**Headline:** Telling the ‘Untold’ Stories of Palestinian Lives, Dreams, and Hopes—in Gaza and Beyond

**Teaser:** The media collective Untold Palestine gathers the stories mainstream media doesn’t tell about Palestinians—videos, photographs, and written accounts from Palestinian people about their culture and daily life.

By April M. Short

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**[Article Body:]**

After a decade of struggling with infertility and undergoing IVF procedures, 27-year-old Alaa gave birth to her first son, Kareem—an “energetic and brilliant child” with a “sweet” soul who “filled the house with joy.” Two years later she had another child, Ahmed, nicknamed Moudi, who was “the funniest kid ever with his words and stories.”

Maram Al Masri, the aunt of the boys, [shared](https://www.instagram.com/p/C4qO6TzIOq8/?img_index=1) their story on Instagram, which was posted by the media collective platform, [Untold Palestine](https://untoldpalestine.com/), on March 18, 2024. On January 8, 2024, Kareem and Ahmed Al-Masry were killed by an Israeli artillery shell. “It took away Kareem and Ahmed, the children we had longed for over many years… vanished in the blink of an eye.”

Kareem and Ahmed are two of [more than 13,000](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/unicef-says-over-13000-children-killed-gaza-israel-offensive-2024-03-17) children killed by Israel’s attacks on Gaza since October 7, 2023, according to figures [provided](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/unicef-says-over-13000-children-killed-gaza-israel-offensive-2024-03-17) by UNICEF on March 17, 2024.

**A Book Full of Stories**

Ibrahim Sha’ban loved life. He was “like a book full of stories and memories, laughter and joy” and “the best engineer in Gaza,” writes his brother, Mohammad Sha’ban, in a note [shared](https://www.instagram.com/p/C4dF3ZusIgq/?img_index=1) by Untold Palestine on Instagram on March 13. “He was also my teacher for mathematics, physics, and Arabic and the keeper of my secrets. He filled us with his kindness, happiness, and love,” adds Mohammad. Ibrahim and his wife Aya, his “soulmate in kindness and happiness,” had many projects and travels planned with their two children—the youngest not yet three months old—when the four of them were all killed by Israel on October 24, 2023.

As of [March 2024](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx0ZeIjrnps), the Sha’ban family was among the more than 30,000 victims killed by Israel since the war began, in what UN experts have called a [genocidal](https://www.npr.org/2024/01/26/1227078791/icj-israel-genocide-gaza-palestinians-south-africa) campaign. Despite ongoing, mass protests worldwide, and a ruling in January 2024 by the International Court of Justice ordering Israel to do everything in its capacity to prevent death, destruction, and any [acts of genocide](https://apnews.com/article/genocide-explainer-israel-hamas-africa-court-7b74e7a1fdf4512e44a42066581fa587) in Gaza, Israel has continued constant military bombardment in the region and prevented food and [aid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/7/israels-blocking-of-aid-creating-apocalyptic-conditions-in-gaza) from reaching people in refugee camps in Gaza. Experts [warned](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/experts-warn-of-imminent-famine-in-gaza-with-lack-of-aid-reaching-palestinians) that millions of people in Gaza were on the brink of famine due to Israel’s actions, PBS reported on March 19.

**Thwarting International Law**

Beyond its brutality in Gaza, Israel’s military, as well as informal settler militias, have thwarted international law with violent attacks that have [increased at an “unprecedented rate”](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/israeli-settler-attacks-on-west-bank-palestinians-have-escalated-since-oct-7-un-says) throughout Palestine since October 7. For example, every morning, 42-year-old Lina Amr gets her children ready and takes them to school, “saying goodbye with a heavy heart, as if it might be our last farewell.” She works as an ambulance officer at the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Hebron, and since October 7, “the dangers and fears have increased on this job,” she writes in a [post](https://www.instagram.com/p/C4yv3els7_T/) Untold Palestine shared on Instagram on March 21, 2024.

“We often face settler attacks and obstacles from checkpoints, settlements, and challenges by the Israeli occupation army, which threaten our lives and hinder our work. Sometimes, soldiers give us a minute to leave before opening fire, which has sadly happened,” she [writes](https://www.instagram.com/p/C4yv3els7_T/), noting that while paramedics were once protected in Israel (as they are supposed to be, by international law), they are now being directly targeted.

**Untold Palestine**

The personal narratives above were collected and shared by Untold Palestine, an independent digital media platform, organized as a collective, which has been working since 2019 to share stories of Palestinian life, told by Palestinian people by way of photos that are accompanied by these stories on social media (shared in both Arabic and English).

As its [website states](https://untoldpalestine.com/about-us/), the stories they share “are people-centered.” “[W]e shed light on their personality, interests, and passions.”

In this way, Untold Palestine aims to [connect](https://untoldpalestine.com/about-us/) the Palestinian diaspora throughout Palestine and around the world, and “to create a multifaceted image of the Palestinian people in all their diversity. Our platform is an open space, and we want to make it accessible particularly… [for] those whose voices are usually not heard due to marginalization, racism, and exclusion.”

In addition to social media channels, Untold Palestine offers learning opportunities for artists and journalists—including photography trails for professional and amateur photographers.

Photographer [Mohamed Badarne](https://www.mbadarne.com/about), who works with the Untold Palestine collective, spoke with me for the Independent Media Institute 160 days into Israel’s bombardment of Gaza. He says that the Palestinian people are typically portrayed in much of the western media through racist stereotypes—and are often either presented as the victims of violence or perpetrators of violence and terrorism. While in the Arab media, they are often shown as heroes in the context of the struggles and clashes they witness almost on a daily basis. He says the Untold Palestine platform was established to paint a more accurate picture of Palestinians and to give people of the region a way to take back ownership of their stories. In this way, the platform might help humanize Palestinian people in the eyes of the world.

Badarne, a Palestinian from Haifa who is now living in Berlin, has been involved in social activism since he was a teen. He worked as a human rights organizer and teacher for years, before becoming a photographer when he was 35 years old. He has experience sharing the stories of those who have been overlooked or oppressed. His exhibition, the [Forgotten Team](https://www.mbadarne.com/copy-of-home), documented the treatment of 2022 FIFA World Cup workers in Qatar.

He says as a Palestinian person he always has to fight for his rights and safety. After facing years of racism in Israel, he moved to Berlin in 2012, but has faced more difficulty and racism living in Berlin.

“I work as a photographer and I hold workshops here for refugees and women,” he says. “All of my work is focused on photography and storytelling for social change.”

Badarne says the Untold Palestine platform started out by sharing everyday stories about the hopes, dreams, art, and activities in Palestine—across ethnicities and ages. The idea was to help people in Palestine to reclaim how they were portrayed. And the hope was that it would inspire people in other places in the world where narratives are often co-opted into stereotypes, to take back their own stories as well.

“We don’t often have the chance to tell our story as we want because the international media and western media tend to control our stories—our photography, our videography, and our scenes… we don’t have the chance, oftentimes, to bring our voices out,” he says. He adds that telling stories from everyday life can help people find shared humanity with Palestinians.

“People can be in solidarity with us when we bring our normal photos to the world,” he says. “One of the very problematic things is that regimes, like the Israeli regime or western regimes, don’t see us as human. They don’t see that we also like to dance, to swim, and to read books. And if you go to our platform, you will find hundreds and hundreds of doctors, teachers, engineers, women, children, and so on… and see that they have a life.”

He says one of the platform’s challenges has been that while the idea is not to tell political stories but personal ones, they are often political by nature due to the realities of everyday life for Palestinians. He shares the example of a teacher who has to cross seven checkpoints on his way to school each day.

“He is the same teacher as everywhere in the world—he has the same dreams—but in the end his story is different,” Badarne says.

He says the goal of Untold Palestine is to give ownership of the Palestinian story back to its people—and that means their photos and stories need to be freed up to the public. Badarne says that Palestinian photographers and journalists seldom have the chance to publish their photos as they would like because they lack the access and funds necessary to reach larger media platforms.

“We established [Untold Palestine] because we believe that not just the Palestinians, but everyone who is under occupation, must have the right to tell their story as their own,” he says.

He says they aim to humanize as many victims as possible, telling their stories, in hopes of increasing solidarity with Palestinians, and with all those people who are fighting for freedom.

**We Are Not Numbers**

Badarne says if you scroll back through the Untold Palestine platform before October 7, 2023, you will find photos and stories of women, children, artists, culture, beauty, and life in Gaza and beyond.

“Now, we show the life that Israel destroyed,” he says.

He says that even before the war began on October 7, it was not always easy to convince photographers, journalists, and others in Palestine to share photographs and stories that had messages of hope, because so often, they were focused on commemorating oppression and clashes. However, over time, Untold Palestine collected stories from all around Palestine, as well as from Palestinian people living around the world, which showed inspiring and humanizing moments from daily life.

In the aftermath of October 7, 2023—due to the level of bloodshed and violence Palestinians have been experiencing on a daily basis—the collective came to the decision to shift the focus to telling the stories of the lives of victims before they were killed.

This is what the collective has been doing since the war began, and the stories of the lives of victims have received millions of views. Badarne says that through the stories of the victims’ lives, people around the world may be better able to connect with the realities of what is happening at a human level—rather than seeing them as just numbers.

“People can be in solidarity with us not just when we are killed, not just when we are bloody… this is a kind of solidarity with the small details in life,” he says.

In fact, “We Are Not Numbers” is the title of Untold Palestine’s Instagram posts, which provide the stories of victims’ lives shared by their friends and families.

The text at the top of these posts [reads](https://www.instagram.com/p/C5BPVmnMZD0/?img_index=1): “With each martyr and martyr raised, it increases our responsibility to document their stories and lives, and ensure that they do not become just numbers,” followed by an invitation for people to send in photos and stories of those they’ve known who have been killed during the war.

“I think the kind of story that we publish has more effect than learning about ‘30,000 people killed,’” Badarne says. “I think about all the photos from Gaza that people see of tanks or bombing—now there are photos of life; these are photos and stories of the people, and details about people we care about.”

In addition to the stories of victims, the platform continues to share stories of those living in Palestine—like that of Lina Amr—including a daily post that often provides insights into the lives of people living in refugee encampments.

Badarne says the platform has inspired other groups to create similar platforms to share the life stories of people who are victims of war and violence, in various languages around the world.

**The Work of Storytellers**

Every day since October 7, Badarne says he or other members of the Untold Palestine collective team learn about a personal friend or relative who has been killed and/or receive an overwhelming number of stories from the friends and relatives of victims.

The work “is not easy”—and it’s unending, because the violence is unending, and the stories continuously keep flooding in.

“We publish stories about the lives of our friends and people that we know… and we don’t have the time to be sad about our friends,” he says. “All the time you must publish news.”

He notes that Untold Palestine’s photographers in Gaza are working under very difficult conditions.

“They suffer on two levels: First, they are photographers and they must [keep] storytelling, and tell the stories of other people,” he says. “Second, they must also care for their families—and themselves are victims.”

He says working as a media collective, rather than a top-down media channel, allows Untold Palestine’s storytellers, photographers, and videographers to mutually support and uplift each other.

“We try to give our photographers [on the ground in Gaza] power and support,” he says. “We work with them; we try to help them. We try to work together… to spotlight their photos and stories,” he says.

The Untold Palestine team mostly comprises people from Gaza and the West Bank, and most work as volunteers, while the organization is funded by donations. They operate under the umbrella [Yura](https://www.albustanseeds.org/events/gaza-habibti-with-untold-palestine), a nonprofit based in Berlin. He says the collective is a mix of media and art, and that it hopes to increasingly fund itself through its own art rather than relying on outside funders.

For example, he shares that there was an exhibition in Berlin in early 2024 where they sold the photos of their photographers.

“While our goal is to become self-funded through art projects, donations play a critical role in the sustainability of our operations,” he says. “In addition, we have partnerships with organizations such as the [IMS [International Media Support]](https://www.mediasupport.org/'), the [EED [European Endowment for Democracy]](https://www.democracyendowment.eu/), and the [Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders](https://emhrf.org/), as well as individual donors and grants from other organizations.”

Badarne says another hope of the collective is to expand on the concept to include other places. He imagines organizations such as Untold Sudan, Untold Morocco, Untold Africa, and so on.

“Our goal is to bring this kind of model to other places, and also to bring more voices about people and life everywhere because we think that solidarity is the main way to change the narrative,” he says. He thinks the only real solution is to free Palestine, and the only way to do this is through global solidarity. And, according to Badarne, solidarity has poured in from everywhere as the platform continues to share people’s stories.

After sharing the stories of the lives cut short in Gaza, “still more people are killed” each day. This can be disheartening. Badarne says it is difficult at the moment for him and the Untold Palestine team, and that the situation has taken a toll, but that there is no time or room to rest and feel it or mourn, as the requests to share stories keep pouring in.

“You can’t rest, you can’t just cry for your friends that you’ve lost—and it is very sad every day to [read] messages and there are people telling you, ‘Please talk about my family,’ or ‘Talk about my brother, talk about this…’” he says. “This work is really a responsibility. You can feel so bad about the situation.”

Badarne thinks with time, the power dynamics will change. He says little changes have already given him hope and gives the example of mass protests against Israel’s actions in the U.S. that have been led by Jewish people, as well as protests around the world that are fighting for human rights and basic freedoms of the Palestinian people.

“My team and I, we think about it as this: we did our best; we did everything to bring the stories [to the world],” he says. “Every day that I see a new story on our platform, I believe more that we have hope. And because of the people that are still in Gaza, there is no way to stop talking about Palestine.”