadi Khaled Abudan, Nadia Sonneveld,  
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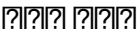
AKRAM JAMEE, FADI KHALED ABUDAN, NADIA SONNEVELD, ANDREA STULTIENS, MATT  
CANFIELD AND ELISA DA VIÀ, DEC 7 2025

Education is a fundamental pillar of individual and societal advancement. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that education is a fundamental human right for all peoples. This right has been taken seriously in the West Bank and Gaza. Despite difficult conditions including ongoing occupation and siege, Palestinians have among the highest literacy rates in the world, at around 98 percent as of 2020. Yet despite the importance of education, both in international law and in Palestinian society, an entire generation now risks being deprived of this right, especially in Gaza.

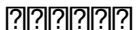
In 2019-2020, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) had 217,645 students registered in higher education, of whom 62 percent was female and 38 percent male. This picture changed drastically when, after 7 October 2023, Gazan universities and institutions of higher learning were destroyed one by one until the last one was blown to pieces in January 2024. In the span of less than four months, seventeen universities and institutes that graduated more than 45,000 students annually were destroyed. What fell was not only walls, but, as a Gazan educator said,

The lives of professors and researchers – who carried knowledge in their hearts before they wrote it in books – were taken. And our students, who once dreamed of graduation, of advanced studies, of a dignified life are now among the martyrs, the displaced, or the missing (Picturing Scholasticide.org).

In the first six months after 7 October 2023, the IDF killed more than 5,479 students, 261 teachers and 95 university professors (OHCHR, 2024). By 15 April 2025, 13,419 students had been killed and 21,653 injured. Among educational staff, at this point, 651 teachers had been killed and 2,791 injured (Relief Web, 2025). For surviving teachers, life has changed completely as an illustration, produced by graphic designer and artist Ola Namara, and shared by a Gazan educator emphasises: “Instead of going to educational institutions, we now carry water cans and search for water to drink and food for our children” (18 December 2024).

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KyaiEyRGZ9/com.twitter.pic 

— Ola  (@ola\_alnamara) June 29, 2024

In this context, a group of staff and students from Leiden University established the project, *Picturing Scholasticide*, in September 2024. Picturing Scholasticide is a multimodal project that documents, through a website and a traveling exhibition, the destruction of Palestinian institutions of higher education in Gaza. Scholasticide is the deliberate destruction of an educational system and its institutions. We worked together with staff and students from Gazan universities, photographers and web designers from Gaza, and a staff member and students from the MA Photography & Society at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague.

We all know that a good education not only teaches us to read, write, and do math; it also has the potential to foster

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moral and social values: empathy and appreciation for those with different beliefs and perspectives, indispensable for respectful engagement in diverse societies. We quickly learned that for our Gazan colleagues, education is one of the most important sources of hope and liberation, especially for the young people who have spent their entire life under siege. Losing education in this context is profoundly painful, as a Gazan colleague said:

The biggest problem: how to feed my kids with these crazy prices and how to deal with their loss of education?

We, along with all the people of Gaza, are literally living on the streets. The tent only covers our bodies, but there is no privacy, no education, and no future.

I do not want to continue in Gaza. It will have been two years of this war for us and horror upon fear... the children's future will be gone... a very dark, very tragic life... May God help us. (15 June 2025)

Education can also lead to the opposite and continue division and cleavage. When we asked a Gazan colleague in the project about the relationship between education and peace, he responded that while education has the potential to facilitate individual and collective advancement, it can also lead to greater divisions as both the Palestinian and Israeli educational system suffer from a balance in presenting or defining the 'other.' Structurally, however, the Israeli educational system is more powerful, influential, and effective in consolidating national and religious superiority. Israel, he continued, has a unified national curriculum supported by the state with huge budgets, while Palestinian education suffers from political restrictions due to the Palestinian divide and limited external funding to modify Palestinian identity content and encourage critical thinking (18 June 2025).

It is important to take such insights into account when imagining, planning for, and subsequently realising a future of education in Gaza and the challenges involved.

While it is a common adage that there can be no peace without justice, educational justice is often overlooked. Education plays a vital role in peacebuilding by promoting critical thinking and mitigating trauma. It achieves this by restoring predictable daily routines, fostering hope for the future, and, most effectively, when psychosocial support is embedded within existing educational systems, ultimately paving the way for new futures. And yet, in the face of the quick and nearly complete destruction of Gaza's educational life, how can you convince a child, who was deprived of education for two years, to coexist with those who destroyed his school and forced him to search for drinking water and food aid? How can you tell a teacher, who lost her husband and all but one of her children, to speak about peace? How can you ask a mother, whose sole concern was that her children be among the top students in school, to speak about justice? Even one of the educators in our project who believes that "education is the messenger of peace -it is the light and the lamp that illuminates the path of truth and justice," (20 June 2025) quickly added that "However, the Israeli-Palestinian issue requires much more than education alone to reach peace" (ibid.).

The complete destruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure presents a tremendous foundational obstacle to peace. To our knowledge, no Israeli university has publicly condemned the destruction of the universities or the loss of life among their counterparts living on the other side of the wall. That iron wall still stands.

Israeli universities train soldiers: some universities have developed specialised degree programmes for soldiers in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence; they develop military technology and weapons as well as jurisprudence that justifies what should not be justified. These universities played an important role in making the wrong walls fall.

There will be no peace until the right walls are rebuilt, not to divide, but to protect dignity, justice, and truth. And until then, the only thing we can do is bear witness and document what is happening. "Picturing Scholasticide," another Gazan colleague said, does not merely provide a platform to present images and numbers. It is a testimony to history, a message to the world: that what happened here was not only bombardment, but an attempt to erase awareness, to break will, and to kill the future. From Gaza, he said, I promise you: we will continue to film, to document, and to declare — the truth cannot be bombed.

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