

From Photo Kegham to Unmute Gaza: An Archive of Resistance

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"If I must die, let it bring hope, let it be a tale."¹

These were the final words of Refaat Alareer, a Palestinian poet who died in an Israeli air strike in northern Gaza on 6 December 2023. Since then, the dominant media coverage has been saturated with Western perspectives on the matter, while Palestinian voices have had to navigate censorship, blockade, and skewed reporting. This photo essay explores photographs emerging from Gaza as tools for creating counter-narratives, and in the process, birthing an abstract archive that shifts the agency typically associated with a curated photographic repository. This photo essay focuses on the efforts of independent artists, journalists, and organizations, who are capturing the realities of this conflict—often in real time—not relying on mainstream media to curate and display a narrative coloured by political interests. This is not to claim that photographs being uploaded to the social media pages of conscientious citizens and independent journalists are devoid of politics; rather, they are imbued with a politics that lets them exercise the agency of their own narrative. The essay focuses on photographs that have shifted from documenting the violence of the war to documenting life within the war, and thereby creating an 'abstract archive' containing the "Gaza Experience." We demonstrate how this archive has the potential to serve as a tool for advocacy by making the truth visible. The essay investigates how this photographic archive is a form of resistance in a situation where people's very existence is at stake. It shows how Palestinians attempt to cling to what is left of their identity in the face of collective destruction.

Keywords: Palestine, photographs, archive, resistance, Gaza, memory.

Introduction

What people record in the form of photographs, however mundane, has the potential to become a tool of history, if need be. We highlight in the upcoming sections how photographs serve as a means of resistance despite not being an organised, large-scale tool for demonstrating discontent and demanding attention. We chose to focus on photos because they are a means of subtle

¹ Refaat Alareer, "If I Must Die," *Palestine and Us* 11, no. 2 (2024): 14.

defiance,² sitting at the intersection of reality and interpretation. In contrast to sculptures or paintings, photographs are not rare; they are ‘infinitely reproducible,’³ making them a suitable medium for mass communication, particularly in times of crisis. Since October 2023, journalists and civilians in Gaza have used photography to testify, turning photographs into testimonies that cannot be completely censored or erased from history. They are critical sources for understanding the “struggles from within structures,”⁴ structures that are collapsing, yet difficult to act against except by quieter means that can make noise when needed.

Hence, photographs do not merely document; they ‘stage’ human decisions—recording what is present and what is absent, what is visible and what is hidden. Photographs become imperative for understanding one’s own past, and in this case, they remind us that Gaza’s history is not a passive one. Instead, it is a history which was taken by force and furnished by outside forces that took over people’s homes and lands. In their desperate attempts to preserve the impression of life as Gazans, they have demonstrated an archival fever,⁵ which negates the traditional understanding of the archive—being found in households of power-holding officials with a stamp of confidentiality⁶—and transforms it into one of a community repository accessible through diverse channels of information dissemination. Ariella Azoulay argues that the standard theory of the archive, influenced by the

² In the context of peasant rebellions, Scott writes that subtler, or everyday forms of resistance were more rampant and even successful in creating pressure on oppressive mechanisms than outright movements. He quotes “...foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth” as “ordinary weapons.” James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 28-29.

³ John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (London: Penguin UK, 2013), 28.

⁴ Anindita Ghosh, *Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia* (New York: Springer, 2008), 9.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Archive fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 14. Derrida defines archival fever as a paradoxical obsession with preserving the past while also containing the potential for destruction and forgetting, where we focus on the former rather than the latter.

⁶ Nasrullah Mambrol, “Analysis of Derrida’s *Archive Fever*,” *Literariness*, February 19, 2018, <https://literariness.org/2018/02/19/analysis-of-derridas-archive-fever/>.

Hegelian idea of ‘Aufhebung’⁷ (sublation or assimilation), tends to ignore the fact that archives are produced and handled by human beings. The theory claims that archives are self-standing objects that are distinct from those who produce and work with them. Referring to Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, Azoulay addresses the role of the “archon,”⁸ the guardian of the archive who, together with the concepts of place and law, upholds the architecture of the archive. She criticises the way in which these actors manage access to an archive, generally holding individuals at a distance until the time when the content is made ‘historical’ and hence less threatening to present power structures. It is a response to an increasing urge to access archival materials in real time before they are turned into curated collections inaccessible to those for whom they were not curated. In this manner, the new repositories become ‘bottom-up’ archival practices, where knowledge is not being rediscovered in ‘official documents’ of the past, but actively formed through capturing the present.⁹

The following section presents a thematic arrangement of the visuals recorded by individuals and organisations on the ground. We focus on the period immediately following the onset of the genocide in 2023–24, selecting photographs that captured the first wave of responses, the realities of displacement, and the persistence of memory. Our thematic choices aim to counter the narrative of Gaza as an empty, war-torn space, instead highlighting it as a land layered with the memories of living, breathing people with hopes and aspirations. While many powerful images exist, our selection was limited by the scope of the paper. We prioritised visuals that either gained viral traction or reflected everyday acts of creativity—what we term as an “archive from below.” These images resist censorship and dominant narrative tropes, offering a more grounded, civilian perspective of the crisis.

⁷ Ariella Azoulay, “Archive: Ariella Azoulay,” *Political Concepts*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.politicalconcepts.org/archive-ariella-azoulay/>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Anjali Arondekar, *For the record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 9. She notes how traditional archival research often seeks to recover “lost” histories. We seek to identify these lost and found narrative shifts in the Gaza experience, and how people are not looking for a ‘lost’ document but rather actively capturing the present which is their idea of resistance.



Figure 1 : Khegam Studio in Gaza.



Figure 2 : A man with his kids, posing in front of a UN plane.

A MAN AND HIS KIDS POSING IN FRONT OF A UN PLANE.



Figure 3: A Family having a picnic

A FAMILY HAVING A PICNIC.

It starts with the story of Kegham Djeghalian, whose very first photo studio in Gaza captured life as it is, and was less about any conflict. When the most recent hostilities began in 2023, there was an eruption of graphic and sorrowful visual reportage from the region, which eventually ended up being censored in various ways by the state and digital platforms. The suffering was intense, and the suffocating atmosphere demanded expressive outlets. The heavy scrutiny shifted reportage from the traditional media into the hands of local photojournalists and concerned civilian groups. Its theme shifted from a depiction of the war itself to a depiction of life that was surviving within. It is imperative to caution the viewer about the emotions these photos evoke, particularly the risk of reducing Palestinian suffering to consumable trauma.¹⁰ Many images that emerge from conflict zones, in this age of fast and large-scale consumption, risk encountering a desensitised audience, and in this case, framing Gazans strictly as victims. However, we approach these photographs as testimonies against a “crisis of representation”¹¹ which confronts historical exclusions, resists erasure, and opens space for counter-hegemonic narratives. These photographs are unique precisely because they are not being produced nor consumed by systems that profit unethically through them.

Kegham Djeghalian could have hardly envisioned that his photographs, which were meant to capture daily life, friends, and family (Figure 1),¹² (Figure 2),¹³ and (Figure 3),¹⁴ would resurface as a means for people to trace their past, especially after it was engulfed in the fires of unprecedented destruction of life and property. His personal endeavour is now hailed as historical testimony to

¹⁰ Sadaf Javdani, “The Commodification of Trauma,” *New Socialist*, October 21, 2021.

¹¹ Karen Cross and Julia Peck, “Editorial: Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory,” *Photographies* 3, no. 2 (2010): 130-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2010.499631>.

¹² Dana Al Sheikh, *Kegham Studio in Gaza*, “Unseen Photos Show Life in Gaza in the 1940s,” *Vice*, April 23, 2021, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/unseen-gaza-photos-1940s/>.

¹³ Dana Al Sheikh, *A man and his kids posing in front of a UN plane*, “Unseen Photos Show Life in Gaza in the 1940s,” *Vice*, April 23, 2021, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/unseen-gaza-photos-1940s/>.

¹⁴ Dana Al Sheikh, *A family having a picnic*, “Unseen Photos Show Life in Gaza in the 1940s,” *Vice*, April 23, 2021, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/unseen-gaza-photos-1940s/>.

the “lesser known”¹⁵ aspects of life in Gaza. His bundles of images also include historic political moments, such as the visits of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Jawaharlal Nehru. This was his indulgence. He wanted to preserve his time. He worked for no one and the photos remained unmarked. At the time of their creation, these were not meant to be objects that sheltered an alternative historical record against a dominant narrative. Yet, at the time of their publication, they became pearl insights into a life less-known. A yearning to remember this lesser-known life strengthened after the violence in 2023. Both mainstream and social media were attacked by heavy censorship in the immediate aftermath of the October 2023 attacks. In her article “*It’s not a glitch: How Meta systematically censors Palestinian voices*,” Palestinian policy analyst Marwa Fatafta sheds light on how Meta, a multinational technology company, was systematically silencing the voices of both Palestinians and those advocating for Palestinian rights across its digital platforms.¹⁶ So how were people navigating these silences?

The citizens and civil organisations of Gaza came through with various means of, and outlets for, visual documentation. While earlier archives were rooted in analogue formats and physical studios, the post-2023 movement is defined by decentralised, mobile, and highly digitised forms of archiving. Social media platforms have become the new battleground for visibility. Additionally, the posts on social media were reworked into website projects to create a repository while spreading awareness, imbuing these photos with an ideology and a distinct framework. One such initiative is *Unmute Gaza*,¹⁷ a website-based art and advocacy project that aids in selecting subjectivised photographs taken by on-ground photojournalists and artists, and turning them into artworks, making them available for free, for global print-and-paste campaigns. In this manner, they attempt to avoid censorship and provide space for their viewers to pause and ponder over the art they produce which, according to their website, encourages more conversations than the photographs themselves. The project’s ultimate aim is to question the Western

¹⁵ Dana Al Sheikh, “Unseen Photos Show Life in Gaza in the 1940s” *Vice*, April 23, 2021, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/unseen-gaza-photos-1940s/>.

¹⁶ Marwa Fatafta, “*It’s Not a Glitch: How Meta Systematically Censors Palestinian Voices*,” Access Now, February 19, 2024, <https://www.accessnow.org/publication/how-meta-censors-palestinian-voices/>.

¹⁷ Unmute Gaza, “Unmute Gaza,” accessed March 29, 2025, <https://unmutegaza.com/>.

world's silence on the matter and support the photojournalists who go to great lengths to spread awareness about the suffering of the people.



Figure 4: "Can you hear us?" Photo by Belal Khaled.

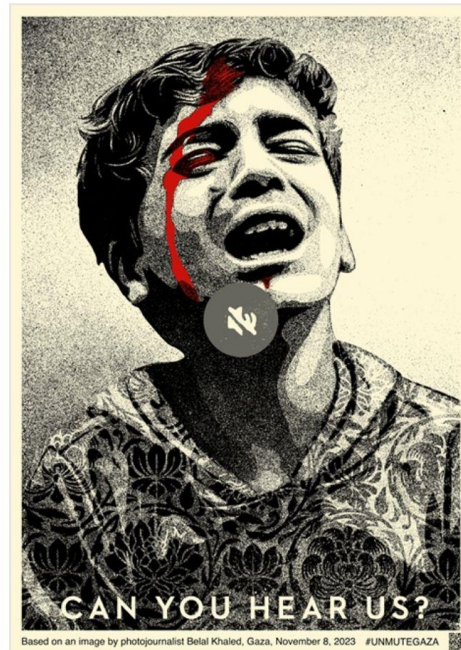


Figure 5: "CAN YOU HEAR US?" Poster by Unmute Gaza Project.



Figure 6: Unmute Gaza teamed up with Greenpeace to unfurl a gigantic banner on the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, Spain. Greenpeace / Mario Gomez.

The Journey of a Photograph

The photo (Figure 4)¹⁸ was captured by Gazan photojournalist Belal Khaled on 8 November 2023. It depicts a distressed young child with an expression of agony, and mouth open, as if crying out. The raw image on Belal's Instagram page, which has now turned into a trove of pictures showcasing the Gazan plight, shows the child covered in dust, with his head bleeding. This picture has since travelled from Belal's page to the *Unmute Gaza* project (Figure 5),¹⁹ to the glass exterior of the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid, Spain (Figure 6).²⁰ On the photo-inspired artwork under the *Unmute Gaza* Project, the phrase "**CAN YOU HEAR US?**" is written in capital letters, reinforcing the urgent plea for attention. A muted speaker symbol is placed over the child's mouth, symbolising silence or suppression. The long journey of this picture is a reflection of the efforts of both Palestinians and those advocating for Palestinians' rights in the creation of a repository that survives, endures, and spreads widely to resist the silence imposed on their voices.

The project is an example of resistance against various forms of censorship in the media on the Gaza issue and a skewed narrative that is being fostered by the power-holders. But is resistance only limited to such awareness campaigns depicting the apocalyptic nature of a genocide? Is it confined to showing the destruction inflicted and endured? Other photographs emerging from Gaza demonstrate otherwise. They attempt to document what has remained intact in both material and memory. When your existence is questioned, and is also being systematically wiped out, you respond with fiercer ways of living, which include concerted efforts to memorialise a fading memory. Every space

¹⁸ Belal Khaled (@belalkh), "Can you hear us?" Instagram photo, November 8, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CzZJa6Er0W-/>

¹⁹ Shepard Fairey and Belal Khaled, *Can you hear us?*, Photograph, November 8, 2023, https://unmutegaza.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/21_Shepard_Fairey_Belal_Khaled_November_8_2023_w.jpg.

²⁰ Greenpeace/Mario Gomez, *Unmute Gaza teamed up with Greenpeace to unfurl a gigantic banner on the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, Spain*, in "'Unmute Gaza' Street Art Project Uses Global Landmarks To Demand Ceasefire," *HuffPost*, January 16, 2024, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/unmute-gaza-street-art-project_n_65a66059e4b07bd6950e0e30.

When memory outlives its walls

Figure 7: Displaced Palestinians walk inside the destroyed Islamic University in Gaza city. March 25, 2025. Photo by Majdi Fathi.



Figure 8: This is not a beautiful picture of night time camping, despite the author having played with the aesthetic value of the lighting. It is a refugee camp for displaced people in central Gaza City after being told by the Israeli army to leave their homes in Northern Gaza City following the resumption of the war on the Gaza Strip. March 19, 2025. Photo by Saher Alghorra for The New York Times.

Figure 9: A Palestinian shop owner displays wedding dresses for sale on mannequins outside a damaged store in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip. February 23, 2025. Photo by Majdi Fathi.



that has been grazed down in the violence has been brought to life through documentation; for every studio destroyed in Gaza, people have painted the walls of refugee camps with their stories, woven quilts to commemorate meaningful days, and donned cultural symbols to prevent being lost in a 'homogenised' crowd of 'victims.' The essence of resistance in the Palestinian case is not limited to capturing their destroyed homes and the dead, as done by the mainstream media, but also aims to capture the enduring human spirit.

In doing so, 'absence'²¹ is repeatedly used as a thematic portrayal. Photographs are not just meant to capture the violence and destruction (which is the mainstream media's main and only focus), but also the life that 'is' lived in the midst of a warzone, and that which 'could have been' lived if things had not panned out the way they did. The photograph of the wedding gown on a mannequin against the backdrop of collapsed buildings (Figure 9),²² is a reminder of the latter. Similarly, the photo of refugee tents stands as evidence of the absence of homes that once stood on the same piece of land (Figure 8).²³

Memory is shown to persist in urban landscapes, in stone and mortar, and within those who inhabit these spaces. But such an absence is not just about 'emptiness.' This sense of loss lies in the consciousness about an 'active presence' that backs this imagery of 'absence.' The photographs convey a quiet, lingering sense of 'what could be.' The site emerges as a material claim to memory, captured through the lens for the purpose of memorialising. This is best described by Karen Cross and Julian Peck when they argue, "this critical history seizes upon memory and its sites, assiduously collecting the remains,

²¹ Berger, *Understanding a photograph*, 28.

²² Majdi Fathi (@majdi_fathi), "A Palestinian shop owner displays wedding dresses for sale on mannequins outside a damaged store in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, on February 23, 2025," Instagram, February 23, 2025, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGaJEIxo3Rg/>.

²³ Saher Alghorra (@saher_alghorra), "March 19, 2025, Gaza City, Displaced people set up tents in central Gaza City after being told by the Israeli army to leave their homes in northern Gaza City following the resumption of the war on the Gaza Strip," March 20, 2025, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DHbXt5QIwY0/>.



Figure 10: The Ruins of Imam Shafi'i Mosque, destroyed during Israeli bombardment in the Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City. February 28, 2025. Photo by Majdi Fathi.

Sites of Survival



Figure 11: Praying amidst the ruins of what was once a mosque highlights the sense of community and veneration of space in the memory of what it constituted. Photo by Majdi Fathi.



Figure 12: Palestinian children sit on graves in a cemetery they sought refuge in due to the conflict-ridden situation in the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood of Gaza City. February 17, 2025. Photo by Fathi.

testimonies, documents, images, speeches, and any visible and tangible signs that have signs that have been left behind.”²⁴ The Islamic University, depicted as razed to the ground in Figure 7,²⁵ was once a place of ‘official records,’ possibly of a traditional archive. Now, it is a hollow, broken structure, having turned into a lingering image of a ‘lost presence’ itself.

In the context of Gaza, photographs thus become more than mere records; they enact collective memory, forging deep emotional and nostalgic social bonds. Unlike mainstream media, which often prioritises instantaneousness, strategic analysis, and statistical data regarding violence, grassroots documentarians focus on the human dimensions of the conflict. Their work captures the land through the eyes of those belonging to it, offering an archive that preserves community identities and resists the erasure of lived experiences. Community identities also frequently manifest in spaces of collective veneration, but what happens to these sacred spaces during war? Photographers attempt a ‘historical reconciliation’²⁶ by documenting the continued use of urban (or otherwise) spaces despite the irreparable damage meted out to them, especially places of worship and veneration.

Fereshte Moosavi explores how photo archives serve as powerful tools for producing knowledge. Moosavi’s analysis resonates with the work of the late Iranian documentary photographer Kaveh Golestan (1950–2003), particularly his *Prostitute* series (1975–1977).²⁷ Comprising sixty-one images, this series captured the everyday lives of female sex workers in the Citadel of Shahre-no, Tehran’s former red-light district. Using these photographs as a foundation, curator Vali Mahlouji reconstructed an extensive archive tracing the site’s historical trajectory, from its formation to its destruction, engaging in an act of historical reconciliation (the same area is now a public park).

²⁴ Karen Cross and Julia Peck, “Editorial: Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory,” *Photographies* 3, no. 2 (2010): 127–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2010.499631>.

²⁵ Majdi Fathi (@majdi_fathi), “Displaced Palestinians walk inside the destroyed Islamic University in Gaza City, on March 25, 2025,” Instagram, March 26, 2025, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DHqaqHeolfN/>.

²⁶ Fereshte Moosavi, “Archives as Forms of Resistance,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 23, no. 1 (2024), 72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702029.2024.2305526>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

Figure 13.



Figure 14.

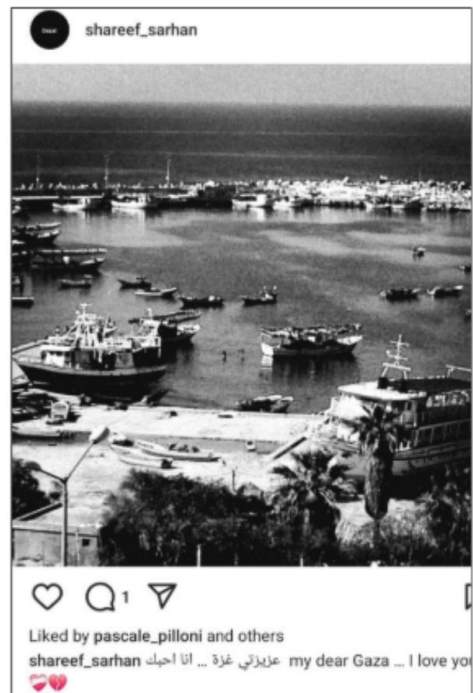


Figure 13-14: Gazan multimedia artist Shareef Sarhan posts more reminiscent photographs of life on Gaza's shores, an imagery of escape from the face of violence that Gaza has become. Along with Figure 13., these are cryptically captioned in an emotionally evocative manner "...my dear Gaza...I love you". Giving no insight into when these photos were taken. Just a fond remembrance, or even a memorial to a past which can never be retrieved.



Figure 15: Shareef Sarhan's instagram reminiscence circles back to Kegham's manner of memorialising Gaza within photographs. He says "This is the shadow of my grandfather on the sand, and this is my aunt with one arm around my father's shoulder. They're peacefully strolling down the beach barefoot as the sea brushes against their feet." This is how Kegham remembers the shores. As the background to a mundane day in his family's life.

The photographs discussed here, though not intentionally curated, end up creating an archive for the rest of the world; for both the present and the future. For example, Majdi Fathi's photographs document on-the-ground scenes of communal prayers (Figure 11)²⁸ unfolding amidst the ruins of the Imam Shafi'i Mosque, which was destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Gaza's Zeitoun neighborhood (Figure 10),²⁹ or children playing in a cemetery where their families have sought refuge after losing their homes (Figure 12).³⁰ These images evoke a profound sense of collective consciousness, illustrating how faith endures even in the face of devastation. The act of worship or play within these ruins becomes a powerful assertion of resilience, transforming destruction into a site of remembrance and defiance against attacks on the human spirit.

Such persistence and perseverance circle back to photographing in a similar vein to what Kegham was doing in the 1940s. Shareef Sarhan, a Palestinian artist and photographer, says: "Most people know the Gaza they see in the media—destruction, war, destruction, blockades, and occupation. Yet beyond that, there's another Gaza."³¹ The photographs he regularly posts on his social media handles are less bleak in nature. Since 2023, he has often captured the beaches of Gaza where people come to relax (Figure 13),³² the various trades that people practise on the streets, and even something as mundane as a beautiful bird perched on a tree. It is an album of Gaza—unfiltered and uncensored—showing people spending time with friends and family, doing their daily chores, documenting buildings and ports that have escaped

²⁸ Majdi Fathi (@majdi_fathi), "Palestinians perform Friday noon prayer on February 28, 2025, next to the ruins of Imam Shafi'i Mosque, destroyed during Israeli bombardment in the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza City," Instagram, February 28, 2025, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGnVWLbIQo7/>.

²⁹ Fathi, "Palestinians perform Friday noon prayer."

³⁰ Majdi Fathi (@majdi_fathi), "Palestinian women sit on graves in a cemetery they sought refuge in due to the conflict in the Shuja'iyya neighborhood of Gaza City, February 17, 2025," Instagram, February 17, 2025, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGLcmggIcqm/>.

³¹ DW Documentary: *Preserving Gaza's Photographic History*. Documentary Universe, 2024, <https://documentaryuniverse.com/preserving-gazas-photographic-history-dw-documentary/>

³² Shareef Sarhan (@shareef_sarhan), "انا احبك / my dear Gaza ... I love you," Instagram, November 19, 2024, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCjQ-b5t5Ta/>.

destruction (for now), and giving a glimpse into the rich coastal culture of Palestine (Figure 14).³³

The beauty of these photographs lies in their ordinariness. They are an island of calm amid the conflict and confusion that is often depicted in media emerging from that region. Infused with colours, one might easily mistake these pictures taken by him as belonging to other parts of the world, where life is not infested by armed conflict. One finds interesting overlaps in the life story of Kegham Djeghalian and his journey of capturing photos with the trajectory of logging the Palestinian genocide. Djeghalian was an Armenian who fled a genocide, landing in Gaza in the 1940s. All he wanted to do was to capture the essence of this beautiful landscape he had begun to call his home (Figure 15).³⁴ The cycle is repeated now, as Gaza of the 1940s appears a distant memory, and people want to desperately remember the space and its people in any and every way possible. These people, though, in contrast to Djeghalian's case, have not left Gaza behind (metaphorically). Even when outside its territory, they continue to document and amplify the plight of their people and continue to talk about it. The present is being treated as history, because the lifespan of news is increasingly short-lived.

The archives emerging out of Gaza find resonance with archiving initiatives by other marginalised groups, for example, the Rohingyas of Myanmar. Both groups have faced systematic erasures through denial of citizenship and state-sponsored genocide. The suppression has rendered them stateless and stripped them of all basic human rights. Highly marginalised and helpless, the Rohingya people have seen their plight being amplified through projects like *Rohingya Genocide Archive*³⁵ and digital initiatives such as *FORSEA*'s³⁶

³³ Shareef Sarhan, (@shareef_sarhan), "انا احبك ... عزيزتي غزة / my dear Gaza ... I love you," Instagram, August 1, 2024, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-IHdzotDYN/>.

³⁴ Dana Al Sheikh, *Kegham junior's father and aunt*, "Unseen Photos Show Life in Gaza in the 1940s," Vice, April 23, 2021, accessed March 29, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/unseen-gaza-photos-1940s/>.

³⁵ *Rohingya Genocide Archive*, accessed May 26, 2025, <https://rohingya-genocidearchive.org/>.

³⁶ FORSEA, "Myanmar's Rohingya People: A Documented History, Identity and Presence," FORSEA, June 8, 2024, <https://forsea.co/myanmars-rohingya-people/>.

documentation of the identity and history of Rohingyas. These archival initiatives perform a dual role of emphasising the injustice and ethnic cleansing inflicted upon them, while also seeking to preserve the lost cultural roots of the people. The Palestinians and the Rohingyas have undergone a “cultural genocide,” and their resistance has taken the form of collecting and holding onto what is left. Their archives are civilian-led, digital, and transnational, emerging from refugee camps, diaspora communities, and allied networks.

Like Palestinian “archives from below,” the Rohingya archive resists the institutional silence of governments and the mainstream media. It relies on testimonial photography, personal narratives, and oral memory to assert both presence and belonging in the face of state-sponsored historical amnesia. Together, these projects reflect a broader global pattern of marginalised communities increasingly turning to self-archiving as a political act in order to bear witness, to demand accountability, and to preserve histories otherwise marked for deletion.

Conclusion

In the face of censorship and web repression, Palestinians and their allies are leveraging alternative forms of technology and creative means, to construct a living and dynamic archive that encapsulates the complete spectrum of life under blockade.

The resultant archive operates on two levels—the first is the unmediated, immediate documentation on the ground, where photojournalists and civilians photograph suffering and survival. The second is the meta-archival process of how those photographs are then curated or disseminated through projects like *The Accountability Archive*,³⁷ which is an initiative to scrape social media accounts of photojournalists who have succumbed to the conflict or whose content has been flagged due to algorithmic bias; or *Unmute Gaza*,³⁸ which abandons the traditional curatorial approach altogether. However, the

³⁷ Accountability Archive, “Accountability Archive,” accessed March 29, 2025, <https://accountabilityarchive.org/>.

³⁸ “Unmute Gaza”.

common thread that runs through both the “abstract” archives is the node of agency. The subjects of documentation are the documenters. Since the ‘archons’ are eliminated, the photographic content bypasses co-option and commodification because there is no ‘othering.’ The matter is grievable for all those involved in the making of the photograph, and not a matter of ‘routine’ with regard to the region, as viewed from an outsider’s eye.

The *Accountability Archive* creates an evidentiary photo archive for potential judicial proceedings and historical studies. As stated on its website, “The *Accountability Archive* is a crowdsourced record of journalists, politicians, and public figures endorsing or encouraging the ethnic cleansing of Gaza and/or defaming pro-Palestinian activists. We have a vision of a public resource to be used by future historians and researchers, helping understand how power holders attempted to manufacture consent for the genocidal aggression towards the Palestinian people. We hope this resource will serve to hold them to account.”³⁹

It signals a shift from grassroots documentation towards what we might call meta-archival practices—intentional, curated repositories designed not only for memory but for action. These archives are built with legal, evidentiary, and historiographic functions in mind. Unlike momentary digital uploads, they seek permanence, traceability, and institutional legitimacy. By preserving metadata, timestamps, and creator information, these archives challenge the erasure of testimony and bolster the claims of state violence or war crimes. Within historical scholarship, they also complicate traditional archives by foregrounding *non-state, civilian-authored narratives* (emphasis ours), altering how future historians will write about genocide, occupation, and resistance. They ensure that Palestinian memory is not passively archived but actively weaponised against forgetting. The *Accountability Archive*, thus focusing on the role of “power holders,” addresses how this particular project of curation takes the reins of the narrative into the hands of the persecuted. On the other hand, projects like *Unmute Gaza* disrupt the traditional archiving hierarchy by refusing to place the images within a specific narrative, instead releasing raw images, dependent on artists’ choices of reproduction, to engage viewers without imposed conclusions. In doing so, it introduces a level of subjectivity

³⁹ “Accountability Archive”.

into interpretation, engaging viewers on a more visceral, personal level, while also challenging existing structures that inform the 'authenticity' of a narrative. This two-step process of documenting and then contextualising resists the passive consumption of war images, fighting against media desensitisation through its inherent procedure, or the lack of it.

Through digital and grass-roots action, these new-age 'archives' challenge the limits of institutional memory and provide a decentralised, participatory model of historical records. The imperative of such work is not so much to remember Gaza as it once was, but to ensure that its people, their voices, and their lived experiences cannot be silenced, neither in the present nor in the pages of history.

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