

The World Humanities Report

# Case Study: Institute for Palestine Studies

---

Tamara Sleiman



The World Humanities Report is a project of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), in collaboration with the International Council for Philosophy and the Human Science (CIPSH). The views expressed in the contributions to the World Humanities Report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editors, scientific committee, or staff of CHCI.

The World Humanities Report gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

© 2023 The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System

This work carries a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License. This license permits you to copy, distribute, and display this work as long as you mention and link back to the World Humanities Report, attribute the work appropriately (including both author and title), and do not adapt the content or use it commercially. For details, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>.

This publication is available online at <https://worldhumanitiesreport.org>.

Suggested citation:

Sleiman, Tamara. *Case Study: Institute for Palestine Studies*. World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023.

More information about the author can be found at the [end of this document](#).

# Case Study: Institute for Palestine Studies

Tamara Sleiman *American University of Beirut; afikra*

The Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS),<sup>1</sup> established in 1963 in Beirut, is the oldest “institute in the world devoted exclusively to documentation, research, analysis, and publication on Palestinian affairs and the Arab–Israeli conflict.”<sup>2</sup> They have two other offices, the Institute for Jerusalem Studies in Ramallah and the Institute for Palestine Studies USA in Washington, DC.

According to Yara Hawri, Sharri Plonski, and Elian Weizman,

The production of knowledge in, for, and by a settler colonial state hinges on both productive and repressive practices that work together to render its history and present as “normal.” It reshapes critiques of capitalist and colonial social relations—in which the dispossession of the native is an ongoing and ceaseless feature—to give it moral parameters, through which to assert and entrench its legitimacy.<sup>3</sup>

The IPS publishes original work on Palestine, noting that the battle between Palestine and Israel is not only political but also intellectual. The institute’s publications include more than 800 books, along with long-standing academic journals, including the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, first published in 1971; the *Revue d’études palestiniennes*, first published in Paris in 1982; the Ramallah-based *Jerusalem Quarterly* (1990); and *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyah*, based in London and Beirut (1990).

The IPS’s Beirut-based Constantine Zurayk Library is the largest library in the Arab region that specializes in the Arab–Israeli conflict, Judaica, and Palestinian affairs. Their collection includes more than 78,000 volumes and 248 periodicals in English, Arabic, Hebrew, French, and German. They also have periodicals published before 1948 from the Arab region and the occupied territories, along with documentary films, maps, and photographs.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.palestine-studies.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> “History,” Institute for Palestine Studies, “History,” <https://oldwebsite.palestine-studies.org/content/history>.

<sup>3</sup> Yara Hawari, Sharri Plonski, and Elian Weizman, “Seeing Israel through Palestine: Knowledge Production as Anti-Colonial Praxis,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 158.

IPS's main mission is to archive and preserve Palestinian culture and heritage and to gather and analyze information on the "question" of Palestine. After the Palestinian exodus (Nakba) in 1948, clashing narratives about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict arose, leading—at some point—to the disappearance of Palestinian people and perspectives in British narratives.<sup>4</sup> Founded fifteen years after the exodus and three years before Naksa Day in 1967, the IPS aims to revive and restore this misleading history. As its motto says, IPS is "the most reliable source of information and analysis of the Question of Palestine."

"The insider/outsider dichotomy as a dichotomy proved to be fictive because it ignores the political agency of actors in the communities in which we carry out our research—who are actors, in more than one sense of the word, rather than the more passive and highly problematic designation of 'informants.'"<sup>5</sup> Branches in Lebanon, Palestine, and the United States allow the IPS to collect varied data from many parts of the world. As part of its research methodology, the institute focuses on data collected from Palestinian residents and members of the diaspora. This focus is particularly important because IPS aims to answer the "big question" of Palestine's history and reality. It focuses on documenting stories from Palestine, voicing financial and social challenges, and communicating the daily problems of Palestinians creatively and continually. To do this, IPS is concerned with all individuals who identify as Palestinian, whether by birth, heritage, or sense of belonging. These people were brought up in a wide variety of sociopolitical environments, which makes IPS's research even more rich and diverse. In addition, IPS divided its work into historical categories, beginning in 1963, which allows different generations to participate.

Although there are controversial debates about youth in Palestine, IPS focuses on connecting with younger generations by providing workshops and engaging with social media. The focus on engaging with Palestinian youth and telling their stories to a broader audience reflects Julie Norman's assertion that "youth media representations are especially valuable in the case of Palestine for amplifying the voices of young people, who are often portrayed in the mass media solely as victims or perpetrators of violence."<sup>6</sup> To counter these narratives, IPS amplifies the voices of young people and conducts research on how Palestinian history and current events are shaping the younger generations. IPS collaborates with many universities, such as Birzeit, Columbia, Exeter, and Brown, using

<sup>4</sup> Anaheed Al-Hardan, "Decolonizing Research on Palestinians: Toward Critical Epistemologies and Research Practices," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (2013): 62.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Hardan, "Decolonizing Research on Palestinians," 62.

<sup>6</sup> Julie M. Norman, "Creative Activism: Youth Media in Palestine," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 2 (2009): 254.

research efforts by students and scholars who believe that Palestinian cultural heritage should be preserved.

In the World Humanities Report survey, the IPS pointed to two of its publications as proof of the critical nature of its work. The first, *Palestinians in Syria: Nakba Memories of Shattered Communities* by Anaheed Al-Hardan,<sup>7</sup> aims to show the importance of studying memory in the Palestinian diaspora, since it contributes to the study of the community's struggles and history as a whole. The second example, the Palestine Oral History Archive's project at the American University of Beirut,<sup>8</sup> replicates and complements this point. The project puts memory front and center, opening new angles of exploration in historiography through oral history.

As an organization that deals with a controversial topic often opposed by many powerful institutions and parties, the IPS faces two main challenges. The first obstacle is a linguistic restriction. IPS does not have the capability to fully publish in Arabic. The organization seems to be working on solving this problem: it has launched an Arabic version of the website that includes translated articles from English and original articles in Arabic. On its website, IPS indicates whether a given journal or news article is in English, Arabic, or French or is available in multiple languages. The second main challenge that IPS faced was a shift in international and regional attention from the question of Palestine to the events of the Arab uprisings of 2011.

Rami Salameh suggests that autoethnography is a way to engage people with their disturbed realities.<sup>9</sup> Salameh encouraged his students to reflect on their own experiences and express how they feel about their positions and realities, which led to a discussion of how power plays a big role in shaping their lives. IPS uses this method by giving space to all of those interested in documenting memory in Palestine, specifically youth and students. By acknowledging power and its ability to erase certain histories, IPS is keen to creatively produce knowledge that can address the occupation in Palestine. Through research, debate, discussions, and collaborations, IPS has a crucial role to play in developing resistance against the erasure of a nation and its people.

<sup>7</sup> Anaheed Al-Hardan, *Palestinians in Syria: Nakba Memories of Shattered Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Pages/poha.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> Rami Salameh, *A Critical Autoethnography of Teaching and Writing from Palestine* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

**Tamara Sleiman** is an instructor of linguistics at the American University of Beirut and a research and operations team member at afikra. Sleiman had been a researcher at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and a research consultant at Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, sociophonetics, politics of language, and language policy and planning. Her master's thesis was titled "Dialect Identifiability, Language Attitudes, and Perception of Employability in Lebanon."