



Partecipazione e Conflitto

<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>

ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)

ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)

PACO, Issue 18(3) 2025: 534-549

DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v18i3p534

Published 15 November, 2025

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Grammar of Israeli Settler Colonial Violence and the Genocidal War waged on Gaza: from the Nakba to the 7th of October 2023

Abaher El Sakka

Birzeit University

ABSTRACT: This article analyses the official and unofficial Israeli discourse(s) towards Palestinians since October 7, 2023. These discourses are separate from established historical colonial ones, but the article sheds light on the shifts in semantic structures and uses pertaining to meanings and connotations. First, the article offers examples of official Israeli speeches outlining fundamentally colonial discourses when it comes to arguments and narratives re-employed in the current context of the genocide. Thus, the article examines discourses that fall within the binary structures of the ordinariness of evil; good and evil; progress and savagery; enlightenment and darkness (immorality), and the 'animalization of the Palestinians'. This logic of binarity facilitates calls for forced displacement, urbicide, domicide, annihilations of families, the killing of children, deprivation of food, water and fuel, closures to aid, bombings of cemeteries and hospitals, bombings of Islamic and Christian places of worships, killings of paramedics and volunteers in civil protection and humanitarian aid. Second, the article examines genocidal warfare, which relies on the negation of the existence of Palestinians as a people and community, and the dehumanization's process which allows for the destruction of the land and the people of Palestine. In particular, the article looks at the violence organized against Palestinians of the West Bank since 7th of October, by interrogating the speeches that accompany such acts of violence undertaken by both settlers and military forces. The focus lies on the analysis of the socio-political backgrounds of actors and the discursive and material mobilization of Israeli parties and organizations.

KEYWORDS: Israeli discourse, Settler Colonialism, Genocidal War, discourse(s), Palestine

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: asakka@birzeit.edu

1. Introduction

The current genocidal war waged on Gaza since October 2023 (Nader, 2025) has led some to see it as an extension of the Nakba¹ or, in the words of Khoury (2012a), *al-Nakba al-Mustamirra (the ongoing Nakba)*, **rather than** as a mere response to the armed attack that took place on 7 October 2023. In line with a structural settler colonial framework that produces settler discourses translated into actions through systematic policies, *al-Nakba al-Mustamirra* defines what is occurring nowadays as a planned long-term process. Within this context, the article analyses the official and unofficial Israeli discourse(s) regarding Palestinians since October 7th. The article does not claim that these current discourses are separate from established historical colonial ones, but it notes that there have been some considerable shifts in the semantic structures and uses related to meanings and connotations. The focus is thus on analysing the socio-political backgrounds of key Israeli actors such as journalists or political leaders, their discourses, and their ideological and religious references pertaining to the representation and the dehumanization of Palestinians.

In doing so, it is important to highlight that by the summer of 2025, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reported that more than 100,000 tons of explosives had been dropped on the Gaza Strip since the military aggression began on October 7, 2023, killing more than 62,500 Palestinians in one of the bloodiest wars in the region's modern history. In addition, 2,300 bodies of Palestinian victims have been stolen by the Israeli army from Gaza's cemeteries, seven mass graves were set up inside hospitals and dozens of bodies disappeared either due to decomposition or because they were dissolved.² The almost complete collapse of the health infrastructure (the destruction of 38 hospitals, 81 health centres, 144 ambulances and 54 civil defence vehicles), forced medics to treat more than 2.1 million infectious disease cases, including more than 71,000 cases of epidemic hepatitis B. When it comes to the education sector, 143 educational institutions have been destroyed and 366 have been partially destroyed by the Israeli army, leaving 785,000 students without access to education, while more than 13,000 students, 800 teachers and 150 academics have been killed. The sanitary infrastructure has also been severely damaged, with the destruction of 719 water wells, 330,000 meters of water networks, 655,000 meters of sewage, 3,780 kilometres of electricity cables and 2,105 transformers. The PCBS also estimates the economic losses to more than 42 billion dollars, including 1.25 billion in the agricultural sector alone, as 92% of agricultural lands and 85% of greenhouses have been destroyed, leading to the collapse in the annual production of vegetables from 405,000 tons to only 49,000 tons. When it comes to the religious and civilian infrastructure, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics documented the destruction of 828 mosques and the partial destruction of 167 more, along with three churches and 19 cemeteries. As part of the policy of siege and starvation, Israeli forces have targeted 66 relief facilities and prevented the entry of 37,400 trucks of aid and fuel since the closure of the crossings as of March 15 2025³. Finally, the war has seen the total destruction of the collective memory of Gaza city and its inhabitants, the destruction of more than 200 archaeological monuments, including historical mosques, churches, archaeological sites, houses and public libraries.

¹ The term 'Nakba' is used by Palestinians and Arabs to describe the establishment of the State of Israel. This event was characterised by the destruction of the Palestinian homeland, resulting in the expulsion of its inhabitants through massacres and forced displacement. The term 'Nakba' has been used twice before in Arab-Islamic history: once to describe the Baramika Nakba during the Abbasid period in the 8th century AD, and again by Constantine Zureik in his work *Ma'na al-Nakba* (The Meaning of the Nakba), in August 1948.

² The report appeared on Euronews and is available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2023/11/27/israel-stealing-organs-from-bodies-in-gaza-alleges-human-right-group>

³ Figures available at: https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang_ar/1405/Default.aspx.

It is in this context of near-total destruction that the article articulates the way in which the current genocidal war must be understood in the larger structure of Israeli/Zionist settler colonialism. Several international institutions, including Amnesty International (2024), the International Federation for Human Rights (2025) and the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) as well as the United Nations Special Committee, have defined the war on Gaza as genocide. The IAGS presented a litany of actions undertaken by Israel throughout the 22-month-long war that it recognizes as constituting genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Finally, the UN special rapporteurs have also warned of a plausible risk of genocide in the Gaza strip, and the ICJ recognized the risks of genocide when examining the court case brought by South Africa (2024). In fact, the Gaza Strip has become a laboratory for the systematic grinding down of human dignity, as well as a testing ground for genocidal violence. Genocide can be defined as the deliberate destruction, whether total or partial, of a social group that is perceived as inferior (Lemkin, 1946). This involves defining and setting limits for a group, whether political, social or religious. This can occur over a long or short period of time. Genocide may involve the mass killing of certain groups through physical or symbolic destruction. Some focus on specific aspects of the killing and extermination process, such as the number of victims, as the criterion for invoking the concept of genocide. However, social sciences have shown that genocide can be understood historically (Browning, 1993) and within a social-psychological framework (Milgram, 1974; 2017). These multidisciplinary approaches allow for a deeper understanding of genocide and massacres in comparative historical contexts. For example, Fassina (2023) compared the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples of Namibia to the Palestinian context, when focusing on structural similarities.

2. Fundamental colonial discourse

Several authors, including Balandier (1951), Césaire (1950), Mannoni (1950), Fanon (1965 [1952]; 2002 [1961]), Memmi (1957; 1985 [1957]) and Bourdieu (1958), have sought to explain colonialism and its effects on the colonisers. While their work is central to understand contexts of hegemonic colonial domination, they failed to identify the specific dynamics of the settler society(s) in Palestine. Within the settler colonial framework (Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury, 2014), it is important to understand the colonization of the land and the displacement of its population, through the establishment of two main colonies, one established in 1948 and the other in 1967. The two colonies are linked by the same colonial structure, which enforces shared laws and practices despite their differences in time and structure. This demonstrates that the differences between the two colonies have been fading over time. There are thus a few specific characteristics of settler colonialism. One of those specificities is that it involves the appropriation of a territory inhabited by an indigenous population, with the aim of establishing a foreign settler population in this territory. This appropriation of land and the creation of colonies require the erasure of the indigenous populations already on the land (Wolfe, 2006), which leads necessarily to the destruction of indigenous livelihood and living spaces.

Historically, the founders of Zionism did not show any concern for the Palestinian society their project threatened to harm or destroy. They simply believed that the “renewed” Jewish community would be beneficial for Palestinians by its very nature, and that it was therefore unnecessary to worry about the relationships to be established with them. These dynamics are like those of the French colonizers imbued with the democratic ideology of the French Revolution (Rodinson, 1997 [1967]). In reality, the dominated, colonized society is not only denied the right of self-determination, but even more so, that of interpreting the past, present and future world on its own terms (Mignolo, 2000; 2002). This denial is essential for the colonial project together with the appropriation of the land.

The corollary of the colonial appropriation of Palestinian space is the appropriation of time, meaning that history must be rewritten in such a way that frames the settlers as the rightful owners of the territory, something

that Belhaj's contribution to this special issue also highlights. The settlers are thus made to be the default actors in the history of Palestine, those who constitute the teleological climax of its presence on the land. On this, one observes a double appropriation of time: the appropriation of Arab time (i.e. designation of Palestinian history as insignificant), but also appropriation of Jewish time (i.e. denial of Jewish life outside Palestine as equally insignificant, as there is a home for all Jews irrespective of what they might be located and who are supposed to use their time to promote the Zionist enterprise. As a result, a large part of the Israeli population is no longer content to regard Palestinians as something unforeseen: they have become a problem to be eradicated once and for all. In so doing, the denial of their presence and their history is no longer a furtive practice, but an assertive political program. A final element specific to settlement colonialism, which is repeatedly played out in Israel, is the assertion of cultural superiority, which, in turn, legitimizes the replacement of the indigenous people by Zionist settlers. In 1967, Rodinson (1997 [1967]) asserted, that although they had been discriminated in Europe, the founders of Zionism shared with other Europeans a sense of political superiority regarding their colonial project. This superiority, manifested first and foremost in relation to the Palestinians was furthermore manifested towards other Jewish groups, namely the Jews of Arab and Muslim countries (Shohat, 2017). Such superiority takes three forms: moral, political and civilizational. It is through this historical continuity of alleged superiority that they can carry out a genocidal policy in Gaza, while justifying it in the name of "national security". In fact, the acceptance of the genocidal policy in Gaza among broad segments of Israeli society, manifests the population's support for the colonial enterprise and, as Fanon (2002 [1961]) would put it, the need for brutal repression. This brutality reveals the necessary conditions created by the settlers, for what can be termed a post-necropolitical transfer. Analysing the ongoing genocide through the post-'necropolitics' lens (Mbembe, 2019), we observe the ways in which power is used not only to control life and death, dictating who lives and who dies, but also who is exposed to death. Through the reading Mbembe (2019) offers, what we are witnessing in Gaza is a process to kill off as many living people as possible, as well killing corpses, bombing cemeteries, and kidnapping corpses.

The narrative around the history of the land that settlers now inhabit and the justifications for seizing it also imply the need to develop a further settler narrative regarding the characterization of the natives, the Palestinians. When one digs a little deeper, a racist logic emerges: Arabs are to be eliminated, not only because they are perceived as enemies who threaten the "State of Israel", but also because they are racially inferior. This logic, since very early on, was also applied to the Arab-Jews (Shohat, 2017), who have always been called upon to deny their Arabness-(Chetrit, 2010; Khazzoom, 2003; Shenhav, 2006; Shohat, 1988, 1999). Since Arabs are seen as '[the] Barbarians at the gate' (Rejwan, 2006: 111), Arab, or Oriental Jews, while being part of the settler society, were also subjected to similar racist attitudes reserved for the colonized, which translates into a dehumanization that turns them into a homogeneous group characterized by what they are not rather than by what they are (Memmi, 1985 [1957]). Starting from the premise that settler colonialism is based on transfer, i.e. on the need to physically or cognitively eradicate the natives (Veracini, 2010), these binaries are the primary instrument for both distinguishing between groups and establishing which are to be emulated and which are to be eradicated.

The physical destruction of both Gaza and its population represent a logical Zionist step on the settler continuum, and thus on the broader colonial project. Zionism, which emerged in the latter half of the 19th century, advocated the 'return' of the Jewish people to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state on its land. The ideological foundation of Zionism is predicated on the establishment of a state for a people who lack a homeland, within a geographical entity that is itself, allegedly, lacking a population, as the now famous

saying states: “a land without a people for a people without a land.”⁴ According to this ideology, Palestine was an empty and desertic land before the arrivals of the settlers, and Palestinians were not considered as a people, their relations to their land being ignored or even denied. Therefore, this implies the fact that settlers are superior by nature, from a religious and/or ethnic point of view, because they can make the desert of Palestine bloom and bring modernity to this savage land. We can identify such discourses legitimating the arrival of settlers in Palestine and the theft of land as the perpetuation of European colonial ideology (Dana and Jabari, 2012; Jabari et al., 2012; El Sakka, 2022). In this case, this ideology of religious and ethnic superiority is predicated on the notion that this population is 'God's chosen people' in accordance with religious doctrine (Rose, 2005; Rouhana, 2021).

In August 1975, the session of the Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity, and the conclusions of the August 1975 Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement led the United Nations to adopt a resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism⁵. The resolution was repealed following intense diplomatic pressure exerted by the United States and Israel on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), with the latter persuading numerous countries to vote in favor of the repeal. The repeal of the resolution was in fact a pre-condition for accepting the dialogue with the PLO. Irrespective of these diplomatic and negotiating tactics however, Zionism remains a settler colonial project aimed at establishing a non-indigenous population on a land already inhabited and from this perspective, the territories taken from Palestinians in 1948 constitute *the first colony* (El Sakka, 2022), upon which the entity now recognized as the Israeli state was established. The remaining Palestinian territories - occupied by Israel since 1967 - represent the *second Israeli colony* (El Sakka, 2022) and are fragmented and devastated by the presence and ongoing expansion of settlements as well as by the violent control the Israeli colonial military apparatus exercises. The terms (*al-musta'mara al-awla*) ‘first settlement’ and ‘second settlement’ (*al-musta'mara al-thania*) thus refer to the Palestinian territories colonised by Israel in 1948 and 1967 respectively.

3. Civilizational discourses and dehumanization

The structural analysis carried out so far presupposes that the semantic organization of colonial discourse is not arbitrary but rather a set of social grammar(s) that can be detected by means of empirical indicators. To understand the processes of dehumanization seen within Israeli society for the last two years, one must understand the double dynamic of colonization at work within Israeli common sense, to use Gramsci (1971). In other words, one must understand the way in which a dynamic of discrediting and erasing the Palestinians' relationship to their own space, history and culture is central in Israeli public imagination (Dor, 2021; 2024). In continuity with the genocidal rhetoric and practices in place since the Nakba, this section presents some of the statements Israeli officials, as the colonial administration in place, made since the beginning of the most recent war. As in early years of the Zionist movement (Rose, 2025), Israelis leaders continue to use ‘civilizational’ claims to justify the brutal and inhuman colonized population. The following public declarations were made by the Benjamin Netanyahu. On October 7th 2023: “Gaza is the city of evil, we will turn all the places in which Hamas deploys and hides into ruins. I am telling the people of Gaza – get out of there now. We will act everywhere and with all our strength” (Boffey and Jones, 2023). Shortly after he employed religious rhetoric in his civilizational claim, by stating: “We are the people of the light, they are the people of darkness [...] we shall realize the prophecy of Isaiah” (Disclose TV, 25 oct 2023). A month later he

⁴ The phrase “Palestine is a land without a people for a people without a land” is sometimes attributed to Herzl :Ilan Pappé, *The 1948 War in Palestine*, La Fabrique-éditions, 2000 for the French version, p. 16.

⁵The text is available at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-181963/>

declared: “it is necessary to make cultural changes in Gaza such as in Japan and Germany following WWII” (Treisman and Inskeep, 2023). By December 2023, the rhetoric had escalated further: “we’re facing monsters, monsters who murdered children in front of their parents . . . This is a battle not only of Israel against these barbarians; it is a battle of civilization against barbarism” (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023a). In a similar vein, President Isaac Herzog, declared that: “...we will uproot evil so that there will be good for the entire region and the world” (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023b). Amichai Eliyahu, the Minister of Heritage, invoked eradication: “the spirit of Oslo is still here. And if we don't get rid of it ... we will lose again. With Nazis and their assistants, you don't talk. You eradicate evil from the world. Do you want your pop. [in Gaza] to drink? Release the hostages. Now” (Shaul, 2023a), while Amit Halevi, member of the Israeli Knesset (Likud) also declared: “there should be two goals for this victory: 1. There is no more Muslim land in the Land of Israel... After we make it the land of Israel, Gaza should be left as a monument, like Sodom” (Doyle, 2023). More problematically, but unsurprisingly, the same kind of expressions can be found in the discourse of some American officials, such as Mike Huckabee who was “nominated as Trump's new ambassador to Israel, [and who] signalled his support for Israeli claims on the West Bank in an interview last year. ‘When people use the term ‘occupied’, I say: ‘Yes, Israel is occupying the land, but it's the occupation of a land that God gave them 3,500 years ago. It is their land’” (Williamson, 2025).

In addition to the civilizational discourse, one of the foundations of colonial supremacy is the dehumanisation of the colonised, which serves to justify inhumane colonial practices through semantics and terminology. Numerous Israelis official figures showed such logic in their speeches and declarations since October 7, 2023. For instance, Yoav Gallant, at the time Minister of Defense, compared the entire Palestinian population to animals when saying: “we are imposing a complete siege on [Gaza]. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly” (HRW, 2023). As Gallant, Ron Prosor, the Israeli ambassador to Germany, also compared Palestinians to animals when saying “ [Palestinians are] ‘bloodthirsty animals’, and former Israeli ambassador to the UN, Dan Gillerman, referred to Palestinians as ‘horrible, inhuman animals’” (Miyashiro, 2023). On another level, Itamar Ben Gvir, Minister of National Security, defined all Palestinians as terrorists and called for unlawful punishments: “the terrorists should receive the most stringent conditions, eight handcuffed terrorists in a dark cell, iron beds, toilets in a hole in the floor and Hatikvah [the IL National Anthem] playing on a loop in the background” (Shaul 2023b). Revital Gottlieb, member of the Israeli Knesset (Likud) also declared: “a leadership that has mercy on monsters who massacred us is not worthy of leadership. A ceasefire for several hours is surrender, it is weakness, humiliation ... Without crushing Hamas and razing Gaza, we will not have the right to exist” (Shaul 2023c).

The civilizational discourse is deeply intertwined with the dehumanization of Palestinians. Following the events of October 7, Palestinians have been collectively portrayed as terrorists, against whom all forms of violence are deemed necessary and legitimate. This strategy - widely deployed by France in Algeria as mentioned in the first section, and by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan - aims at normalizing extreme violence by framing it as a response to an existential threat. Labeling an entire population as terrorist normalizes an indiscriminate violence targeting civilians. This discursive framing is especially potent in Western contexts, where the notion of ‘terrorism’ remains a mobilizing tool for governments to justify their actions and international interventions or at the very least interference in foreign countries. Israel gains Western support in part because of this, placing its actions within a broader narrative of counterterrorism and national self-defense. The invocation of terrorism thus becomes a powerful rhetorical device, eventually morphing into an association of the targeted population with non-human entities. Once Palestinians are reduced to sub-humans or animals, the use of annihilative violence becomes ideologically and morally justifiable, framed as a necessary measure to eliminate an existential evil and preserve a higher civilizational order. This is a point

that also emerges from the analysis of the coverage of the war by Israeli media in Pereleman's contribution to this special issue.

Similarities can be drawn with the many other cases of settler colonialism, in which similar discourses and practices can be observed. As mentioned, the Franco-Algerian example is one such case. Comparing Israel discourses on Palestine and French discourses on Algeria reveals striking similarities between the colonial systems imposed on the native population in so far as both colonial cases articulated their mission as a civilizing endeavor. Their presence on the land and 'development' of the colony are presented as a positive evolution in a vacant land for a savage population, insufficiently mature to be able to self-rule (Lalaoui-Chiali 2010). The lexicon of pacification and modernization is also widely deployed in both cases. The systemic violence imposed by colonial governments is being justified through this civilizational and dehumanizing rhetoric, that either portrays the colonized as being dependent and passive human beings who will benefit from the colonizer's rule, or as a threat to progress and security that should be targeted (El Sakka, 2023). The first indication of the colonial content of the encounter between the Zionist movement and the Palestinian population is Zionism's complete disregard for the local population, with the coveted territory presented as either a vacuum *domicilium* or *terra nullius* (Mann, 2005), or, as Israel Zangwill put it in 1901, "a land without a people for a people without a land" (Shapira, 1992: 41-42). Consulting the local population before implementing the Zionist project was never considered because the local population is of no importance. It is important to remember though that has occurred in Gaza since October 7th is a continuation of the Nakba, a foundational event that the state of Israel implemented through a colonial policy that took the form of massacres and the expulsion of populations (Abu Sitta, 2000).

4. Genocidal warfare: Negation of Palestine and Palestinians

State representatives and deputies are not the only actors that spread such discourses. We find such expressions in official media and social media, made by journalists, influencers and well-known personalities, all focused on negating Palestine and its indigenous people. Spreading such an idea and denying the very existence of Palestinians and of their historical relation to the land of Palestine allow for the destruction and forced displacement of the people of Palestine. If Palestinians are not a people, they do not belong to the land and therefore can be forced off it.⁶ The denial of the Palestinian existence can also be shown in settlers' discourses in the West Bank, and their justifications for expanding the occupation there. In November 2023, when questioned about her understanding of the legitimate presence of settlers in the West Bank and the destruction of Palestinian heritage, history, memory, urban places and the community itself, Daniella Weiss, a well-known figure within the extreme right settler movement, answered: "none of the communities in Judea and Samaria are founded on an Arab place or property, and whoever says this is a liar. I wonder why you said it. Why did you say that, since you have no idea about the real facts of history? That's not true. [...] No, you never read things like that. No. There are no pictures" (Chotiner, 2023).

These statements demonstrate not only the lack of recognition that these lands are Palestinian but also the hegemonic rhetoric of denial. This denial is often expressed through biblical expressions erasing the historical connection between Palestinians and their land. Palestinians are being treated as transients. The Israeli colonial state did not invent new tools in the war waged on Gaza; it used its tried and tested military, police, and intelligence methods sharpened over the years with greater intensity. Relying on a powerful tracking and

⁶ See the documentary by Louis Theroux *The Settlers* broadcast on the BBC in 2025 and available at: <https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/louis-theroux-the-settlers/>

suppression apparatus to silence, intimidate, and prevent any expression of opposition to the war or support for the people of Gaza, Israel has simply notched up the abilities of its war machine without fundamentally altering its nature. We can find the same perceptions towards Palestinians whom Israel has imposed Israeli citizenship in the first colony called Arab Israelis by the colonial state. In fact, from the first days of the war, the Israeli establishment, comforted by the overt support of very large sectors of Israeli society, has targeted any expression of opposition to the war or solidarity with Gaza and its people on social media, in places of education and work, or in simple protest vigils. This targeting has exposed Palestinians with Israeli citizenship to outright criminal prosecutions or sanctions in the workplace or the classroom. These measures have ranged from arrests, summons to investigation, indictments, arrest requests, and other legal procedures, often based on serious charges such as ‘supporting terrorism’. This campaign has affected all segments of society, from medical staff to teachers to imams. Since 7th October, Israeli universities have permanently or temporarily expelled dozens of students because of their posts on social media, and some academic institutions have issued immediate eviction orders for some students from their residences. The degree of complicity of Israeli universities went as far as denouncing students to the police and providing them with evidence to enable them to initiate legal proceedings against students on charges of ‘supporting terrorism’ or ‘sympathising with terrorist organisations.’⁷ A report published by the joint body of student blocs operating under the umbrella of the Arab Emergency Committee, shows that more than 100 students were referred to obedience committees⁸. On October 28, the student dormitories at Netanya College were attacked by racist groups that gathered in large numbers, attempting to storm the building. This reality is reminiscent of the post-Oslo days when the establishment tried to contain the outrage of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship for the collapse of the peace talks, but today there is even greater fear and intimidation, as it was in the 1950s during military rule. All this makes life even more difficult for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and it is not unlikely that these policies towards them are part of Israel's project to eliminate the Palestinian cause internally.

In a recent study, Amtanis Shehadeh examined Israeli responses to the 7th of October, explaining the lack of opposition to the war in Gaza within Israeli society as follows: “the absence of a unified movement that is calling for an end to the war and has clear motives and a political alternative to the continuation of the war and occupation means that the voices of those who oppose the war are weakened and dispersed. This prevents the emergence of organised collective action that could challenge the right-wing government coalition. Opposition voices fall into three main categories: The first comprises the families of prisoners and abductees, who demand an end to the war and a prisoner exchange agreement. The second group is motivated by concern for Israel's international interests and standing, as well as fear that the war will result in a decline in this standing and associated damage, and they demand an end to the war of extermination and starvation. The third group is the smallest and least influential. They accuse Israel of committing war crimes, genocide and collective punishment by starvation.”

⁷ See for instance: ‘Israeli academic institutions prosecute Palestinian students for their social media posts in light of the aggression on Gaza,’ Adalah, 26/10/2023.

⁸ Palestinian students, citizens of Israel, from 25 institutions facing disciplinary actions and punitive measures for alleged “support of terrorism.”, Many of the Israeli academic institutions also published official statements declaring that “there will be zero tolerance for “supporting terrorism” and have proceeded to suspend or expel students in a manner that targets Palestinian students, whose posts express their Palestinian identity or solidarity with the Palestinian people in Gaza. See ‘Israeli academic institutions prosecute Palestinian students for their social media posts in light of the aggression on Gaza,’ Adalah, 26/10/2023.

The colonial mentality dominating Israeli society was also seen in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*.⁹ On May 22, 2025, the daily published a survey providing a picture of how Jewish Israelis (the survey did not include Palestinian citizens of the state) felt about the war in Gaza. The poll shows that 82% of Israelis are in favor of forcibly displacing Palestinians in Gaza. Furthermore, it shows that 56% support the expulsion of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship; 47% are in favor of repeating the ‘biblical Jericho massacre’ against civilians in Palestinian cities if they are by the Israeli Defense Forces; 69% of secular Israelis support mass deportations from Gaza and 31% of them justify a genocide along the lines of the “myth of the destruction of Jericho”. The figures in this survey are not particularly surprising and are the logical conclusion of the process of democratic backsliding and increasing illiberalism among Israeli citizens, as Ridge makes clear in her contribution to this special issue. We must add that some Israelis scholars themselves, such as Bartov (2025) recognize that: “in 1948, the “realization of the dream,” whereby Israelis “woke up” to a land generally emptied of its Arab population following the Nakba, was accomplished through massive ethnic cleansing. But this was also a mechanism that operated in many other genocides in the past, beginning with attempts at ethnic cleansing, as in the case of the 1904 genocide of the Herero in German Southwest Africa, the Armenian Genocide in 1915, and, indeed, in the Holocaust, which began as an attempt to remove the Jews from Germany and then other parts of occupied Europe, only to find that there was nowhere to move them to, eventually resorting to outright and increasingly mechanized killing. [...] This genocidal logic is what we are currently seeing in Israel.”

5. Urbicide and domicide

Entire neighborhoods have been destroyed and obliterated in an organized and systematic urban clean-up operation. Needless to say, the places and houses that embodied people's memories were wiped out. This is coherent with colonial policies that seek to erase bodies, sites, cities and memory. In Pierre Nora's (1984) sense, the destruction of places of memory tears apart relationships, social roles and community structures. They affect the ability to live in dignity and erase as much the past as the future. Large parts of Gaza's old town have been destroyed, wiping out its rich neighborhoods and markets. This means that the suffering has been generalized to all social strata, making this a war that transcends denominations, classes and regions. These practices have been qualified as ‘war crimes’ and ‘crimes against humanity’, as attested by human rights organizations or by the UN rapporteur Francesca Albanese (2024).

In this respect, the concept of total violence needs to be added to the vocabulary of what Israel's colonial structure and its systemic and structural control mechanisms do. Some researchers (Guiomar, 2004; Grubaudi, 2005; Bell, 2010) use the concept of ‘total violence’ to refer to the number of victims, as is often the case when studying wars in Western Europe or terrorism, as Isabelle Sommier (2002) does. However, here we use the term to understand the ‘total violence’ exercised by the state and in this case by Israel as a colonial state. This type of violence goes beyond actions directed against specific individuals and groups within a society. It is carried out by the colonial state as a deliberate practice of disruption of all components of Palestinian society: political, economic and social. This ranges from extreme violent practices (attempted obliteration, murder, destruction) to practices of ‘ordinary violence’, i.e. in everyday life, like food deprivation. Total violence must be understood within the Nakba continuum in which the Zionist movement's denial of the Palestinian relationship to their land, and the denial of the existence of a Palestinian people, has been exercised for decades. This denial has led to the death, expulsion and exodus of some 850,000 Palestinians and the destruction of 518

⁹ See the article at: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/2025-05-22/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/00000196-f3a3-d6d3-ab9e-f3bbf6070000>

villages in 1948 (Abu Sitta, 2000). The policy of ethnic and spatial eradication, including massacres, has been apprehended within different conceptual frameworks: sociocide (Abdel Jawad, 2006); mass exclusion (Ophir et al., 2009); spatio-cide (Hanafi, 2009); politicide (Kimmerling, 2003); the segmentation and exploitation of resources and territories, such as labor, or the administration of populations (Gordon, 2008), workforce and the administration of populations; and more recently, since the 2023-2024 war, the violence has been defined by Latte Abdallah (2024) as futuricide. Martin Shaw (2004) has recently suggested that total war means that cities and their inhabitants have become the *de facto* targets of war and bombardments, consolidating a move away from the selective destruction of key sites in cities to large-scale attacks on populated urban areas and the outright elimination of entire urban spaces with their populations and infrastructures.

The goals of Israeli colonization are realized not only in the immediate liquidation of Palestinian families and their homes, and in the colonial control of the vital processes of the Palestinian body, but also in the transformation of Gaza into a space of death for many years to come, and in the creation of a war biosphere that creates tools and methods for reshaping the health of the population, ensuring that the damage continues and is regularly renewed after the war. Systematically destroyed and de-urbanized infrastructures and cities shape the biosphere of war, transforming it from a tool for organizing and supporting modern life into a system of death and an environment that attracts epidemics, disabilities and health vulnerability. The intensity of the colonial erasure of the Palestinian people and spaces has led to a brutal tearing apart of social and family fabrics and their intimate relationships, and thus to a forced abandonment of the roles attached to maternity, paternity, filiation, dependence and mutual aid.

In other words, the structure of colonial annihilation creates a new, oppressive environment in which the various social roles of Gaza's inhabitants are reshaped, social and economic hierarchies destroyed, and styles and ways of living altered. By depriving individuals of the opportunity to provide for their families, it is the traditional roles of family members that face far-reaching social, economic and emotional change. Thus, the discourses that emerged after October 7, 2023, are not new, but simply represent a continuation of these principles. What has changed is that the discourses calling for the destruction of Gaza and, more broadly, of Palestinians, now permeate all spheres of Israeli society and are widely disseminated internationally.

6. Violence against Palestinian in the West Bank

In a statement on X, Eliyahu Yossiansaid, a settler residing in the West Bank, said clearly: “annexing areas C is a must thing... Annexing the northern part of the Gaza Strip is a must... It is important to note that the value of the land is not only biblical but gives us a geopolitical depth and a grip on the territory...” (Shaul 2023d). This practice of colonialist discourses and conformity with state policies, is manifested among the segments of the population that most identify with these policies and explains why Gaza has not been the only target of state violence. The annexation of the West Bank has been put forth quite clearly as a goal Israel should pursue while also destroying Gaza.

According to a 2025 OHCHR report: “systematic aerial and ground attacks on Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarem and Tubas governorates, particularly targeting refugee camps, have been a feature of the Israeli assault on the West Bank since 7 October 2023. At the end of August 2024, Israeli occupation forces launched a full-scale military operation against these areas, killing at least 39 Palestinians, including women and children and injuring dozens... Experts were gravely concerned about comments by the Israeli Defence Minister that sought to justify the new onslaught as a response against Palestinian terrorism. The Minister invoked the concept of the iron wall, coined by Jabotinsky, a founder of Zionism, to argue for a crushing, unyielding defence.” The report, which covers the period from 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, also shows a significant expansion of

Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. According to Israeli NGO Btselem¹⁰, steps have been taken to implement plans to build more than 20,000 housing units in new and existing Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, while 214 Palestinian properties and structures in East Jerusalem have been demolished. More than 10,300 units are planned in existing Israeli settlements in the rest of the West Bank, and an unprecedented 49 new Israeli outposts have been established.

In all of this, the line between settler violence and state violence has blurred further, leading to increased violence and impunity, the report also reveals, highlighting the measures taken by Israel to further militarize the settler movement. In particular, thousands of settlers have been recruited into the Israeli security forces operating in the West Bank. The report shows a monthly average of 118 incidents of settler violence, compared to 108 in 2023, which was already a record year. A total of 1,779 Palestinian structures were demolished in the West Bank for what is often considered by the State/authorities as ‘lack of building permits. The permits are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, resulting in the forced displacement of 4,527 people. The number of Palestinians forcibly displaced by demolitions increased by almost 200% compared with the previous period” (PCNS, 2025a) The operation that began in the Jenin refugee camp in 2025 and had spread to the Tulkarem, Al Far’a and Nur Shams refugee camps, each time with systematic outbreaks of violence against Palestinians.

Human rights organization have shown that the Israeli occupation authorities and settlers have been operating with impunity, protected by the Israeli occupation army, and have perpetrated 16,612 attacks against Palestinian citizens and their property during 2024. The attacks were distributed as follows: 4,538 attacks on religious properties and places, 774 attacks on land and natural resources, and 11,330 attacks on individuals. The attacks resulted in the uprooting, damage and bulldozing of a total of 14,212 trees, including 10,459 olive trees. Furthermore, during the initial three months of this year, the Israeli occupation authorities and settlers instigated in excess of 5,470 attacks on citizens, property and religious sites. In addition to the aforementioned attacks, the Israeli occupation authorities implemented arbitrary measures, including the deployment of checkpoints and gates at the entrances of the majority of Palestinian communities. These checkpoints, numbering approximately 900, significantly impeded the movement of citizens and their transit between Palestinian communities and cities (PCBS, 2025b). These practices of the Israeli colonial administration in the West Bank, and its assistance to settlers in carrying out abuses against Palestinians, discards the official Israeli argument that the military operations in the West Bank in parallel to the genocidal war waged on Gaza are a response to Hamas. There is no real presence of Hamas cells in the West Bank, and the displacement and uprooting of trees, the arrest of thousands of Palestinians, and the attack on villagers’ homes are linked to a colonial mentality and colonial plans.

7. Conclusion

The current genocidal war waged on Gaza has shown that, in addition to organized and planned massacres, it aims to displace Gaza’s population, as a continuation of the Nakba. Military plans call for the transformation of the northern Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, into a military zone. This would mean the expulsion of over 1.6 million people from the northern Gaza Strip to the south. These urban and social genocides aim to transform the Gaza Strip into a depopulated and uninhabitable zone. Urban genocide destroys the memory of places and spaces in addition to people's relationship with their towns and villages, uprooting them and their generational connection to the land. The structural and essential aspects of Zionist colonisation in Palestine, as settler

¹⁰ The report can be found at: <https://www.btselem.org/>

colonialism and military occupation, are aimed at destroying and dismantling the indigenous society. The Israeli settler society as a whole has implemented, and continues to implement, a colonial 'global system of violence' that has resulted in an ongoing catastrophe of massacres, executions, forced displacement, destruction and war.

The settler Zionist movement, since the early 19th century to current days, acts to Judaize spaces, alters the topographical and geographical landscape, modifies the environment and denies the collective identity of the indigenous community as a society and as a people. It has created new social categories based on ethnic and racial divisions and has disseminated a supremacist and racist discourse through narratives that legitimize their illegitimate and inhumane practices. In addition, it has applied policies of exclusion against the indigenous population and invented names, a sort of colonial social engineering aimed at transforming the spaces and lands of the settlers and at changing Palestinian society into one subjugated to a policy of economic annexation and growth based on the employment of a large part of the colonised population working in the Israeli market and in the settlements, while maintaining clear differences between the inhabitants of the two colonial regimes.

The practices in what I have named *the first colony* and the *second colony* show that all Palestinians are demonized and treated as pariahs on their own land. The practices in the first colony from 1948 were a reminder that technical approaches to the colonial condition are a way of spreading analytical illusions. On the contrary, the use of the same repressive practices in the 1950s against Palestinian citizens of Israel today reminds all Palestinians that they live under a colonial condition, albeit with different forms of repression. The process of historically belittling Palestinians, framing them as savages and dehumanizing them is part of the practices of the colonial state that functions through a racist and discriminatory ideology. The practices of the army and settlers attacks on Palestinians in 1948 and the almost total identification of the colonial society with genocidal policies, is nothing but confirmation that it is time to break with the illusions of analysis in the social sciences that continue to describe the colonial situation as a conflict between two parties, which is a cognitive distortion. Not naming the current violence in terms of genocidal war is biased towards the narrative of the colonialist. The violence currently wrought in the genocidal war on the Gaza Strip should motivate researchers in the social sciences and humanities to break with technical analyses, and to assert that what is happening in Gaza, the killing and annihilating of more than 7% of the population, can and must be defined as a genocide.

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AUTHOR'S INFORMATION

Abaher El Sakka is Professor of Sociology in Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Dean of Arts Birzeit University, Palestine. He is also Editor-In-Chief of *Idafat: the Arab Journal of Sociology*, and Vice-chair at The Arab Council for the Social Sciences. He worked as a lecturer at the University of Nantes from 1998-2006 and was a visiting professor at several French and Belgian universities from 2009-2025. His research focuses on cultural processes and societal practices, as well as political and identity issues and artistic expressions, social movements, colonialism, social history, histories of the social sciences, urban studies. A large part of his research focuses on the social history of Gaza City.