

Unveiling the colonial violence of space in the Gaza genocide

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Abstract

This article addresses the ongoing genocidal war and extended blockade of Gaza that has been in effect since 2007, framing it as a manifestation of colonial violence against space and a collective punishment. I reflect on my positionality as a Palestinian UK-based scholar whose work focuses on captivity and resistance in Israeli prisons and the impact of colonization on my life and my family who are living under this genocidal war. Drawing from personal experience, I recount the forced displacement of my family from space, the destruction of our family home and the subsequent struggles of sheltering in the harsh conditions of tents amid the cold, lacking the essential necessities of dignified life, such as food and warmth. The narrative extends the broader dehumanization and dehistoricization of the Palestinian people enacted by the international colonial discourse embraced by Western liberal media, which works to justify the current genocide and mass killing of Palestinian civilians. This highlights the media's blindness to the historical context, exposing the current war of Gaza as a continuation of the Zionist colonizer's relentless effort since Nakba 1948 to eliminate Palestinian existence and erase them from the space. By shedding light on these critical issues, the article seeks to challenge prevailing narratives and reflect a more nuanced understanding of the Palestinian struggle for existence within the space they call homeland.

Keywords

Displacement, genocide, lived experience, open air prison, settler colonialism, violence of space

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Introduction

In this article, I employ an expansive interpretation of Nirmal Puwar's (2004) concept of 'Space Invaders' in the context of settler colonialism in Palestine. Specifically, I examine the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza, framing it as an illustration of colonial genocidal violence directed toward both space and the people within it. This violence is evident in the Israeli colonial state's deliberate efforts to erase and ethnically cleanse Palestinians (Pappe, 2007). The settler colonial state serves as the agent of invasion, systematically eradicating both the physical and human dimensions of space. Settler colonialism is a structure rather than an event and is driven by the logic of elimination, which seeks to erase the indigenous presence from the land (Wolfe, 2006). This manifests itself through various forms of violence, including physical, cultural and epistemic forms that work together to replace the indigenous presence with a settler society. This violence is not only physical, as seen in bombardment and displacement of Palestinians, but also cultural and epistemic, aiming to annihilate Palestinian identity, knowledge and heritage. Baruch Kimmerling (2006) introduced the term 'politicide' in his critique of Israeli policies toward Palestinians. He argues that these actions were intended to 'destroy the political national existence of a whole community of people and thus deny them the possibility of self-determination' (Kimmerling, 2006: 4).

Gaza is often described as the world's largest open-air prison, where 2.3 million Palestinian have been confined and subjected to harsh inhumane blockade since 2007. This constrained space has tragically evolved into a concentration camp marked by the slaughter of Palestinians and loss of lives due to bombardment during the current genocide. Sari Hanafi (2009) describes this as 'spacio-cide', a form of violence targeted at both space and its inhabitants. Initially developed during the second Intifada, he later elaborated it explaining how Israeli policies systematically target and destroy the spatial and social fabric of Palestinian life (Hanafi, 2013). In a further recent expansion of the concept, he sees the war in Gaza as the Israeli's settler colonial project, having shifted from 'spacio-cide' targeting Palestinian land and space to outright genocide, resulting in not only the destruction of physical structures but also the denial of Palestinians' right to life and self-determination (Hanafi, 2023). Henri Lefebvre (1992) perceives space as intricately tied to social reality, where people are continually experiencing and shaping the space they inhabit. In Gaza, the production of the space is dominated by the violent practices of the Israeli forces, which seek to confine and obliterate Palestinian existence through the territorial confinement imposed on Palestinians coupled with the destruction of their living space. The mass demolition of residential structures in Gaza has given rise to the term 'domicide', referring to the destruction aimed at rendering the territory uninhabitable. This term first appeared in 2001, in the work of J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith in their book 'Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home' which highlighted the Israeli strategy of making Gaza uninhabitable through the destruction of the institutional infrastructure, including the erasure of Gaza's education system. Alberto Toscano (2024) labeled this as an act of 'scholasticide', 'educide' and 'epistemicied', and identified it as part of a broader assault on Palestinian intellectual life aimed not only at eradicating Palestinian bodies but also at annihilating their knowledge, culture and prospects.

The intentional targeting of civilians by Israel has resulted in the complete eradication of hundreds of families from the population register. Approximately, 1.5 million people have been forced to leave and are now displaced. This includes my family whose ancestral home is one of the many victims. Their 4 months of multiple displacements echo the experience of most Palestinian families. Documenting their stories serves as a counter-narrative to the Western media embedded in the global colonial system, and serves as a means to write back against the dominant narrative that silences indigenous voices (Smith, 2013). In a forthcoming article on feminist decolonizing methodology (Ajour, 2025), I propose a storytelling approach to address the challenges associated with writing about human suffering in a research process within the framework of a feminist decolonizing research. My approach involves dismantling boundaries between knowledge and humanity positioning. ‘Writing from the heart’ is a critique of the prevailing liberal paradigm and necessitates empathy, and a distinct genre of writing about human suffering. This approach allows me to articulate personal and intimate emotions with regard to my family’s experience during the Gaza genocide and has proven to be therapeutic in that it provides a space for me to navigate and heal my own pain and trauma of witnessing my loved ones live this horror.¹

The first section of this article addresses my positionality as a Palestinian scholar and focusses on the themes of captivity and resistance. Then, based on text messages and phone calls between us, I discuss my family’s construction of the meaning of their experience of genocide and provide the historical context of settler colonialism and the systematic erasure of Palestinians from the space since 1948 with an overview of the current genocide in Gaza. The conclusion of this article centers on the dehumanization of the Palestinian people by the colonial liberal discourse.

My positionality as a Palestinian scholar studying captivity and resistance

I am a Palestinian scholar based in the United Kingdom, focusing on research topics related to captivity and hunger strike resistance within the context of settler colonialism in Palestine. The cause of political prisoners reflects the broader historical context we are both embedded in and which we embody. While I have not experienced incarceration like my research participants, to live under occupation is to exist in an open-air prison. Ilan Pappé’s (2017) ‘The Biggest Prison on Earth: The history of the Israeli Occupation’ argues that the Palestinian colonized lands should be conceptualized as the most extensive mega-prison in the world. Within a militarily colonized space, Palestinians are effectively confined to de facto prisons and cantons due to the absence of freedom of mobility. They are denied freedom of movement due to closure, checkpoints and a segregation apartheid wall. Walid Daqqa (2010) demonstrates that the Israeli regime has created a system based on the most up-to-date oppression techniques, making prisons a model of the segregated controlled Palestinian lands. The conditions of Palestinian citizens are parallel to the conditions of Palestinian prisoners, not only in the form of oppression and torture, but also in the way they are held in segregated geographical cantons and isolations. This fundamental similarity enables us to understand the entire Palestinian scene – from the small prison to the big prison.

In 2014, I relocated to London from Ramallah in the West Bank where I used to live, totally separated from my family in Gaza, my place of birth. I have been separated for years from my family. The Israeli Ministry of Interior refused to grant travel permits for both my children and me, thus preventing us from any connection to family roots in Gaza. Even when my father had surgery in a hospital in Jerusalem, I was unable to obtain the necessary permit to be by his side during this critical time. This geographical segregation of our space has instilled a profound sense of captivity within us.

Since October 7, the Israeli authorities have escalated the detention campaigns against Palestinian political prisoners with at least six Palestinian prisoners dying in prison due to torture. The Prisoners Association in the West Bank and Jerusalem documented 3000 cases in October alone. To date (February 2024), there are approximately 8800 detainees held in Israeli prisons. Political prisoners and their families are subjected to violent assaults and attacks by the Israeli authorities during detention operations, including threats of killing, violent beatings, field interrogation, threats of rape and the use of civilians as human shields. One of the videos circulating online shows Israeli soldiers torturing and abusing civilians in a degrading manner, after taking off their clothes and beating them while handcuffed and blindfolded. Israeli authorities have a policy of arresting family members of the wanted people to apply pressure and force those people to turn themselves in.

Incarceration is an integral part of the broader system of Israeli colonial repression (Nashif, 2008). Rashid Khalidi (2014) noted that the Israel state was established as a carceral state and has taken the traditional approach of isolation, confinement and control by creating settlement blocs, segregation walls, checkpoints and a vast prison structure to control the Palestinian people. In my book *Reclaiming Humanity in Palestinian Hunger Strike* (2021), one of the research participants I interviewed said ‘if you don’t leave your room for four or five continuous days (you could) experience our feeling’, adding ‘this is voluntary in your comfortable home, so imagine if you are forcibly held under detention for long years and you don’t know when you will be free and you don’t know why you are in prison’. Can we imagine 2.3 million people, in what is effectively a prison, slowly starving to death under constant bombardment? Imprisonment is part of the overall picture of the practice of colonial power that confines, debilitates and expels the Indigenous people by a carceral system that extends beyond Israeli jails. The Gaza Strip has become the world’s largest open-air prison where people have been living in a confined and besieged ghetto for years. But Gaza is now a concentration camp where all civilians – men, women, the elderly, children – are subjected to collective death.

What do we imagine happens when human beings are imprisoned and deprived of food, water and electricity? The hunger strikers resisted using their bodies as weapons to reject their dehumanization. How then does the Israeli government not expect that the Palestinian people will resist their collective dehumanization? People living in that complete siege feel that they do not have any hope or future. Severe movement restrictions make it difficult to travel abroad for work, study, or to visit family. The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated places in the world and more than half of Gaza’s population (60 percent/1.85 million) are refugees expelled from their homes in other parts of Palestine in 1948 and now living just a few kilometers away from their original homes and towns. Since imposing the siege on Gaza in 2007, Israel has launched four wars, this

being the latest. In 2015, the UN warned that conditions were deteriorating and that by 2020 Gaza could be uninhabitable. Israel's siege on Gaza has devastated the economy. About 56 percent of Palestinians in Gaza suffer from poverty and youth unemployment stands at 63 percent, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. This latest war is probably the final nail in the collective coffin. Negotiations are currently in progress aimed at halting the genocide in Gaza, with a primary focus on the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli prisons. The scenario extends far beyond the concerns of just the Israeli hostages and Israel is unwilling to release the Palestinian political prisoners.² At the same time, the 2.3 million residents of Gaza have essentially functioned as hostages for the past 17 years enduring an inhumane and severe blockade.

The lived experience of my family: multiple displacement out of the space

The wartime suffering experienced by my family involved multiple displacements under murderous bombardments. On October 13, Israel forced more than 1 million Palestinians in the north of Gaza to leave their homes and go south, which was supposed to be safe but continued to be targeted. My sister conveyed this distressing news to me via WhatsApp text: 'imagine, they ordered everyone, million and a half in the north to go south. It is insanity, just an insane genocide'. Unable to comprehend the catastrophic situation, I turned to the news for confirmation. I initially doubted the feasibility of such a mass displacement considering it might be a psychological tactic by Israel to instill fear. However, my sister's subsequent messages confirmed the shocking reality when she responded with horror that they were under intense bombardment very close by, leaving them and the children terrified and screaming. They received recorded messages urging them to flee due to an imminent 'carpet bombing' targeting residential areas, and my family found themselves on the streets uncertain of the fate of our home. With this disturbing update, I closed my phone and tried to visualize my family's situation on the streets. My heart felt heavy and my body trembled with a mix of emotions, leaving me overwhelmed with anger and uncertainty.

My father initially resisted leaving the house, but my brother, who had returned from the United States in the summer of 2023 just before the war, persuaded him. They decided to seek refuge in the heart of Gaza city, moving to our flat in the Tal Al-Hawa area – a home my mother had invested in as a teacher. The flat, situated near the sea, was part of a housing project for educators, where my youngest sister lived with her small family when she decided to settle in Gaza after she returned recently from Dubai. But this relocation offered scant safety, for my sister informed me that the tower next to our building, which housed numerous families, received a warning that it was about to be bombed. 'We had to flee in a hurry, unable to even change our clothes and sought refuge in our sister's husband's relative's home'. In a heartbreaking video she sent, all my family members, including our parents, two sisters and my sister's children were shown sleeping on the floor in one single room. Watching this distressing scene, especially seeing my elderly parents, left me reeling about the injustices being inflicted upon my family. The

following day, my sister said that despite the evacuation warning, the tower was not bombed. This reveals the psychological warfare being waged against the Palestinians as most of the places are bombed quite randomly without any prior notice. The Israeli army spokesman Danil Hagari stated, 'we are dropping hundreds of tons of bombs on Gaza, the focus is on destruction not accuracy'. The objective seems to be the eradication of homes from the space, geocoding bodies and dehumanizing the Palestinians.

The following day, my sister sent me a disturbing account about the violent bombardment resulting in the deaths of numerous people. She said evacuation messages were circulated but they are no longer certain if they are true, mentioned that the local hospital in the area has been bombed and bewailed the bombs raining on innocent people's heads.

She found it hard to process the situation and the fact that even those seeking refuge in the hospital are not safe. Gaza city became increasingly dangerous due to airstrikes and destruction, prompting my family to forcibly evacuate once again, seeking refuge in the south where my sister fortunately resides. The journey from Gaza to the south was 'a death journey' as my parents described it, with my family witnessing cars being bombed right before their eyes. They miraculously escaped death in their way, but tragically lives were lost among those attempting to escape to the south due to the continuous heavy Israeli airstrikes. Consequently, some people in the north, including my uncles, decided to remain in their homes fearing to be targeted during their journey south.

After my family left to the south in Khan Younis, both our apartment in the Tal Al-Hawa neighborhood and our ancestral home in the north were reduced to rubble. I received photographs capturing the devastation and my parents were immersed in grief and inconsolable. Destroying our family home equates to erasing the family memories and history that are woven within our family. The impact of the destruction affected my soul even from a distance. However, I tried to reassure them, emphasizing that the most important is their safety and that we could work together to rebuild our family house. Despite Israel designating the south as safe, it was targeted by airstrikes. My sister mentioned being dangerously close to bombardment when she ventured out to bring food. I advised against risking herself. In response, she shared a video of my 4-year-old nephew, Rezek, asking her not to go out, as if he knows that I am scared and my heart is trembling. My sister mentioned that they managed to have a few fragmented hours of sleep that she considers a significant achievement given the constant carpet bombing throughout the nights. I witnessed on the news the devastation of the Al Zahra city towers in Khan Younis, viewing images capturing their former beauty juxtaposed with the aftermath of their erosions. A female journalist expressed her sorrow and mourned the loss, revealing that her home was situated there and that she had left her family in these towers that were now reduced to ruins after the bombardment. I listened to my father's voice over the phone describing the difficult situation they are facing and requesting prayers for their rescue and safety. My brother remarked that we had always perceived our father as strong, and now, he has asked for our prayers.

The hardest time is when I lose contact with my family due to communication blackouts heightening my anxiety. Upon the restoration of communication, I heard my mother sobbing on the phone out of concern for my wellbeing, after they knew that some individuals in the diaspora have suffered from anxiety and had strokes worrying about their loved ones in Gaza. My sister also provided me with updates on my other extended

family members because I am anxious about my uncles and aunts. Sometimes she does not know their news due to lack of connections in Gaza, but she learned about the air-strikes in the north without any warning and that the house next to my grandmother's was destroyed, which raised our anxiety about my sick uncle who has a lung disease. My family continues to live in fear in Khan Younis, facing the constant threat of death. Every morning as soon as I wake up, if I managed to get some hours of sleep, I hurry to check my phone for my sister's message to ensure they are still alive. She described a horrifying night where three houses in their areas collapsed and 21 were killed. She said 'The situation is insane, with our house shaking, children are screaming in terror, and we lie to calm them telling them the bombardment is far. I have a feeling of disbelief, hoping it is just a nightmare'.

My nephew expressed his hate of the night, struggling to sleep due to the frightening atmosphere. My sister remarked:

there is no language to describe what the night brings; it is different from the endurance we could bear in daylight. It feels like Israel deliberately chooses the night for attack to torture us more. I experience fear at night and think of the impact on children. It is disjointed sleep if we manage to have some.

This time I received a video revealing the use of white phosphorus bombs, which is prohibited internationally, and the footage shows the smoke illuminating the sky. My sister shared a frightening experience, describing an incident where she opened the window and had a ball of fire shoot in her direction. This left her in a state of shock and trembling for some time. She chose not to share this with my parents to avoid their worry. There were subsequent explosions and then the wail of arriving ambulances.

Every night, they faced what seemed like the ultimate challenges only to experience even more horrifying events on subsequent nights. Confronting relentless bombing they gathered in the corridor, believing it to be the safest space within the home where they huddled together and prayed for safety and strength. Amid the bombardment, the struggle extended beyond survival to find necessities, such as food, water and clothing. Forced to hastily evacuate they had no extra clothes and other belongings. They faced great danger if they ventured outside to secure essential provisions, my two sisters were terrified by the bombing trying to get back home, where they had the added burden of hauling the water to the fifth floor. My brother and I managed to transfer support to my sister for the purpose of helping needy people in Gaza. She described people in the streets struggling to find refuge. The market in Khan Younis had been turned into a shelter for displaced people, but of course lacked even the most basic resources. At my request, she tried to support displaced children in the UN schools by giving them biscuits or chocolates. In collaboration with the school's head, they tried to organize a short activity for children before distributing the treats, but the plan failed as the presence of food led to an attack by hungry deprived children. Witnessing the scene left her in tears and she shared the videos of the children with me.

Like the massive destruction in the north, the most challenging period in Khan Younis occurred when Israel targeted the area with carpet bombing. During this time, my family endured a hard time witnessing the burning of the houses surrounding them.

These difficult circumstances caused my mother to break down and instilled terror in my two sisters and their children. My mother said that death would be a relief from the ongoing torture and daily struggle to survive. Despite my sister's strength in updating me and supporting my parents and the children, she felt that their lives hung on the edge of death. This intense experience has persisted now for over 2 months.

Despite these critical circumstances, Israel has now issued an evacuation order for Khan Younis. My family, having already relocated from the north of Gaza, cannot face leaving once again. Where was there to go? My elderly parents, having navigated a death journey from the north to the south, were now facing shelter in tents during December's cold weather. My sisters were uncertain whether they too should leave. The difficult choice was to face potential death in Khan Younis or sheltering in cold weather, with no guarantee of safety from bombardment.

When I and my brother reached out to help our family to decide, my two sisters were in tears, my mother collapsed and my father was at a loss. It was challenging for me to intervene in such a critical decision, fearing that if I suggested leaving, they might face danger on their way, and if I advised staying, their home could be bombed. I discussed it with my brother, believing that this decision should be made by them. These few days leading up to their displacement from Khan Younis were incredibly difficult for me and I suffered from sleep deprivation from the fear of waking up to the loss of my family. They continue to send live videos of the bombings they were experiencing, and the sight of explosions near to them terrified me. Watching these videos, the fear of these explosions killing and taking the lives of my family members reminded me of what I had seen in the news – Israelis inscribing messages on the rockets before they penetrated the bodies of our children. Amid the bombing in Khan Younis, people were forced to evacuate. My sister describes the heartbreaking scene of people wandering the street, unsure of where to go, carrying whatever belongings they could manage. They sought refuge in UN schools or shelter in tents in the Rafah or Almawasi areas in the south.

My family's third displacement led them to an isolated area of Almawasi where they found temporary refuge in tents by the sea. I had no connection with my family for 2 weeks due to the absence of electricity and the Internet. Then, I finally received a voice message from my sister assuring me that they were still alive but enduring extremely challenging and degrading conditions: dehumanization, hunger, cold, illness and filth. Despite this she had managed to come to Rafah once to charge her phone and send this message providing me with some needed relief from the 2 weeks without any updates from my sister. A few days later my brother managed to contact them, enabling me to hear my parents' voices over his phone. My mother could only express her concerns about us not knowing their news through tears, saying that they were living in dreadful conditions. I learned from my sister that she had fallen ill from consuming food contaminated with bacteria, the only option available to them. My father's voice indicated that he had caught a cold and conveyed that they lacked enough blankets to keep them warm. He said, 'I tried to fold the blanket into two layers to generate some warm since I only have one'. Later, my mother sent me a voice message to say that she remained unwell but was able to obtain some medicine from Rafah. She said that their situation was torture marked by hunger, cold and illness, and they lacked sufficient clothing and blankets. The destruction of our home resulted in the loss of most of our belongings including kitchen

tools and plates. 'We find ourselves having to wait for those currently using the plates to finish so that others can use them' she said. On rainy days, the tent roofs leak onto their blankets and clothes, making it difficult for them to sleep and there is a daily struggle to secure food and living necessities amid the lack of any basics for a decent life. They survive day at a time.

My mother said 'There is nothing harder for a human being than living outside his home. Living as displaced people is the last thing we imagined'. I never imagined that my parents would ever find themselves in such a desperate situation. My father, who had been a nationally famous football player, and my mother who is a well-known educationist are now struggling to live in tents and cannot sleep from cold. The bitterness of living in such conditions increases the feeling of oppression and dehumanization every day. The war does not differentiate between old or young, rich or poor. My sisters describe their life as tragic, constantly exhausted and fearful of permanent displacement. 'We had hoped to return home after the war, but the destruction of our home left us uncertain about where to go once the war finally ends'. My family is not fine and lives a precarious life in dangerous circumstances. The war eliminates everything, their home, dreams and futures.

Erasing Palestinian from the space since 1948 Nakba

The 2023 genocide in Gaza is a continuation of the 1948 Nakba, which was marked by the displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians to uphold the Zionist settler project. The term is used to describe both the events of 1948 and the ongoing persecution of the Palestinian people. In 1948, Palestinians were forced to leave their land and seek refuge in other countries or remain in colonized Palestine.³ This resulted in the forceful Zionist acquisition of 78 percent of Palestine, leading to widespread destruction, with approximately 300,000 Palestinians displaced due to the Zionist occupation of the remaining 22 percent of Palestinian land comprising the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem after the 1967 war. Then, in 1982, Israel forces bombarded Palestinian resistance in Beirut, further contributing to the destruction and displacement of the Palestinian people (Gelvin and Gelvin, 2005; Pappé, 2004; Shindler, 2013). Patrick Wolfe (2006), in his article, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', posits that the essence of the settler colonial project lies in the elimination of indigenous people. He contends that settler colonialism is not invariably genocidal but is inherently eliminatory of the native, with a focus on permanent settlement and the appropriation of land (p. 387). It is a project aimed at the elimination, both symbolically and physically, of the native population by settlers, intending to replace their existence by a settler entity.

Palestinian striving to break free from structural dispossession and devastation plays a pivotal role in shaping the Palestinian collectively and the formation of Palestinian political identity. This is a process of dismantling the structural loss, and paves the way for a new existence that transcends loss and dispossession. Edward Said's work 'The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Self Determination, 1969–1994' portrays Palestinians as a historically oppressed people subjected to colonial cruelty, rendering them susceptible to loss and harm. Within this narrative, Israeli settler colonialism commits an injustice against people stripped of all rights, transforming them into 'victims of victims'.

Said (1995) presents the Israeli state, marked by a tragic history of genocide and persecution, as responsible for dispossessing the rights of the people it displaced.

Building on Said's insights into land and exile as discussed in 'After the Last Sky', Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano (2017), in their article 'Representing Palestinian Dispossession: Land, Property and Photography in Settler Colony', delve into the correlation between property and the experience of dispossession. But the specificity of Zionist settler colonialism extends beyond property and land dispossession. It encompasses the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland, contributing to the decades-long Palestinian refugee crisis and suffering (Benvenisti et al., 2007; Brynen and El-Rifai, 2007; Dumper, 2007; Salih, 2013). The fundamental demand for Palestinian historical rights lies in the demand for the right of return for Palestinian refugees experiencing forced exile (Weiner, 1997). For Said, Palestine is a political and human experience that embodies the emancipatory logic of anti-colonial humanism.

The ongoing colonial violence of space in Gaza genocide

For more than 4 months, Palestinians in Gaza, often referred to as the largest open-air prison, have been subjected to a genocidal war that has transformed Gaza into a concentration camp where people live under a constant bombardment. In his 2023 article, 'Genocide in Palestine: Gaza as a Case Study', Mohammed Nijim, anticipated the ongoing genocide in Gaza by examining Israeli policies implemented in the post-Gaza siege that he asserts constitute a form of slow-motion genocide. Approaching the case from a sociological perspective, he argues that the genocide should be viewed as a social practice that goes beyond physical annihilation or mass killing, contextualizing the siege within a broader settler colonial framework that underscores the ongoing process-oriented nature of Nakba. As the world watches for 4 months the televised live streamed genocide on TV, Palestinians in Gaza are being massacred by the 'democratic' settler state with the complicity of the Western 'democratic free world'. These Western governments gave the green light to this collective punishment of civilians, embodying the very imperialist forces that established and nurtured the colonial Zionist project in Palestine since 1917.

Palestinians have been racialized and likened to animals as a justification for implementing collective punishment. The Israeli Ministry of defense said Israel was dealing with 'human animals' and enforced severe measures, such as cutting off access to electricity, food and water in Gaza. Questions arise about the nature of these actions – can they be classified as military operations? With the majority of Gaza's 2.3 million residents affected, the situation exposes fascist tendencies within the colonial Zionist ideology, indicating a desire to annihilate Palestinian existence. In Toscano's (2023) analysis of the war on Gaza and Israel's fascism debate, he contends that fascism is ingrained in the Zionist Israeli colonial project. These fascist elements are upheld and celebrated by the settler and religious right, manifesting in structured violence. Despite attempts by liberals to downplay the situation, fascism is deeply rooted in colonialism.

In intensifying the 17-year blockade by cutting basic needs and essential resources, the colonial state employs hunger as a weapon of war. Beyond the death toll and casualties caused by bombardment, millions of civilians face starvation and are deprived of

drinkable water. Hospitals are incapacitated because of Israel's targeted bombardments, coupled with electricity and communication shutdowns. The comprehensive siege has hindered the delivery of crucial medicines and supplies from entering Gaza. Tragically, premature infants have died at *Al-Shifa* Hospital after the neonatal intensive care unit stopped working due to a lack of electricity.

Israeli bombs fall on people in their houses and on their shelters without warning. Entire residential blocks are destroyed and turned into rubble. These destructive weapons supplied by its Western allies target homes, hospitals, universities and schools. Israel is using internationally banned phosphorous bombs that are dropped on the most densely populated spaces. At the time of writing, the number of people killed by this bombardment, according to the health ministry in Gaza, exceeds 31,000, including 12,000 children, one child being killed approximately every 10 minutes. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called Gaza the 'graveyard of children'. By comparison, in 19 months of the war in Ukraine, Russia has killed 9700 civilians. More than 66,200 Palestinian have been injured and thousands more are missing under rubble. On October 13, Israel ordered 1 million Palestinians to evacuate from the north of Gaza within 24 hours, an order considered impossible by the UN. This mass displacement is a continuation of the 1948 Nakba with Palestinians repetitively forced to leave their homes. The south is supposedly safe, but it continues to be targeted. There is no safe place in Gaza.

The extensive destruction by Israel on homes and civilian infrastructure, coupled with bombardment and siege has rendered Gaza uninhabitable; 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza find themselves internally displaced. The impact of Israel's airstrikes has left more than 70 percent of housing damaged, with an additional 50,000 completely obliterated. Consequently, over 1 million people in Gaza are left without a safe and secure home to return to. Palestinians found shelter in Gaza's schools, churches, mosques and medical center. Others stay with relatives or simply sleep in the streets.

The majority of those displaced have relocated to the southern areas. However, tens of thousands remain in the north, including the disabled, elderly and sick. Amid intensified bombardment in southern Gaza, Israel has issued additional displacement orders, even within areas designated as refuge zones. Schools that have sheltered displaced people and provided refuge have been attacked and damaged, forcing the population into overcrowded places where tents serve as their temporary shelters, and where they face winter and grapple with starvation and disease. Essential services, such as health care, education and protection systems, have collapsed, compounding the humanitarian crisis. Airstrikes target Rafah city, where over 1 million people are densely compressed after having been previously displaced. Israel now threatens a ground invasion, compounding the severe shortage of food, clean water and medical care. This Rafah attack in the south is a continuation of genocide and forced displacement. But if Egyptian borders are closed, where can the Palestinians now go?

Dehumanization of Palestinian people by international colonial liberal discourse

The dehumanization of Palestinian people in the ongoing genocide is facilitated by the interconnected relationship between Western governments and their mainstream media

using racist narratives and orientalist tropes to diminish public outrage. The Israeli actions and discourses show that this current war is not about the criminalization of resistance and Hamas' action on October 7, but rather about the annihilation of Palestinians as a people. Senior government officials are engaging in genocidal and dehumanizing rhetoric. They advocate for the 'total destruction' and 'erasure' of Gaza, expressing a desire to annihilate them all and compel Palestinians from the West Bank and East Jerusalem to relocate to Jordan. In the West Bank, around 300 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of 2023 by settlers in conjunction with the army, who have been accelerating their project of ethnic cleansing and annexation.

The international colonial discourse only sees the action of October 7, as if this is the date history began, and presents the events of October 7 without context. This dehistoricizing of Palestinians enables the genocide. Thus, the angry response toward Palestinians but not the genocidal atrocities by colonizers. The long blockade imposed on more than 2 million, the constant bombardment, the killing of civilians, the destruction of hospitals, the collective punishment – all this fails to generate any condemnation or concern. These are double standards and complicity in genocide. When Israel was attacked, the Western world showed immediate concern. In contrast, there was a long period of silence about the suffering of the Palestinians.

The war in Ukraine concerned the world but that same world – or at least its dominant powers – do not show any solidarity with the Palestinians. Is this because Ukrainians are perceived as civilized white victims, while Palestinians are treated as 'human animals?' The racist Israeli political discourse and media supported the genocide in Gaza by claiming Israel has a right to defend itself. What about the right of Palestinians to fight oppression and the Zionist genocidal project? Palestinians are active victims and have always resisted their dehumanization ever since the establishment of the Zionist entity. In their struggle, they have been displaced and killed, yet they continue to resist and stay steadfast.

Since the establishment of the colonial project in Palestine, resistance by Palestinians has been criminalized regardless of the group's orientation – secular, leftist or Islamic political parties. The colonialists desire the killing and annihilation of Palestinian people from the space regardless of their political background either secular or leftist. The Palestinian is being target for being Palestinian, and this dehumanization is to justify the killing of Palestinians. But the growing international mass protests calling for an immediate ceasefire and a halt to the war machine instill some hope.

Conclusion

This article explores the genocidal war and prolonged siege of Gaza, framing it as a manifestation of colonial violence against space and a form of collective punishment. As a Palestinian scholar based in the United Kingdom, my focus on captivity and resistance in Israeli prisons allows me to reflect on the impact of colonization on my life and family who currently experience a very severe reality in the ongoing genocidal war. I recount the forced multiple displacements, destruction of our family home and the subsequent struggles for necessities amid the harsh bombardment in Gaza.

Despite the forced displacement of Palestinians from their home in the north, the Israelis continued with targeted bombardment. My family initially sought refuge in Gaza

city only to face further threats, leading to another displacement to the south in Khan Yonis. The destruction of our family home in the north and apartment in the center of Gaza city added to our anguish and grieving. Continuous airstrikes in Khan Younis forced my family to experience unimaginable terror. Their nights were filled with fear, of the white phosphorus bombs and the constant threat of death. The destruction of surrounding homes intensified my family's trauma. My family was forced to again relocate to Almawasi, where they endured dehumanizing conditions – living in rain damaged tents and subject to hunger, cold and sickness, disconnected from the world by a communication blackout.

The narrative highlights how the broader dehumanization and historicization of the Palestinian people by the international colonial discourse, including Western media, contributes to justifying the ongoing genocide and mass killing of Palestinian civilians. This illuminates the media's disregard for the historical context that locates the current war in Gaza as a continuation of colonization since the 1948 Nakba, and which aims to eliminate Palestinian existence and erase them from the space – their homeland.

Data availability statement

All data supporting the findings of this study are included in the article.

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Notes

1. In this piece I documented the experience of my family in November 2023, after a couple of month of the genocide 'An Account from the Genocide in Gaza: 'What My Family is Going Through is Impossible' | Institute for Palestine Studies.
2. On Palestinian prisoners and Israeli hostages, see <https://jewishcurrents.org/the-abolitionist-logic-of-everyone-for-everyone>.
3. The total number of Palestinian refugees is estimated at 7.25 million in total; 5.1 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the UNRWA and around 1.03 million are unregistered refugees (Badil, 2015).

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Biographical note

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